THE ACCIDENTAL AMERICAN

Immigration and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization

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an excerpt from

The Accidental American: Immigration and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization

by Rinku Sen with Fekkak Mamdouh

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Introduction

COMING TO CITIZENSHIP IN A NEAR-GLOBAL AGE

At 8 a.m. on September 11, forty-year-old Fekkak Mamdouh was asleep, having worked the previous night's late shift from 4 p.m. to 12 a.m. His wife, Fatima, lay beside him; she had dropped off their daughter at kindergarten four blocks away and then climbed back into bed. For six years, Mamdouh, whom everyone knew by his surname, had been a waiter at Windows on the World, the luxury restaurant on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center's North Tower. He had started working there in 1996 when Windows reopened after the 1993 terrorist bombing in the building's basement. Mamdouh's wide brown eyes and the round apples of his cheeks gave him a disarming look of innocence. These mellow features hid the scrappiness that had made him a beloved, though sometimes controversial, union leader.

The first call came from Mamdouh's sister Saida, who lived in Italy. She told him to turn on the TV. The second call was from his brother Hassan, who lived down the street. "Listen, brother, there was a plane that just crashed through the Twin Towers," Hassan said. "Guess what? You're not going to have a job for a couple of months while they fix the place."

Mamdouh and Fatima turned on the TV thinking of terrible accidents when the third call came—their neighbor telling Fatima to get their girl out of school. Fatima hurried to retrieve her daughter Iman. When she got back, Mamdouh was still transfixed by what was flashing across the television screen. He said, "You watch. They're going to say it's Muslims."

Fatima asked him why he thought so.

"Because they did it in ninety-three," he said, referring to the earlier attack.

Without eating, Mamdouh left their house in Astoria, Queens. He went to 8th Avenue and 44th Street, the offices of his union, Local 100 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE). He and other union members made two lists: one of all the workers who would have been catering breakfast for Risk Management employees that morning, and another of all the places they might be found. Then teams of shop stewards and union organizers set off to search for the workers and track their families. Mamdouh paired up with a colleague, an Egyptian immigrant and now former captain at Windows. The two started out at hospitals, asking who had been brought in. They met many families of people who had worked at the World Trade Center, but they found no actual casualties of the attacks. They made their way down Manhattan's West Side, where all its hospitals are located. After the fourth one, Mamdouh's companion, who had been crying steadily, said he couldn't take any more. He went home, while Mamdouh headed to the morgue on First Avenue and 30th Street, staying there until 3 a.m.

The following night, Mamdouh gave an interview to a cable news channel. One of his friends, another Moroccan, saw the interview and called him the next day to ask why he hadn't said that Muslims—meaning regular, real Muslims like them—hadn't done this thing. Mamdouh told him that people already knew.

For the next five days Mamdouh ate and slept very little. He spent hour after hour circling the morgue's lobby carrying a sign: "If you know anyone who worked at Windows or if you worked at Windows, please call the union." Mamdouh was able to cross barback Mario Peña's name off the missing list on September 12, and he found cashier Faheema Nasar a full week later, but in the end, seventy-three of his co-workers weren't coming back.

A couple of days after the attack, Mamdouh and Fatima went to their neighborhood Pathmark store. She had covered her head in *hijab*, as she had since her mother died three years before. It was evening and the store was not at all crowded. They were the only people wanting to buy fish, and Mamdouh stood at the counter with her while she tried for several minutes to get the fishmonger's attention. Eventually, Mamdouh's patience gave out.

"Hey, she's trying to talk to you," he said to the clerk, who continued to ignore them. "She's trying to ask you a question."

"Don't you know what you guys did?" was the response.

"What?"

"The World Trade Center." It was a mumble, but Mamdouh heard it clearly enough.

He snapped. His eyes widened, his smallish frame puffed up.

"What are you talking about, what we did? I lost seventy-three of my friends there. Maybe you didn't lose anybody, and you don't know what you're talking about." The clerk backed up from the counter while Mamdouh yelled, "I want to see the manager!" He yelled some more at the manager, who apologized. Neither Mamdouh nor Fatima would ever return to that store.

Something shifted in Mamdouh that day. The clerk's accusation had wounded him. Two days after the tragedy, he was ever aware that he himself could easily have died. He suffered for the loss of his colleagues, and the idea that someone would associate him with their deaths because he was Muslim was shocking. Until then, he had been living the life of a lucky immigrant, getting great jobs in high-end restaurants because he spoke fluent French. He had come to the United States to make money and to be near his younger brother, and although he missed Morocco, he had felt American enough to marry here and have two children who were born U.S. citizens. Despite his prediction to Fatima that Muslims would be blamed for 9/11, he had actually managed to get by for twelve years without noticing American discrimination in a daily way, not toward black people or Asians, and certainly not toward himself. Now he rewound his history, noticing things that he hadn't clearly seen before. He couldn't yet know, however, that these new insights would reshape his life as an immigrant worker in America.

Wall vs. Amnesty: Old Debates and New Perspectives

This book tells the story of modern immigration through the life of Fekkak Mamdouh, an ordinary, if somewhat fortunate, immigrant who found himself at the center of historic events. Situations like his have given rise to a contentious debate across the United States about immigration and the purpose of contemporary policy. Politicians, media pundits, populist organizations, and policy advocates have focused either on stopping unauthorized immigration or on legalizing undocumented immigrants. The current discussion prompts seemingly discrete questions. How big should the fence along the southern border be? Should undocumented immigrants be allowed to correct their status, and if so, how easily? The debate is intensely polarized, yet too narrow to lead us to real solutions.

The wall-versus-amnesty framework hides the far more fundamental question: Should the United States continue to welcome immigrants in large num-

bers? To answer that question in a humane manner that promises the best possible outcomes for both immigrants and current residents, for both the United States and for the countries that send immigrants, we need a holistic new framework within which to plan future action.

Substantial numbers of people are making new homes in this country. Each year, about 1.5 million come here to live and work. The largest single group, comprising about 40 percent, come from Mexico; the rest arrive from other countries of the Global South or former Eastern Bloc European countries, including India, China, the Philippines, Cuba, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Korea, Colombia, and Ukraine. Worldwide, immigrants have been a major source of economic support to their home countries; 190 million people sent $300 billion to their countries of origin in 2006.[1] Immigrants also make enormous economic contributions to their new countries.

Demographers and sociologists estimate that two-thirds of these 1.5 million immigrants arrive with official sanction; the rest either cross the border without documents or overstay tourist visas. It is impossible to know exactly how many immigrants are undocumented, since the Census Bureau doesn't ask about immigration status. The most commonly quoted source of projected numbers, the Pew Hispanic Center, calculates a national figure by subtracting citizens and legal residents from the total population reported by the Census Bureau. Using admittedly limited projection techniques, demographers generally believe that between 7 million and 13 million undocumented people now live in the United States, and that the number grows by 500,000 or more each year. The Pew Hispanic Center estimated 11.1 million in 2005 and as many as 12 million in 2006.[2]

Participants in the mainstream debate on immigration typically take one of two sides: a secure-the-borders/punish-the-"illegals" side, and a side that argues that we should legalize undocumented workers and improve the immigration system. On the punitive side, immigration restrictionists make three arguments. First, they assert that the country cannot bear the growing material burden of illegal immigrants; second, that illegal immigrants threaten the American public's psycho/social sense of identity; third, that lax immigration policy has enabled terrorists to enter the country. While restrictionists who advance these arguments largely focus on unauthorized immigration, they have also opened the door to proposals to limit legal immigration.

