



DIASPORa

di·as·po·ra \ dī-as-p(ə-)rə, dē-\

n. the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland. a collective of individuals with the shared history of migration and separation from their origins; the voices of those scattered individuals; we who belong in multiple spaces, we who belong nowhere.

Hannah Chinn

Ginneh Dickenson

Em Prozinski

Jasmine Stanton

Uncanny Worlds in Familiar Spaces

diaspora blues*
songs that remind us of homes both near and far

jasmine

1. circle – fatima
2. la diaspora – nitty scott
3. i owe you nothing – seinabo say

hannah

1. portland – zoology
2. your best american girl – mitski
3. evermore – alison krauss

ginneh

4. picky – joey montana
5. rica y apretadita – el general
6. la negra tiene tumbao – celia cruz

em

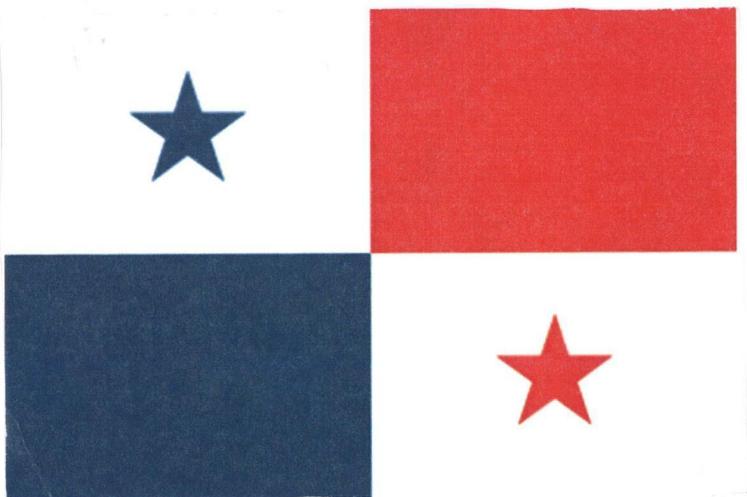
1. korea – st. lenox
2. just for now – imogen heap
3. moon on the bath – japanese breakfast

*sadness [blues] not required for diasporic jams

Reggaeton

Que sopa?? How many people know about reggaeton? It has been a popular form of music since the late 1990s, so it is much more popular in this modern era. This is a form of music that has been adapted from Jamaican reggae music but in Spanish with a few other rhythms included. Reggaeton came out of a afro- latino/diaspora movement. In its history, there were many black peoples from the Caribbean and other latin american countries who came to Panama for work during the building of the canal. Many of these people stayed and made Panama their home.

This is important to me especially because my family is from Panama and reggaeton has been a major part of my families life and culture. Panama is actually the birthplace of reggaeton and took off in various other latin american countries (Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, etc) with this genre as well. I can remember family get togethers with songs from artists like El General, Eddy Lover, and Latin Fresh. These nights made people young and old get up and move as best they could. My great- grandmother even in her old age, would move around her hands and bob her head to its impudent rhythm. The mixture of rapping and singing, often times in spanish, but more I come across a mixture of "Spanglish".



A collage of various images. At the top, there is a close-up of a green tree. Below that is a dark, textured area with some white shapes. On the right side, there is a large, dark, leafy plant. At the bottom, there is a white surface with small, dark spots. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the middle-right portion of the collage, containing a table of contents.

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the winter of my sophomore year, my friend kamara introduced me to a phrase: "diaspora blues."

↑ the concept made sense to me almost immediately, but in case it doesn't to you, here's the best explanation i have:

a first generation immigrant is an individual who was born in one country and has become a resident in another. a second generation immigrant would be the child of a first generation immigrant – so an individual who was born in their resident country, but whose *parents* were born abroad. a third generation immigrant, then, is an individual whose *grandparents* were born abroad and migrated here.

see? simple.

most polls on american immigrant identity – a recent gallup poll, for instance – count only the first and second immigrant generations. the reason for that is easy: by the time you're multiple generations in, the americanization process is pretty standard. with a few exceptions, most "third-and-up"-generation children are more fluent in english than their heritage language. they've assimilated to their schools and churches and clubs. they have american citizenship, they have american language, they have american community.

again - simple.

except... not really.

because by the time you're old enough to start realizing your assimilation, you start realizing everything you've lost as well.



i know right now you like learning mandarin... or at least, you like trying words and singing songs.

