

RESEARCHING LITERACY WITH (MARGINALIZED) YOUNG PEOPLE: SOME CONCEPTUAL PROPOSITIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

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Abstract

In this conceptual essay situated in literacy studies, I attempted to map out recent conceptual propositions in researching with young people. Whilst these propositions came about from research with youth in general, I paid particular attention to research with marginalized young people such as immigrant youth of colour, Black youth, Indigenous youth, and young people who identify belonging with the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Drawing on emerging themes from the literature, I developed three categorizations of these conceptual propositions, namely, ecological and sociomaterial orientations of literacy studies, transborder literacies, and literacies as public medium for communal desirings and resisting. This paper aims to consolidate these concepts to facilitate ongoing discussions in the field, rather than providing a comprehensive overview or systematic literature review.

Keywords: research with youth, sociomateriality, transnationalism, immigrant literacies, stories and counterstories, literacy research concepts

Introduction

Literacy researchers share enthusiasm regarding investigating the literacy activities of learners both in formal classrooms and out-of-school settings (Barabas, 2023; Deroo & Watson, 2020). By so doing, scholars also advocate for the expansion of the meanings of literacy while similarly understanding it from the lens of various poststructuralist and critical theories. With this goal, along with deploying non-traditional and arts-based methodologies, literacy research concerning the lives of marginalized youth such as immigrant youth of colour, Black youth, Indigenous youth, and youth who identify belonging with the LGBTQ+ community is proliferating. Some works in this area look at the historical dimensions of immigrant youth's home countries when attempting to understanding their literacy practices in the new country (Jiménez et al., 2015) and some scholars call for the use of poetry to convey identities and interrogate social issues and injustices (Jocson, 2005; 2011) along with the utilization of social media (de los Ríos, 2020; Lemieux et al., 2022; Wargo, 2017). There is also no dearth of studies that look at immigrant youth's translingual practices outside and after school contexts (Burton, 2023; Daniel, 2018; Smith, 2020; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017). Some work has explored the influence of social spaces or institutions on youth's literate lives, for instance religious institutions (Ek, 2019; Pacheco & Morales, 2019; LeBlanc, 2017). Recently, there is also a growing number of projects that highlight partnerships between organizations and school communities to solidify creative literacies (for example, hip-hop literacy) in formal schooling contexts (Gage et al., 2019), in addition to using digital stories of immigration to enrich educational programmes (Low, 2015).

Given the multitude of domains in the field of literacy studies, the goal of this essay is to map out these conceptualizations, thereby providing an overview on recent theoretical and conceptual propositions. In what follows, I offer three categorizations of these conceptual propositions, namely, *ecological and sociomaterial orientations of literacy studies*, *transborder literacies*, and *literacies as public medium for communal desirings and resisting*.

Ecological and Sociomaterial Orientations of Literacy Studies

Towards Decentering the Humans

Expanding on the theorization that literacy should be viewed from a social and cultural perspective (Ku et al., 2015; Linares, 2020; Wood, 2023), scholars have put forward the argument to decenter humans from inquiry. The current ecological and sociomaterial turn in literacy studies (Bhatt & Roock, 2013; Burnett & Daniels, 2019; Kalan, 2024) advocates for giving equal value to objects, felt forces, and the environment where literacies are enacted, mediated, and challenged. This is because these entanglements of bodies and objects produce new realities (Zapata et al., 2018), and material platforms are needed for literacy to come into being (Villacañas de Castro et al., 2020). Such reimagination and reconsideration of our understandings of diverse entities as they come into concert with worldly relations (Zapata et al., 2018) may reveal further insights on how economic and political structures shape rhetorical practices (Kalan, 2024) and thus, in a broader sense, literacies engagements. However, while series of human encounters in space and time are often dictated by structures and institutions, they are not always driven by necessity (Baynham, 2017). Interpreted in the context of literacy

instruction, this means that the hyperfocus on functionality (for example, language, genre production) fails to capture the sociomaterial and affective processes that significantly impact the enactment of learners' organic literacies.

