

UNBORDERED

FOR THE AMERICAN EMIGRANT

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



When we, the *Unbordered* team, chose the theme for this issue, "Rebuilding," we were interested in what life looked like on the other side of immigration. We wanted to see if we could move past the many and varied reasons for leaving the U.S., which are becoming more and more obvious with every passing day, in order to focus, instead, on what life looks like once you land.

But as we've been putting together this issue over the last few months, we have also been watching the ICE raids from a distance. We've watched democracy, which the U.S. has long claimed to hold fortified, wane in defeat. We've watched the reputation of the United States slowly disintegrate abroad. And we have watched the ones we left back home fret about how to leave. And for those of us who have already left, we have struggled to figure out how to cope. We question how much we should be involved. How much should we focus on building new lives v. defending our old ones. How far do we extend our resources?

We've started to ask: is it possible to rebuild a life when you still have one foot firmly planted back home? How much good can we do? Do we owe our attention and our voices to the ones that either could not or would not leave? Can we celebrate the small victories as Veronica Zora Kirin does in her piece, "Period."? Or do we mourn the people and obligations we left behind like in "The Guilt Trip Abroad" by Meredith Burns? Will we be able to hopefully conceive of futures where we can cry with wonder as our children gather in multicultural celebration, as in "The International Assembly" by Cecily Stone?

What we've realized is that there is really no such thing as an "after." Immigration is not divided into before you leave and after you've started your "new life." There is only time, distorted by change and trauma and promise. And you carry all of it with you when you leave. Your life is not new, only your experiences. "How do we assemble the face we wish to show the world?" asks an Anonymous Artist.

This issue reflects that tension. In it, Jessica Wilde longs for the familiar in the unknown in her poems, "Home Depot" and "Banana Bread." "JFC" by Debra Guckenheimer reminds us of the complexity of leaving both the fight and the judgement behind, and in "There and Back Again," Erik West studies his own family's immigration history in order to make his decision to leave.

In "Is Immigration 'Ruining' Albania?" Megan Reeves wrestles with what it means to be from a colonizing culture while trying to craft a life of respectful coexistence. And we continue to ask: will our new neighbors accept us as immigrants in our time of need when people from the U.S. have been responsible for so many of their own upheavals?

So all these questions remain: How can we stretch and expand and learn without causing damage to the places that, despite our history, have welcomed us into their homes? How do we bridge the past and the present to form a connected life? Do we dig down deep here in the places of our migration? Do we begin to take the roots that are being burned and replant them into safe soil? Do we let ourselves grow and spread like an uncontained wildfire?

We carry our foundations with us. We cannot choose to rid ourselves of them, only where to set them down. We can choose where we would like to build. The materials might be a little different this time around, maybe not what we're used to. But it is my hope for each of us that we can build something beautiful.

In solidarity,



Amber Stewart,
Founder, *Unbordered*
Montevideo, Uruguay
February, 2026



Unbordered is more than a magazine. It's a record of those who are choosing to build a life beyond empire. Subscribe on Substack to receive weekly updates as we document what comes after leaving.



"Lost"
Alice B.

JFC

DEBRA GUCKENHEIMER

I stand at the top of a cliff with a beautiful, blue sky in front of me
Hopeful, full of ideas and dreams about what could be
Behind me are screams in terror as men with their faces hidden
grabbing innocent, dehumanized people as if they are fruit on a tree
I wonder what might happen if I were to leap into that unknown,
brazen
Then I feel tiny fingers nudging for an embrace
Is the next step jumping together?
Will anyone catch us?
I notice the people watching us.
Their judgmental eyes blaming us, shaming us
How dare we exist here?
How dare we not try to make ourselves more pleasing?
They're not coming for you, stop paying so much attention.
HELP!
HELP!
I want to scream, but that would be scary, so I hold it in.
"Why are they destroying everything that is good, Mommy?"
"I don't know. I'm sorry. They can't destroy our love"
Searching.
Searching.
Searching.
Look over there, kids.
Shhh help shhh
How dare you talk to us that way?
How dare you acknowledge the reality that's in front of you?
HOW DARE
Look, kids, the blue sky



POETRY

A GUILT TRIP ABROAD

Meredith Burns

"Meredith, I don't want this to affect your life. You have so many good things happening and I want you to go and do them. Understand?"

My mom was experiencing ninety minutes of "lucidity" when she said this to me. Which is a total mind fuck.

Because when you have dementia, they give meds to slow down the progress of the disease.

But after taking her meds six hours later than usual this day, she was more clear than she had been in months. To be more "lucid" because you didn't take your meds is so confusing to me.

Unlike most days, for these ninety minutes, she knew she was sick. She knew that something terrible was happening to her that we couldn't fix.

And she was fucking angry.

I don't blame her. I was fucking angry too. She didn't recognize my dad's name on the calendar we keep in the kitchen. She asked to be shown their marriage certificate.

That part happened before I was in the room with them. I think the look on my dad's face might just have killed me if I had been there for that.

Once she kept denying knowing her husband, Dad finally came outside to get me.

In the moment, he needed reinforcements. In the moment, it made me feel connected to him in a way I hadn't felt before.

Yes, Dad. Let me help.



We had moved abroad six months before this and I was visiting them for a few weeks in the US so I had not witnessed this kind of breakdown myself yet, even though I had been preparing myself for it for years.