4. i'm glad -- it makes our *nai nai* really happy when you do. you know the song she sings to you, the song about baby having mother's eyes and father's mouth? she said to me once that she remembered singing that song to me and that i liked it, but i never sang it back to her.
sing it back to her for me.

5. it's hard to get our grandfather, our *gung gung*, to tell stories. he likes lecturing ("an inch of time is worth an inch of gold," he'll say, "but one inch of gold cannot buy even one inch of time") or telling us about the deal he got on apples the other day ("very cheap! very good quality!"). even when expressing care, he says "gung gung love you" – the third person distances him slightly, keeps him grounded in fact. he's a surgeon, you know; logical, not emotional.

but he does occasionally tell stories, stories about boarding school in china and medical school in taiwan and small apartments in new york. they seem almost unbelievable to you and i, but they're true. by the time you're old enough to care about hearing them, i'm worried that he won't be able to tell those stories anymore.

in the meantime, i tell myself,
i'll listen hard enough for both of us.

your oldest sister
hannah



excerpts of a letter to my little sister (age 6)

1.

when i was born, our grandmother told our mom that she didn't want to be called *wai po*, the word for one's grandmother on one's mother's side -- translated, it means "outside grandmother". it felt distant, alienating, and she didn't want that. instead, we called her *nai nai*, a warmer word for grandma. so the chinese word that i grew up using was technically incorrect. it was accurate to the relationship, but not the language; it mirrored what i knew about our family, not about our culture.
(i know very little about our culture.)

2.

you're turning seven in a few months, little sister.
when i was seven, i went to china for the first, and only, time. i have only fragmented memories: splashing through pools of water in dimly lit halls, biting into warm fragrant buns filled with custard, holding my nose and running along the bridge over a tarry black "poison river".
i was convinced that there were more people in china than in the rest of the entire world. everyone looked like me, but it never felt like home.

3.

our family sent us to chinese school for a little while, a long time ago, before you were born. i tried, i really did, but somewhere along the second week all the class work switched from being assigned in english to assigned in mandarin and all the other kids had someone at home to translate for them except me and i started coming to class with my name and the date written on the sheet but nothing else because i didn't understand anything else and the teacher stopped asking me questions and i stopped trying and eventually everyone else gave up too.

because, you see...

having diaspora blues is like being constantly aware that you don't have a home.

not necessarily in the literal sense of the word -- we have dorm rooms, after all -- but in the sense that you don't have a place to belong. one day, people mistake you for an international student, and the next, you sit in class getting schooled on asian geography and apologizing for your inability to translate anything. you're read as one thing and you're polled as another and neither of those identities feel right.

and it's this strange in-between feeling -- the sense that you're disconnected from your own origins, coupled with the fear that you don't really have the right to claim those origins in the first place -- that constitutes "diaspora blues".
cheery, right?

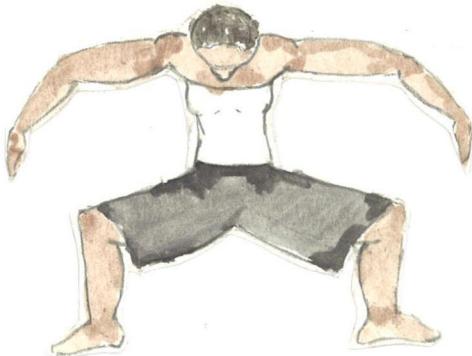
...and okay, maybe it's strange that my friends + i find solidarity not in a shared language or history, but in a vaguely melancholy state of mind.

but according to the mpi's 2016 current population survey, immigrants and their u.s.-born children now number approximately 84.3 million people. if you included third- and fourth- generation immigrant kids, i'm willing to bet those numbers would double -- which means that more than a third of the u.s. population is in some way estranged from their home/heritage language, culture, and community. we're all simultaneously stuck in various shades of diasporic blue.

it's a weird thing to be constantly contemplatiing.
but it's also nice to know i'm not alone. ♥

(nannah)

Dance can act as a means of communicating, meditating, restoring, and resisting. It can also be a tool to maintain cultural identity and sense of self, and encourage a stronger sense of community. Dance has been used as a vessel for self-expression and resistance in black communities.



