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We Are Expected to Lose Ourselves to Fit In

Nobody can truly fit in. Whether you try to reshape to fit the mold or not, it takes a great loss to assimilate. To fit in means losing what is important to you- who you are and what you value. When one enters a different world, it is expected that they forget their culture to blend in. The people in power disregard the importance of different cultures, as well as the lives of people who are different, simply because they are not what is considered normal. One needs to lose oneself in order to fit in. In the end, the blending of cultures does happen. But the immigrants never feel the same after. Sadhu Binning's "Chhaledde" and Jim Wong-Chu's "Equal Opportunity" are poems that honestly reflect what it is like for immigrants to move to a strange country with different cultures.

When someone tries to enter a different society, the people in charge expect the newcomer to forget their culture and assimilate. The sharing of cultures never occurs. In Chhaledde, Binning describes that:

**“[they] forget the strawberry flats picked
while stooping and crawling on [their] knees
[they] forget the crowded windowless trucks
in which [they] are transported like chickens
to and from farms” (Binning 11-16).**

On their way to their new country, they forget who they are, just to fit in. They forget their culture and their life, as they reach for a “better” one. In “Equal Opportunity”, Jim Wong-Chu explains that some people expected the immigrant’s culture to be forgotten completely. There were rules for riding the trains, but only for the Chinese. One such rule included that “the chinese could only ride / the last two cars / of the trains” (Wong-Chu 5-7). However, this rule only lasted “until a train derailed / killing all those in the front” (Wong-Chu 9-10). In this case, the people in power tried to hide the immigrants, so that the country’s own could forget their existence. People tried to erase a culture, just because the new culture didn’t fit in with society.

As well, when immigrants come, there is a great disregard towards the importance of the different cultures and the lives of people who are different. This is because they are considered outliers. Immigrants desensitize themselves towards this. They forget the heartache it took to be a part of a new country. Binning emphasizes the loss of their culture through “[forgetting] the pain of not being able / to speak Punjabi with [their] own children” (Binning 23-24). In a utopian world, language and culture would be embraced. However, Binning did not get to experience that perfect universe. People were unwelcoming to him and tried to change him by making him feel so uncomfortable about his culture that he had to hide it from his own flesh and blood. Wong-Chu’s story is more morbid. According to him, after the first attempt to hide away the Chinese,

“a new rule was made

the chinese must ride

in the front two cars

of the trains” (Wong-Chu 14-17).

This second rule shows blatant negligence for the lives of the Chinese. They were put in the front to be the first to die. No one cared for them. They were seen as outsiders and people not worthy of their own lives.

Assimilation occurs eventually. However, it takes its toll on the immigrants. They never feel the same as who they were before they migrated, but they also never feel as equal to the people of their new country. Binning states that “by the time [they] get off the plane / [they] become members of a different class” (Binning 32-33). Not alike with their kin anymore, but also below their new neighbours. The sacrifice that immigrants put into a “better” world goes unnoticed and disregarded. With Wong-Chu’s tale, he discloses that “the chinese are now allowed / to sit anywhere / on any train” (Wong-Chu 24-26). Even though the Chinese are treated a little more like equals, people needed to die for it to happen. Equality in a community shouldn’t have to come with hard work and effort being felt invalid or people having to die.

Many things get lost in order to belong. Culture, language, values, self, and even lives are forgotten, just to be equal with the one another. The expectation that people should change who they are to fit in was and still is prominent to this day. There is still a disregard for the value of other cultures and the lives of immigrants. If the world truly wants to move on to become a better place, it needs to move past seeing people from other backgrounds as different, and start seeing them as people.