See that's the thing with dementia. It's a million tiny little losses.My mom was fucking irate. The woman who rarely said the "F" word was yelling and cussing and extremely upset.

She demanded to know why she was never told about her sickness until now.

She was convinced that she was just finding out this weekend and that I was the daughter that got the "short end of the stick" to come and tell her.

The truth was that we have been aware of her decline for over five years. All of us.

She had been monitored and tested and medicated to do anything possible to slow down this monster that was eating away at her, bit by bit.

But in this moment, she couldn't understand why the doctors can't help her.

She cried as she pleaded to understand why being a "good girl who studied + worked hard all her life" was ending like this.

Why she can't be left alone ever. Why she can't do anything she used to enjoy anymore.

ESSAY



And then the bad got worse.

“I’d rather be hit by a truck. Just slit my wrists. Might as well put me in the electric chair.”

I wanted to be sick.

Hearing her say those things made me want to crawl into a hole.

I don’t know what could be worse than hearing your mom suggest detailed ways she’d rather die than live like she was living.

My mom, child of the 60s, who went to college and became a pharmacist when most of her friends just became wives and mothers, felt stupid.

She felt dumb.

She was also worried about who else knew.

She felt shame.

She wanted it to be a secret.

She didn’t want anyone to know. She cried while she wished she could hug her parents again. I watched a seventy-three year old wife, mom and grandmom crumble into a child who just needed the love and comfort of her parents, long gone.

And then she said...

“Meredith, I don’t want this to affect your life. You have so many good things happening and I want you to go and do them. Understand?”

I sobbed.

The guilt of moving away when she was only getting worse was always the biggest struggle of our move to Portugal.

I’m convinced to this day that the reason I was there to witness this painful episode was to hear those words come out of her mouth.

A clear reminder of her blessing to move abroad, to live life bigger, to go do the things that she may have been scared to do in her life.

To live for now because we don’t know what “later” will look like.

To not take anything for granted.

To live in gratitude every damn day.

90 minutes passed. Her meds started to kick in.

It was as if nothing had happened.

The words and the tears and the pain just swept out to sea with the tide.

And Dad and I are standing on the shore, trying to process, trying not to cry, trying not to be angry with the world for what my mom is going through.

I gotta say.

It’s a fate worse than death to me. And I’ll believe that until the end of time.

I used to try to forget those ninety minutes ever happened. I tried to push that pain so far away.

Ironic, huh. Now, whenever I am feeling guilty about being further away from my family than I’ve ever been in my entire life, I recall it on purpose.

I remember that blessing she gave me.

I think about what she may have done differently in her life if she had known this would be her fate.

I remember that the cliche is real.

Life is short and we have to live big now because we certainly aren’t guaranteed tomorrow.

Or if we do get a tomorrow, we also are not guaranteed the quality of that time.

I write this as I make my way home for a visit.
I’m nervous and scared to see my mom.

To feel all the holes.

To force myself to experience what our new normal is for her.

But what I can always hold on to are those words she said to me and know that I’m doing exactly what she wanted me to do.

Living as big as I can.



“Windswept Forest”
Alice B.



FLORA

Living in a world where white, beige, and "Millennial Gray" are standard, I always found myself desiring brilliant, whimsical color.

A majority of my work is flamboyantly colorful and sparkly; each piece a window into my mind which craves stimulation.

There are many things in life that sparkle: my cats' fur in the sunlight, rainy streets, melting ice.

That love for color circles all the way back to black and grayscale. The sparkly night sky, moonlit dark waves, bioluminescent life in the deep dark ocean or in waves crashing gently on the shore.

With "Flora" I highlight the beauty of all of these elements: color, sparkle, gray and black.

I rarely have a finished look in mind when starting a piece. I trust the process, making a mess and transforming it into something delicious to my eyes.

Ultimately I hope my art is captivating, exciting, and inspires a sense of wonder to the possibilities of these elements.

MELISSA RAE

THERE AND BACK AGAIN

ERIK WEST



My family has a complicated history with living in the United States. Not a problematic history, no, but a history that is complex to explain. One side of my mother's family were Pennsylvania birthright Quakers, going back who knows how long. Another were Russian Jews, running from the Revolution to the promise of safety in the United States. Her mother arrived in the 1950s along with her younger brother, after the Holocaust, having been liberated from Auschwitz at the age of sixteen. My father, much more simply, was Australian.

My mother met a handsome Australian at Harvard when they were both in graduate school. (Yes, my family has a history of academics. Yes, I am following in those footsteps.) I spent my very early childhood in Boston, but we moved to Australia when I was about to turn six.

All this to say, I grew up half-American. We celebrated Thanksgiving, and I had an accent that would always get me picked as not quite Australian. I started calling myself American when I started being made fun of for being American, in grade school.

I came to America myself when I was nineteen. It had always been expected that I would do my higher education in the United States, had always been the tacit understanding that colleges there were better than the ones in Australia. That I would get a good education there, and make something of myself.

It's trite to say that to me America was a land of opportunity. It smacks of a fourth-grade lesson about immigration history. But it was true. I had a clean slate in America. I had a life to make what I wanted of.

And I made a lot of pleasant things out of it. I got the education that set me up for my future. I learned to be an adult. I met people that will mean the world to me for the rest of my life. I even met my own handsome American and married him, in a stunning reverse of what my mother had done years earlier. I started building a life. I was ready to become an American.

Two things changed that at the tail end of 2024. The first was that my wonderful husband – soon to prove to be not so wonderful after all – told me that he wanted a divorce. The second was the re-election of Donald Trump.