These entanglements of humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans which produce new realities, knowledges, and literacies may be analyzed not as interactions but intra-active relationships (Zapata et al., 2018). Barad (2007) prefers to call this relationship "intra-action" instead of interaction to emphasize that "meaning ...emerges through a constant interplay within context" (Liaw et al., 2023, p. 199) and in effect "it forces us to consider what might be and what might have been missed or excluded" (Zapata et al., 2018, p. 482). Intra-action is the suspension of boundaries between bodies in an activity (Ehret et al., 2016) and when literacy is conceptualized this way, all materials involved function "together to co-produce meaning in the ongoing flow of experience and entanglement of agencies" (Ehret et al., 2016, p. 348). The conceptual framing of intra-activity therefore troubles the notions of agency as human-centric, highlighting instead its dynamic nature (Zapata et al., 2018) that is provoked by multiple forces (for example, digital tools) that are inherent in human's literate practices (Bhatt & de Roock, 2014). For Barad (2007), these practices "do not reveal what is already there" (p. 361), but what is exposed is the outcome of the intra-active engagements of human's participation. In this case, literacy phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions which, Barad argues, do not require cognizing minds to exist but instead are material phenomena that surface through entanglements of (non)materials and actions.

A Non-Representational Theory

It is for this reason that Ehret (2018) calls for a nonrepresentational theory of literacy events through the lens of relational transformation, affective tonality, event-time, and desire. By relational transformation, Ehret (2018) refers to the act of becoming and the consciousness of the individual as they go through the literacy events. In terms of affective tonality, the focus is on the "qualification of events- soothing, care, fright, embarrassment" (p. 572). Put simply, it is the tone of the affective moment. On the other hand, event-time is what binds both relational transformation and affective tonality and it is through the entanglement of these two entities that moments are being sought. This leads finally, for Ehret, to desiring. Put simply, desiring is looking for answers to questions through actions (for example, writing, speaking, and reading). However, it is not purely representational. Beyond these literacy events, there is a sense making in light of what matters in life.

Because the post-humanist concept of intra-activity is interested in the entanglements of human bodies and material objects, such conceptualization can be seamlessly applied in the context of digital (multimodal) literacies, particularly marginalized youth's engagements. We already know that, from the lens of multiliteracies, marginalized youth leverage their various literacies in order to engage in multimedia manipulation, thereby developing criticality in exploring various dimensions of their identities (Bigelow et al., 2017; Cingel et al., 2019; Daniel, 2018; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009; McLean, 2010; Stewart, 2013). By situating literacy in this regard, we develop lenses into how these youth draw from multiple linguistic and semiotic resources to portray themselves and how they navigate diverse networks (Lam & Smirnov, 2017).

Research has also shown that understanding literacies in the context of multimodality transcends representations of material objects and that the human body is co-equally responsible for generating tensions that may emerge from these material engagements (Burton, 2023; Lenters, 2018; Pyo, 2015; Watts-Taffe, 2022). For instance, immigrant youth's multimodal literacy practices bring together their diasporic identities and reveal different forms of tensions (Honeyford, 2014; Melo-Pfeifer, 2021). Whilst research on multimodal digital literacies reveals how youth leverage their digital literacy practices and participation in both online and physical spaces, Darvin (2023) cautions that there are missing components here. Drawing on ecological approach, he similarly aligned his views with sociomaterial ideations that cognition and agency are distributed across the body, the environment, and the availability of materials or resources in a given space and time. Centering his inquiry on Filipinx learners who had unequal access to resources, and utilizing materialist semiotic lens to investigate their engagement with different tools, Darvin (2023) proposed conceptualizing design as sociotechnical structures. That is, while digital designs may offer learning opportunities, they are also platforms of inequity since it may cause constraints in literacies engagements. This corroborates the claim that meaning-making and other aspects associated with literacies such identities, power, and privilege are laden with inequities that are "entangled with/in non/human sociomaterial force relations" (Dernikos et al., 2023, p. 170). For Darvin (2023), attending to the ways in which resources determine access to information may transform literacy instruction such as that taking digital platform design as an assemblage of sociotechnical structures may allow learners to "recognize to what extent tools can shape our behaviour" (p. 41).

