



Allá Sobre el Horizonte/There Beyond the Horizon

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In her past-president's address to the Council on Anthropology and Education, Thea describes being haunted by images and sounds from her childhood growing up during the Lebanese civil war. Thea's personal memories lead her to reflect on other children and youth growing up in wartime across the globe and over a span of decades—children whose images we might have encountered in the media and children Thea has met throughout her career as a teacher and ethnographer. The children Thea has worked with include a Palestinian boy living in a refugee camp in Syria in 2019, a young boy attending a Philadelphia elementary school in the 1990s, and Palestinian American adolescents at an inner-city high school in the early 2000s.

Thea's address brings together these students' stories in the retelling of everyday schooling experiences shaped by political processes of colonialism, capitalism, and racialization that influence their lives as well as our own. She explains: "these very real children do not only haunt me, for like children everywhere they also take my breath away." Throughout her remarks, Thea refers to Ann Stoler's (2013) theorizing of the felt, material, and contemporary effects of imperialism; they both show that ruination, debris, and haunting can be generative. In addition to the pain and destruction that issues from oppression, stunning new possibilities for connection and survival may also emerge from the ruins, taking our breath away. I follow Thea's lead in trying to find a language for making sense of life and learning in this fraught world. As Thea looks to literature, I turn to poetry and song for a lexicon that helps me to articulate contemporary contradictions and seek humanizing approaches to ethnographic engagement.

Imaginary Lines

Thea's humanizing approach to educational anthropology entails listening in closely to the words of "oppressed people and communities as they continually create and regenerate forms of conjoint living that refuse the status quo." In one of these many moments of listening in—inhabiting in that moment her role as arts educator and ethnographer—Thea heard a young woman named Sara describe nation-state borders as "imaginary lines" (Abu El-Haj 2009). Borders as fictions with real effects, lines drawn between people, by people, have become a guiding trope in Thea's work. It is a powerful one because it suggests that we have the potential to reimagine social relationships despite political boundaries. Of course, the fact that these lines are imaginary does not make them any less real because the effects of racism, exclusion, and violence shape the lives of oppressed people daily.

I'm reminded of the lyrics to a song titled *Punto y Raya*, which was adapted from a poem by Venezuelan poet Aníbal Nazon and popularized by the singer Soledad Bravo in the early 1970s. Bravo is a Spanish-born folk singer who spent most of her life in Venezuela, and her music formed part of a period in Spanish and Latin American cultural history known as *La Nueva Canción*. *La Nueva Canción* is a genre of folk music with a political

message—it was especially important in the 70s and 80s because its singers put to music many of the concerns underlying the massive Latin American revolutions of that era.

Bravo sings¹:

<p>Entre tu pueblo y mi pueblo, hay un punto y una raya. La raya dice no hay paso, el punto vía cerrada.</p>	<p>In between your town and mine, there’s a dot and there’s a line. The line says no entry, the dot street closed.</p>
<p>Y así entre todos los pueblos, raya y punto, punto y raya. Con tantas rayas y puntos, el mapa es un telegrama.</p>	<p>And so between all of the towns, line and dot, dot and line. With so many lines and dots, the map is a telegram.</p>
<p>Caminando por el mundo se ven ríos y montañas, se ven selvas y desiertos, pero ni puntos ni rayas.</p>	<p>Walking through the world, one sees rivers and mountains, one sees jungles and deserts, but no dots nor lines.</p>
<p>Porque esas cosas no existen sino que fueron trazadas para que mi hambre y la tuya estén siempre separadas.</p>	<p>Because those things don’t exist but rather were drawn so that my hunger and yours will be forever separate.</p>

In the first years of my two young daughters’ lives, I sang this song to them nightly as I helped them fall asleep. It comes to me often now when I think of family separations affecting children at borders across the world. The song is a metaphor for the ways in which our connections are rendered vulnerable through longstanding social divisions that keep us separate. The words of Thea’s participants and the lyrics that Bravo sings issue a call to rethink these divisions even when—or especially because—they have become so naturalized in our everyday lives. What role can educational anthropologists play in making tacit social practices visible, in identifying the ways in which power is consolidated and wielded for division and destruction, and in creating opportunities to intervene and incite change? I believe that the answer lies in part in our understanding of everyday life and the roles we take up within it.