In making their fiscal and economic argument, restrictionists express concern about the ability of our public school systems to absorb so many non-English speakers, and about our public hospitals' having to provide emer-

gency care to the undocumented. Employers pay lower wages to immigrants, they point out, thereby dragging down the average wage rates of the lowest-paid American workers. In this story, the immigrant is a parasite.

A second set of opponents focuses on cultural identity issues: immigrants' alleged refusal to learn English; their large extended families, all piled into overcrowded homes and apartments; their practice of separating themselves out in neighborhoods and business districts that then become unwelcoming to "real" Americans. All this multilingualism, restrictionists assert, is changing the character of the United States, and it will end with a complete takeover of this nation-state by Mexicans or the Chinese. In the harshest expressions of this narrative, immigrants behave so differently from Americans that their very humanity is questioned.

Finally, restrictionists advance the law-and-order argument. It begins by making the single misdemeanor act of crossing the U.S. border a person's sole defining characteristic (illegal) and ends by equating immigration policy with national security. In this narrative, the immigrant is a criminal and a terrorist.

On the other side of the current mainstream debate, the business community and some immigrant rights advocates have argued that immigrants, on the whole and over the long term, generate more resources than they consume. These advocates cite studies showing that about 75 percent of undocumented workers actually do pay taxes through fake Social Security cards, and that immigrants in general use far fewer public health resources than do native-born Americans. Today's immigrants assimilate at exactly the same pace as yesterday's immigrants. They commit crimes at far lower levels than native-born Americans. The characterization of immigrants as a socio-cultural threat, this side argues, is overblown and racist. While this attitude is obviously more sympathetic to immigrants than that of the restrictionists, it frequently reduces the immigrant to a hard-working but one-dimensional economic actor. The immigrant might have a family, but he or she has only a little bit of culture (usually culinary), virtually no politics to speak of, and contributes nothing to the United States other than labor to ensure long-term economic growth.

Conducting the debate within these boundaries—punishing undocumented immigration or legalizing the undocumented people who are here now—has not and will not deliver an effective, humane solution that can produce the greatest benefits for the largest number of people. Captive to the rhetorical status quo, both sides have decided, for various tactical reasons, to

ignore three important realities. First, globalization is incomplete, creating a situation in which corporations are free to move jobs, operations, and capital anywhere they wish, while workers' mobility is limited by borders and immigration laws. Second, a permanent, unchanging American identity is neither possible nor desirable; the culture of the United States has changed many times over the course of its history, and further transformations are always already in motion. Finally, the current debate posits immigrants and U.S. residents as foes, when in fact our destinies are closely tied together. Without focusing attention on these three blind spots, we cannot gather enough information to make rational, innovative choices.

What we currently call "globalization"—or "neoliberal economics"—was promoted by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s to propel most of the world into an expanded system of unchecked capitalism designed to give corporations more flexibility than either workers or governments. Clarifying its mechanisms and effects is the key to understanding why so many people are moving around the world, scrambling to make even a basic living. "Globalization" has three major characteristics: smaller governments that levy lower taxes and provide fewer public services; deregulation of business so that corporations have fewer labor, environmental, and pricing limitations; and opening new markets for consumer goods by removing tariffs and other trade barriers, which are essentially taxes on international commerce. Since the 1980s, when the Reagan and Thatcher administrations controlled the international financial system, any country that hopes to borrow money from global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank has been forced to make "structural adjustments" to bring its economy into line with these principles.

As a result, corporations have assumed ownership of many of the major resources—resources previously managed by government—on which the poor rely, including utilities, water, land, health care, and a host of others. These resources have become increasingly expensive for consumers, not just in the countries of the Global South, but everywhere. Deregulation was touted as a way to help poor countries attract foreign investment—corporations are far more likely to locate their operations where the costs of doing business are minimal, whether because the legal minimum wage is low, or unions are weak, or health protections are not required. In addition to structural adjustment programs required by the World Bank and IMF, free trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) generally build upon these principles without questioning their value or applicability. With

corporations pressing for lower labor costs, and governments caving in to that demand, workers are squeezed between two gigantic forces—with no countervailing force to protect their interests.

Neoliberal globalization creates the conditions that drive people to migrate. Without that understanding it is difficult to see why all our laws designed to keep out undocumented migrants are self-defeating. Large numbers cross borders illegally in the first place because it is their best choice to achieve a dignified life—if not for themselves, then for their children—in a neoliberal world. They come, and they stay, even at the risk of losing any legal standing in their adopted country. The response of receiving countries has been to treat these migrants as purely economic beings, allowing a limited number to fill "temporary" labor shortages that corporations might claim they have. The migrants are then supposed to go home.

If we continue to ignore the true reasons people come to the U.S., characterizing their actions as a matter of decontextualized individual behavior ("They chose to break the law"), they will continue to come, no matter how many fences are erected or how dangerous it is. Militarizing the U.S.–Mexican border by deploying ever increasing numbers of Border Patrol officers (tripling the force from 1980 to 2000) and building fences has not discouraged migrants from crossing. These measures have, however, driven them into the most remote reaches of the desert. During 2005, at least 473 people died under such circumstances, a historical record.[3] Such a death, some people say, hurts far less than slow starvation.

Thanks to our second blind spot, we assume that cultures and national identities do not change. This assumption prevents us from acknowledging the full humanity of immigrants, which in turn leads us to reject their potential cultural and political contributions. Immigration restrictionists seem to imagine that Americans have thought and behaved in pretty much the same way since 1776. Americans and immigrants alike, they imply, encounter each other in economic situations and are otherwise untouched. The mainstream national response to the collective trauma of September 11 has been to draw and freeze a particular definition of the true American: white, Christian, English-only-speaking, and hungry for nothing but hamburgers. Foreigners are cast not only as strange, but also dangerous. We apply our fears and biases selectively, however: Arabs, South Asians, and Muslims are all seen as potential terrorists, while Mexicans are seen as criminals. The Irish, not so much.

In this view the good immigrant does nothing but work, and the bad immigrant does nothing but undermine the rule of law. Pro-immigration advocates

who try to deflect the culture war argument by stressing that immigrants just want to work hard and raise their families imply that if immigrants are allowed to do that, they will keep their cultural and political ideas to themselves.

Stasis, however, is a fiction. Cultures do not stand still, nor should we want them to. The English language, for example, is full of words that originated far from England. The word *jungle* is related to the Bengali word *jangal*, the word *shmuck* is actually Yiddish, and the word *gumbo* comes from the Bantu *ngombo*, meaning okra. Hamburgers and hot dogs began as hearty German fare, slapped onto buns by intrepid immigrants to meet the needs of New York street life in the late nineteenth century. American jazz has its roots in ancient African musical traditions.

As immigrants change America, so too does America change immigrants. The clashes between generations of immigrant families, so deeply written into American literature, testify to the inevitability of identity shifts. The language of immigrants shifts, as do their culinary, educational, political, and romantic habits. All these modifications can be both positive and negative. It is not acceptable, or even possible, to prevent any change at all. Instead, it's up to us to drive the changes that are occurring in a positive direction.