I spent the night before the election unable to sleep. For the start of the evening, I watched the election results roll in on a group call with friends. Really, what I was hoping for was that West Virginia – home to my best friend in the world – was going to swing blue, historically improbable as that was. I was safe, living in Maryland, or so I thought. I felt sweaty as I lay down to sleep in a newly-empty bed. But I told myself it was just my anxiety, my OCD, working me up. I told myself I was certain to wake up in a United States of America led by Kamala Harris. That I'd wake up to a historic first, our first Black female president.

I didn't. And the words I said in response sealed my fate twice over, both determining my future and sealing my divorce. "I want to go home."

This enraged my husband. Apparently, it was evidence I didn't consider our little apartment in Baltimore to be "home". But there's a difference between considering a house a home, and considering a country a home. Suddenly, America had decided to no longer be a home to me.

Like I said, there was a distinct history in my family of running away from countries that almost overnight were no longer safe places to be: Russia in 1917, the country about to be Yugoslavia in the 1950s. My grandmother and her family, as you'll note by that date, hadn't left fast enough. By 1945, both of my great-grandparents were dead: one in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, one shortly after leaving from an inability to cope with the stress on his body. Like so many, they left it too late, and were trapped.

I was not going to be trapped. A switch flipped in my head, and a voice came to me, and that's what it said. Don't be like them. Something is going to happen, and it's not going to be good. Don't let it happen to you.

As I tried to fight this voice, my best work friend turned to me one day and asked "how do I stay a good person under fascism?" She knew I had made a study of the Holocaust and Nazi Germany out of a morbid fascination with that slice of my family's history, starting in my childhood. I devised an answer for her, of course. Don't become a collaborator. Learn to stay quiet. Always know where your documents are. But, selfishly, I could not answer the question for myself. As long as I had an escape route, I was not going to be left struggling with making a good life for myself in what was very possibly going to be the fall of empire and the rise of fascism. And I had that escape hatch: my Australian passport.

I returned to Australia in February 2025. I don't think I will ever stop feeling guilty for that. I saved myself, but, in doing so, I abandoned my people in crisis. I fled a sinking ship, and I think I will always be thinking that I should have gone down with it. The feeling of selfishness rots inside me. I took advantage of the privilege of dual citizenship, a privilege that so many don't have. Certainly, I – disabled, transgender, assigned female at birth – would have been at higher risk than some if I had stayed. At the same time, I – white, educated, able to rely on family monetarily – would have been so much safer than so many. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't take it.

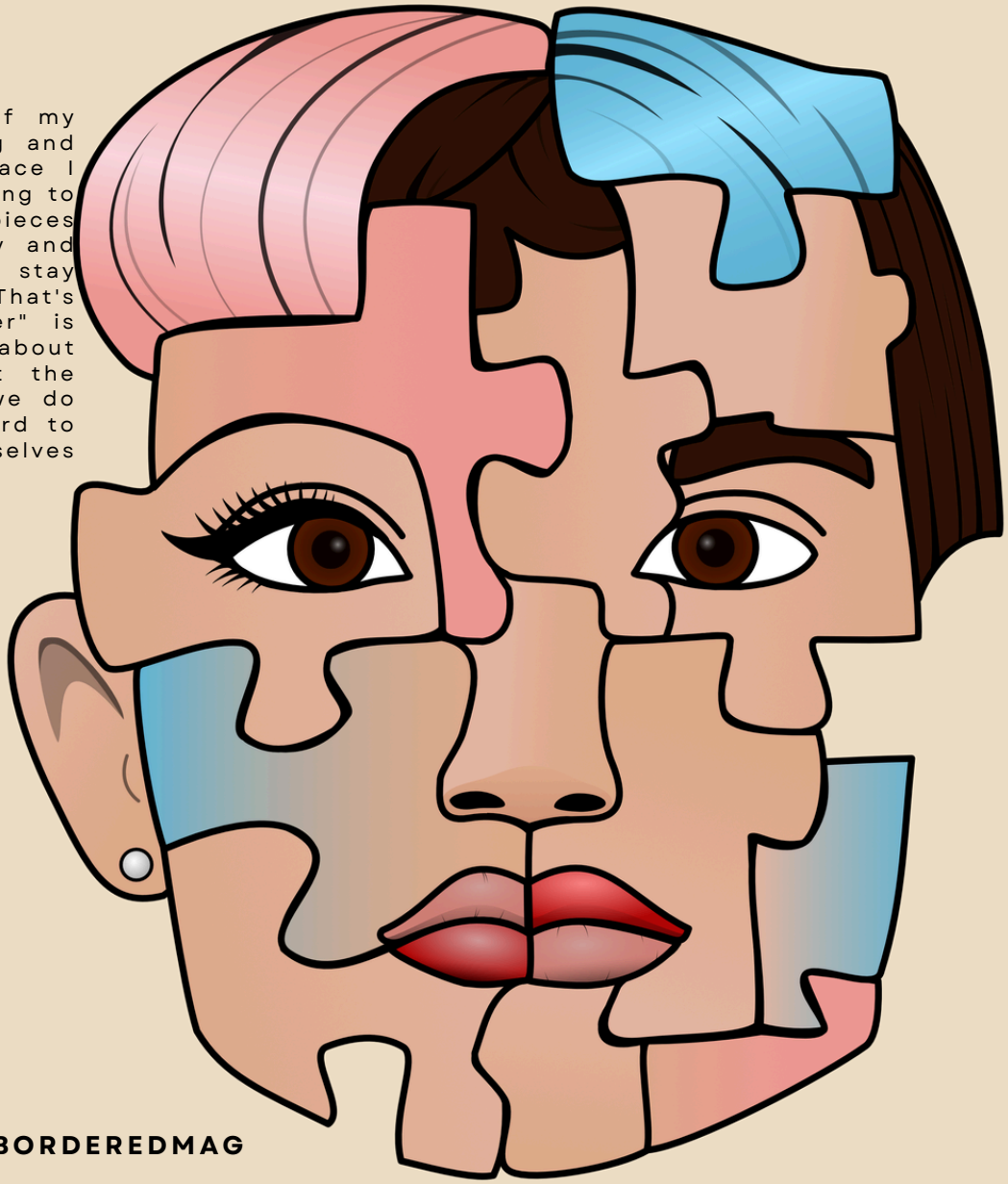
I have a good life now. A house, a cat, a legal divorce in a sleepy mid-sized Australian town. But I miss the United States enough to keep myself up at night sometimes. It's the little things: my favorite fast food, the trees on my street, the smell of the air. The friends I had there that I still speak to.