The Everyday

As ethnographers, we are charged with rendering “thick descriptions” of culture. For many of us, this means making visible those aspects of everyday life that have become so routine and familiar that they often go unnoticed. For Clifford Geertz, who popularized the phrase “thick description” through a series of essays drawing on his research in Indonesia and Morocco, ethnography entailed understanding and representing “a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (1973, 10). Much of this holds true for educational anthropologists today: making sense of complex systems, disentangling the

underpinnings of school life and culture, and grappling with questions of representation. However, there is one key difference: fewer of us travel to conduct extensive ethnographic research in societies that are completely new to us; instead, we tend to work within societies and schools that we know quite well through our own firsthand experiences as students, educators, and ethnographers.

What are the implications of this shift for the ethnographer? When we set about conducting ethnographic research in familiar settings, the task of producing a thick description of culture shifts from grasping what is strange and unfamiliar to working instead to make the familiar strange. This task is essential, if we consider, as sociologist Harold Garfinkel does, that everyday life is steeped with the values and morals that shape our routine interactions. As Garfinkel put it: "A society's members encounter and know the moral order as perceivedly normal courses of action—familiar scenes of everyday affairs, the world of daily life in common with others and with others taken for granted" (1967, 35). In this light, anthropological studies of the everyday are important because they enable us to make visible those ideologies that shape the way we treat each other without our even realizing it. In a political moment defined by extreme political polarization and violence against communities of color, the work of seeing and naming these social norms has become more exigent. When we render these norms and values visible, we can begin to imagine how we might change them and the social world they underpin.

Turning now to music from Puerto Rico, I would like to draw our attention to song lyrics that simultaneously highlight micro moments of everyday life and encourage us to consider macro political questions regarding national, social, and ideological borders. Through music and song, singers often integrate mainstream popular discourses circulating throughout society with representations of mundane life moments. In so doing, songwriters and singers can make the routine and everyday performative and exceptional, rendering it visible in order to raise broader questions about what we value as a society. As Briggs and Bauman note in their 1992 essay: "by virtue of its capacity for closely regulating pitch, timbre, tempo, volume, and other features, and its frequent use in regulating movement (through dance), music can provide a powerful resource" (158). In Puerto Rico, a longstanding colonial history has led to an equally long legacy of resistance through song that has accompanied social movements both on the island and in diaspora. At the time of writing, the power of music was especially visible as Puerto Rican musicians played a key role in amplifying populist calls for political change on a national and global scale resulting in the resignation of former Governor Ricardo Roselló.

The lyrics of a song based upon a poem by Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén can help us to consider the relationship between borders, belonging, and everyday life. Renowned Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén's poem titled "La Muralla" describes an "archetypal situation of a wall that has been built by all, by white hands and black hands, to let in the good and shut out the evil" (West-Durán 2004, 12). Born in 1902, just over a decade and a half after slavery was abolished on the island of Cuba, Guillén would become one of the leading poets of the Afro-Antillean movement, which articulated pride in a mixed-race island identity. Guillén's poem begins with a utopic racial fantasy of a society in which blacks and whites work alongside one another. However, this utopic vision is complicated by the joint enterprise of building a wall together—a critique about forms of social exclusion seemingly inherent to nation-state formation seen in the enslavement of Africans and sedimentation of racial hierarchies during emancipation when Guillén was writing.

The song version of the poem interpreted by the Puerto Rican folkloric group *Haciendo Punto en Otro Son* became an anthem for a leftist political and social unity on the island and in diaspora. This song was one of the defining sounds of my childhood, as I

was raised in a Puerto Rican home in which critiques of U.S. colonization echoed daily. I heard this song played on my father’s record player, on the Sunday afternoon salsa show that we always tuned into at my grandmother’s apartment, and as a staple at nearly every Puerto Rican cultural event my family attended throughout New York City in the 1980s and 90s. In Guillén’s fantasy, the wall circumscribes the ideal multiracial nation—delimiting the boundaries of a geographical region stretching across the horizon from the mountain to the beach that depends upon both black and white hands working together.²

Para hacer esta muralla, traígame todas las manos: los negros, sus manos negras, los blancos, sus blancas manos.	To build this wall bring me all the hands from blacks, their black hands from whites, their white hands
 Una muralla que vaya desde la playa hasta el monte desde le monte hasta la playa, allá sobre el horizonte.	 A wall stretching from shore to summit from summit to shore way over on the horizon

