

Conclusion

The Way Life Should Be

Migrations are acts of settlement and of habitation in a world where the divide between origin and destination is no longer a divide of Otherness, a world in which borders no longer separate human realities.

—Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens*

In his June 2012 Enough Is Enough column in the *Twin City Times*, Lewiston mayor Robert Macdonald railed against the “rude behavior of teenagers, immigrants, and unproductive parents” for talking on their cell phones at the high school’s recent graduation ceremony in the huge Lewiston Colisée. His complaints quickly narrowed to only the immigrant attendees, those “from oppressive refugee camps, which harbor crime, disease, and hunger” to whom “Lewiston residents have opened our city.” While acknowledging that some immigrants are properly appreciative, he chastised those who “take advantage of our generosity and act like we owe them,” concluding his article with these words:

During the singing of our National Anthem, these ingrates chose to sit talking to each other or talking on the phone. They need to be reminded that when the “Star Spangled Banner” is played, they are expected to show it the same respect and courtesy that U.S. citizens show it.

They are guests here, and they are expected to adapt to our culture. If this is too much to ask, then perhaps it's time [for them] to leave.¹

The online responses to this article included forty comments. Twenty-two agreed, some emphatically so, with the mayor, many employing the same sort of rhetoric described in chapter 5 (calling the immigrants “bottom-dwellers,” “greedy and inconsiderate,” “rude and unappreciative,” who “stink up the place,” “need to learn our language so we can **FUCKING UNDERSTAND THEM**” and are “reward[ed] . . . for their barbaric behavior”). But fifteen of the comments, many from self-identified local teachers, chastised the mayor and the negative commenters for their racist, ignorant, bigoted comments, suggesting that they might wish to compare their anti-immigrant allegations with those wielded in earlier generations by the KKK against their French Canadian and Irish immigrant ancestors and asking why the rude behavior of white people was so quickly overlooked in favor of blaming immigrants as a category.

Barbara McManus, a Lewiston ELL teacher, wrote, “The exuberance demonstrated by our new citizens is due in part, to the realization that miraculously, someone in that family has attained a level of education that seemed impossible. They too, are proud parents, relatives, of some of the graduates. Some call Africa so that the entire family can hear the ceremony, right here and over there. Imagine for a moment, a dozen or two people gathered around a cell phone in Africa, trying to hear what is going on in America, and the tearful and meager celebration that follows.” Others wrote, “Somalis are among my most appreciative parents,” whose presence in Lewiston “has softened the impact of the recession, the housing bust, and school budget cutbacks,” reminding the mayor that as an elected official, he is supposed to represent all of the city's residents. One commenter asked, “Seriously, what kind of Mayor would write something like this?”

These comments capture in stark form the ongoing debates among Lewiston's residents about civic belonging. Although some, like Mayor Macdonald, continue to champion the view that Somali immigrants are guests who are expected to demonstrate gratitude and appreciation while self-consciously striving to assimilate, others challenge such boundary making by emphasizing residence rather than citizenship as the meaningful measure of belonging, advocating for the right of immigrants to demonstrate their sense of belonging by, among other things, exuberantly phoning relatives in Africa during a high school graduation ceremony. Although many Somalis are gaining citizenship and, of course, children born in the United States are automatically citizens, it is residence rather than citizenship that stimulates people like Kim Wettlaufer, Mayor Gilbert, Lt. Robitaille, Barbara McManus, and other non-Somali resi-

dents of Lewiston to speak out in support of the civic rights of Somalis who share their city to be viewed as neighbors rather than guests.

“Welcome to Maine: The Way Life Should Be” reads the sign at Maine’s state border. Somali and Somali Bantu immigrants heartily embraced this message of promise and possibility to make their refuge in Lewiston through dedicating themselves to creating their own structures of solidarity and mutual support, networking with social workers, teachers, police, and other professionals to establish points of contact with the mainstream community, defining for themselves what self-sufficiency and integration should look like, demanding accommodations and respect for their values and practices, and engaging in vigorous internal debates about how to repair ruptured cultural understandings of marriage, gender norms, authority, discipline, and parenting in ways relevant to their new context and reflective of community values. Their efforts to create the way life should be have been fraught, contested, hard, and sometimes damaging, but throughout their process of adjustment they are insistent on their own agency to make decisions for themselves.