An Ecology of Literacy Practices

As literacy events and the structures that mediate their enactment occur in a localized environment, it is co-equally important to take a conceptual stance that considers the ecology of practices. Bhatt and de Roock (2014) opine that carefully attending to these practices, such as "contestations, impasses, breakthrough" (p. 6) would surface our understanding of how sociomaterial relations are materialized and enacted. This would also allow us to trouble traditional or habitual ways of approaching literacy activities (Burnett et al., 2019, such as those conceptualizations that emphasize sociocultural relations or participatory cultures. For Burnett and colleagues (2019), acknowledging the sociomaterial relations that maneuver and emerge across time and space might significantly contribute to how we account for social injustices that permeate our social structures. Thinking about these assemblages in an ecology of practice could contribute to our understanding of how our use of objects, in terms of their cultural agency, might highlight how space and materials are claimed and re-claimed as they are assigned meaning (Burnett & Daniels, 2019) in spaces that are not neutral and where matter is understood to have agency (Gravett, 2020).

This meaning-making, in turn, may present envisioning of various future possibilities, which according to Compton-Lilly and colleagues (2022) is subject to revision, reiteration, and rejection. We see an example of this in critical digital literacy studies that capitalize on identity work and activism such as in Shrodes' (2022) conceptualization of queer political feeling and Coleman's (2019) elucidation on queer futurity and the digital age. Moreover, recently, conceptualizing literacies in algorithmic cultures (Ehret 2024; Low et al., 2023) from the lens of sociomaterial and affect theories is starting to emerge in order to further understand contextual

ecology of practice. For instance, Ehret (2024) postulates that critical literacies in these cultures are driven by processes of “human-machine feeling-thinking that cannot be reduced to rational critiques of ideologies, platform capitalism or other forms of power alone” (p. 1).

As we can see, within this ecology of practices there is a widening definition of literacy, and it pushes the boundaries of conceptualizing agential notions. Thiel (in Zapata et al., 2018) brings into the conversation the conceptual framing of porosity, trans-corporeality, and liveliness by looking into young people who are spontaneously creating, doing, or making something. Situating theory making within the posthumanist epistemology, conceptually framing literacies as a trans-corporeal phenomenon removes the division of the biological or human activities from other bodies—that is material objects. Borrowing from Alaimo (2010), Thiel argues for permeability that takes into consideration interconnections, interchanges, and transits between bodies and non-human objects as they participate in an emergent literacy event. Similarly echoing Ehret’s (2018) argument that writing materializes through bodily experiences and that “material works on mind and mind on material” (p. 564). Thiel argues that trans-corporeal writing bodies allow stories to emerge and that these stories were made possible not only by obvious bodies but also by other dimensions that were not physically present (Zapata et al., 2018).

In short, although the human body is a tool for writing and a medium that experiences writing (Woodard et al., 2020), materials need to be also understood in the human bodies’ social context and must be taken as “sociomaterial assemblages that can be studied to uncover relationships and power dynamics” (Burke, 2023, p. 110). Taken this way, this leads us to further understand the felt forces of literacy. This can be drawn from the lens of affective atmosphere (Holleth, 2020) and affective imaginaries that may produce new ways of being and reconceptualize what it means to be together (Nichols & Coleman, 2020) in any social spaces.

In this section, I explored conceptual provocations that augment current understandings of the ecological and sociomaterial orientations to literacy studies. These orientations, which center embodiment, material objects, and affects, have (in)direct implications to (re)conceptualizing identities and spaces. This is because as individuals move around, they also carry with them their literacies that may or may not be afforded similar value. Such is especially true for transnational individuals, who may experience both liberation and disengagement as they attempt to recognize their place in the community. In the following section, thus, I explore conceptualizations that reimagine transnational identities in reference to literacies enactment. I will center my exploration on literacy concepts that relate to transnationalism and immigration.

Transborder Literacies: Dismantling Ideological Borders and Normalizing (Un)mediated Crossings

Transnationalism and Borders

Given the transnational background of immigrants, the act of physical and ideological border crossings plays a central role in the ways literacies are framed in relation to understanding constructs of identities and documenting varieties of struggles that marginalized youth and their families experience. In this regard, I find that viewing literacies from the lens of transnationalism

and border thinking reveals new angles into the complex dynamics and more often problematic relationships of humans as well as the failure of the very social institutions that are supposed to center their identities and lived experiences. Whereas there are varying interpretations of transnationalism, I subscribe to the view that it has multiple and multilayered manifestations due to movements across both physical and ideological borders, and that it is an on-going process (Machado & Hartman, 2020; Skerrett, 2012; Taira, 2019). Examples of these multilayered dimensions include languaging, national, ethnic, and political affiliations, navigating online spaces, religious affiliations, among others. There are indeed connections between transnationalism and the development of youth's nuanced global understandings through language and literacy practices (Kwon et al., 2022) not only between their countries of origin and the present host countries, but also through shared colonial legacies. In this case, whilst identity work is at the center of transnationalism, connectivity and social networks are key components for successful literacies engagements.