The debate over cultural change reflects a deep racial anxiety in our country. Although whites are still a significant majority, their proportion of the population is definitely shrinking. California, New Mexico, Texas, and the District of Columbia are already majority-minority jurisdictions; New York, Maryland, Mississippi, Georgia, and Arizona are next in line. But these populations already exist—shutting down immigration today, or restricting it to only white countries, will not reverse the trend. Continuing to define the American as a white person can only lead us to institutionalizing racism, a system in which only whites are considered entitled to the privileges and rights conferred by citizenship.

The third assumption embedded in the current debate is that immigrants and U.S. residents have opposing interests stemming from competition for limited resources. In fact, our interests and our fates are closely linked. The Reagan/Thatcher program of corporate globalization has hurt us all. While a punitive, limited immigration policy might make current residents feel better, it won't magically refill the public coffers or bring back thousands of formerly high-paying jobs. For example, the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was presented as the key to stimulating both the U.S. and the Mexican economies, had so few labor and environmental protections that it was virtually ensured to harm workers in both countries, although corporations have

certainly done well from it. Sadly, all the data shows that NAFTA has been a dismal failure for almost all involved, driving millions of Mexican workers to migrate within their own country and farther north to survive, while simultaneously enabling the loss of over 750,000 jobs in the United States.[4]

Our punitive approach to illegal immigration harms Americans in equal measure. First, making immigration difficult while doing nothing to change conditions in sending countries creates the whole category of illegal immigration in the first place. If people could immigrate legally, or if they had other options for making a living in their home countries, few would take the option of entering illegally. Second, when undocumented people cannot protect their rights, employers are able to abuse them, which makes them the labor force of choice and drives down working conditions for everyone else. Third, immigrants who are driven underground out of fear become vulnerable to all kinds of crime, from fraud to mugging, undermining the rule of law rather than strengthening it. By refusing to join forces with immigrants, we damage labor rights, forgo substantial tax revenue that could be used for the public good, and, most of all, sacrifice the social and economic benefits of a free and open society.

Living in a New Immigration Framework

Grappling honestly with these three realities—that globalization is incomplete, that cultures are always changing, and that immigrants and U.S. residents have more to gain from embracing each other than they do from an adversarial stance—is the key to driving the immigration debate in a positive direction. Organizing workers in New York City's enormous restaurant industry after September 11, Fekkak Mamdouh saw the effects of the national debate on the average immigrant—a person of color, stuck in a low-wage job, about one-third of the time without documents and therefore without a legal identity. These immigrants suffer greatly to keep New Yorkers in great meals at low prices. They often live in severely overcrowded apartments. They earn little, and are frequently cheated of their wages by their employers. They send back much of what little they do earn to support families in their home countries. They perform the industry's most dangerous jobs, documented in burn scars and missing fingers.

Mamdouh's work to transform the restaurant business, one of the largest sources of local economic growth in the country, echoes the efforts of other immigrants upon whose backs this country's prosperity was built, and who transformed the Industrial Age with strikes, protests, and political action. The

industry also holds lessons for other parts of the economy. It is both a gateway—an entry point through which low-wage immigrant workers can make their way in a new country—and an archetype, offering important models for building local economies that are less vulnerable to the negative aspects of neoliberal globalization.

Ironically, Mamdouh's association with such immigrants brought him closer to, rather than alienated him from, native-born Americans. Through a series of unpredictable events, he learned that the key to making things better for everybody lies in focusing on the most reviled, the people at the very bottom of the hierarchy. He learned that everybody really meant *everybody*, from kitchen workers to New Yorkers who ate in restaurants on a weekly basis to employers who were trying to live by the rules. To learn these lessons, he would struggle with his own mythic ideas about what it meant to be an American. He would also struggle with the role of September 11, an event that both inspired and limited his work.

While Mamdouh was organizing in New York City, Cecilia Muñoz, an immigrant rights advocate in Washington, D.C., was laboring to change policy from the top down. Muñoz was on Capitol Hill with a direct view of September 11's effect on the immigration debate. Through her, we track the federal debate from the day before the attacks to the death of comprehensive immigration reform in the 2007 session of Congress.

Together, these two stories reveal an ironic truth: even as Mamdouh's work on the streets of New York continually broadened his community, the discussion of appropriate federal policy went the opposite way. The scope of congressional proposals to create a legalization program shrank while enforcement measures grew, the whole process giving the impression that the United States is an increasingly narrow community, disconnected from the rest of the world. The contradiction suggests that our public officials are deeply, even tragically disconnected from the actual communities in which we live. When allowed to, those communities work things out with broad analysis and promising solutions, solutions that Congress appears to be missing.

We need a new framework for addressing immigration, a global framework that both takes a clear-eyed view of Americans' struggles and enables the birth and fruition of forward-looking, humane, and effective policies. The immigration "problem" cannot be solved through immigration policy alone, nor even in the United States alone. We can go a long way with a system that eases rather than restricts people's movement, that respects immigrants as more than cheap labor. Such a policy would decriminalize immigrants by

increasing legal immigration (rather than temporary worker programs), while protecting their labor and civil rights.

An open immigration policy, however, won't resolve the deep inequities that exist among countries. For that project, we need to bring countries closer together—not by ratcheting down workers' wages and rights in the receiving countries, but by raising wages and rights in the sending ones. Such a project may sound politically impossible, but we already have a global political and economic system that is remaking the world in the name of neoliberalism, based on trade, war, and diplomacy. The task before us is to complete the process of globalization in such a way that it benefits the largest number of people, rather than only the economic and political elites who gain so much from the current system. We can imagine and build regional transnational taxation, governance, public service, and labor systems that allow us to end the cycle in which corporations race to the bottom, forcing workers to race, fruitlessly, to what they perceive as the top.

Without intending to, Mamdouh uncovered the seeds of a new immigration and economic framework. He came upon them by accident—as a child, he never imagined traveling even 200 miles from his home in Casablanca. But larger forces presented challenges and opportunities, as they always do. He figured out how to speak back to those forces and, in that speaking, how to act in the best traditions of the United States, when its instinct for ingenuity was turned toward the project of inclusion. Mamdouh is neither hero nor criminal, but just an ordinary immigrant. If he can find a way, so can we all.

Chapter 1

LEAVING HOME

Mamdouh's own migration history was typical for his generation in many ways, from the conditions in which he grew up to the family relations that propelled his moves. Even before he left Morocco, Mamdouh's life took shape in a global context, politically, economically, and culturally. He was born poor in a country that had achieved independence just before his birth. Those were heady times for Moroccans, but a good portion of their optimism turned out to be misplaced. Although independence freed them from French colonial control, it didn't transform Morocco's monarchy and political system, nor did it improve life for most Moroccans.

Mamdouh's circumstances and decisions were closely tied to those of his family. He was actually part of a second generation of migrants; both parents had made the universal trek from the countryside to the city within Morocco. He himself followed his brother, who was the first to leave the country altogether. In each generation, the decision to move was motivated primarily by the need to survive, but also reflected a healthy anticipation of adventure and change, of breaking out from old patterns and expectations.

