
EPILOGUE: IDENTITY AND HOME

Exile is a universal experience and one that is more and more common as the globalization of the world economy intensifies. Border crossing has become more and more idealized in the media in films and literature. As entertainment this can be exciting, but the fantasy of the exiled hero or heroine with the accompanying angst and anomie can be far from the truth of the individual struggle to find agency and authenticity in a new context, a new life.

I have discussed the cost to the individual in the struggle to acculturate in *Lives in Two Languages* (University of Michigan Press, 2001). I am impressed by the flexibility that a person can have in fashioning a new identity and making the best out of circumstances that are not within the individual's control.

It is true that the objectivity of perspective gained by exile can be a resource, especially for writers, beginning with Conrad and Nabokov and continuing with modern writers, like Kyoko Mori, Isabel Allende, V.S. Naipaul, and many more than we have been able to include in this book. This resource can be seen as the positive end of a spectrum that includes frustration and loss. The yearning for home and security exists alongside the lure of the exotic and the unknown. We are never completely home in terms of being completely safe. Uncertainty and danger will always exist,

especially in this day and age. Home can become idealized or demonized, and thus lead to extremes in attitude and thinking. Reason must intervene; when we learn something new, we are visiting a new place, even if it is in our minds. Landmarks cannot be fixed symbols in our thinking but points of reference in a world community. We can integrate the new into the old and make transitions more gradual as we move into new territory.

It has been said that writers carry their home, even their identities, on their backs, that their writing creates a true home for them. As someone who writes, I can attest to that fact. And when I go back to my oldest home, I do not find that I can write because the perspective and objectivity of it have gone. I am too busy living that life, like a pair of slippers that feel very comfortable.

Mary Catherine Bateson says that we are all immigrants today because we are learning to live in a world we are not familiar with and we must “live lightly on the earth and to hold our convictions lightly too; to go against the ancient impulse to maximize our offspring and our accumulation and our years of life. To take care of one another in spite of profound differences” (Bateson, 134–135). I believe we must learn from our stories and take responsibility when we can to shape them in positive, life-affirming ways. In this direction lies our true home.