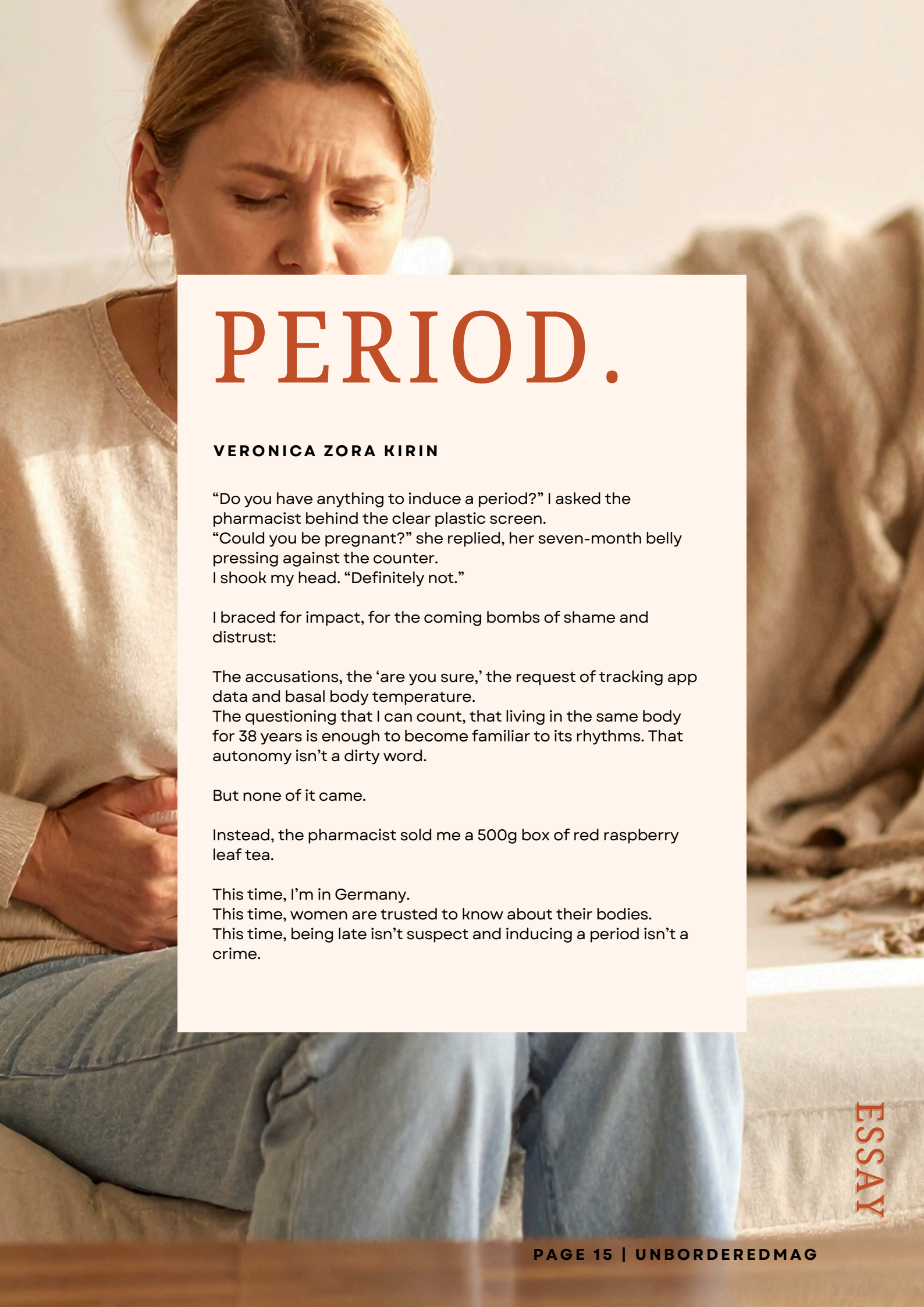
Despite all these feelings, I still think I made the right choice. Looking at what's happening in the United States now – looking from the outside – I know that I saved myself.