Perhaps one of the concrete manifestations of transnationalism is traversing borders. These borders are tangible, real, and always the subject of contestations especially when they physically divide nation-states that are of different economic stature or laden with historical and political conflict. However, borders are also ideological (Orellana, 2016) in a sense that they perpetuate values, beliefs, and may put some population at a disadvantage especially when both cultural and physical forces reinforce internalized prejudices. As Orellana (2016) further explains, borders are:

Social constructions that appear far more real than they could ever actually be. They are used to decide what belongs together and to proscribe what should be kept apart. We participate in their construction and enforcement even when we do not know what we are doing so, understand why, or realize their full effects. (p. 2)

This critique is concretized, for instance, in the shaping of literacy education which is often mandated by politicized and ethno-centric legislations. As Kalan (2023) argued, despite progressive discourses for a more inclusive language and literacy education, the guiding ideologies always go back to how states are created, that is through common race or ethnicity and religious identities. This, in essence, has lasting or generational implications for the minority population who will always hold on to their cultural and linguistic identities. Thus, even those who do not engage in physical mobility imagine themselves in connection to languages and cultures outside the boundaries of the nation-state (Kwon et al., 2022).

Border Thinking and Third Space

The undeniable intensification of border crossings, both physical and ideological, led to the transnational turn in literacy studies (Gallo & Corral, 2023; Kwon et al., 2022; Machado & Hartman, 2020; Skerrett, 2012). And although several terminologies and framings have emerged as a result of centering the concept of transnationalism and border thinking, the key ideas direct our attention to physical and ideological crossings of humans and the various types of literacies that are enacted in these spaces. One of the prominent conceptual framings is Anzaldúa's (2012) border theory and border thinking. Anzaldúa's influential work on border thinking (*pensamiento fronterizo*)—which highlights both the physical and imagined boundaries—provides a critical

lens on understanding movement, literacies, and the several social justice issues that arose from these spaces. It emerges from “critical reflections of (undocumented) immigrants, migrants, bracero/a workers, refugees, campesinos, women, and children on the major structures of dominance and subordination of our times” (Saldívar, 2006, p. 152). The concept was theorized out of the nature of borderlands, which, for Anzaldúa (2012), have their own unique culture that is formed out of its unique space between first world and third world.

One of the ways to understand the concept of borderlands is to look at it from the lens of youth and their schooling experiences. For instance, transnational youth do not fully identify with the cultures and values of both sides, which are perceived to be dominant “principles, ethics, and ideals of popular culture” (Kazanjian, 2011, p. 372). These young people’s unique position is a powerful central focus of inquiry and the reflections derived could contribute to decolonizing citizenship because they can “capitalize on the insights of their outsider status and create new collective identities that are not tied to the nation-state and its hegemonic social formations” (Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020, p. 182).

The emphasis on *pensamiento fronterizo* or border thinking and the centering of immigrant youth’s in-betweenness and unique identity positioning strengthens the sociological construction of third space. The concept of third space refers to how minority populations reclaim their identity in order to speak back to the stereotypes propagated by first space (Bhabha, 1994). The first space is dominated by the majority group and is imposed on minority groups, while the other space refers to where the minority groups see their actual culture (Benson, 2010). Within these third spaces, minoritized youth’s interactions emit mutual attention, harmony, conflict, and disruption that are similarly provoke by language, topics, and interactions (Gutiérrez, 2011).