The rhetoric of assimilation posits that change works in only one direction—through the self-transformation of the immigrant who strives to join the mainstream host society. In 2008, the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funded a national conference for representatives from Somali Bantu communities from throughout the country to come together in Lexington, Kentucky, for a day of workshops and discussions about their first years in America. In his formal presentation, one of the speakers from the ORR office lectured his Somali Bantu audience about the importance of change and assimilation, emphasizing that they will have to leave tribalism and the steady Africa-centric grip of tradition behind and embrace change in order to adapt to American life. As he spoke, I looked out over his audience of young men and women whose lives had been utterly transformed, shattered and rebuilt; people who moved from small farming villages in Africa where lions and hippos are daily threats to cities in America where they face threats of an entirely different sort, from mud and grass huts where life is public and cooperative to isolated apartments in American cities where they are assaulted by their neighbors, from cooking with charcoal and bathing in rivers to using electricity and running water, from farming with short-handled hoes with a hope for rain to working the night shift as cleaners at Dunkin’ Donuts. I wondered how many people in his audience, on their journeys from Somalia to Kenya and Dadaab to Kakuma, witnessed the deaths of family members from militia attacks, starvation, and dehydration, how many experienced rape, how many made the terrible choice to leave behind family members who could not make the trip to America. Many in the audience learned Swahili in the refugee camps

and English in America, and all the men were wearing suits rather than sarongs or *qamis*. Throughout the day, attendees shared e-mail contacts and cell phone numbers during breaks and posted photographs of the conference from their cell phones on Facebook. Nothing about their lives has been stable, unchanging, or resistant to change; their very presence in that auditorium meant they had embraced change every chance they got.

The speaker's emphasis on the need of those in his audience to change and assimilate echoes, of course, the autobiographical American story about immigrant integration noted in chapter 8 and evidenced in the words of Mayor Macdonald and his supporters and the ubiquitous insistence on conformity by the bloggers and other Lewiston residents introduced in chapter 5. But such a flat view of assimilation rests on two faulty assumptions. The first is that assimilation and integration are about wholeness and assimilating to some other, already existing culture. The second is that assimilation only works in one direction: the immigrant assimilates to the host society and not the other way around.

The story of Somali and Somali Bantu refugee immigrants in Lewiston challenges both assumptions. Chapter 8 noted the problem of a "pretheoretical commitment" to the idea of wholeness, which implies Somalis in the grip of cultural change are somehow in between or fragmented while they reconstitute a new whole through culture change and gaining citizenship. But their devotion to diasporic connections suggests that wholeness for Somali Americans includes both the experience of emplacement in Lewiston and ongoing transnational connections, an embrace of many aspects of American culture (education, cars and other forms of technology, Western medicine, changing gender roles, and more) and subjective membership in a global Somali Islamic community (and a value system that prioritizes faith, mobility, family, a particular aesthetic, and resource sharing as a normal expectation rather than a commendable act). Presumptions of wholeness obscure not only emergent Somali American cultural formations but also the ways in which many domains of social life in Lewiston are changing for the city's non-Somali residents as well because of the presence of Somali American residents. Lewiston's story shows that assimilation goes both ways: immigrants change, adapt, and hybridize, but also transform the host community.

Citizenship, Mobility, and Diaspora

At the annual 2011 SBYAM soccer tournament, parents gathered along the sidelines for the final match as the two best teams in the league faced off. The talk continually turned to everyone's worry about their relatives in East Africa because yet another upsurge in violence in southern Somalia sent people

fleeing across the border into Dadaab to seek safety from Al-Shabaab atrocities and famine. Several Somali Bantu men from Lewiston visiting Kenya for the first time since their resettlement phoned to report that life in the camps was worse than ever and they planned to return early to Lewiston. People were starving to death.