SHAPE SHIFTER

Every single day of my life, I'm assembling and reassembling the face I show the world, trying to figure out which pieces are safe to display and which ones need to stay hidden in the box. That's what "Shape Shifter" is really about. It's about survival. It's about the exhausting dance we do when we can't afford to be our 'complete' selves in America.





PERIOD.

VERONICA ZORA KIRIN

“Do you have anything to induce a period?” I asked the pharmacist behind the clear plastic screen.
“Could you be pregnant?” she replied, her seven-month belly pressing against the counter.
I shook my head. “Definitely not.”

I braced for impact, for the coming bombs of shame and distrust:

The accusations, the ‘are you sure,’ the request of tracking app data and basal body temperature.
The questioning that I can count, that living in the same body for 38 years is enough to become familiar to its rhythms. That autonomy isn’t a dirty word.

But none of it came.

Instead, the pharmacist sold me a 500g box of red raspberry leaf tea.

This time, I’m in Germany.
This time, women are trusted to know about their bodies.
This time, being late isn’t suspect and inducing a period isn’t a crime.

ESSAY



“Crow on a Wire”
Alice B.



IS IMMIGRATION "RUINING" ALBANIA?

BY MEGAN REEVES

When a larger creator stitched one of my videos and called me a "colonizer," I felt my stomach drop. It's a harsh word, but I also didn't want to dismiss the truth hiding inside the accusation: that moving to a developing country has real consequences for the people who already live here.

When we first moved to Albania, I was still recovering from deep burnout from our life in the US. It's also incredibly overwhelming to move to an entirely new country. There's a different language, different customs, even different products at the grocery store. Any comfort-zone you thought you had back home gets completely shattered, and it takes time to rebuild a new level of comfort and familiarity.

It took several months for me to feel solid enough to want to form new connections with the outside world. Eventually, I started posting about my experiences on social media, with the hope of connecting with like-minded people. I also wanted to show what life can look outside of the US, and maybe even inspire others to take the leap.

Pretty soon after I started posting, I had a much larger account stitch my "Unpack with Me" video, saying that I was a colonizer and ruining life for local Albanians. The hate comments started flooding in, all with the same basic sentiment: tourism and immigration was driving prices up for locals, who are now struggling to pay for food and housing.

Back home, anti-immigrant hysteria was really easy to label as xenophobia and hatred. The lines between race and

privilege were all neatly divided: it was clear who was punching down and why. It's a bit bizarre to find myself feeling like the bad guy for immigrating in search of a better life. Does my race and my American money mean that I'm not allowed to move somewhere that's more affordable with a slower pace of life? Does it mean that I'm not allowed to escape political instability in my home country?

A lot of Albanians still put America up on a pedestal, and they can't understand why anyone lucky enough to be born there would leave. Wages are higher (the average Albanian makes about $400/mo), infrastructure is better, everything is bigger, and there are more opportunities. So many people I talk to here aren't aware of the political and economic realities that Americans are facing today.

They don't understand that while wages are higher on paper, they've also been stagnant for decades and aren't keeping up with inflation. They don't understand that corporate greed has skyrocketed the cost of everything from utilities to rent to groceries, and that a medical emergency can bankrupt you. They don't understand that people are so burnt-out and isolated, that there's no time or energy left for hobbies, friendship, or community.

There's a slow death of the soul that happens when you're stuck in that world, and it feels like no one around you is even acknowledging that it's happening- - especially in the South. You start to feel crazy, hopeless, and paralyzed. The election was the shock we needed to get out, but it was far from the only reason that we wanted to leave.



When we first came to Albania, it was astounding to find ourselves in a world that felt built for humans instead of cars and corporations. It felt like going back in time to a simpler, better era, with all the conveniences of a smart phone and Google translate.

But we know that the Albania we're experiencing as outsiders isn't the same Albania that the locals are experiencing. Just like so many back in the states, they too are dealing with low wages, rising prices, long working hours, and corruption. They love their country, but are struggling to keep their head above water.

We've seen the same thing happen with gentrification in the US: young professionals move to a developing part of town on the outskirts of the more expensive central areas, excited to see lower prices and willing to wait for the new trendy businesses and better infrastructure to come in. Meanwhile, locals who have lived in the area for their whole lives are pushed out.

But how do you stop people from seeking out more affordable places to live? How do you stop business owners from opening up where they see an emerging market? How do you stop prices from going up when demand rises? The wheel of progress keeps turning, no matter anyone's opinion of it.

There are also undeniable positives to consider: foreign investment and tourism creates jobs, improves infrastructure, helps protect cultural sites, and revitalizes declining communities. 44% of young Albanians have moved abroad since 2011, due to lack of economic opportunity. But tourism is now one of the country's biggest industries, making up 20-25% of GDP (up from single digits a decade ago). This creates not only jobs in the hospitality, travel, and real estate sectors, but also construction jobs as roads and utilities are improved, and more housing and businesses are built. Historic centers like Gjirocaster, Berat, Vlora's Old Town, and Tirana Castle have also been revitalized as tourist destinations, preserving history while promoting local businesses.