Desperate as they are, once emigrants decide to leave, they try to choose not only the most geographically accessible place, but also one that seems welcoming or exciting. Like most migrants, Mamdouh came to the United States after an earlier stint in Saudi Arabia—trying life in multiple countries is extremely common. As he traveled, working for very wealthy people, Mamdouh was allowed to see, and sometimes to participate in, luxurious lifestyles

based on rampant consumption. Living in proximity to riches he couldn't have imagined as a child didn't make him greedy, but it did show him the vast distance between the poverty in which he'd grown up and the wealth that was possible. It made him more determined to gather at least some of the good things in life for his own family, and made it impossible for him to return voluntarily to his old life in Morocco.

Over the course of his journey, Mamdouh experienced life in all the possible immigrant statuses—as a guest worker, as an undocumented person, as a legal permanent resident, and as a naturalized citizen of his new home. As it does for many, restaurants provided him a gateway to a new country. And like most immigrants of color, he started in the lowest wage jobs the industry had to offer. Unlike most, however, he quickly rose to a position at the front of the house, which put him on the path to what can only be called the top of the profession— waiter in one of the world's most famous restaurants. The timing made a difference. He was fortunate to arrive in the United States in the late 1980s, when the attitude toward undocumented immigrants was far more accepting than it would be fifteen or twenty years later. He was also lucky to work with restaurant managers who recognized his skill, including his multilingualism, and who therefore gave him opportunities to rise.

Mamdouh's family history of migration began with his father, Bouchaib, who left the countryside for the city in 1938. Bouchaib grew up in a poor village 60 kilometers south of Casablanca. By the time he was fourteen, Bochaib had suffered the deaths through illness of two brothers and his father. Most of his neighbors were farmers, but Bouchaib learned commerce by traveling with his uncles to local markets where they sold tea and sugar.

As a young man, Bouchaib joined the independence movement, protesting the "voluntary" arrangement between French presidents and Moroccan kings that made his country a French protectorate. When King Mohammed V refused to renew the agreement in 1931, France brought in its Senegalese colonial troops to force his hand. Bouchaib found himself in the midst of a mass protest that turned to panic as a pro-independence crowd ran from French cannon fire. Bouchaib survived that night by lying down among the dead and pretending to be one of the victims.

As he approached manhood Bouchaib watched his friends leave the countryside to make money in the city. He told his mother that he too wanted to go to Casablanca, where he could do something with his life. He took the bus, arriving with nowhere to stay and no work. But he made do. He always found someone who took him to a friendly café where he could spend the

night, or pointed him toward day work in the mornings. Eventually, he got a small job in Mohammedia cutting the grass on a Frenchman's farm; he soon became the farm's foreman and was given a small house on the grounds. He returned to the village a year later at the insistence of his mother, but within four months he returned to Casablanca. There he met Americans for the first time—GIs who had arrived to fight the war in Europe.

Bouchaib finally opened his own little grocery in 1942, a small shop next to the little shack he called home. In 1953 a friend introduced him to Aicha, a young woman who had also come from the countryside. The two married just as the French sent Mohammed V into exile for once again refusing their "protection." Together Aicha and Bouchaib had seven children who grew to adulthood. Within the next fifty years, four of them would continue their parents' migration trajectory, leaving Morocco altogether.

Bouchaib raised his family through the postwar and postcolonial period in a country ruled by monarchs who maintained close ties with the West even after Morocco gained independence in 1956. The family's history illustrates the consequences of postcolonial economic schemes that consisted too much of privatizing state functions to enrich elites and foreigners, and too little of encouraging democracy and real development. As a result of the monarchy's policies, Mamdouh's childhood was marked by both poverty and repression, which together pushed him to search for something better. He wanted the material means to live a dignified life, certainly, but also the freedom to stop looking over his shoulder. Rumors of grand opportunities to find such things outside of Morocco would eventually pull him halfway around the world.

Mamdouh was Bouchaib and Aicha's fourth child, born in June 1961, just months after Morocco celebrated the crowning of a new young king. Hassan II's thirty-eight-year reign would eventually be known as the "period of fire and steel," but at that point the country was still somewhat placidly enjoying the aftermath of a relatively bloodless independence struggle. By then the family was well established in Ben M'sik, a neighborhood of tin shanties and unpaved streets; most of the streets around them were too narrow for even a single car to drive through. They had three shanties—one to live in and two for the grocery store. Bouchaib sold coffee, sugar, tea, flour, and other dry goods, and by Mamdouh's tenth birthday the business had prospered for thirty years. The family shop was located between other neighborhoods and a hugely popular open-air bazaar, so the constant flow of foot traffic guaranteed steady customers. Mamdouh and his brothers got up early every morning to help Bouchaib lift the shop's heavy metal door. His parents had opposite

personalities, his father gruff and loud, his mother shy and housebound. The couple regularly fed friends and strangers along with family, sometimes more than a dozen people in a night.

Still, they were poor. Nine people created four bedrooms out of a roughly 10-x-10-meter space. The house froze in the winter and steamed in the summer, and the lack of running water or indoor plumbing meant that the children took shifts getting water and washing up at one of the mosaic-tiled public fountains that dotted Morocco in the tens of thousands, or bathed occasionally at the local *hammam*.

From an early age, Mamdouh admired his father's independence and entrepreneurial spirit. The family saw Mamdouh as an honest, straightforward child whose siblings didn't torment him excessively. He was especially close to his eldest brother, Mohammed, who taught him how to swim and later how to drive. Mamdouh's early childhood didn't feel deeply deprived, but he was accustomed to making his own toys like soccer balls out of any material that could be made to roll.

Despite the family's poverty, Mamdouh had plenty of typical childhood fun. During the summers, his father sent him to the countryside to stay with his uncle in Ben Hamed, about 70 kilometers south of Casablanca, and Mamdouh traveled to the surrounding towns with his uncle, who had continued the family tradition of selling goods at the market. One of Mamdouh's favorite treats was watching Hindi movies from Bombay, which united Asia and the Middle East culturally, providing a major source of entertainment for a relatively low price. On Sunday mornings, when it was cheapest, he would indulge his obsession with Bollywood actors like Rajesh Khanna, Rishi Kapoor, and Amitabh Bachchan.

Mamdouh learned to make money early on. By the age of fourteen, he was picking through the European and American castoffs at thrift shops, finding items he thought he could resell, taking them home to wash or mend, and then marking them up slightly for sale on the street. His friends knew him as smart, ambitious, and generous, a sharp dresser yet perfectly willing to sell the shirt or jacket off his own back. People regularly asked him about his clothes, "Are you ready to sell that?" and he often was. Once he sold the sneakers he was wearing and walked home in his socks. By the time he was seventeen, Mamdouh had opened the family's first bank account. He talked constantly about his plans to change his life, lecturing his friends about how they needed to make money, go to school, give their parents what they deserved, and never lose hope.

But Mamdouh could not escape the political and social context of his own society. King Hassan II did try to introduce some reforms, expanding the public school system, providing food subsidies, and raising the wages for government workers, but global conditions made hampered these efforts. The French had conducted a friendlier form of colonization in Morocco than they had elsewhere in their empire, but they had still retained economic control of the country. Hassan II wanted both to modernize the nation and keep government control, and these two ambitions marked his tenure. The result of Morocco's large-scale development projects on Mamdouh's family was to aggravate their economic need rather than to bring prosperity. Without democratic rights, however, there was little they could do. The combination of poverty and political repression drove many young Moroccans of Mamdouh's generation to leave the country as soon as they could. The best they could hope for in Morocco was a government job—but the number of those was shrinking and they were in many cases part of a system of corruption.

