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# **Bridge Building through a Duoethnography: Stories of Nepantleras in a Land of Liberation**

*Ethan Trinh & Leonardo Javier Merino Méndez*

Change is inevitable, no bridge lasts forever. (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009, p. 1)

We are here, sitting at a table in a cozy apartment in North Atlanta. On the table is a plate of brownish, crunchy crust from two loafs of bread from Walmart and two cups of Vietnamese iced coffee. We are in the first weeks of February in Georgia, wherein cold winds start blowing. In this small space, two of us are exchanging our stories—the stories of transnational immigrants who have started our lives over in the United States (USA). We are dismissing labels that are placed on us, one as an English as a Second Language (ESL) Vietnamese instructor and the other as an Ecuadorian adult English language learner. This is a space where we transnational immigrants attempt to use our stories as transnational literacy autobiographies (Canagarajah, 2020) to seek mutual liberation in this collaborative storytelling (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012). Both of us share the same authority in this space in order to co-share and co-reflect on our transnational immigrant stories with readers, who may have similar experiences.

I (Ethan) invited Leo into this academic collaborative project because I want to contribute to disrupting the rigidity of academics toward “non-academic” writers. In addition, I want to continue to de-academize (Trinh, 2019c) and decolonize (Smith, 1999) western academic standards where the voices of minoritized language users and transnational immigrants are invisible (G. Kasun, 2014; S. G. Kasun, Trinh, & Caldwell, 2019). What I mean by de-academizing in my work is to re-gain the position of transnational immigrants, immigrants of

color, students/teachers of color in academic writing and visibilized their voices in a published academic work. Therefore, writing this piece with Leo, a transnational immigrant, is part of decolonizing work that I want to continue to develop in order to contribute to a larger scope of decolonizing in education (S. G. Kasun et al., 2019; Smith, 1999). Further, this piece is written to (1) answer Rashi Jain's (2014) call for ESL teachers to "engage deeply in theoretical yet relevant inquiries" (pp. 516-517) in the instruction, and (2) look for a simple but complex question in this book, *Where is home?*, for people like us, transnational immigrants.

I (Leo) was a graduate student in a local college in Georgia, USA, where Ethan was an instructor. Ethan uses they/them as gender pronouns, which surprised me when they were first introduced. I was not in Ethan's class, but I got to know them through a former instructor. To my understanding, Ethan's work focuses on the intersection of gender, race, and language. Ethan identified themselves as a gender non-binary teacher. After the first meeting, I was convinced by Ethan's purpose as they invited me to their work. After graduating from the ESL coursework, I wanted to practice my English, and I found this to be a great opportunity. More importantly, I was gaining confidence of using English again. However, Ethan gave me a different perspective, that I could use this opportunity to share my stories to the world, so I accepted their invitation.

As such, we both agreed to use duoethnography (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012) to examine our lived-experiences of marginalized transnational immigrants in the dominantly white society "through an emic lens" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 11). Through this collaboration, we aspire to contribute to disrupting an ideology where the teacher is a power holder (hooks, 2010) or an oppressor (Freire, 2000) in the classroom to one where the teacher appreciates and values critical dialogues with students. Especially, as Ethan has identified themselves as both an English language learner and immigrant teacher of color, who oftentimes struggled with "academic

identity clashes” as transitioning and teaching between the “home” and “host” country (Swearingen, 2019, p. 8), this collaboration is an opportunity for them to look deeper into their teacher’s transnational identities, which will be discussed throughout the paper.