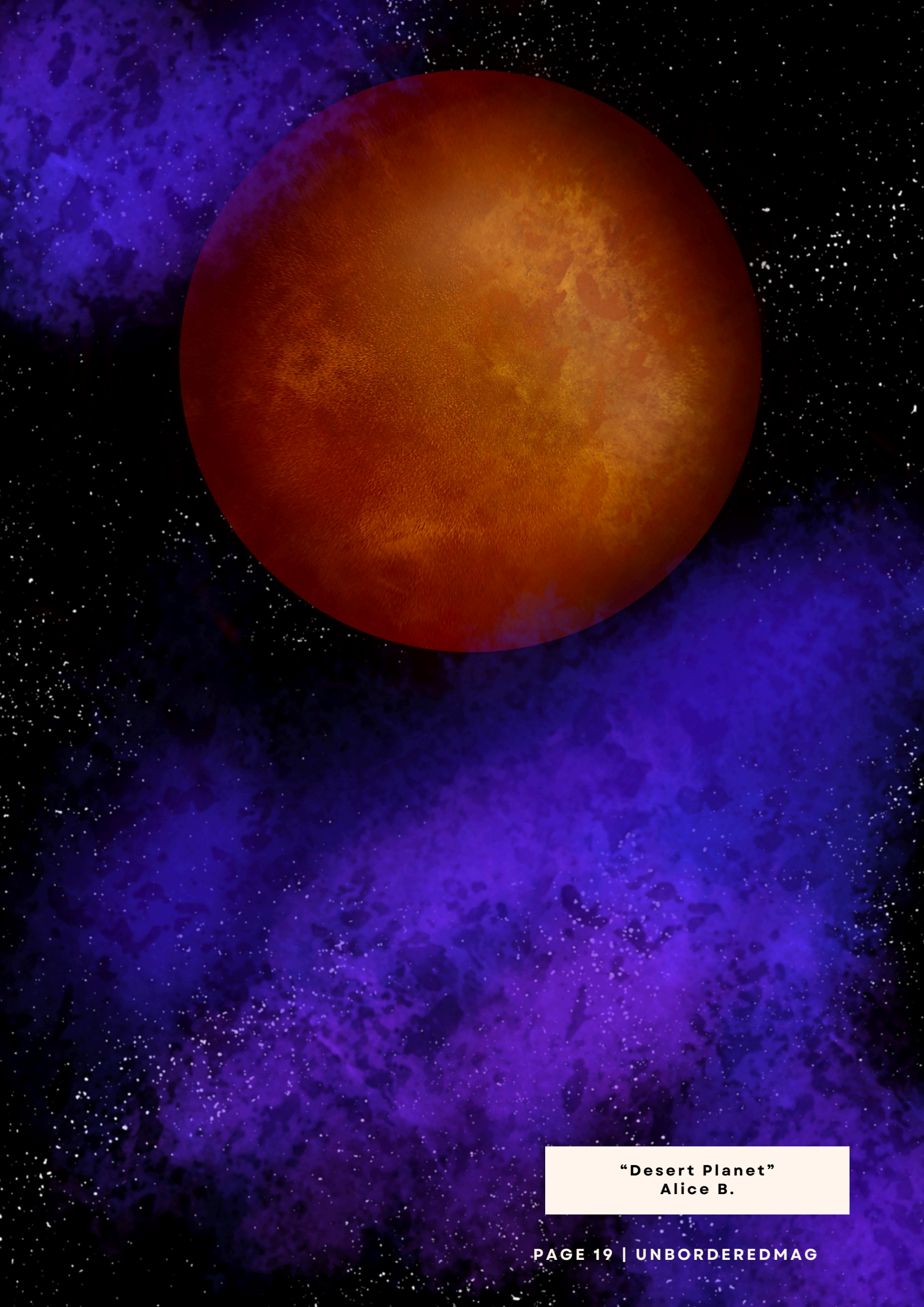
Tourism has shaped Albania's international image, from an isolated post-communist country, to a vibrant and welcoming cultural destination. I get comments and DMs on a regular basis from Albanians living abroad, who say they're thinking about moving back because of how much things have changed in the last few years.

I want to be clear that I've received many more positive, welcoming comments than hateful ones–both online and in person. Albanian's reputation for its warm hospitality is definitely well earned.

Being here is a privilege, but it comes with responsibility, humility, and a willingness to listen. I can love the life I'm building here and still acknowledge that it's harder for the people who were here long before me. Both things can be true at once.

My goal isn't to paint Albania as a playground for expats, but to show what's possible while honoring the reality on the ground. To learn the language. To support local businesses. To show up with respect instead of entitlement. To not impose my culture onto the Albanian way of life, and try to learn from our differences.

I can't single-handedly fix the economy. But I *can* choose to be a thoughtful guest. I can choose curiosity over defensiveness, connection over fear, and solidarity over shame. That's not colonization–it's coexistence.



“Desert Planet”
Alice B.

HOME DEPOT

JESSICA WILDE

I never thought I'd miss Home Depot but here I am standing at the front of Mitre 10 in New Zealand missing a hardware store/ It smells like home/ like lumber/ like longing to be lost amongst the evergreen trees/ we need a hose/ I don't know/ where they are/ I don't want to move from this spot/ why does a hardware store smell like home/ it's odd/ I only ever visited Home Depot when things were changing/ like when I painted my entire upstairs on a due date that was never going to come/ like when my partner painted Mt. Rainier for our daughter under a midnight blue sky sprinkled with stars/ our new home/ we only lived there 4 years/ I thought it'd be much longer/ possibly forever/ we need a hose/ to water someone else's plants/ we don't live in the home we own/ we can't paint the walls here but my daughter gets to play /out front with her friends/ I'm standing at the front of Mitre 10/ my baby in my arms/ healthy and heavy/ my seven year old clutching a pool in a box and