The Moroccan royal family traced its lineage to the Prophet Mohammed. Although they had created an administrative structure that was formally separate from the monarchy, after independence that structure and the monarchy effectively merged. Suspecting an assassination attempt, Hassan II suspended parliamentary elections in 1971. He also established a secret police force that searched out seditious behavior.

Morocco's economy wasn't strong enough to support Hassan II's ambitions, and Morocco's relationship to the West remained suppliant even after independence. In the end, France had released the protectorate relatively easily, choosing instead to focus on its bitter war against rebels in Algeria, but Europe limited Moroccan imports after independence and kept the country at arm's length economically. In exchange for an International Monetary Fund loan granted while the country's population was growing, Hassan II agreed to reduce public spending on basics like food and education. Throughout the droughts of the 1970s, peasants abandoned the countryside for cities. Food prices shot up in the 1970s: sugar by 37 percent, butter and milk by 45 percent, and flour by an astonishing 76 percent. The cuts prompted food riots, which in turn set the state's repression apparatus in motion.[1]

These events affected Mamdouh's family. In 1971 the family got word that the government planned to build a new airport at the outer edge of Casablanca, then a four-lane highway from Rabat to Casablanca. The neighborhood would eventually be razed, the Mamdouhs were told, but they vowed to stay as long as possible in their home of thirty years. As a white wall went

up all the way around their community and highway construction started, the foot traffic that had kept the store so lively over the years slackened, the store's profits shrank by half, and the family entered hard times for real. Their own poverty grew apace with everyone else's—the country's resources were largely going into fighting to control Western Sahara or paying for large infrastructure projects that could attract foreign investment. The police and army kept the populace in line with violence. Seeing state authoritarianism at such close proximity made Mamdouh consider political action courageous—for other people.

Despite government repression, by the 1970s their neighborhood had become the site of radicalization for trade unionists and political activism. The early 1970s were marked by enormous demonstrations and strikes, some lasting a full year. The conditions encouraged protest. The *Washington Post* reported of Mamdouh's neighborhood that "the problems are easily visible. Only a 10-minute drive from Casablanca's beachfront resort and chic night clubs lie the crowded tenements of Boush N'touf, where street boys were seen playing soccer with a dead rat instead of a ball, or the makeshift huts of Ben M'sik, where thousands of families live without electricity or sewers in what resembles a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon."[2] Mamdouh joined the occasional window-breaking demonstration with his friends, more out of youthful exuberance than moral commitment. He never got caught, though, and his father continued to think of his sons as good boys who worked hard and stayed out of politics.

Soon after Mamdouh graduated from high school, an acquaintance told Bouchaib that he would make a good recruit to the secret police, since he was known to be smart and capable.

"What are you planning to do now?" Bouchaib asked Mamdouh.

"I want to keep studying," he said. "School is good and I'm doing well in it. I want to keep going."

"But you will need to start working sometime." Bouchaib told him about the secret police idea, eliciting an uncomfortable chuckle from his son, who knew the police to be wildly corrupt. "Why are you laughing? Because you think I'm crazy?"

"You know, Baba, you've done a lot and been through so many hard times. You've raised us all well and we are all doing good. But if I go to the police, I will be feeding my family bribes."

In June 1981, two weeks after Mamdouh's twentieth birthday, Morocco's trade unions called for a general strike in Casablanca to demand reinstate-

ment of food subsidies. The strikers called in particular for a gas boycott—no one was to buy gas or move their cars all day—and effectively shut down the city's economy, including airports, train stations, factories, and shops. When the government started running buses along the highway to get around the boycott, Mamdouh watched from the wall as people threw stones. The general strike itself was controlled, but the unions couldn't predict or manage the level of frustration among the city's people, and full-scale riots broke out two days later. The army brought in its tanks, helicopters, and armored cars and ordered a curfew, essentially imposing martial law on the city's poorest neighborhoods. People stood on their balconies and threw rocks at the police.

Mamdouh rarely ventured out during these three days. On the first day of rioting he watched from the family home as people took over the highway, burning cars and trucks. On the second day, the day of the most intense repression, he, his brother Hassan, and several friends stood at the edge of a soccer field when tanks started rolling down the street perpendicular to them. He watched as two people were shot down, then saw a mass of people running across the field, trying to get to the shanties on the opposite side. The tanks continued shooting, and the field was soon littered with bodies. The rioting and repression went on all night and into the next morning, and the police continued to hunt for rioters for days afterward.

The family learned that the police had walked into the house next door and taken Aziz Khetab, Mamdouh's childhood best friend. Khetab had woken up from an afternoon nap to find soldiers standing in his bedroom; they dragged him off to jail, releasing him the next morning, after Bouchaib and the other heads of families went to the police station to plead for his life. Khetab was badly shaken and bruised from being hit and shoved, but he was lucky. Another friend of the family, who had been picked up while sitting in a café in the days after the riot, was sentenced to seven years in prison. The government set the death toll at 66 people, but the opposition and labor unions reported that the number was 637, nearly ten times the government figure. Thousands were arrested, 2,000 were tried, and hundreds, including teenagers, were jailed for up to ten years. The International Monetary Fund denied responsibility for the riots and deaths, saying that it hadn't forced Morocco to adopt its structural adjustment program or end the food subsidies.[3] Although Mamdouh sympathized with protestors, the dangerous atmosphere kept his political role down to an occasional rally. He largely focused on studying.

It was hard to keep going to school when the family's fortunes were so tight. By the time of the riots, the highway was finished and a seven-foot white

wall now separated the road from their shantytown. The shop was virtually closed by then, and most of the family was unemployed. Mamdouh spent many afternoons sitting on the highway wall wondering where all the cars were going and whether he himself would ever leave. Trying to move them out to new housing, the government offered mortgages to families to move to new brick apartments about six kilometers away. These apartments were the equivalent of a new urban public housing development.

The move and the house were presented as voluntary, but there was clearly no other choice but to take it. Eventually the neighborhood wouldn't exist at all. They moved out in the mid-1980s, the very last family to do so long after all the shanties but their own had been razed. The move itself happened suddenly—the boys and parents were simply forced out one day while the girls were away in the country. Mamdouh stayed behind—someone had to be there to tell his sisters Lakbira and Saida that it was time to leave. Late that night, Mamdouh held Lakbira as she cried for their home.

Most prospective immigrants are part of a family chain, encouraged to search for a better life by a relative who took the first steps. Mamdouh was no different. Hassan, his youngest brother, began their generation's pattern of leaving Morocco entirely. He had carved out a niche as the family's maverick, the unpredictable one who always went his own way without asking permission. He and Mamdouh were hanging out in the street one night when they saw one of their neighbors getting into his small Honda. He had found steady work delivering cash and goods for a Saudi prince, mostly from hotels to his house and back, and that night he told Mamdouh and Hassan that he had just transported a lot of money that day. Hassan, only sixteen at the time, got the destination address of the deliveries. The next day, when the neighbor came out of the dropoff point, Hassan was waiting, asking for a chance to work. He shadowed this neighbor on his rounds, and three days later accompanied the royal party hunting gazelles in the Sahara. And just like that, after dropping out of high school at fifteen, Hassan had talked his way into a job guiding and doing errands for a Saudi prince. After a year of these kinds of trips, the Saudis told him to get a passport and gave him 1,000 dirhams for the family. He left with his Saudi sponsors and was sending money home to his family within a week.