But what is the purpose of this wall? This question is especially urgent today when calls to build a wall along the existing U.S.–Mexico border have become commonplace and reverberate throughout popular culture from presidential speeches to political rallies to online discussion boards where white nationalist viewpoints are espoused. The song’s chorus shifts from the somber call to build a wall to an enlivened exchange between those on the inside and those on the outside of the wall, or perhaps between those already on the inside as they debate who to allow in or keep out of their fledgling society. This involves a knock on the door and a question—who is it?—followed by a series of responses from possible entrants representing good and evil.

—¡Tun, tun!	Knock, knock!
—¿Quién es?	Who’s there?
—Una rosa y un clave	A rose and a carnation
—¡Abre la muralla!	Open the wall!
—¡Tun, tun!	Knock, knock!
—¿Quién es?	Who’s there?
—El sable del coronel.	The colonel’s cutlass
—¡Cierra la muralla!	Close the wall!
—¡Tun, tun!	Knock, knock!
—¿Quién es?	Who’s there?
—La paloma y el laurel.	The dove and the laurel.
—¡Abre la muralla!	Open the wall!
—¡Tun, tun!	Knock, knock!
—¿Quién es?	Who’s there?
—El alacrán y el ciempiés	The scorpion and the centipede.
—¡Cierre la muralla!	Close the wall

As an ethnographer of language, I'm attuned to the changes in tone registered in the song—the somber and serious call to found a community through racial solidarity that describes hands joining together to build a wall and the frenetic social energies released in that project of nation building that are communicated in the question and answer sequence. This political process continues to involve wall-building and gate-keeping projects as consequential decisions are made about who and what should be allowed in, left out, or forcibly removed.

As we know from the contested history of citizenship and race in the U.S., the terms for who belongs and who does not are dynamic and shifting (Chomsky 2014; Ngai 2004). In the song above, the scorpion is treated as a threat—a reason to close the wall—but we could also imagine a society in which the scorpion is revered and the wall is opened for it. While the setting of the song is poetic and wonderous—a scorpion and a centipede rapping on a door nested inside a wall—it is a reminder of the power of ideology sedimented in the mundane moment of knocking and answering. In this frightening moment in which state violence against black and brown bodies continues to go unpunished and when local and federal law enforcement collaborations in the name of homeland security continue to devastate immigrant communities, this song reminds us that there is a lot at stake in a simple knock (tun, tun) and answering of the door (¿quién es?).

Throughout her career, Thea has shown how “the *everyday mechanisms* through which the categories of who can and cannot belong fully to this nation are established in ways that build a complex and uneven map of inequalities” (2015, 32). These mechanisms are embedded into the routines of daily life, and evident in the ways that we address one another, school our children, and more. Hearing a knock at the door and responding to the person standing behind it becomes a powerful moment, an opportunity to include or exclude, to welcome or reject. In many immigrant communities today, a knock at the door may mean that an ICE officer or law enforcement agent has arrived to detain or deport a loved one.

Around the country, educators and anthropologists are fighting for immigrant families' rights: disseminating information on what to say and do if approached by law enforcement, bearing witness to and speaking out against the caging of children and families at our southern border, and supporting those children and youth separated from their caregivers from one moment to the next. What this means is that the everyday can have a reproductive quality, by modeling behaviors that children witness and learn, but also a potentially transformative quality if we model humanizing modes of engagement with and for those around us. As educational anthropologists working in a wide range of settings, we have the power to make tacit social norms visible, model humanizing forms of inclusion, and teach in ways that promote change.

The Circle

In 2009, Samia—a fourteen-year-old Arab American teenager and participant in the same arts program where Sara described borders as imaginary lines—recounted the story of visiting Walmart with her grandmother who, wearing a headdress, was refused help by a sales associate in the store. When Samia registered her upset with the store manager, explaining that it was caused by this racist treatment, he refused to address their unfair treatment and said that they could “just leave.” Samia explained the impact of this everyday exclusion:

And now, whenever I can, I go to all these places with her because people just look at her funny, and they just, like, they say stuff about her. It just makes me so mad. I don't think it'll ever stop,

like the racism. I think it will just keep going from family member to family member, from family to friends, and it's just like this big, giant, never-ending circle. (Abu El-Haj 2009, 1).