This has been applied to literacy studies, especially in the context of transnational youth. For example, Linares (2020) proposed the term “transborder writing space” where one could develop personally and academically. It has been theorized that such space allows youth to enact their agency in making decisions to translanguaje, engage in multimodal writing, and use familial knowledge (Linares, 2020). However, understanding border literacies is not simply confined to re/deconstructing what is tangibly produced by marginalized youth. Along with questions on representations through authoring their identities for tangible portrayal (Kwon et al., 2022), agency as a form of invisible force remains unexplored. I found Gallo and Corral’s (2023) framework on transborder literacies of (in)visibility as more encompassing when it comes to understanding diasporic people’s innovative interactions with both texts and society in general. This is because in addition to acknowledging the strong influence of racializing immigration processes, they positioned institutions as mutually unintelligible, requiring hybrid types of transborder literacy practices (de la Piedra, 2010). Situated in the complex immigration policies of the United States, Gallo and Corral (2023) argued that “individuals develop literacy practices of (in)visibility as they navigate when and how to be recognized by, or remain outside the sight of, government authorities” (p. 104).

Indeed, such political tension that looms over immigrants due to their or their family’s immigration status calls for recontextualization of texts and literacy practices (de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012). This is concretized by the concept of border crossing biliteracies (Nuñez, 2023),

which was proposed to understand how children and youth read and write the world. For Nuñez, language and literacies are more than just distinct monolingual systems of reading and writing skills. Language and literacies are also about navigating and thriving despite facing numerous oppressive systems and practices that exclude youth and families through such notions as immigration, nationality, and language use. It is important to note that in Nuñez's theoretical conceptualization, she positioned these youth and families as subaltern communities who are capable of using their experiences of reading and other textual engagements to agentively imagine and rewrite the "multiple and in-between worlds" (Nuñez, 2023, p. 478) that they actively inhabit. I find such positioning complementary to Gallo and Corral's transborder literacies of (in)visibility in a way that despite the population's desire to remain unnoticed in some aspects of their literacies engagements, they also exercise agency in spaces, situations, and times that call for it.

These concepts, again situated within border thinking, also highlight the utilization of transcultural knowledge (Flores & Saco, 2022; Jones & Curwood, 2020; McNeil, 2021). Such knowledge, which includes information, understandings, and skills, is acquired or constructed through youth's lived experiences and is continuously reconstructed in relation to daily life (Nuñez, 2023). We might surmise that this view is zooming in on the micro-context of literacies engagements in daily life, but in the realm of transnationalism, border thinking, and diasporic lenses; therefore, execution and enactment of transcultural knowledge is seen from a wider viewpoint. In writing, for instance, Leal and Gilliland (2023) argue that it cannot be boxed in a limited context because transnational youth writers are affected by, and affect, macro contexts as they cross borders and congregate in multiple cultural worlds. It is because of these entanglements—that is culturally and linguistically dynamic humans (Entigar, 2021) affecting and being affected by their situated practices and contexts—that Ghiso (2016) argues for "a return to the relationship of temporality to spatiality" to further understand "global patterns of mobility within and across locations while retaining the historicity of particular contexts" (p. 6). Applied to my own work, I can see the relevance of this conceptual framing because immigrant youth's current meaning-making is a complex and dynamic process that is contingent on their histories and practices, and further complicated by dissonances (Ghiso, 2016). Such on-going engagements may also produce new identities, particularly since youth participate in the flows of ideas and engagements that they can use for cultural and political organising (Entigar, 2021).

Transliteracies Framing

In the context of the trans turn in literacy studies, the work of Stornaiuolo and colleagues (2016)—which they called "transliteracies framework"—seems to offer an overarching and comprehensive view on mobility, literacies, identities, and could provide a feasible lens for understanding self-decolonising and healing. Arguing for the need "for theoretical and methodological approaches to explain and study the contingency, instability, and emergence of mobile literacy practices that simultaneously open some opportunities and foreclose others" (Stornaiuolo et al., 2016, p. 70), their framework centers on the paradox of mobility. While other conceptual framings that I have so far discussed primarily center literacy practices, Stornaiuolo and colleagues position mobility as loaded with paradox. Although I am not necessarily distancing myself from the social practice of framing literacies, the transliteracies framework is also something that I would like to associate myself with because, in addition to analyzing how

people's practices can be relationally valued and recognized regardless of context, there is also a closer inspection of how such practices can actually reproduce, intensify, or confront social inequities. The framework, highlighting the paradoxical nature of mobility as its dialectical focus, takes into consideration the configuration of materials, persons, practices, and texts as they dynamically interact within and across various temporalities and spaces. This echoes Ghiso's (2016) arguments to foreground time and space to also problematize dissonances.