For his part, Mamdouh started at university studying physics and chemistry and got an offer to study in Brussels. But his mother, devastated by Hassan's emigration, wept and wept over the prospect of Mamdouh's accepting the offer. Not wanting to hurt her, Mamdouh stayed put. Hassan was at the

same time working to bring his brothers over to Saudi Arabia. He first tried to get a work permit for Mohammed, the eldest, but Mohammed's poor health led to a rejection. In 1985 Hassan finally called to say that he had a job for Mamdouh. One of the princesses wanted a "manager" to handle her family's affairs. In the way of mothers and sons, Aicha cried, but a little less hard this time, and Mamdouh was a little more determined.

"Cry all you want, Ma," he said, "but I am going."

Many immigrants are forced into much lower-skilled jobs than their educations or ambitions would indicate. In this way, too, Mamdouh was like most. He managed his first migration as a guest worker in a system that was designed to give employers complete power. He was lucky, though, to get a fairly easy assignment through his brother's connection to the most powerful family in one of the world's wealthiest countries. Even though Mamdouh had never imagined living anywhere but Morocco while he was growing up, once he left he found that he wanted more than just material things—he wanted to feel a sense of belonging and he wanted to have an interesting, independent life.

Mamdouh arrived in Saudi Arabia in 1986. He was twenty-five years old, with a full head of thick curly hair and a bushy mustache, but his body was in the state of borderline emaciation rarely seen outside the developing world. He was one of 11,000 Moroccans living and working in Saudi Arabia that year.[4] He earned $400 per month. His employer controlled his status and kept his passport. Mamdouh couldn't travel even within Saudi Arabia without his employer's written permission; if he lost his sponsor he would have had to return to Morocco. He knew people who actually had to pay their sponsors in order to stay in the country.

It wasn't quite the exciting life he had expected, even though it was the first time he had gotten a close look at extreme wealth. Although he quickly became used to material comforts—having a large bedroom to himself and anything he wanted to eat—he found that it wasn't enough to make him happy.

Mamdouh lived in a small mansion with nothing to do but sleep and read the newspaper. "It is just in name that I'm a manager," he thought. Eventually, the princess for whom he worked assigned Mamdouh to be a companion to her nine-year-old son; his life then consisted of taking the boy to school, then doing homework, skating, and playing. Mamdouh earned plenty of money, but he rebelled against the boredom and lack of independence. After two years, he began asking the princess for permission to go home, but she always refused. Finally, she said she would not release him from his contract, but

she would allow him to work elsewhere in Saudi Arabia. He left the palaces and found a job selling cold cuts and cheese in an upscale supermarket with a large French clientele. He moved into a group house with fourteen other men from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, getting his first taste of an international community.

Several weeks into the new job, he began to think about the possibility of going to the United States, again a move that Hassan had been the first to make. Hassan was now in New York working in restaurants. Mamdouh's first application for a visa to the U.S. was denied. When a casual friend offered to get him one, Mamdouh handed over his passport. One morning as he opened the grocery store at 7 a.m., the princess called, wanting him to accompany the family to Disney World—the young prince refused to go without Mamdouh. The only problem was that they were leaving the next day and Mamdouh didn't have his passport. Another friend drove him all over town in a frantic search for the man who did, finally finding him at noon.

Early the next day, Mamdouh was at the airport with a family group of about forty people, including servants. Stepping off the plane in Orlando, he felt an immediate and inexplicable sense of belonging. Nothing in his life had prepared him to be in that place, and he had spent his whole life in countries with large secret police forces. Yet as he looked around at the palm trees and sweated in the Florida humidity, he thought freedom seemed to have a smell to it. It might in fact have been the absence of scent, namely the sulfuric odor of coal-burning fires so thick in the air at home, that made him think so.

"This is my place," he thought.

The family rented four mansions for $3,000 a day each, two for the family and two for the servants. Mamdouh spent a month playing in Orlando's theme parks and racing golf carts with the young prince. One day the whole family went to a restaurant, a huge chain outfit that used beepers to let waiting customers know when their tables were ready. Looking around, Mamdouh saw that people were leaving money on the tables after paying their bills. He asked the British chauffeur why they did that and learned about the concept of tipping. That struck him as the feature of a very fine job.

As the family prepared for the trip home, Mamdouh faced a life-changing choice. He could either return to Saudi Arabia, where he would continue to live under the yoke of his guest worker contract, or he could join his brother in New York City. He didn't intend to stay forever in New York, and it wasn't completely clear to him that he would have to look for a way around his lack of a permanent visa, but he knew that Hassan would help him figure those

things out and assist him in finding a job so that he could stay for a time. Mamdouh asked the princess for his passport so he could visit his brother. She refused, sure that he planned to run. In fact, there seemed to be a tacit understanding that everyone who got to the United States would choose to stay rather than return to the restrictions of life in Saudi Arabia or to the poverty of their home countries. Craving more than this limited set of options, Mamdouh secretly decided that he would go to New York with or without his passport. That would have made life hard. He wouldn't get very far with no ID at all. But he was willing to try it if necessary. He was relieved when he eventually got the passport from the princess's son-in-law, who handed it over with the equivalent of a wink and a nod.

When Mamdouh got to New York, Hassan told him to enroll in school and change his status from tourist to student, which he did by taking English classes at Baruch College. He also tried to get into aeronautics school, but was unsuccessful.

Instead of becoming a pilot, Mamdouh got a job in a restaurant.

The Restaurant as Port-of-Entry

By moving into food service, Mamdouh was following a time-honored immigrant and worker tradition. The first high-end restaurant in the United States was founded in New York City by John Delmonico when he opened Delmonico's on William Street in 1831; he provided businessmen with hot meals in the middle of the day, cooked by a real French chef, in a luxurious atmosphere with "prompt and deferential" service. The concept of the restaurant was itself imported from France, where the "liberated" chefs of former aristocrats had been forced to find a new clientele after the Revolution.[5]

The first American restaurant unions also sprang up in New York City. In 1885, German-Jewish waiters and bartenders organized the first culinary workers union in hotels, the direct antecedent of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 100, the local that Windows workers would join a century later. Dozens of independent unions stepped into the industry, including the Industrial Workers of the World, which organized a series of wildcat strikes in 1912 demanding an eight-hour day, a $20 weekly minimum wage, and the banning of "vampires," agencies that charged a month's wages in return for finding someone a job.[6] HERE was one of only two unions to offer membership to black workers in those days.

But the unions were also roiled by infighting and corruption, competing to represent the same workers, refusing to support each other's strikes, and

rushing to offer employers sweetheart contracts. In the 1920s, Prohibition attracted racketeers, including the famous bootlegger Arthur "Dutch Schultz" Flegenheimer, who bullied his way into the leadership of some HERE locals. Businesses had the choice of paying for labor peace or having Flegenheimer cause labor trouble, occasionally forcing a union election at gunpoint. Again, it was immigrant workers at another local who beat back organized crime, and the union's international office started a massive cleanup campaign in New York.