A constant experience during my years of conversations, meals, and meetings with Somali Bantus in Lewiston is the incessant ringing of cell phones with calls from the Kenyan refugee camps and Somalia. People talk daily with their distant relatives, checking in about news, safety, movements, threats, and health. One day in the back office of Aliyow's store when I was looking at the Somali Bantu Experience website with a group of Somali Bantu acquaintances, there appeared a photo of Khalar, who was the youth community health worker and our frequent companion during our residence in Banta. Khalar stayed behind in Somalia when others fled the second time, living off his farms and, now, remittances from friends and relatives in Lewiston. Abkow pulled out his cell phone and said, "Let's call him!" Within a few minutes he reached someone in Banta with a cell phone, who located Khalar, and suddenly his still-familiar voice was on the line asking about Jorge and the baby I was carrying when I lived in Banta. I asked about his news and learned that his family of seven was barely surviving because of drought and insecurity due to robberies by Al-Shabaab militia. There was no food and his children were starving. I knew Abkow was sending him money every month, and I promised to send additional money that afternoon.

As Khalar and I talked, Sadiq's phone rang. It was his brother from Somalia calling to ask for money. That morning when I was visiting Iman, his phone rang with a call from his older brother in Somalia, asking for money. The brother was fleeing Mogadishu because of the upsurge in violence between government forces and Al-Shabaab and was not yet sure where he would end up. He was phoning to ask Iman's family to be prepared to send him additional money when he found someplace safe. Isha, Idris, and Idris's older brother were supporting Ciise, Rabaca's family, and now Ambiya's family as well. The combination of Al-Shabaab threats and drought sent Ambiya from Somalia to Dadaab with her husband—the man who abducted her at gunpoint in Banta—and their children, from where she was able to reconnect by phone with Isha. In one of war's many ironies, the man who stole Ambiya is now surviving on the remittances sent by his wife's family to support them.

In 2011–12, everyone was anxiously worried about their relatives in Somalia trying to live through or escape from the predations of Al-Shabaab. Debates about escape routes and deteriorating life in the refugee camps dominated conversation. People returning from visiting Dadaab reported that the most

recent wave of refugees from Somalia's ongoing violence included young men who grew up in a lawless country, and, intimately familiar with murder and robbery, were now wielding violence in the camps to steal and rape. Abkow reported that thugs burned down the markets in two of the camps and life there is "totally horrible. The extremists are trying to use the camps as a battleground." And perils of a different nature have emerged as well: some of my Somali Bantu friends are receiving death threats if they return to Kenya because of their prominence and activism on behalf of Somali Bantus in the United States. Somali Internet sites keep readers well apprised of people's political activities in the United States, Europe, and Africa.

Everyone has dozens of close relatives who are desperate for help. The owner of Aliyow's store, who travels back and forth to East Africa for his business, asks me, in distress, "Who do you choose to help?" Everyone I know agrees: their resources are spread so thin between covering their expenses in Lewiston and sending as much money as they possibly can to extended families in Dadaab, Kakuma, and Somalia, and they know that relatives who receive remittances are surrounded by starving and desperate people who do not. Concerned that the millions of dollars in remittances sent to East Africa every month might be redirected to support Al-Shabaab, the U.S. government announced its intent to shut down the money transfer operations used by Somalis, provoking panic in Lewiston as everyone tried to send as much money as possible before the network closed to hold their relatives over until a new channel opened.²

And yet, despite the danger and fear, as soon as Somali Bantu refugees became eligible to apply for citizenship after the mandatory five-year waiting period, SBYAM's citizenship classes filled with students avidly memorizing the questions in English so they could gain U.S. citizenship in order to visit their relatives in Kenya. Citizenship brings greater security against deportation, but the primary draw is the right to travel across international borders, which is prohibited during the probationary five years after resettlement.³ Tutors in SBYAM's citizenship classes pose as citizenship test interviewers, asking questions from the list of official test questions, which people learn to answer by rote memorization. A joke circulates in the community: one person asks another, pretending to be the citizenship interviewer, "Why do you want to become an American citizen?" The applicant answers, "So I can travel to Africa!" At that everyone cracks up and yells, "Wrong answer!" While applicants recognize the need to claim nationalist patriotism as part of their citizenship interview, for many people citizenship is about transnational mobility and diasporic linkages.