### **Methodology**

Drawing from Joe Norris’, Richard Sawyer’s, and Darren Lund’s tenets of duoethnography (2012) where the authors reconceptualize the epistemological stances toward the Other in research (Brown, 2005), we use critical dialogues to delve deeper into understanding the complexity of transnational immigrants beneath the surface of popular culture (Storey, 2018). Specifically, despite our differences in terms of language, religion, gender identities among others, we share a similar background of transnationalism and an ideology of the “American dream” before moving to the USA. Therefore, we view duoethnography as a form of critical collaborative inquiry and storytelling that allows us to meet at the intersectionality of our own identities (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). As this method is “polyvocal and dialogic” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 13), we do not impose conclusions on the readers; rather, the readers are invited to engage with us in these conversations to “disrupt individually constructed metanarratives of themselves and their world and make counter-punctual reading the norm” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 17). In addition, Norris, Sawyer, and Lund (2012) have warned us, the writer-collaborators, about a higher risk of exposure when using duoethnography, as compared to autoethnography (Chang, 2008) due to the exposure of vulnerabilities of one individual to another. However, the benefit is the ability to see ourselves “through the eyes of another” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 11). Therefore, we decided to take the risk of exposing our personal positions and stories, although we had not met before. By doing so, we wanted to build a bridge of mutual understanding,

caring, and respecting each other despite differences (Tinker Sachs, 2014), and aimed toward a clearer understanding of what we have faced while we acclimated to the USA's culture.

The challenge of this collaboration lays in analyzing the stories. In order to keep Leo's genuine voice and his role in this collaboration, I (Ethan) attempted to share the responsibilities of co-authorship with him. First, I set up conversations in two different places; the first place was in Leo's apartment, and the second place was in a restaurant. I then recorded the conversations while both of us were taking notes and bringing up different questions as needed. For example, when we first met, I asked Leo to introduce himself and his backgrounds, and then I introduced mine in return. We opened the conversation by reflecting on each other's *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5), i.e.: life story and biography, to get to know each other. In the second meeting, we started our conversation by asking how we were doing in our daily jobs and started from there. Then, Leo shared a picture of his son and discussed why his son was a motivation for him to live in the USA. After the meeting, due to our different schedules, we could not meet in person again. However, we exchanged our writing via email to make sure we were on the same page. We set up Skype meetings once a month to discuss ideas, perspectives, and writing styles. Writing process was a mind-shifting process for both of us as we had to continue to confirm what we meant in our words. I (Leo) appreciate Ethan a lot as they did a lot of editing to make sure we convey what we wanted to say to the readers, which was more difficult than oral expression. We decided not to come up with themes, a common practice in traditional research, but agreed to keep the stories and conversations the way they were since we wanted the readers to engage with us by reflecting on their own stories. Then, we co-analyzed stories and re-read the ideas to ensure that they made sense to us. Patience and open-mindedness were the key to this collaboration. Next, we describe our theoretical framework.

## Theoretical Framework

In this section, we first discuss the framework of transnationalism and then delve deeper in the concept of *Nepantla* (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002), an important lens to understand transnationalism (G. Kasun, 2014), to analyze our conversation.

Transnationalism includes, but is not limited to, transnational practices of those who still maintain the cultural and linguistic identities and values of their home countries while embracing the values in the country of current residence (Levitt, 2009). In addition, transnationalism embraces both physical and emotional border crossing (Wolf, 2002) and helps transnational families negotiate transnational literacy, language ideologies, and identities while acculturating in the mainstream society (Nguyen, 2019). In the recent framework of transnationalism, Sue Kasun and Cinthya Saavedra (2014) call for a shift to “highlight the complexity of who they (Transnational English Learners) and their families are, as well as their ways of knowing” (p. 207). Connecting to the theories, both of us are working-class transnational immigrants experiencing “in-betweenness” (Anzaldúa, 2012). We left our home countries to seek refuge, but oftentimes “visit” our home countries through connecting with friends in the home countries via social media or through using home languages in our daily lives in the host country. However, beyond our border-crossing communication, we are struggling with our own identities in terms of language, culture, relationship with people in the “host” country. Therefore, we collaborate in this piece to examine the complexity and the richness of our own identities and stories to enhance our ways of knowing toward transnational families and individuals in the USA’s context. We truly hope that the readers will “oscillate between the stories” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 22) and engage fully with us during the conversation.