i

t smells like home

BANANA BREAD

JESSICA WILDE

Everything is new, nothing is familiar

I can't carve out comfort anywhere/ I want to make my great grandmother's banana bread muffins/ the mug I used to drink my coffee from/ is sitting on someone else's shelf/ my daughter bought it for me/ I want to make my great grandmother's banana bread muffins/ I miss the way the entire house seemed to glow/ a golden tenderness/ I wonder if my daughter feels the same softness when we make them together/ I didn't know muffins could smell/ like love but they did/ and they do/ I want to make my great grandmother's banana bread muffins/ I can't/ we've been here two weeks and I don't have muffin tins/ or sugar or bananas/ my chest aches/ cultivating comfort used to be easy but I don't have flour/ I have eggs

that's something

nothing is familiar,

everything is new

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Cecily Stone



Children's school productions always make me cry. Like a little bitch.

I'm not sure what is the quality in them that sets me over the edge. Is it the costumes? (Oh god the costumes. Have you ever seen a light up piggie costume on a six year old? With the ears and curly tail? Save us all.)

Maybe it's their shrill yet soft little voices, off-key, untrained, trying to figure out where in their tiny throats they should settle. They've got these little round piping faces that are confused on the next words sometimes, but more or less in unison.

Maybe it's the parents. Faces ashen with the burden of survival, here we are, our phones all pulled out, hunched on horrible chairs, and recording like this is the next big thing. This little space is uncomfortably swollen with love.

Look, we all smile at each other. Look at how ridiculously adorable this is.

No matter the failures, we promise, they did SO GOOD.

I hate crying in public, but at these, tears fight their way out anyway. These little baby children singing their little off-key songs together morph me into a creature I am deeply embarrassed of.

My children love this. They know it will happen, every time. And when my daughter came to me asking for something red, white, and blue to wear for her international assembly in her New Zealand primary school, she smiled a little smile because she knew how into it I would be. But in my head, I had the usual working parent meltdown.

Where on earth am I going to invent an American costume seven thousand miles from America? Have they got the Old Navy here then? Should I have packed American flags in our luggage just in case of a school parade? The closest thing I could find to an apple pie on the Fourth of July was an apple croissant at an Asian bakery. I ate it with a coffee in the bitter cold of the morning after my first week in Auckland and mused at the places life takes us.

But as we always do, us parents, after bitching about the extra work: we comply. I drove across town to the carefully researched craft store I found and bought her red white and blue ribbons and bows and figured it out.

My travel SIM was out of data. My multi currency bank account was nearly empty. But she got her ribbons, damn it. I gave her sparkly eyes and she beamed at me so proudly.

“You’re gonna cry, huh,” she said.

“Nuh uh,” I lied.

My husband, who knows me well, just smirked and held my hand.

We went into the assembly hall and there were flags hanging all in a row, lined up like the backpacks after school. I was vaguely reminded of my elementary years back in the US. Back then, it was in vogue to show smiling international children holding hands on the walls. Curated, crafted, ethnically diverse kids show how evolved we are, and in the nineties that was how you declared that you’re not racist. I remembered how a teacher in the States had gotten fired last year for displaying one of those images.

She was asked to remove it, and brave woman that she was, she refused.

The times have changed. Smiling, hand-holding international children is Woke. And Wokeism is a disease we must purge from our schools. For Jesus.

But if we’re being honest, those always felt a little disingenuous, didn’t they? We always kind of felt that nod to multiculturalism was a little bit bullshit. It really must have been…because eventually, away it went, and here we are in 2025, when my husband and I have taken our children and moved across the world, primarily because of the terrifying, deadly hostility towards immigrants in our country.

Here, we’ve been welcomed. Graciously. The kiwis have given us a knowing smile and told us, oh, you picked well. It’s calmer here. I awoke with a start last week, drenched in sweat, when upon awaking from a nightmare,

I realised that people in the States have been imprisoned for no other reason than what I just decided to do here.

I just…relocated, man, and all my papers are in order. That’s it.

They would feed me to the alligators back home for doing this and being brown.

But instead of men in masks telling me to get in the car, I am here at my daughter’s school, another flat white steaming in the July winter morning, celebrating the heritage of these kids.

I at least was smart enough to avoid the eye makeup, because when it began, I didn’t stop blubbering until it ended. The NZ national anthem, in Māori and English. The children doing dances and singing songs. And then the parade, country by country, with all the kids from Australia to Zimbabwe waving their little flags in their cultural costumes.

These parents, unified by the love for their kids, the late nights from feeding these babies to eventually teaching them division, by the injustice of having to craft these outfits for their kids, clapped so hard and cheered every child, every country. (Even Israel, though there was the slightest of hesitations for that country. But we know it’s not his fault, poor little dude up there.)

I wandered out into the sun feeling kind of drunk from the dopamine if I’m being honest. It was the most adorable little school assembly that had ever made a spectacle of me in public.

I had just witnessed the live-action remake of the little multicultural kids holding hands.

It was so sincere. Not even a little bit of bullshit.

They were smiling and so happy to be celebrated and cherished and loved. It was over half the school up on the stage, the international children. The principal, his kiwi accent heavy, reminded us that we all learn from each other. The local kiwi kids sat and enjoyed the whole



production, grinning ear to ear without their shoes, and enjoyed their lollies. They were content without the spotlight.

Why is that so wrong and so missing in the states?