Citizenship deepens diasporic identity and participation through enabling mobility, even if emotional connections to Somalia remain conflicted for So-

mali Bantu refugee immigrants. Some, like Jama, renounce any attachment to Somalia. After gaining citizenship, he proudly showed me that his passport card listed his nationality as United States, although he is irked that the card also indicates Somalia as his country of birth because he feels no allegiance to Somalia and, to the contrary, says he is ashamed to be from such a destructive place. Although he was born there, he fled with his family at the age of six, returning during the repatriation in 1995, when life in the Jubba Valley was terrible, before fleeing again. When I ask about his memories from the second short stay, his grave face says more than his words. He recounts a few instances from his memory of that year—his uncle attempting to guard his mature crops from Somali invaders who aimed their guns at him and told him they would blow him away if he took one more step. “And we knew they would,” Jama said. “They were killing anyone who tried to protect their farm. It was the same shit.” He refuses to talk about his memories from the second flight across the desert to Dadaab. He wishes his passport card listed his country of origin as Kenya, where he came of age, began attending school, and learned English, and from where he departed to the United States.

Like Jama, many young people in Lewiston claim stronger personal attachments to Kenya than Somalia, naming Kenya as their place of origin and ongoing cultural connection through their ties to family and friends there as well as their consumption of Kenyan music and dance styles. Ahmed, who is often called to speak at city and state events as a Somali Bantu youth leader, talks about wanting to find a way to help his country of birth, but other young adults disagree, saying they will help their relatives but have given up on Somalia. Ahmed is not so sure, explaining, “The U.S. gave me an intellectual life, but Somalia gave me life. I was born there; my ancestors are from there; my relatives still live there.” He struggles with the implication that becoming a U.S. citizen would obligate him to renounce his attachments to Kenya and Somalia, explaining that for him, being Somali and being American are intimately connected: “If I wasn’t Somali I wouldn’t be here. I’m here in America *because* I’m Somali.” Ahmed holds a complex approach to describing an identity forged through mobility. Another student, already a U.S. citizen, says, “It’s just adding something. I want citizenship so I can check on job applications that I’m a citizen, but I didn’t renounce anything. It’s just an addition. It’s a resource for me. I don’t deny where I’m from, but really I don’t know anything about Somalia. . . . Citizenship is just a document.” It is a document that he needs to return to the camps to visit his mother, who was not included in the resettlement program.

Many immigrants to the United States in earlier generations maintained transnational linkages, identities, and relationships despite the emphasis on assimilation in American nationalist lore, but Somalis and Somali Bantus may

be distinguished as among the most transnational. Mobility is at the heart of Somali culture and experience, an expectation and norm shared by Somali Bantus despite their more sedentary background. Citizenship status, for the Somali Bantus I know, means the legal right to mobility as a physical dimension of diasporic belonging and global networks maintained through technology. Citizenship enables enhanced diasporic connections, through allowing travel and the hope for greater access to resources in the United States (through employment) that can be used to support relatives abroad. But if citizenship for many is about mobility, diasporic participation, and belonging, what is the relationship between diaspora and locality? What does living in Lewiston actually mean to the Somali Bantu refugee immigrants who live there?

Somali Bantu diasporic self-consciousness is based in a sense of cultural integrity rooted in Islam, a shared place of origin and historic experience, and persistent global networks, but also is shaped in constant dialogues about how to live Somali Muslim values in the United States. It is not a barricaded diaspora identity, holding onto traditional practice; rather, it is a constantly evolving identity that morphs and shifts in dialogue with encounters with other practices and beliefs. As we have seen, young people debate the significance of clan, racialized difference, status, tribalism, gender norms, religious fundamentalism, history, and Islamic practice in a Western context, in person and on vibrant and lively Internet sites, Facebook pages, and phone chat lines. My young Somali Bantu friends regularly post quotes from the Quran on Facebook (as well as words of wisdom remembered from Cali Osman), engage in debates about identity and Islam on Somali Bantu websites and Facebook pages, share homemade videos about changing cultural practices in the diaspora (youth romance, parent-child relations, making good choices), and consume videos about youth culture in Africa.⁴ Diaspora scholarship has challenged the focus on immigrant assimilation by introducing important perspectives on hybridity, creativity, and creolization, but how does the experience and imagination of diaspora also intersect with emplacement, with the physical reality of living in a particular place?⁵