As transnationals, we are struggling and living in between worlds where we are both housed in the space of *Nepantla*. According to Anzaldúa (2012), *Nepantla* is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities, [...], is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it. (pp. 548-549)

People in this space are *Nepantleras*. *Nepantleras* open the space of *Nepantla* as “a zone of possibility” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 544). People in this space experience “reality as fluid, expanding, and contradicting” that are “open to other perspectives” for both individual and collective change (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 544). Keating (2006) delves deeper into the concept of *Nepantleras*, especially emphasizing the rewards for these risk takers entering this space, where they “develop innovative, potentially transformative perspectives. They respect the differences within and among the diverse groups and, simultaneously, posit commonalities” (p. 6). The transformation which Keating has demonstrated helps us recognize and call out the reality of the “American dream.” While we are writing, discussing, and navigating through *Nepantla*, we build a bridge of multiple understandings toward each other’s worlds, stories, histories to “see through” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 544) our state of confusion and ambiguities; then we provide each other encouragement and support for each other’s struggles. A zone of possibility that comes out from this conversation is a self transformation to learn and move on with each other’s dreams as we continue to live, work, and teach in this country. We hope you are ready to enter the conversation with us.

## **Taking off for a better start**

*Leo:* After many years of waiting, my wife and I successfully passed the interview at the USA's Embassy in Ecuador and were so excited to start our journey to the United States. We wanted to have a better future for our son. The day my son was born was the happiest day of my life. Seeing him for the first time was a combination of love, peace, and excitement, but at the same time, as a father, I thought about how I could make this life the best for him, how I could make his future full of happiness, and how I could give him the best education. Seeing him growing made me happy. Ethan, you may not understand that feeling now, but one day you will. My wife and I were so excited that we decided to document the size of his foot in a daily journal. We wanted to show him when he grew up, we would be there for him, no matter what.

In Guayaquil, Ecuador, I worked as a salesman for a multinational company whose headquarter was housed in the United States; I was well paid. I got paid to travel every two weeks to different parts of Ecuador, but due to the global financial crisis in 2008, I was fired. Then I quit my teaching job at two universities in Guayaquil for personal reasons. We could not stay in our country anymore. We had to find different ways to continue this life for our son Leo (Jr.). That was why we decided to leave our home country to move to the USA. I remember the day I was boarding, spending six hours of traveling from Ecuador to Atlanta, realizing that our lives would rise from zero, I had mixed feelings; we did not know what would be waiting for us, but we were ready for it, for Leo Jr.. The song by Facundo Cabral (2012) called "*No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá*" was playing in my head as I looked out the airplane window. The melody of this song saddened my heart, but I knew a bright future was awaiting our family.

*No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá  
no tengo edad, ni porvenir  
y ser feliz es mi color  
de identidad*

I'm not from here, nor from there  
I have no age, nor future  
And being happy is the color  
of my identity

*Ethan:* That's beautiful, Leo. I could feel your passion, your hope for your son. I probably cannot understand everything from your viewpoint as a parent, but we do share something in common: family. We prioritize our family above everything. My family had to wait for an interview to the US for 13 years. I thought I could not make it, since we had to ask for another separate visa from the US Embassy in Saigon. I was over 18 at that time, which disqualified me for an interview. When we all obtained the US visa, we decided to go together even though I knew I would leave everything behind, including a stable, well-paid job as an ESL teacher in an international school in Vietnam. I was awarded with the "Teacher of the Year", but how could I, as an eldest son, leave them to go to this country by themselves where they did not speak English? How could I see them struggling by themselves when I could help? In Vietnam, we call a child "*bất hiếu*" (not showing filial piety to the parents) if a person does not support their parents when they are in need. I am not afraid of Vietnamese cultural norms; I live this life for my parents, and that is who I am. As I am reflecting on that decision, I think I made the right one. You and I made the right decisions because we lived for our family, not for ourselves.

