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Literacy as Geographies of Transnationalism and Mobility: Diasporic Experiences, Identities, and Knowledge Production

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In an increasingly mobile world, be it virtual or material, we have an incredible opportunity to conceptualize this mobility as a generator of knowledge production, giving us new ways to understand embodied literacies (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Schmidt & Beucher, 2018) and ultimately reimagine our world. At some point in our lives, most of us have had to move or relocate, facing new ideas, people, and places/lands. These *movimientos* and migrations inevitably turn our worldview upside down, blurring our realities, a phenomenon Gloria Anzaldúa (2002, 2015) calls *arrebatos* (earth-shattering ruptures). *Arrebatos* are moments in our lives when we are catapulted into deep reflection and introspection, and have an opportunity to rethink what we believe to be true about ourselves, our culture, our worldview. Thinking of these *movimientos* as opportunities that produce knowledge allows us to shift our thinking about diasporic peoples of the world.

In a time when world powers are spewing vile discourses demonizing migrants, immigrants, and refugees, and constructing them as less than human and undeserving of opportunities for a less violent and poverty-stricken existence, this reframing of diasporic people is necessary and just (Saavedra, 2019). As educators, we have a chance to learn from the *arrebatos* students experience, bringing greater onto-epistemological diversity to our pedagogy, our classrooms, and our lives. Vieira and Skerrett (in this issue) echo this sentiment in their provocative discussion of the significance of appreciating and centering the unrecognized transnational literacies that transpire in the lived experiences of transnational students. A transnationally inclusive approach to literacy education (Skerrett, 2015) would facilitate the transformation and “potential for imagining a more just future” that Vieira (this issue) believes is possible. Consequently, literacy studies can be thrust into new terrains that originate from the embodied realities of diasporic peoples of the world.

Recordando my story of migrations and transnationalism, I now acknowledge and appreciate it as a legitimate journey of knowledge production. This is the knowledge production that stems from the lived experience of a little girl fleeing from the violence of a civil war in Nicaragua, who then and now border-crosses and lives between multiple countries, cultures, and languages. Through this mobility, I experienced multiple epistemologies that fused to create new ways of being and thinking about the world (Anzaldúa, 2015). As a little girl, the concepts of nation and borders were strange to me. Constant new encounters and wanderings with language and culture were my norm. I often draw from these early childhood experiences to rethink the work I do in literacy/language education and research. Similarly, Vieira and Skerrett (this issue), through their keen observations and projects with transnational students and in transnational contexts, are moved to reconsider the boundaries of literacy education.

Thus, I turn to Anzaldúa for a deeper examination of traveling literacies. For example, Anzaldúa (2015) believes that “as our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (*tejemos*), and are woven into, our identities” (p. 69). The body becomes the land encrypted with our travels or movements with a variety of understandings and knowledges that are transgressive and potentially transformative. Therefore, movements, migrations, and our bodies can be examined through what Anzaldúa (2015) calls *geographies of selves*¹. Here we can contemplate our traveling, traversing, and border-crossing as rich learning experiences and encounters that become imprinted on our bodies. Anzaldúa (2015) eloquently captures this sentiment as follows: “The places where I’ve lived have had an impact on my psyche, left a mark on every cell in my body. . . . Our bodies are geographies of selves made up of diverse, bordering and overlapping ‘countries’” (pp. 68–69). Border-crossing, migrant, immigrant students can offer us new and exciting ways to reimagine our lives. If we allow it to, the classroom can become a space where we unleash stories and literacies of *supervivencia* (Galván, 2011) and multilayered and fluid identities.

Ultimately, the ideas of authentic “native,” “nation,” “belonging,” and “citizenship” would be blurred and disrupted by the encounters we might have with our border-crossing students, because we would be aware that “[w]e’re each composed of information, billions of bits of cultural knowledge superimposing many different categories of experience. Like a map with colored web lines of rivers, highways, lakes, towns, and other landscape features *en donde pasan y cruzan las cosas*, we are ‘marked’” and connected (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 69). Indeed, we are all marked on our bodies with pieces of everyone and everything we encounter, making the self “multilayered, stretching in all directions, from past to present, vertically and horizontally, chronologically and spatially” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 71). Our identities become malleable, and who we think we are becomes blurred as we acknowledge our interconnectedness through our *encuentros*, *movimientos*, and migrations.

This drastically shifts our bifurcated and hierarchical conceptions of us/them and immigrant/native because, as Anzaldúa (2015) contends, our identities are dependent on those we interact with and encounter along our life’s journey. Centering diasporic and transnational experience draws our attention to how migrating bodies act as land, marked with billions of pieces of information that can be not only useful but necessary for our survival. We just have to listen to our bodies—the border-crossing, refugee, migrant, immigrant, and marginalized bodies—to reimagine the world. Literacy studies has so much to gain through this re-reading of global diasporic bodies.

NOTE

1. My colleague Mónica González Ybarra and I are using Anzaldúa’s concept of *geographies of selves* in a literacy research project. Our *pláticas* on geographies of selves have influenced this essay.

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Investing in the Learning of Transnational Youth: Considerations for English/Literacy Educators and Researchers

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My researcher lens was drawn to the phenomenon of transnationalism and literacy around 2010, as I noticed youth participants in my research projects whose identities and literacy and language practices were inextricably connected to living across two or more nations. Thus, I began my own learning journey into literacy research on transnationalism, hoping to make sense of the transnational

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