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Preface and Acknowledgments

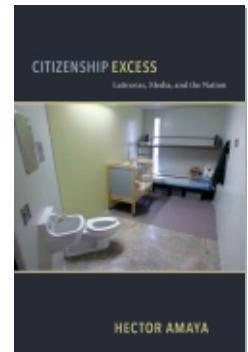
Published by

Amaya, Hector.

Citizenship Excess: Latino/as, Media, and the Nation.

NYU Press, 2013.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/23412>.



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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

And then all good things come to those who have the one best thing. Possess that one, and the others come in train. Or, to change the metaphor, a dominant good is converted into another good, into many others, in accordance with what often appears to be a natural process but is in fact magical, a kind of social alchemy.

—Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*

I have not had a usable citizenship for the past couple of decades. I have been living in the United States with a Mexican passport. I moved away from Mexico, my country of birth, in 1992 and have lived a life that I did not plan. I could not have planned it. In Navojoa, the small Mexican northern city where I was born, I had few contacts with immigrants, and immigrant narratives were relatively rare, unless they came from Hollywood films. Who can forget Chaplin on the move? Several uncles, aunts, and even my sister eventually migrated to either Los Angeles or Calgary before me, but I now recognize that the years when they were immigrants and I was not, they spoke about their experiences too enthusiastically, even when describing the penuries of loneliness in countries not theirs. It was not their fault. I know that as an immigrant I have never fully talked about the strangeness of my experiences to people back in Mexico, not because I am trying to hide it but more because I am a bit ashamed of complaining while stubbornly holding on to a life-project that I chose and has given me some grief. There is also some guilt about complaining about emotional things while my wallet is full. I am a professor, after all: do I really have the right to complain?

My life is relatively good, but not having a usable citizenship has become a constant issue and the inspiration for my scholarship. I live in a political world in which I cannot fully participate. But I would be lying if I claimed to feel always victimized. That is not how it works. For the most part, there is simply a strong sense of otherness that marks my affective relations to social and political systems. Once in a while I do feel outraged or moved to commiseration. A few other times, I actually take pleasure in my difference and relish being able to step back and simply watch, like an anthropologist, the world unfold with the strange logic of

an alien civilization. In all of these issues, I am not the standard but the exception. Most residents of the United States who walk around without citizenship have more reasons than I to be outraged. The majority of immigrants from Latin America must fight against poverty, biased law enforcement, educational systems that refuse to treat them as equals, and, increasingly, a lack of political rights and basic access to basic goods and social benefits. To make matters worse, Latino culture and Latino media seem marginal. What is the value of Univision or Telemundo if you cannot talk about telenovelas around the cooler with others? Latino social networks seem overdetermined, socially engineered by a masterful mind set on ghettoizing immigrant life. The incentives seem sweet enough: the Mexican store around the corner; the international-food aisle at the supermarket; the American Express card; every four years, the World Cup of soccer (Go Costa Rica! Go Mexico! Go El Salvador!); politicians trying to talk in Spanish (often a bit funny); and Spanish-language media reminding you that you belong to a large community of nonbelievers.

I have thought enough about citizenship that I could come up with dozens of silly similes to try to explain how it feels not having it (for instance, “Not having citizenship is like walking without shoes”). I will spare you. Neither will I place in front of you a tragic narrative exploring our postcoloniality, our loss, becoming undone. I will also try to avoid constructing a romance that lionizes a fight against all odds. Instead, in this book, I explore a simple metaphor from another scholar. In the epigraph, Walzer talks about dominant goods, and throughout the book, he discusses citizenship and wealth as two such goods. Compellingly, he describes how dominant goods have currency in many social fields, and thus they assure the bearer a trading advantage. Over time, this trading advantage in multiple social spheres accumulates and exponentially multiplies, allowing the possessor of the one good to be at the top of many hierarchies. Echoing Walzer, this book shows the centrality of citizenship. But unlike Walzer, I am invested in querying liberalism and the public sphere, two central theoretical constructs that explain and reconstitute the centrality of citizenship. My hope is to provide a theoretical framework and vocabulary that explains the state of marginalization of Latinas/os in the United States.

I need to thank an array of people, organizations, and institutions that were essential for the completion of this project. I first have to mention Southwestern University, the place where I began writing on the subject of citizenship and Latinas/os seven years ago. There, I received expert

and kind advice from Mary Grace Neville, Jay Baglia, Teena Gabrielson, Erika Berroth, and Katy Ross, who lent me their editing and theoretical skills. However, the book itself was written at the University of Virginia, a place where Jeffersonian ideals seep deeply into the ground. It is perhaps natural that it is in these buildings and gardens, full of hope for the political, that my own reflections on citizenship, discourse, justice, and equality happened.

At University of Virginia, I received the sustained support of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dean Meredith Woo, Associate Dean Karen Parshall, and Vice President for Research Dr. Thomas Skalak. Last, I have to thank the Department of Media Studies at the University of Virginia, Chair Andrea Press, and the Verklin Program on Media Ethics for energizing my research financially and emotionally.

My writing group at the University of Virginia must be singled out for providing me with their expertise and insights every step of the way. This book could not have happened without them. Sylvia Chong, Daniel Chavez, and Jennifer Petersen have left a deep imprint in my work, and their knowledge on ethnicity, race, film, media, and the juridical are now central to the project. I cannot thank them enough for their patience, their theoretical views, and the unwavering commitment to excellence that pushed me forward. Last, I need to thank New York University Press for providing such a rigorous set of reviewers.

Biography is also origins. I wish to thank my parents, Mita and Hector, who are the real origin of the book and to whom this work is dedicated. They are the structure in my thought, my moral fiber, and my perseverance; whatever wisdom I may possess I have only borrowed from them.