### **Starting from scratch**

*Leo:* But the beginning was never easy. When we arrived at the Atlanta airport, I had three questions written on my cell phone that I tried to learn by heart: Where is the bathroom? Where is the Delta Airlines office?, and Where is the immigration office?. I was very afraid of being asked to answer in English. I felt that I had a bandage on my mouth; I could not speak a word of English even though I tried to learn English back home. We went to live with my mother-in-law and her husband for the first few months, but we felt trapped in the house. When both of them went to work every day, my wife and son stayed in the house, waiting for the immigration

papers, but it seemed like the wait took forever. Each day seemed longer to us. For me, as the breadwinner, frustration and doubt subsumed me at that time. I told myself, “*Una mezcla de desorientación y sentirme con las manos atadas era la sensación constante*”; in another words, it was a mixture of disorientation and doubts that tied my hands, my mouths, and my thoughts. I felt useless because I was supposed to help my family out. I remember one day when I looked in the bathroom mirror, I did not recognize myself at all; I did not know who I was in the mirror; I did not remember who that man was; I did not remember that was me who used to be in a suit with a tie. *¡Qué vaina!* ¡Damn!, “*¿Quién eres tú?* Who are you?”, I asked myself.

*Ethan:* I remember that I threw up badly when I first came out of customs at the Hartsfield Airport. Then I passed out and did not remember anything else. We lived with my uncle, who sponsored us to come here in the beginning. We lived in a house where there were ten people in three small-sized bedrooms and one-shared restroom. My brother and I asked for a small space in a garage to leave a room for my parents, and both of us stayed there until we all moved out six months later. I felt useless sometimes when I saw my parents coming back from work with frustration on their faces. They needed extra time to adapt to a new life here, probably. My brother spoke little English; therefore, they all had to rely heavily on me with translation, interpretation for applying for green cards, job applications, and driver licenses. But for sure, we all had insecurity, wondering if it was a mistake to come here.

*Leo:* I was confused, too, Ethan. The insecurity took over my days little by little. I began to doubt that we had made a wrong decision. I began to have doubts about the future. I began to remember past moments of achievements when I was in Ecuador. Even though my wife and son tried to encourage me and told me that they were happy, I desperately wanted this to be reality as quickly as possible. But what should I do when I was still afraid of speaking English, when our

savings were being spent, and my fear, doubt, and responsibility were putting a stress on me?

*Soy un extraño en un país donde no hablo el idioma y la cultura es diferente!* I was an outsider of this country. I truly was.

*Ethan:* We are all outsiders, Leo. Even though I could speak English, my English was different from how people speak English here. It's like when you open your mouth, the next question will be, "Where are you from? How long have you been living here?." I doubted my English competency. I wanted to hide my identities and languages. I wanted to sound like "an American" so that none would ask me where I come from. I was scared if people found out that I was an outsider, a non-American, an immigrant with little lived experience in the U.S.

*Leo:* I had a similar experience. One day we decided to go to the park with my son after we stayed at home for too long. A child came to speak to my son in English; my son did not understand at all. Then, the other two children came and talked to him, but he just looked at them and walked away. He was then playing alone in a corner of the park. This was one such moment when I felt that we were coming to a realization that this place would never be a place for us. I felt so bad that I could not look at my son. I did not know what to do and how to support him as a parent. I sat alone in the park, *con un nudo en la garganta y triste*. I got stuck. I regretted that I separated my son from his friends in Ecuador where they had already formed strong friendships in kindergarten. I felt I did not do a good job as his parent. But I could not give up. It was not an option. I wrote a poem in a diary so that when my son grew up, he could read it again.

Faith - Hope - Charity - Justice - Love  
Keep those words in your mind, *mi hijo!*  
*Lo escribo aquí en español*  
So, you will know where you are from  
Before you build yourself a family,  
You have to build yourself as a human! *Te amamos*  
(personal communication, Feb. 18, 2014)

## Remembrances, dreams, and actions

*Leo:* Life in Ecuador is a little different than living in Georgia. The society in my country usually places criticism on other people; in some cases, we had to please others and seek acceptance from others. In Ecuador, people are valued for the amount of money in their accounts, the clothes they wear, and the university degree they earn.

I was a professor at the two universities in Guayaquil, Ecuador. I loved to share my professional experiences and anecdotes with students so that I could encourage them to overcome barriers they face in their lives. I gave talks on campus and taught economics back then. For me, I always valued a class where the professor shared their lived experiences and did not dictate theories from the books. A teacher can change a student's life when there is an engagement in using theories of academic learning as a supporting tool to connect with real life. I advised my students to set their goals for their dreams; for it was going to take time to achieve, and they should not give up on their dreams. But now I was stuck in my own dream in Georgia, where I thought I could bring a better future for my whole family, especially for my son.