By mid-century more than 50,000 restaurant workers belonged to the union. That figure shrank through the 1980s as the union was hit with a combination of union-busting policies and corruption investigations. By 2000, the number of unionized non-hotel workers had shrunk to about 1,500, or 1 percent of the restaurant workforce.

While the power of workers to bargain collectively has declined, the supply of restaurant workers has exploded, thanks in large part to the influx of millions of immigrants. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the U.S. restaurant industry had become a gateway of opportunity for immigrants from all over the Third World. People from almost every ethnic group work in restaurants as their first job in this country. Roger Waldinger's book *Still the Promised City?* describes how manufacturing jobs started to leave New York City in the 1950s, with the most severe job loss coming in the 1970s. Government and white-collar jobs boomed, however, including communications, transportation, and advertising, with many national headquarters of major firms remaining in the city.[7] There was great demand for high-skilled workers, and eventually, for lower-skilled workers to serve them.

During this period, New York City experienced an influx of blacks from the South, an outflow of whites to the suburbs, and three decades of immigration, with 80,000 new immigrants coming every year. These workers filled the demand for service jobs. While high demand should have resulted in high wages, the labor surplus among the rising immigrant and migrant populations kept job competition intense and wages low. The difference between the high rate of white-collar compensation and the low rate of service sector pay contributed to dramatically growing income inequality in the city.

Windows on a New World

Mamdouh's experiences as a waiter reflected these historical realities: large numbers of immigrants used the industry as a gateway and many were deeply abused by their employers, which drove them to organize for political change

during the height of labor organizing in this country. Mamdouh worked in some of the city's fanciest restaurants, although he started out as a delivery man and busser like everyone else. He quickly rose from busser to waiter in a series of high-end French eateries, where his fluent French helped him break into front-of-the-house jobs. He was extraordinarily lucky to get these jobs, given how few immigrants of color generally are hired for them. He worked with all kinds of people, but he spent little time focused on the racial division of labor—he himself was at the front of the house, he was fortunate to have considerate bosses, and he was so enamored of life in New York City that it was hard for him to see beyond himself. He felt no need to look out for the secret police, as he had in Saudi Arabia, and he had only the most occasional, vaguest sense of discrimination. He read about blacks and sometimes Asians bringing discrimination charges, but never really believed that anything untoward could have happened.

By 1991 Mamdouh was working at Madison Square Garden, where he served meals worth thousands of dollars to star athletes. He joined the union there, but he had little interaction with it. His relationship with his employers was so good, in fact, that when his manager at the Garden moved to run the Hudson River Club, Mamdouh moved as well. The Hudson River Club was not unionized, but Mamdouh felt that management liked and respected him enough to give him a lot of flexibility. While he worked there, an Egyptian friend who felt that he had been passed over for promotion because of race subpoenaed Mamdouh as a witness to his Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claim. Mamdouh testified, but inside, he did not believe that such a thing had ever happened to him. It would still be some time before he understood restaurants as workplaces that needed to be reformed.

The only thing troubling Mamdouh was his lack of documented immigration status. He had been living on his student visa, but knew he couldn't do that forever. All around him, immigrants were talking about the amnesty that had been passed in 1986. Someone told him about a lawyer in Florida who was faking papers for immigrants to get legalized, and Mamdouh decided to try that. He knew that this was all against the rules, but he couldn't see a way around it. He justified it to himself as the only way he could stay in New York. His remittances and those from his brothers were supporting the entire family in Morocco, but he also had become attached to the city itself. If he went home and waited for legal entry, he thought it very unlikely that he would be able to return. So he flew down to Orlando again, looked up the lawyer, signed papers saying that he had been in the country before 1986, and got a

temporary work visa that he had to renew annually. The visa didn't get him a green card, but it did allow him to travel for emergencies. Every year, he created such an emergency, a dying or sick family member, so that he could get permission to go home. He felt especially guilty about claiming those events, afraid that fate would catch up with him and someone in the family really would become deathly ill.

On the bright side, Mamdouh was enjoying a series of phone conversations with a young woman named Fatima who had emigrated to New York from Sidi Kacem, an industrial town not far from Casablanca. She regularly called the Brooklyn house in which Mamdouh was living with four other Moroccans to speak to her cousin. Fatima was tall and slim but sturdy—just slightly taller than Mamdouh himself. She had curly waist-length hair and a straightforward manner. Fatima had grown up an only child whose father was mostly absent, working as the head groundskeeper for a resort in France. She had come to New York intending to take English classes at New York University, only to be discouraged by the expense—and instead of school she started work as a housekeeper at the Essex House.

Their phone conversations often consisted of Mamdouh giving her advice. For one thing, NYU was too expensive. She had to check out Baruch College, as he had done. One day when she visited the house Mamdouh opened the door but didn't identify himself as her telephone friend. The next time Fatima called, Mamdouh said, "I'm the one who answered the door." For their first date, he took her to dinner in the West Village, where he worked and she lived.

In 1995 Mamdouh and Fatima married. As he prepared yet again to make up a story and get permission to travel to Morocco, she said, "Why do you keep putting yourself through this?" She had a green card, and he could get one as her husband, she thought. Mamdouh's machismo was activated for a while—he was loath to have his wife sponsor him, since the world was always meant to work the other way around. He eventually gave in, however, and found a lawyer to help him. Together they applied for his green card. In his application, he admitted that he had lied in order to get the temporary work permit and paid a penalty for having done so. He had been paying taxes all along, through his temporary work authorization.

When the vice president of the Hudson River Club moved to Windows on the World after its reopening in 1996, he encouraged Mamdouh to apply there as well. Windows opened as a massive luxury restaurant taking up some 50,000 square feet on the 106th and 107th floors of the World Trade Center's

North Tower and was well known for its floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Manhattan skyline. Given its tourist-attraction status, the restaurant's owners had always been committed to having an extraordinarily diverse and integrated workforce to match its international clientele. The restaurant had been destroyed by a bomb blast in 1993, and huge celebrations accompanied its redesign and reopening in 1996.

Mamdouh's hiring process was long and convoluted. He interviewed first with the company that was contracted to hire new staff, then with the woman who managed club lunches, then with the banquets manager. After three interviews, Mamdouh was allowed to enter the two-week Windows training program, where he practiced putting in orders and checking food and wine quality. Windows was run by the general manager, the floor managers, the maitre d', and the hostess, and was divided into thirteen sections, each with its own captain, waiter, and busser. Runners brought the food from the kitchen to all the sections. As he started the training, Fatima was about to give birth to their daughter Iman. Mamdouh told the manager who had placed him in the training that he might need to respond to a page from his wife about the baby. The manager responded by telling him that he would be fired for answering a page. Luckily, Iman was born in the middle of the night while Mamdouh wasn't at work.

On the final day of training, this manager told Mamdouh that he had failed, that he was too slow in entering orders into the computer and that he would never work at Windows because of that. Mamdouh tried to argue, but had no real standing and so gave up fairly quickly. He had gotten to know the bar manager, who offered him a job there, but the training manager changed her mind a week later for unknown reasons and Mamdouh finally started at Windows as an à la carte waiter. It was by far the most expensive and exciting restaurant he'd ever worked in. He looked forward to going to work and gazing out the windows at the weather and the city lights every night.