For good reasons, Somalis (and, by association, Somali Bantus) are often described as quintessential models of flexible mobility whose home is located in kinship networks and social groups rather than physical locations. “Transnational nomads” is one apt description.⁶ But even the globally mobile, like Somali and Somali Bantu refugee immigrants, inhabit particular places and must face the ideological and physical constructions of “home” required of all human beings. In his book *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa*, anthropologist Francis Nyamnjoh criticizes the fascination with deterritorialization in the literature on mobility and

identity: “No amount of questioning by scholars, human rights advocates and immigrants immersed in the reality of flexible mobility seems adequate to de-essentialise the growing global fixation with an ‘authentic’ place called home. Thus trapped in cosmopolitan spaces in a context where states and their hierarchy of ‘privileged’ citizens believe in the coercive illusion of fixed and bounded locations, immigrants, diasporas, ethnic minorities and others who straddle borders are bound to feel like travelers in permanent transit.”⁷ When Somali Bantus in Lewiston give public presentations about their experiences of mobility and immigration, even when their presentations stress their experiences of discrimination and violence, there are inevitably two questions from the audience: Do you want to go home? Would you return home if you had the chance? The presumption, of course, is that Somalia is home. Somali Bantus respond by stressing that Lewiston is their future, while acknowledging their ongoing emotional connections to the people—parents, children, siblings, and grandchildren—still living in East Africa. (At one such event, one Somali Bantu friend answered the persistent question with a proverb, “When you look at a pile of ashes take care because it might still produce fire,” before explaining that he would return only to visit his mother, whom he has not seen in a decade.) Somali Bantus are trying to explain that while their diasporic belongings and transnational connections are fundamental dimensions of their being-in-the-world, Lewiston is now home. And Lewiston, in turn, is transformed by the dynamic presence of diasporic Somali and Somali Bantu immigrants.

Mutual Transformation

“Is there a universal orientation within liberalism that allows an open engagement with the difference in other cultures, or does its method of incorporating otherness revolve around its particularistic viewpoint so that the relationship with difference is always a form of blurred domestication?” asks Nikos Papsaterdiadis.⁸ But some forms of “domestication” are essential, because immigrants have to learn to navigate a new society, which means understanding laws, attending school, knowing “how things work here,” and so forth. The interesting question is how those being domesticated respond by both seeking help and shaping new subjectivities through adapting while simultaneously encouraging their new neighbors to adapt to them. While Somali Bantu immigrants are changing gender roles, finding new approaches to arranged marriages, learning new parenting strategies, navigating new political bureaucracies, trying new forms of medical intervention, and crafting new subjectivities as U.S. citizens and diaspora members, other residents in Lewiston cannot help but be changed as well by their presence and engagement in the

local arena. In short, everyone is adapting. Some adaptations are small and quotidian: a judge learns how to talk through a translator; an “old French woman” learns how to buy spices in a Somali-owned shop; a Franco-American museum director learns to love sambusas; white kids on the playground begin speaking to their friends in Somali; Somali girls at a high school track meet pray in Arabic for the success of the white high jumper who is in their math class; white locals wish they had elders.

But other changes are far-reaching. The “boo-hoo white do-gooders and their carpetbagger friends” know that city institutions, schools, workplaces, and local culture must change to adapt to Somali immigrants. They are among the architects of change, from Cheryl Hamilton and CareerCenter director Mary LaFontaine, who want to train employers to work with New Mainers; to the ELL teachers fighting to change school culture; to Kim Wettlaufer, who helps his clients come to recognize their similarities and form solidarities; to the police department that creates a special community resource substation to engage with Somali immigrants. Their efforts are augmented by those of Somali and Somali Bantu cultural brokers who work in social services agencies and medical facilities teaching non-Somalis about Somali perspectives on faith, family, and more, translating Somali practices and beliefs along with words to non-Somalis.