One person used to tell me: "*Hermano! ¿Tú fuiste profesor en tu país? Olvídate de todo, aquí tienes que trabajar lo primero que te salga.*" (Brother! You were a teacher in your country? Forget everything, here you have to take whatever comes to you). His words were such a slap in my face when I thought about a time when I was a professor at the university. I never thought I would be working in a warehouse, cooking in a restaurant, or working in construction. Those are the kinds of work that poor people in my country do, but what could I do when I no longer had the options? I had to put my pride, the ego of a middle-class professor aside. I am here for my son, and that is something I always remind myself of: *My dream is his dream.*

*Ethan:* I was told that my degree in Vietnam was not accepted here, so I should give up and work in a factory. Initially, I believed in these words, but then I realized that my passion was teaching, and it never changed. I found the real me when I could use my experiences to teaching transnational students like you. Leo, we share the same teaching philosophy. I felt proud when I could come back to teaching. Especially, when I reflected on my transnational identities of both English language learner and immigrant teacher of color, I was passionate about teaching my students to appreciate their cultures and home languages to challenge European-centric and assimilated textbooks. I was in tears, Leo, when I realized my efforts were paid off when transnational students could relate to my transnational identities to reflect on theirs. Further, I successfully created a critical and inclusive classroom where both students and the teacher truly found the meaning of the “American dream” that I have been discussing in my publications (S. G. Kasun et al., 2019; Trinh, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, forthcoming, in press). I am convinced *my dream is my students’ dreams*.

*Leo:* We all have different ways to make our dreams come true. In order to make my dreams and my son’s dream happen, I applied for a local restaurant. I remember the restaurant manager told me in the interview that I was overqualified for the position; however, I was very determined. I told the manager that I was looking for my first opportunity in Georgia because I needed to practice my English and I wanted to learn more about the North American culture. I really wanted to serve and help others in the position I applied for. Surprisingly, I got the job. However, the first week was stressful and frustrating. All I wanted was to run out of the restaurant because I did not understand what the customers were ordering; I felt the English that I learned at school was not helpful at all. Sometimes, I wanted to stay in the kitchen all day to wash the kitchen utensils so that I could hide from speaking English, but I did not do that. Little

by little I did learn vocabulary in the kitchen, learn gestures from customers, and from colleagues who helped me out with real English. I started to learn English again from scratch, even though I graduated with honors from my ESL classes. At that time, I truly felt that what *real* English was.

After a few weeks at work, I started to feel much better because I understood what people were ordering. I was more confident than I was during the first days at work. Then, I asked my manager, Percy, during a break. “Do you think there is a so-called ‘American Dream’? Is it real or is it just a concept in the movies?.” Percy replied, “The ‘American dream’ is to succeed and fulfill your dreams here.” He continued, “Here in this restaurant, be better and faster; that is the goal.” In Ecuador, we thought we understood the concept of the “American Dream,” but here, the meaning was different. The American dream to me here is to be able to use English in real situations, save some money, and think about the next steps to support my family. And probably, in this “American dream,” I found you (Ethan) to be a friend of mine because you, as a teacher, are sitting here with me and listening to my story. I truly appreciate you and this conversation.

### **Seeing doubles of different perspectives**

Ethan, let’s sit down again, have some burritos, and continue the conversation we stopped last time. I (Leo) felt too much emotional after our conversation. Through duoethnography, I felt that the complexity of our journey has been demonstrated, where there is a portrayal of belonging and not belonging, a mixture of accepting and not accepting our identities, a mixture of decision making, of ambiguities of reality, of meritocracy (Margolin, 2015), or the “American Dream.” Further, in order to build trust of each other in this conversation (Norris et al., 2012), we agreed to listen attentively to each other to “see doubles ... of one culture...and of another” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 549), to build bridges of knowing (Kasun, 2014), and to reflect critically on our situations, mutually, in the Nepantla state.