Samia expressed her anger and her fears about racism being reproduced through kin and friendship. She worried that racism would endure as a result of these social relations and show up in the places and people she encountered throughout her daily life.

Ten years later, at the time of writing, twenty-two people were killed in a Texas Walmart hours after the shooter posted a racist manifesto about the threat of Latinx immigrants to an imagined white nation. Echoes of Donald Trump's hateful speech—the refrain that the US is experiencing an “invasion” of immigrants, that immigrants are “invaders”—issued over and over again from his presidential podium have also appeared in the hateful language of the shooter's manifesto (Baker and Shear 2019). In the weeks following this recent violent attack on people of color in the U.S., Samia's fear is my fear too. In these haunting moments, when Stoler's ruination and rot issues not only from historical legacies of imperialism but unfolds right before our eyes as the crisis of white supremacy and racism becomes clearer and more visible by the day, we must return to the question Thea posed in her speech and that I echoed at the start of this essay: What, as educational anthropologists, can we offer in this moment?

This question is not rhetorical, but it is also not answerable by one person alone. I suggest that we think of Samia's circle from a different angle: the circle as a pedagogical tool used for transformative educational purposes that can resist the endless reproduction of the status quo. The idea of circles—both as metaphor and as activity—has been used in grassroots organizing from Agosto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed to the Black Lives Matter movement and from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to the movement for immigrants and DREAMers' rights. At the 2014 AAA meeting in Washington DC I was reminded of the power of circling up to make a political statement when a group of colleagues organized a “die-in” in the hotel's lobby rotunda to call attention to state-sanctioned police brutality, increasing mass incarceration, and white supremacy in the wake of Michael Brown's murder in Ferguson, Missouri. This moment was powerful because it offered ethnographers a space to come together, to feel the urgency of the political crisis collectively, and to engage in critical conversations. While this crisis continues today, not resolved in one moment of political engagement, events such as this one can help us to sustain our commitments and prompt us to find new ways to work in the present.

Speaking of the potential for social change among “Hispanos” in a violent, racially polarized southern city, Sofia Villenas, incoming president of the Council of Anthropology and Education, writes that “emancipatory possibilities lie in the creation of a dignified public space where they can negotiate new identities and break down the biraciality” (1996, 729). The mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, took place at a big box store selling mass-produced goods—a public space familiar to those living in today's sprawling cities where the status quo depends upon the oppression of workers hailing from those Latin American countries that the shooter considered to be invading his country. Villenas calls for us to envision a different polity: one self-defined by communities of color living in the U.S. that can inspire a new public space and public engagement. Villenas also addresses “majority-culture ethnographers,” calling upon them to reflect on “their own marginalizing experiences and find a space for the emergence of new identities and discourses in the practice of solidarity with marginalized peoples” (1996, 729). There is a Baldwin-like quality to these adjacent statements: while there is no denying the differential histories of oppression that shape our lives today, we have to reckon with the fact that we all suffer

from the devastating impacts of inequality and racism. If we take this to be a starting point for listening and learning, then we can find the points of solidarity that arise in our everyday lived experiences of vulnerability, even as we acknowledge and fight against existing forms of oppression that impact us differentially.

Our children—the ones Thea describes in her speech and the ones we each picture as we listen to, or turn away from, the news of the day—need us. As Baldwin extolled in his Talk to Teachers, “those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people—must be prepared to “go for broke” (1963, 678). I include myself, and all of us educational anthropologists, among Baldwin’s addressees. His imperative is that we give our all even as we “understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society” we will “meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance” (1963, 678). Ethnographers and educators across the country are standing for humanity, and they are meeting resistance head on: they are being arrested for providing safe passage to migrants, they are facing off with security and police during playdate protests where caregivers and children demand an end to family separation, and they are being sanctioned by administrators who claim that school curricula can and should be ideologically neutral. I know that many of us are reflected in these descriptions, drawing strength from histories of struggle and survival to insist upon our collective rights in the present—this is our everyday.

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Notes

1. The lyrics to the song Punto y Raya were translated by the author, Ariana Mangual Figueroa.
2. The words to the poem La Muralla were translated by West-Durán (2004).

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