In its second decade of Somali immigration, Lewiston now has two mosques, and Fridays bring hundreds of men and boys to the street in qamis on their way to pray. Thousands of women and girls in hijab move through public spaces daily, and hardly anyone yells, “Go home!” or “Dress like an American!” any longer. People praying at appropriate times is now normal in schools and in some of the larger workplaces. Mental health professionals are meeting with imams and traditional healers to learn more about Somali conceptions of sanity and possession. Somali and Somali Bantu community organizations are intervening more in the civic life of the city, by, as we have seen, marching down Lisbon Street proclaiming “LEWISTON IS OUR CITY TOO,” arguing with school authorities, writing op-eds and letters to the editor, and running for the school board. The situation in the refugee camps penetrates Lewiston as those returning from distressing visits alert the local newspaper and provide interviews about the dire situation in Dadaab and Somalia. Prompted by the worry that their students carry into school from distracted parents, local ELL teachers spearhead fund-raising initiatives for grassroots organizations in the camps. Despite the xenophobes and racists, Lewiston is a success story because ideas about mutual responsibility, cultural values, political practice, and civic engagement jostle and bump and are transformed in the arenas of public discourse and personal reflection. It is precisely in small locales

like Lewiston where new versions of “America” are being forged as mobile immigrants and long-term locals create new forms of sociality, understanding, and collaboration.

The helpers are pushing back, alongside the immigrants, against local discourses fed by popular national rhetoric that distinguish between the “deserving poor” (white citizens who worked in the mills and feel abandoned by their city’s economic downturn) and the “undeserving poor” (“unproductive parents” and black refugees who came to the United States as objects of humanitarian charity). They reject the hierarchies of legitimacy that define some people but not others as acceptable beneficiaries of assistance by insisting on a society that offers care to those who need it on the basis of coresidence, regardless of race, origin, citizenship status, or religion. The ELL teachers, some of the police, former mayor Gilbert, and many others see the immigrant refugees as part of their community and thus part of their responsibility as human beings living together in a particular place. While their definitions of success may eventually include economic self-sufficiency, their more immediate definition of success prioritizes health, security, education, safe housing, and other quality-of-life factors rather than economic productivity. Integration, for the helpers and immigrants alike, is about feeling safe and taking care of each other, not about neoliberal conceptions of personal responsibility or conformity to mainstream American norms and values (of individualism, consumption, a monetary assessment of personal value). To the contrary, many of the helpers express their admiration for Somali values that they see as desirable and waning in American life: strong community bonds, nonmaterialist values, sharing and cooperation, humor in the face of hardship.

Progressive scholars theorize about how to create a sense of the commons (by which they mean the public good, the social community) that is inclusive, border crossing, and nonhierarchical, offering portraits of political action that confront biopolitical exclusions (based on socially constructed categories like race, foreignness, citizenship status, and so forth) in particular localities and that forge connections and networks that transcend particular localities.⁹ Bonnie Honig sees the potential to repurpose immigrant activism to forge a new democratic cosmopolitanism that crosses borders. If immigrants make democracy through fighting for their rights and insisting on being heard, then, she says, “We have a story here of illegitimate demands made by people with no standing to make them, a story of people so far outside the circle of who ‘counts’ that they cannot make claims within the existing frames of claim making. They make room for themselves by staging nonexistent rights, and by way of such stagings, sometimes, new rights, powers, and visions come into being.”¹⁰ Immigrants can stretch political practice into a form of democratic

practice that works across borders, not just in the interest of the nation, she theorizes, thus raising the question of whether the transborder networks and commitments held by Somali and Somali Bantu refugee immigrants might redefine the commons in Lewiston to also include others outside the local community. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri offer an argument about the forms of resistance they call “altermodernities,” which are created through a process of people coming together to imagine and enact alternative futures based on emerging understandings of historic practice and tradition across time and space.¹¹ They offer as examples the Zapatistas in Chiapas and Bolivian resisters to the privatization of water access. These sorts of resistances do not produce reified identities based in claims to authenticity or resistances based on assimilationist trajectories, but rather entirely new forms of sociality in which people are constantly remaking their world in dialogues with resistances, ruptures, novelties, and the imagination. This vision of altermodernity captures the efforts of the Somali Bantu community association and SBYAM to experiment thoughtfully with new forms of subjectivity in conjunction with rethinking and transforming more traditional forms of practice and subjectivity (of community representation, political hierarchy, gender expectations, youth identities, and so forth). They are in the process of shaping and becoming not assimilated Americans, but something new, and they are doing so by forging solidarities and networks with a wide range of collaborators who themselves are transforming their understanding of community through these engagements.