For me (Ethan), when both of us stepped onto the plane and left everything behind in our country, we started to enter the state of facing “divisions within our cultures—class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 548). Even so, we were ready to face them in exchange for a better life for our families.

For me (Leo), the conflicts of my inner mind began when I started my life in the USA. I did not recognize who I was in the mirror; I forced myself to use English only to quickly immerse in the dominant culture; I put my professor’s mindset aside and started working as a blue-collar worker. For me (Ethan), the conflicts started when I came here, starting from zero, when I was told to work in a factory, when I wanted to hide my identities to speak and sound like “an American.” However, as the conflicts occurred, in this Nepantla space, both of us “reflected critically,” and “self-identity became our central concern” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 548). We faced our struggles to get closer to make changes that we wanted to see *for* our families. The transformation that came from “struggles to find equilibrium between the outsider expression of change and inner relationship to it” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 549) involved transformation within *ourselves*. Specifically, as I (Leo) stepped out of my comfort zone by learning real-world English in a kitchen and inquiring about others’ definition of the “American Dream.” For me (Ethan), I did not explicitly describe my “American dream,” but I changed from an assimilator to an educator-decolonizer. I gradually decolonized my teaching by challenging colonization in English textbooks and by embracing Nepantleras’ stories in this academic space (Trinh, in press). During this trusting process, we exposed our manhood vulnerabilities (Carrillo & Mendez, 2016) to share personal stories “without value judgement” (Norris et al., 2012) and respect each other’s differences (Tinker Sachs, 2014). For example, you (Leo) appreciate my gender pronouns (they/them), whereas I (Ethan) appreciate Leo’s home language during our

conversations. We came to this piece with poetic writing style that co-contribute to de-constructing the rigidity of a western academic structural paper. Further, in this Nepantla space, we, as Nepantleras, “question ‘consensual reality’ (our status quo stories) and develop alternative perspectives—ideas, theories, actions, and beliefs that partially reflect but partially exceed existing worldviews” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015, p. xxxvi). We write and discuss together because we want to co-reflect our positions and co-create a collaborative Nepantla space for Nepantleras who want to share their stories in the future. It is this part of decolonizing and de-academizing process that we desired to highlight in this paper.

The Nepantla state is not a hurdle to overcome and when overcome, it never ceases to exist, we have to emphasize. Rather, this state is “a zone of possibility” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 544) for an individual and collective development. Although the Nepantla state is rocky and rough to those who experienced it (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, 2015), but it is “the site of transformation” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 548) for Nepantleras to navigate and understand the complexity of a self and of other’s. Coming out of the struggles of this space, we witnessed strong will, determination, perseverance, and faith during and after this state. For example, when I (Leo) wrote a diary entry that code-meshed between Spanish and English (Canagarajah, 2020), I decided to come back to my identities, my Spanish language for my son. My reward was not increasing the amount of money I earned. Rather, my genuine happiness was that I could come back to my true self and face it—with pride. You cannot see my tears in this paper, but those were some of the first real moments when I was truly happy since I moved here. For myself (Ethan), values and lessons learned from this conversation are truly rewarding. I could thus delve deeper into my transnational/Nepantla teaching and learning identity. As Anzaldúa and Keating (2015) reminds me:

It's not easy to be a nepantlera; it is risky, lonely, exhausting work. [...] Nepantleras do not fully belong to any single location. Yet this willingness to remain with/in the thresholds enables nepantleras to break partially away from the cultural trance and binary thinking that locks us into the status quo. (pp. xxxv-xxxvi)

Therefore, as you (Leo) have witnessed throughout this writing process, I have exposed my identities, stripped away the label of “a teacher” who has the power in the classroom, break down binary spectrum of teacher/student, of ethnicity/language in our conversation. I attempted to eradicate the hierarchical system in educational system, continuously reflecting on my social positionality, and creating a space that we both come together in liberating ourselves from our status quo. This is a “liberatory space” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015, p. xxxvi) where we “see through [each other] with a mindful, holistic awareness” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 544) in order to share our stories and “rewrite [our] identities” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015, p. 82). We came to this space to write toward social change inspired from a change within a self and with others’. This is American dream that I am talking about, “my dream is my students’ dreams.”

