



PROJECT MUSE®

## A Nation of Two

Tsering Wangmo Dhompa

Colorado Review, Volume 47, Number 3, Fall/Winter 2020, pp. 141-142  
(Article)

Published by Center for Literary Publishing

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/col.2020.0085>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/774930>

## A NATION OF TWO

I

The category of the refugee comes with benefits they say so we fulfill their expectations. Knowledge of, acceptance of, analyses of losses don't change how we feel human.

You begin to worry you have not suffered enough. If only you had scars where your bones were broken, your narrative would be reliable.

Your mother was shot by the Chinese.

Your sisters spent their youth in labor camps.

As one who came after you memorize the names of the dead to legitimize yourself or perhaps here it is about suffering I am attempting to write.

The state of refugee is the state nobody wants to conquer. You are there; we cannot leave.

Before I understood her suffering as having no end I thought imagination would color over memory.

One dies out of a desperate loneliness, not the loneliness of being alone, but of being the one who came after. In exile, you crack peanuts between thumb and index fingers. It is also the way I write.

Imagine that you are in the waiting room with an open wound and a ticket with your name on it. Through the door half-shut none of the names called matches yours.

You practice patience. The best you can do is hope.

Year after year she waited for her name to be called.

The loss of this thing called hope comes gradually.

2

I loved a man who was uncertain of being loved. I thought it was fair I love him more. I have never been good with numbers.

I compared marriage to something like the nation of two. I thought the same rules would apply. But the goal for equality began with the lesson that the happiness of one is not directly equivalent to the happiness of the other.

To be a noncitizen in a nation of two is to sit outside the gate to the city with a key to a concept of belonging. To be the one always asking to be let in. The *non* prepares one for everything but possession.

To be content to paint the gate, to look into, to look through, to ask, to ask, to ask the silence that men build.

I say men here because this part is personal.

He saw me as an improper fraction. I was not a good fit.

I tread in his choppy sea. I could not reach the shore.

At best, he saw me as the best

of the worst number.