When I was eleven I decided I wanted to be a ballerina. My mom and my grandparents used to take me to dance shows. I was exposed to the works of Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey American Dance

Theater. My ballerina in a jewelry box was black. It was not until I began perusing this dream of being a ballerina did I realized that ballet was a Eurocentric art form. I was rejected from most ballet schools because I was “too dark”, “too muscular”. “Distracting”. I was confused because I was told ballet was not for me but all the ballet I had ever seen was black.

I decided I wanted to reclaim ballet as my own. Make it for me when so many people said it wasn't.

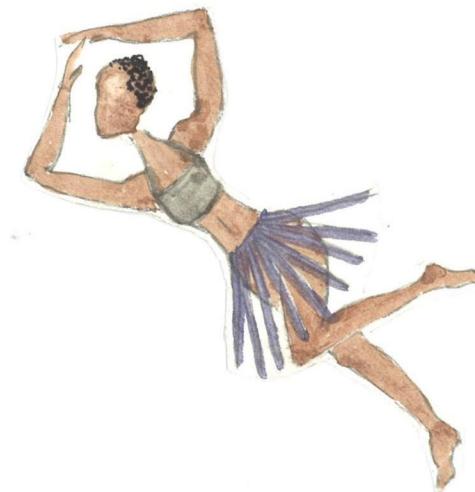


Advice from a diasporic mama, to help with finals week

1. Think of yourself like the puppy. The puppy pees the bed and is sad about it for a little while and then it moves on. It doesn't get hung up on something small like peeing, or blame itself for weeks after.
2. Did you know your grandfather would take on extra work – was happy to do it, even – when surgeons with less experience messed up? Messing up is human – even surgeons do it! And when they do, it doesn't all fall on them. It's ok to depend on people.
3. Think of yourself on a boat in the Mississippi. You can paddle upstream, but you won't get far and you'll only exhaust yourself. Try the other way. Put that energy towards working with the current.
4. If you're so worried about everything you have to do that you collapse when something small isn't perfect, you're doing too much. Cut it down, get things done.
5. When wind comes, blades of grass bend down with it. They still come back up afterwards.



It has always been a bit strange to me how I could find home in an art form that rejected me and hated my black skin and body. I enjoy the breath and lightness of the movement quality. I love the lines and shapes I can form. I have grown to love incorporating parts of myself and my identity into the movement to make it my own.



Dancing to prison songs, negro spirituals, r&b, jazz, and blues is how I resist in my art. I celebrate the stories and contributions of people in the African Diaspora. In high school, I was told to wear fake ponytails, buns, and straighten my hair. I now perform with my short afro. Black is not allowed in ballet. As I dance to these songs, I have an awareness of my years of ballet training but incorporate movements from the African Diaspora. As I dance I resist and I heal.

-Jasmine



Everytime I come home for breaks I take the Megabus and my dad picks me up from Union Station. We always stop by my favorite Jamaican restaurant. I get my beef patty and coco bread with a ginger beer. I haven't found a nice place to get beef patties in PA. hmu if you know!

- Jasmine



ramen is not authentic chinese food, my mother tells me. ramen is like the EasyMac of asian food.

when my family made ramen, we would always make it with leftover chicken + sliced-up greens + sometimes soy sauce or fish sauce. never in the microwave, always in a pot.

never plain (who serves plain noodles?), never drained (my sister told me once, horrified, that her friend drained ramen and ate it with ham and shredded cheese), never eaten with anything except chopsticks.

ramen is cold afternoons when my dad wouldn't turn up the heat ("that's why we have sweaters, han"), or weekday dinners when my mom hadn't had time ~~to~~ cook "real" dinner, or late night convos with my sister when neither of us really wanted to make food. ♡

(-hannah)



When you're little and pepper flakes burn your tongue, kimchi means two glasses of water with dinner - one for drinking, one so that your mom can rinse off the spices. pepper flakes sink, pickled cabbage drops from wooden chopsticks onto your plate, crisp and clean.

on hot summer days when you're older, kimchi means going to the air-conditioned korean store to buy the freshest jar. check the dates on the lid. when your mom comes home, you eat it together straight out of the jar, barefoot, standing in the kitchen.

- em



Enchiladas are one of my favorite comfort foods because it symbolizes one of my grandmothers' special dishes for special occasions. There are many people who make enchiladas but I really love my grandmothers the best. For about the last 4-5 years I have helped her cook it and so now I am able to do it. Regardless I never usually do it on my own because still something would be missing. Her special touch.

- Ginneh