Through duoethnography, both of us are reaffirming the concept of bridge-building for transnational Nepantleras. As Anzaldúa (2002) posits,

To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gage to the stranger, within and without...To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. (p. 3)

From this perspective, “building bridge” is no longer a fixed concept of bringing two objects together; instead, we pushed ourselves to think about nation-less, border-less, and fluid connection for the “bridgebuilders.” In fact, we are building a bridge of “commonality within the

context of differences” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 2) . By writing this piece, we are bridging knowledge and identities to understand the ambiguities and confusion of reality in the USA. We have inspired and learned greatly from each other during the process. We hope to inspire other Nepantleras to continue to write and build a transnational Nepantleras community with each other. This is the goal that we were/are striving for throughout this paper.

### **De-academize ESL classrooms**

We conclude this piece by calling to de-academize academic writing in a traditional ESL classroom. For me (Leo), I eternally appreciate Ethan for inviting me to this project so I could present my voice and my story, which is something I never thought of as a working-class immigrant student. For me (Ethan), I appreciate your story, Leo. As I stated above, de-academicization in writing should be a co-constructed and critical dialogue between the teacher and students. I (Ethan) blame the hegemonic, Eurocentric white supremacy culture that created a rigidity of academization that have prevented transnational immigrant students from telling their stories in a critical way. As Kasun (2014) suggested, we as educators should break the “patterns of commonly whitestream knowing to engage with immigrant students through meaningful *convivencia* or being with” (p. 324) in a shared space where all voices are valued and all are cared for. Both of us agreed that storytelling is a healing process that “help[s] us connect to a world beyond a self” (hooks, 2010, p. 53). We bring our vulnerabilities to the conversation. We share our story as human beings who relate deeply to each other’s experiences and differences. Bridgebuilding work also depends on how we explore the criticality of each story. We believe a story is already there, but we have to find, gradually process, and critically reflect on the story itself. From there, we will be able to understand, empathize, connect, and see doubles of the stories of one another.

Further, this dialogue is an answer to Jain's (2014) call to have teachers and educators to "engag[e] in deeper reflection" (p. 517) with students through dialogues. Specifically, we are thinking of a transnational curriculum which highlights "multiple, but conflicting" (Keating, 2006, p. 6) lived experiences of transnational students and teachers in a classroom. In order to do so, we, critical educators, need to design a curriculum that utilizes a "polyvocal, and dialogic" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 13) approach, like this collaborative paper, where stories of transnational students and teachers are reflected on, embodied, and celebrated with mutual respect, openness, and understanding. Instead of viewing students as a passive knowledge receiver (Freire, 2000); we should view them as co-constructors of knowledge to co-critique and co-challenge the reality itself. Also, we should continue to look into students' identities and reflect on how the teacher can use their identities to connect student's language and culture in the classroom (Yazan, 2018).

All in all, we Nepantleras are still looking for a simple but complex question, *Where is home?*, at the beginning; for we "are not constrained by one culture or world but experience multiple realities" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015, p. 82). Similarly, Canagarajah (2020) asserts,

As writers occupy in-between spaces between the familial and social worlds, they have to construct new semiotic resources to represent their identities. [...] When writers position themselves in a transnational social field, they [...] develop a critical perspective and construct new textual "homes" through creative new expressive system. (p. 55)

As transnational Nepantleras immigrants, we have lived and constructed different homes by crossing so many borders—physically and metaphorically—during the assimilation process to the dominant culture. Over time, we develop our "perspectives from the cracks [...]" that enables to reconfigure ourselves as subjects outside the us/them binary" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015, p. 82). We gradually become critical reflexive thinkers and storytellers growing from this space.

“Home” for us Nepantleras is not a single, simple, physical space, but is now a collective critical space, intertwining and intersecting with contradiction, complexity, liberation, survival, and love, among others. There are no limits, no restrictions in the definition of homes for Nepantleras.

For we are in-betweeners,

living and navigating among worlds.

For we are free winds—the winds that continue to fly,

to challenge, to spread love, to unite

other Nepantleras

Together.

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