Through the transliteracies lens (Stornaiuolo et al., 2016), four tools for inquiry are proposed to be beneficial to trace relational systems of literacies while also accentuating concerns about power and ideology. The first tool is *emergence*. By this, they are referring to the entanglements of cognitive and affective aspects of meaning-making where the researcher is cognizant of the emergent, felt, and mobile dimensions of literate practice in order to develop sensitivities to the paradox of mobility. The second lens is what they called *uptake* which focuses on how researchers can trace ways people's bodies and material, or semiotic objects, respond to one another and otherwise make visible collaborative sense-making processes. In other words, this refers to looking for ways (or methods) to make people's sense-making practices visible as they take into consideration other humans, ideas, feelings, and material things. The third lens is *resonance*, and it is through this tool that "questions about how ideas, practices, symbols, objects, and the like become 'shared' and circulate across spaces and times, even when they do not seem to share direct links or traces to follow" (Stornaiuolo et al., 2016, pp. 80-81). However, in the context of this lens, it is also important to take into account what does not resonate to participants. The last tool is *scale*. This lens allows researchers to trace how a specific artifact moves from its site of production to various spaces of interpretation and how participants participate in scaling practices that situate humans and entities in different relations. It is important to interrogate, in the context of this lens, how hierarchies are constructed and boundaries between humans and things are strengthened.

As presented in this section, literacy can be further understood by reimagining it from the lens of transnational identities and reconfiguring conceptual understandings of borders and borderlands. Because humans are still one of the important elements of this inquiry, their (counter)stories matter. Hence, in the following section, I focus my exploration on conceptual framings that highlight the centering of these voices. In particular, I frame literacies here as medium for the expression of human desires and resistance.

Literacies as Public Medium for Communal Desirings and Resisting

In the third and final section of this paper, I frame literacies as public medium and means for communal desirings and resisting. In this section, I briefly discuss the conceptualization of public because this lens is crucial in understanding how various literacies are enacted and appropriated as medium. I will then connect the concept of public to critical literacy. Because critical literacy is about examining issues of power and encourages reflection, transformative change, and action (Bishop, 2014), I consider other concepts presented here (for example, diaspora literacies and critical racial literacy) as embodiments of critical literacy.

Public vs. Publics

One of the ways to understand how literacies can be a medium for expressing (Comber, 2014; McMillan & O’Neil, 2012) the embodied experiences of the marginalized population who desire change and equity is by viewing it from the conceptual lens of publics (Warner, 2021). Although common understanding of public refers to the general population regardless of race, gender and sexuality, and economic and social status, scholars have problematized and reconceptualized the essence of the term. Warner (2021), for instance, distinguishes the public from a public. For Warner, the former refers to a social totality—that is, what we often consider the general public—whereas the latter pertains to a concrete audience that also has a sense of totality, but is bounded by an event or by shared physical space.

Ervin (2006) argues, however, that there is no such thing as general public, or a unified one in that sense. This is because of, as Ervin (2006) contends, a “rhetorical fantasy” (p. 413) that connotes a citizenry that is both inclusive of ourselves and those whom we deem to be like us, and emphatically exclusive of those whom we deem to be unlike us. Similar to Warner’s concept of a public, she proposed the framing of counterpublics, which is manifested through specific concrete audiences (Rogers, 2016; Warner, 2021). What makes it distinct, however, is that a key component of its conceptual operation is the emphasis on the power difference between members and the larger public (Rogers, 2016). Because counterpublic is a social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse and is constituted through attention (Warner, 2021), it is also distinct in a sense that its participants share similar lived experiences. They also have similar desirings as a result of the types of marginalization that they experience. It can also be, as exemplified in the work of Rogers (2016), that those who are engaged in public-oriented literacy activities are relationally affected by the circumstances of those who are marginalized, hence they perform enactment of such advocacies. This is similar to local public, a concept proposed by Higgins et al. (2006) to denote a body of interested parties who only come into existence because the participants are willing to lend their attention and participate in the discourse.