The Windows workforce was stable and tightly knit. The staff formed strong social bonds, checking in about their children or meeting in the stairwells for Muslim prayers. It was a good job, so the turnover was low and people tended to do well and stay for a long time. Most of the workers had significant experience in restaurants, so they recognized Windows' unique position in the industry, felt a lot of ownership of it, and looked for ways to take care of it. Mamdouh himself was earning more than he ever had before—within a year he was at $50,000. Even he was shocked that he could earn so much. Windows, however, was the most profitable restaurant in the country, and one

of the most famous in the world. He worked hard for that money, too; there were no slow nights and the customers were rich and demanding. His earnings would leave him the lasting impression that restaurants could constitute a working person's lucky break.

Mamdouh enjoyed the company of his co-workers. Sekou Siby was a line cook and chef who had emigrated from the Ivory Coast. Siby spoke four languages and was studying for his certificate to teach French in the public schools. Mamdouh was not Siby's shop steward, but they used to meet in the large stairwell for daily prayers. Abdoul Traore was also from the Ivory Coast and the kind of quiet union leader who spoke rarely but always to great effect. Mamdouh also met Utjok Zaidan, an Indonesian waiter; Shulaika La Cruz, a pastry chef from Curaçao; and Jean Emy Pierre, a sous-chef who had come from Haiti as a child. He had good relations with most of the managers. When he and Fatima had their second child, a boy they named Zackaria, all his co-workers congratulated him. Family life suited him perfectly, and the restaurant schedule allowed him to help Fatima at home during the day, where he became an active diaper changer and reader of stories.

Windows' management had agreed to unionization, with Local 100 to begin representation January 1, 1997. Mamdouh gave that little thought until he focused on the manager who had hired him, a woman who was singularly abusive to the workers. Considering the manager's inordinate amount of power, Mamdouh began to look forward to the union's arrival. He was terrified that she would fire him before the union was set up, since managers went on what he saw as a firing rampage during the last days of 1996, the final period in which the workers lacked representation and a contract. They fired the last person one hour before the final New Year's Eve dinner shift. He felt lucky that they didn't pick him out for termination, and some relief that the union would come in and protect them. He ran for and became a shop steward, responsible for sixteen waiters and bussers in his unit but free to represent anyone who came to him. He quickly gained a reputation for being brave and dogged, challenging the management almost every day not to fire a particular worker and to make sure they all got fair schedules. And when people who had made mistakes came to him, he helped them work out a way to make it right with management.

Mamdouh quickly learned the value of the unions he had paid no attention to before. Like most union contracts, this one included a no-strike clause, but the workers really needed to deal with their abusive manager. For three years people had individually complained that she arbitrarily changed

their schedules and disciplined them. The company never responded to these complaints. The workers didn't necessarily want to get her fired, but they certainly wanted her to have less power over them. On Thanksgiving Day 1999, the Windows workers decided to break the no-strike clause in their contract and force the company to act on their grievances. Mamdouh and other shop stewards went into the employee cafeteria that afternoon and spoke to the workers gathered there.

"Listen all," Mamdouh said, "we are going to sit down today. We are not going to work until the company agrees to deal with this manager."

With 1,200 reservations booked, the workers pulled a work stoppage and demanded a meeting with the general manager in the main dining room, where they insisted that he do something about the abusive manager. She was taken off the floor that day, and gone from the restaurant within four months.

But Mamdouh learned quickly not to take for granted the good will of his co-workers. At one point, more than a dozen bussers sent a petition to Human Resources claiming that Mamdouh pushed them too hard and perpetually wanted them to take on increasing amounts of work. The company began an investigation. Mamdouh, who had defended many of these bussers' jobs, furiously cornered each signer and asked them directly what was wrong, only to find that several couldn't say why they had signed such a petitition. Mamdouh suspected that the whole thing was set up by a captain whose seniority claim he hadn't supported. The investigation uncovered nothing and was eventually dropped.

In the spring of 2001, his eldest brother Mohammed, who had suffered from emphysema most of his life, told him to come home. Now he was dying, and he wanted to see Mamdouh one last time. Mamdouh took a month off and spent every day with Mohammed, taking him out of the house for the first time in months. He also started to build a new house in Casablanca, a 2,500-square-foot "villa," or detached home, in a new housing development going up at the southern edge of the city. He imagined that his parents would live there, along with his own family when they visited Morocco. Mohammed died on Mamdouh's fortieth birthday, and Mamdouh again returned to Morocco for the funeral and other rituals.

When he returned from Morocco the second time, the union was preparing to renegotiate the Windows contract. In committee meetings, the workers talked about their need for a pension plan and their willingness to strike for it. Windows was the most profitable restaurant in the country at that point,

registering a profit of nearly $37 million.[8] The workers there were making good money, but they were concerned about their futures. He had just started doing his part to survey workers and to determine how well they would stick together through a protracted contract fight. His heart, though, was still grieving for his lost brother. If Mohammed had been in the United States instead of in Morocco, Mamdouh thought, he might still have been sick, but with better medical care he might not have died, or his passing would at least have been more comfortable.

Democratic Vistas

Mamdouh's immigration story is typical in some ways and highly unusual in others. Like many immigrants, he was pushed out of his country by a combination of government repression and lack of economic opportunity—the latter at least partly conditioned by the neoliberal policies imposed by the IMF and World Bank. Like most other immigrants, he found his first work at the lower end in restaurants, and he struggled to legalize his status, living on the margins of legality for more than six years. He certainly hadn't dreamt of being a service worker; he had studied hard his whole life so that he could work in the sciences. But that dream turned out to be impossible. In Morocco there weren't enough jobs, and in Saudi Arabia and the United States he couldn't get access to professional jobs. These are common enough experiences.

In other ways, however, Mamdouh was extraordinarily lucky. Lucky to never be cheated out of his wages, lucky to never be caught without immigration papers, lucky to marry a woman who herself had a green card, and lucky to be earning more money than many other people in the United States, not to mention Morocco. While he could take credit for any or all of these things, in truth his life circumstances were shaped by forces he couldn't control, such as where he was born, what his parents had, and that he'd arrived in the U.S. at a moment when people weren't asking many questions about how he had come to be in the country.

Like many immigrants who work in service industries, Mamdouh's jobs exposed him to a great deal of wealth. Seeing it didn't make accumulating money his primary concern, but it did show him what kind of lifestyle was possible. He also saw that many of the people who had all this wealth hadn't physically earned it themselves—they had inherited it, or they got it from investments—and that some of them were no kinder, smarter, or more creative than he was. This new view of the world gave him a sense not only that he deserved more than a life of penury, but also that the resources for a good

life were far from scarce. They were just inaccessible to him. Both emigration and service work brought these resources within reach.

It wasn't just material wealth that attracted him, however. When he got to the United States, Mamdouh was able to experience living in a democracy. He had literally been too afraid to take up political activity in Morocco, and being a shop steward had given him his first taste of collective power. As he came to understand that poverty begets more poverty unless a person gets some proximity to wealth, he also began to understand that participating fully in the life of his community was important to him. With every such insight, the chances that he would return to a life of deprivation and limitation dimmed a little more.

The Accidental American: Immigration and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization

by Rinku Sen with Fekkak Mamdouh
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