What is wrong with the little ring of international children holding hands? Why did that vanish?

It was so cute. It was wholesome. What is so threatening about it? The puzzle consumed me all afternoon. I still am not sure, and here I remain, riddled with theories and streaky mascara.

Lorelei's new best friend is Zoe. This is a cute circumstance, because her best friend back in the States was also named Zoe. When she started school, Zoe started one day before her, and is also an international student.

But Zoe is from China.

I don't know how many times our countries have threatened war towards each other this month, let alone this year. But I know her father loves his daughter like I love mine. We both purchased these expensive uniforms.

We both walk to the classroom door every day and squeeze our babies in hugs when they emerge. We regard each other silently and politely when our daughters play after school, and I admit I am slightly suspicious. I want to give him our contact information so the girls can play. I believe any hostility towards each other's countries is absolutely stupid…but does he believe that too? What if he doesn't?

What if he hates all Americans, and is upset that our children are now best friends?

So instead of saying anything to him I stay safely silent.

Maybe my daughter will do better. Maybe, growing up here, knowing that we just live in a small country in the South Pacific, will understand her place in the world. She will know for a fact that no country is the greatest. She will use critical thinking that she learned in her international schooling to understand prejudice and bias from fact. She will know that religious belief is so diverse it should be privately practiced and universally protected instead of blending it together with nationalistic isolationism into a cult-flavoured milk for them to have in the cafeteria where they bow their heads in prayer before they are issued trays of their daily glyphosate.

That was a mouthful. Sorry. I have complex feelings about my home country right now.

Here there are no cafeterias. They eat their home-packed lunch in the grass. There also don't appear to be shoes because none of the kids can seem to keep them on.

> "But instead of men in masks telling me to get in the car, I am here at my daughter's school, another flat white steaming in the July winter morning, celebrating the heritage of these kids."

But maybe she'll grow up more grounded now.

Feet to the earth, eyes to the world, holding hands with her international friends in ways that in America we can't seem to fathom.

Maybe, America, it's time to put up the little multicultural children holding hands again. Because from Australia to Zimbabwe, that's what humans are.

Children and parents at primary schools. Our phones out, poorly recording a video no one will ever watch. Our backs hurting from these shitty chairs. Cheering for the little girl dancing even when she falters, for the cheesy songs, for the cute little outfits, for the off-key voices, our hearts and souls and our eyes overflowing with love for our children-trying, desperately, to give them the world.



WRITERS, ARTISTS & CONTRIBUTORS

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Alice is an artist and graphic designer who lives in Uruguay. She is the visual arts editor for Unbordered.

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Debra Guckenheimer is a writer, artist, and educator with a PhD in Sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a BA in Politics from Oberlin College.

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Meredith Burns escaped the American hustle culture and corporate rat race with her husband and "furbaby" in late 2023 when they rented their house, packed some suitcases and moved to Portugal. (Best decision ever.) She can be found on the airwaves hosting over 50 episodes of their podcast - Portugal Junkies Podcast - that documents their unedited experience of moving abroad (+ not just the Insta-worthy version).

ERIK WEST

Erik West is a disabled, transgender American-Australian. He currently lives in Tasmania, formerly of Baltimore.

MELISSA RAE

Rae is a queer abstract watercolor artist who grew up in Conway Arkansas where they graduated with their Bachelor's of Fine Arts. Rae's art is inspired by colorful impressionist and modern contemporary movements. Their work draws on vibrant colors and flowing lines mimicking the whimsical paths of nature. Rae moved to Montevideo Uruguay in April 2025 with their partner and 3 cats. On sunny evenings they can be found walking an orange cat named Arkie by the Rambla.

ANONYMOUS ARTIST

Anonymous is a forty-year-old queer, transgender mother who spends their days as a user researcher, diving deep into what makes people tick. When she's not exploring human behavior professionally, she's building a creative side business by transforming their passion of graphic design into the means to relocate abroad with her family. Their life is about understanding others, expressing herself, and creating new possibilities for the people they love.

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Veronica Zora Kirin is a queer Croatian/American writer and anthropologist who studies paradigm shifts. Kirin is cofounder of Anodyne Magazine and the author of “Stories of Elders.” Her short story “The Wife” received second placement in the International Fiction Festival 2024 and is nominated for a 2026 Pushcart. She is currently working on whatever the Muses demand from Berlin. Read more at https://veronicakirin.com/books and @vmkirin everywhere.

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Megan Reeves is a Texas native now building a calmer, more connected life on the Albanian coast. She makes content about navigating cultural transition, healing from burnout, and building community with respect and curiosity. Find her at @meganeliseabroad

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Jessica Wilde is a primary teacher that lives in New Zealand with her partner and two daughters. She was born in Escondido, CA and made the move to Aotearoa, New Zealand from Washington state four months ago. She longs to give her family safety, security, and a passion for being present.

CECILY STONE

Cecily Stone is a mother, writer, computer nerd, American immigrant in New Zealand, and author of These Chasms in the Earth. Her works have appeared in Welcoming The Muse (Twenty Bellows), Poems in Praise of Libraries (World Stage Press), Gypsophila Literary Magazine, Retrograde Review, Canvas Creative Arts Magazine (Indiana University), and on a set of compost liners. Stone shares her stories of motherhood, sacrifice, and rebirth at open mics and on socials: @cecilystonespeaks. On the weekends, you can usually find her alongside her husband and children finding adventure in her new home country.

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