The local or counterpublic, however, needs legitimization from their participants. The process of legitimization could be something that is continuously shaped or reconstructed as participants also interminably renegotiate their place in a specific local public. We see an example of this in Rogers’ (2016) work, where youth engaged in zines, films, photojournalism, and performances, which she collectively called aesthetic citizenship. The youth in these multiple projects produced the work as a counter narration to “address local desires, inequities, and concerns within and against transnational spatial awareness” (Rogers, 2016, p. 272), but the possibility of such production was such works do not only tend to examine lived experiences and the social issues that grapple society. These youth are also engaged in re-envisioning their everyday spatialities (Hamilton-McKenna & Rogers, 2020; Rogers, 2016; Rogers et al., 2010). It is important to note that, rhetorically and discursively, there is an acknowledgment of the material, embodied, and collective dimensions of voice (Harvey & Cooke, 2021).

The concept of local or counterpublics is made evident in literacy studies, particularly when the intention of the inquiry is to advocate for systemic change (for example, infrastructure development, educational resources) and countering harmful ideological narratives (for example, racial stereotypes, gender issues, and dis/ability advocacies). Viewed from the conceptual lens of critical literacy, these undertakings are not only seen to challenge hegemonic discourses but are

also designed to interrogate how the self can be redefined in the midst of oppressive social structures and relations of production (Morrell, 2008). In essence, critical literacy is all about questioning, exploring, or challenging the power relationships between authors and readers (Bishop, 2014). By using texts and print skills, youth examine the politics of daily life in relation to their personal, sociopolitical, economic, and intellectual border identities (Bishop, 2014). Engaging in critical literacies, then, involve border crossing in/within texts; therefore, the act of interpretations of texts and print skills is widened in relation to various modalities that youth engage with due to the powerful impact of technology.

Youth and Critical Literacy

At the center of this engagement is meaning making and understanding how youth position themselves in relation to the dynamic complexity their social and virtual world. Critical literacy makes a case for critically literate individuals being able to understand the social construction of meanings that are embedded in texts and its wide definition in relation to the political and economic contexts of such production (Morrell, 2004). In these projects, youth are engaged in speaking back to their chosen publics and perhaps, multiple publics. These literacy activities are enacted, for instance, in the context of religion (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022), race and sexuality (Bean & Dunkerly-Bean, 2020; Jones & Curwood, 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Lee, 2019), documenting and processing prejudices that are experienced due to embodied migrant identities (Alford, 2023; Mann & Lee, 2022; Lee, 2019; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017) and accessing higher education (Player et al., 2016).

Because, theoretically, participants in a public engage in “poetic world making” (Warner, 2021, p. 114), it is not a coincidence that in the context of critical literacy and its participatory approaches with marginalized youth, the use of literary analytic tools (Hamilton-McKenna & Rogers, 2020), for instance poetry writing and spoken word poetry, have become a salient and powerful means to speak back. Not only do youth craft poems whose themes resonate with them, they are also able to employ additional languages in conjunction with their developing cultural identity (Jocson, 2011; Jocson, 2005). In the past decade, spoken word poetry has gained its momentum as an invaluable critical literacy tool for speaking back (Call-Cummings et al., 2020; Curwood & Bull, 2023; Desai, 2016). In these modalities, critical literacy skills are harnessed when youth are empowered to interrogate texts and their world (Jones & Curwood, 2020) and critically reproduce and perform texts that are intertwined with their lived realities and imaginaries. Moreover, artistic and creative means of countering prejudices and speaking back have also been appropriated by marginalized youth through hip-hop (Atséna Abogo, 2019; LeBlanc et al., 2016; Lesacher, 2014; Low et al., 2009). Being a form of creative and critical literacy work, hip-hop is a form of resistance that affords youth a space to contest harmful portrayals of their identities (LeBlanc et al., 2016). These forms of reproduction and performances are examples of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Freire, 1968/1970) from which third space may emerge as youth discursively reflect on, grapple with, and make sense of their diasporic identities and experiences (Jones & Curwood, 2020).

Conceptualizing Identities and their Markers

Another dominant framing that characterizes the public as a tool and means for collective imaginings and resisting is from the perspective of race, ethnicity, language, and identities (Kiramba et al., 2021; Omogun & Skerrett, 2021; Smith, 2022; Skerret & Omogun, 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Amongst these conceptualizations, race plays a central role because this is deeply entrenched in our lives and is articulated through various institutions such as legal, financial, health, and education systems (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021), with its complications further exacerbated by the transnational identities of immigrant youth. In short, race is a fundamental axis of social organization (Omogun & Skerrett, 2021). Critical literacy tenets that foreground race as socially constructed categories (McLean, 2020) could provide youth spaces to critique and transform sociopolitical systems (Lee et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022).