Suzanne Hall raises the question of how to “re-orientate the politics of diversity and belonging when there is a large and affective apparatus that contrives and maintains prejudice.”¹² How will people in Lewiston confront racism and xenophobia? Hall points to the importance of the welfare state for protecting the vulnerable (although the shrinking welfare state is creating vulnerabilities as well), moving beyond assimilation “towards an acknowledgement of allegiances as a multiple rather than a singular coherence” (as is the case with the simultaneous experience of emplacement and diasporic belonging), collaboration on common projects in which contributions and participation of diverse populations are made visible (such as with the Museum LA exhibition and SBYAM’s citizenship classes), and new forms of empowerment (such as SBYAM’s development as a caseworker organization).¹³ These stories and possibilities begin a second decade of transformation, and we do not yet know how the story will unfold.

The Way Life Should Be

While anthropologists and others have been fascinated over the past few decades with the speedy movement of people, money, and ideas through globalization, with globe-spanning diasporic connections and transnational networks, with theories about cosmopolitanism as a future alternative to contemporary regimes of multiculturalism and the xenophobia they confront, this story has placed us at the intersection of mobility and emplacement, diaspora and locality. Such intersections are where border crossings of a specific sort take place, where slow globalization shifts and blurs boundaries as ideas, cultural practices, relationships, and demographics morph, grow, and slowly become transformative.¹⁴ The slow globalization of refugees and migrants whose movement is relentless even when temporarily constrained means local worlds will be constantly changing as mobility intersects with emplacement and migrants transform local places through their presence. Often (mis)characterized as sites of clashes and crashes, such intersections are more often sites of negotiation, learning, self-reflection, and social change.

Anthropologists have long since abandoned the bounded conception of culture that undergirds images of clashing and crashing, replacing it with a fascination with emergence and becoming, constructions of lived experience that emphasize the imagination, creativity, and dynamism of human life. Subjectivities that are emergent and becoming, rather than fully formed and bounded, are an attractive way to think about the dynamic intersection of mobility and emplacement, about what happens in particular localities when immigrants move in. And yet, anthropologists must also be mindful to see and record the cultural value systems, beliefs, and practices that those who pass through that intersection bring to it. Locality and emplacement are the other side of emergence and becoming, and we should not avoid trying to document the cultural terrain of particular places in our desire to showcase mobility and emergence.

Pundits and popular discourse continue to use the culture concept, although in ways that make anthropologists suspicious and unhappy: as deterministic, essentializing, and exotic.¹⁵ Anthropologists must mind the gap here. How do those of us who continue to find value in the culture concept talk about it in ways that redirect its definition from the popular, essentialized version while still recognizing the sedimentation of meaning and practice that enables groups to recognize and cohere around collectively held values? We do so by describing how such groups debate their values in dialogue with those who hold different values and shift their practice through such engagements, but as groups and not just individuals. Difference is constantly emergent,

constantly renegotiated, constantly revalued, but continues to contain groupness over time. Groupness is maintained by socially constructed racial difference, racism, linguistic repertoires, diaspora identifications, and the diasporic networks within which people, ideas, talk, and money flow. The dialogues, debates, and negotiations in Lewiston cohere around the question of the way life should be.

For the past two decades, Lewiston's immigrants have been refuting the humanitarian presumption that people displaced by war should be forced to abide by paternalistic and neocolonial rules and borders that constrain their ability to seek safety. That is not the way life should be. They have been refuting the presumption that immigrants must assimilate by leaving their culture at the door in their new places of residence. That is not the way life should be. They and their advocates malign a government that abandons resettled refugees upon arrival by refusing substantive and meaningful assistance for education, job skills, and other support while they adjust, promoting instead a starkly neoliberal understanding of human worth as equal to a paycheck. That is not the way life should be.

During a conversation with Ahmed and Abdi about their simultaneous connections to the transnational and the local, Abdi recounted a recent experience at a local gas station. As he was filling his car, he overheard the loud conversation of two white men in another vehicle. One of the men told the other, gesturing to Abdi, "And now they're 50 percent of the population!" Abdi chuckled to himself, thinking, "No, we're not." But one can imagine that they will be. And Sadiq, Idris, Abdiya, Ahmed, Abdi, and their peers, alongside Kim, Beth, Larry Gilbert, the ELL teachers, and their colleagues, will continue working to create the best version of Lewiston that they can imagine, striving to find the way life should be.