



Association of Mexican American Educators

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 15 Issue 1

2021

AMAE Open Issue

Editors

Patricia Sánchez

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Antonio J. Camacho

AMAE, Inc.

Associate Editors

Julie L. Figueroa

Sacramento State

Lucila D. Ek

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Managing Editor

Christian Fallas-Escobar

The University of Texas at San Antonio

<http://amaejournal.utsa.edu>

ISSN: 2377-9187

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.15.1.441>

Border Thinking: Latinx Youth Decolonizing Citizenship. Andrea Dyrness & Enrique Sepúlveda III. (2020). University of Minnesota Press. pp. 280. ISBN-13:978-1517906306. Paperback: \$27.00

Monica Ramos

The University of Texas at San Antonio

In *Border Thinking: Latinx Youth Decolonizing Citizenship*, Dyrness and Sepúlveda study the effects of migration in the lives of Latin American youth, focusing on cases in the United States, Spain, and El Salvador. The authors examine the ways young migrants process the changes brought by transnational relocation and the ways they adapt to a new school environment and social dynamics while going through the biological and psychological changes of childhood and adolescence. The featured stories tell us about happiness and longing, belonging to two places, and being an outsider in their communities, all at the same time. This book explores the concept of citizenship, questions the colonized logics embedded in the mainstream discourse, and examines the ways these individuals in the diaspora develop their own version of citizenship. The authors draw on Gloria Anzaldúa's border *conocimiento* to interpret Latin American youth's process of membership to their new environment, recognizing that migrants must reinvent themselves to negotiate culture with the oppressive receiving culture.

In chapter I, Sepúlveda discusses the deep effects of border gnosis—which questions migrants' systems of belief, of logical reasoning, and of sentimental attachment—and the new transcultural awareness that may label them as outsiders or transgressors in a colonized social hierarchy led by the Whites. For instance, young Latinx migrants in California must face teacher's racism and social segregation in the classroom. The author illustrates the ways white teachers' accounts of their perceptions of Latinx students vocalize their biases against high schooler immigrants by saying that they self-segregate, ignoring their placement in ESL classes outside the main campus in portable classrooms. Through student organizations, *testimonios*, and literature, Chicanos in the US learn to develop *conocimiento*, creating their new globalized identities while coming of age. Likewise, Chicano educators become supporters of Chicano Youth's endeavor, providing *acompañamiento* in borderlands, to help these young Latinos shape their new identity and find their voice.

In chapter 2, the authors delve into the ways the idealized perception of the USA in El Salvador motivates Salvadorian youth to leave their life behind to move to this nation. American military fighting communism in El Salvador originated a sentiment of appreciation, and by association, everything American is good. Concomitantly, teenagers adopt the notions of citizenship that the US imposed on the world via the manipulation of media and other coercion devices in their country of origin. The deportation of many Salvadoran adolescents who lived in the US as small children forces transnationality and these youth must adapt to their new home while overcoming gangs and oppression by government and society. Teenagers of different socioeconomic status are attracted to the US by economic opportunities and, at the same time, feel rejected by American society. They anticipate discrimination if they move to the US, and in this milieu, they develop ethnic resistance and Salvadoran pride to oppose negative stereotyping by the American people.

In chapter 3, the national identity and transnational belonging of Latino diaspora in Spain are explored through teenagers from Central and South America, as they reinvent themselves and explore their sense of belonging. As the authors explain, Latinx youth in Spain face social discrimination and systematic negative labeling in schools and politics. Against this backdrop, Latinx youth recognize their biculturality, showing a deep understanding of Anzaldúa's notion of *pensamiento fronterizo*, even if these two countries do not spatially border one another. Awareness of their in-between lives provides these youngsters with the opportunity to realize their biculturality is an asset and that a hybrid identity can be created. Female immigrants to Spain recognize fewer constraints in expectations on womanhood, and the sense of personal safety, which translates into liberty. Fighting to create a new identity that encompasses multiculturalism and feminism, they associate together to support political causes in Latin America, in addition to educating newcomers about rights, money, and family. Latin American women build empowerment and kinship finding common background through diversity and awareness of their rights.

In chapters 4 and 5, the authors expound ways Latinx youth in the diaspora accounts have remarkable similarities to those in the borderlands, where *fronterizas* develop a dual identity. Transnational youth constantly switch and mix identities and cultures. Females convey the complexities of roles and expectations preselected for women in their groups; their relocation to Europe has redefined their understanding of heritage and of *mestizaje*. Latinas in Spain struggle to break out of *machista* roles while continuing to belong in the Latino community and accepted by

their female peers. The authors exemplify Anzaldua's concept of new mestiza in the accounts of Latinx youth in the diaspora: one who lives transnational pedagogies and cultures of resistance to construct an identity and decolonize citizenship. Migrant Latinx kids' memories materialize the intersection of multiple home national attachments, and Third World feminism. Diasporic adolescents make a stand to resist violence and end colonial bias in political participation in both their new country and the country of origin.

All in all, the authors demonstrate that scholarly, political, and social discourse in the United States and Spain share many characteristics as countries receiving Latinx migrant youth. Authors' employment of Participatory Action Research, participant observation and interviews—particularly the incorporation of *testimonio* and *mujerista* perspectives—aided to elicit complex responses from their participants, conveying a deeper understanding of the perspectives of identity experienced by these individuals. Dyrness and Sepúlveda explore the identity development of teenagers and women living in a third space. As they demonstrate, immigrants, and first-generation nationals in particular, face discrimination by establishments and individuals, and must fight oppression and isolation. As they also illustrate, self-identification with recipient nationalities is quite low among teenagers, and some adults say they will never consider themselves nationals of their host country, even after they have acquired citizenship. This shows that efforts of organizations and local governments are not providing the results needed for social cohesion. Stereotypes must be brought down if full embrace of multiculturalism will ever be accomplished.

The book contributes to explore displaced Latinx youth, who acknowledge awareness of exclusion in their host country. Migrant minors manifest lack of access to educational resources, which contributes to parallel societies opposing social integration of immigrants. Inclusion and education could provide diasporic youth with the tools necessary to break the colonized discourses that will keep them on the sidelines. Forming organizations that create spaces to explore multi identities from feminist and youth perspectives will increase the possibility of political and social change to integrate Latino diaspora in public spaces and politics. Recognizing the necessity of change is the sine qua non of social progress for the oppressed and will decrease ethnic resistance, conferring more adequate conditions to develop sense of belonging without rejecting transnational affiliations. Membership and belonging to multiple cultures can be achieved with no contempt for one or the other. Educational environments serve as the platform to enter the Latino diaspora and explore the habitus in which adolescents come of age and construct self-

perceptions and consciousness; transnational students either conciliate with the status quo or advocate for changing the derogatory treatment generally received from the authorities and society in the host country, and challenging the established concept of citizenships and pedagogies.

In this book, the authors present us with insights of transnationalism and true narratives of inequality and social injustice. The stories of these migrants are of particular relevance in the current global climate of growing xenophobia; they deliver accounts of resilience overcoming racist discourse and family separation. Dyrness and Sepúlveda (2020) explore profound thoughts and migrant interpretations of sociopolitical issues in strongly colonized spaces. This book is recommended to scholars studying borderlands and transnational identities, bicultural or multicultural belonging, and educators or social workers serving displaced or migrant youth, or to the general public interested in learning about teenagers' struggles to create a personal and collective identity in a multicultural setting. Further investigation on transnational Latino migrant youth identity must be conducted to more deeply understand this issue.