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Where We Come From – Six Questions About Oscar Cásares' Novel

Editor's Comment: *Oscar Cásares' distinguished yet understated novel provoked a lot of questions in this reader's mind-especially because of the restraint with which it dealt with volatile issues connected with illegal migrants. The story keeps to the human scale and has a rare eloquence. In the 'book club' of the mind, these are the questions I would like to ask. I'm trying to imagine what the answers would be. My review of 'Where We Come From' can be found [here](#).*

Question: It's a textually rich book. There's a lot happening on each page and the characters have an exceptional memorability. Let's start with the title. Who is "We"? Who is included in that word? And are they coming from a place or a state of mind? If so, what is it? People who are coming from somewhere are going somewhere. Where is that?

Question: The first memorable character I encountered in the story is Nina. I felt a little ambivalent about her. Initially, I saw her as some kind of royal sucker. She's seduced by degrees into taking care of her invalid mother. Of course, she loves her mother, but it appears the rest of her family has dumped the task of caring for the senior on her. Also, I loved the irony of her mother rubbing it in that she lives in *her* house. Nina has given up her *own* house and career to care for her mother. Later on, Nina seems to be manipulated into hiding illegal aliens on her mother's property and *from* her mother who mustn't find out. Nina slowly realizes that she has to help her illegal guests more than she has been doing by providing more food and amenities to relieve the harshness of their condition. What do I think of Nina? Do I have any mixed feelings about the character? Is she a saint?

Question: I wondered if *Where We Come From* isn't meant for me. I'm not Latino. I had to look up most of the Spanish words and it's not my culture. But I admit that I often find mainstream North American culture boring. Am I patronizing Latino culture by reading this book? I like books about outsiders, and I feel "the outside" in *Where We Come From*. Is my attitude is screwed up?

Question: Many of the Latino families presented in *Where We Come From* are North American success stories. Family members have successful careers and stable, happy lives. Why can't the families so depicted have found that success south of the border? Or could they have, and it doesn't matter what side of the border they are on?

Question: Citizens in many countries say that illegal immigration is their number one problem-that their countries are "full". I don't get it. Why not open all the borders and let people go where they want? Would that really be worse than what we have now?

Question: *Where We Come From* turns into a great YA classic in its depiction of the friendship of Orly, the North American kid, and Daniel, the Mexican child that gets separated from his group sneaking north and backtracks to Nina's place. Tied in with that, the conclusion of the novel is quite moving. In my review, I was bothered by my description of the migrating Daniel as "strangely alien" in relation to Orly. I nearly excised the phrase but decided to keep it since it represented a problem. In that context, my last question is: What is alien?