One conceptual framing that highlights race and immigration is Black diaspora theory (Gordon & Anderson, 1999). This theory proposes that stories or narratives afford diaspora people participation in the community and the telling of untold stories (McLean, 2012) through writing, co-teaching about self-decolonization, indigenous practices, and civic engagements through political participations. In this conceptual framing, Black youth immigrants are portrayed as intimately bounded by their stories. However, it has been argued that the process and product of storytelling involves a struggle to find the voice not only to talk about one's experiences but also to respond to the world (McLean, 2012). Given the consistent rise of immigration, especially to the western world, there is a scholarly uptake in terms of conceptualizing postcolonial immigrant identities and their intersection with the social construct of race and language. For instance, furthering the conceptualization of Black diaspora identities, Smith (2023) proposed the Black immigrant literacies framework. This framework, offered largely in part to challenge the perception that Black immigrant youth are the new model minority in the United States, highlights how Blackness, immigration, and languages intersect in terms of the population's literacy enactment. Similar to how the model minority myth lumps Asian youth together (Shih et al., 2019; Walton & Truong, 2023; Yi et al., 2022), Smith's framework aims to emphasize the diversity of Black immigrant youth in the, with particular emphasis on the connections of their linguistic heritage and relationship with English. This is because youth within this population came from diverse countries, with some speaking their own versions of English, Spanish, and French in addition to their Indigenous languages. Smith, thus, brings into the framing not only the linguistic challenges that youth face but also raciolinguistic ideologies (Rosa & Flores, 2017) and transnationalism. From these domains, she proposed five elements, namely: claim to the struggle for justice, myth of the model minority, transraciolinguistic approach, local-global, and holistic literacies (Smith, 2023). These elements will be briefly elaborated to show to the intersectionality of diaspora, racial, and transnational literacies.

In addition to framing literacy as a social justice issue, scholars also interpret it based on the historical and social realities of a specific population. In Smith's (2023) Black immigrant literacies framework, the element of the claim to the struggle for justice is centered on the premise that multiliteracies can facilitate "a solidarity across African, Black American, and Black immigrant populations by facilitating an understanding and hope for shared justice based on the history of colonization faced by Black peoples across the diaspora" (p. 28). Theoretically and practically, this solidarity can be achieved by the literate engagements of the Black American and Black immigrant population, understanding the intersection of their racialized

identities as a result of the similarities and differences of their histories. On the other hand, true to my framing of literacy as a public tool for communal desirings and resisting, Smith's (2023) second element centers on a collective debunking of the model minority myth. According to her, this disruption can only be achieved if youth deploy multiliterate practices that counter the "divide-and-conquer racial politics" (Smith, 2023, p. 29) that they face. This involves employing and manipulating modalities that allow them to understand the problematic notion of being designated as superior and inferior. Moreover, because race and language are at the core of this framing, Smith banks on a transraciolinguistic approach, which is the third element of the framework. Through the transraciolinguistic approach, she extends the concept of raciolinguistics (Alim, 2016; Smith, 2019)—the proposition that race and language are intertwined—and raciolinguistic perspective (Rosa & Flores, 2017)—the call to highlight how the individual and the global address the interrelationship of race and language. Her transraciolinguistic approach then centers the intersectionality and criticality of race and youth's literacy through racial, linguistic, and cultural asset framing. Furthermore, still highlighting the affordances of multiliteracies, Smith's fourth element emphasizes the connection of the local and the global in order to make the process of racialization visible to all youth. By enacting literacies that provoke these conversations, the aim is to raise youth who "advocate for one another in ways that reflect their shared understandings of how their bodies, their languages, and their literacies are racialized by societies and systems in various ways depending on context" (Smith, 2023, p. 31). Finally, the last element of the framework, holistic literacies, consolidates other forms of literacies to counter structured or prescribed literacies. In this element, youth leverage their language(s), multiliteracies, and understandings of borders to reread and rewrite their social world. Consistent with literate practices that move youth to reflect on their physical and social worlds, the last element encourages youth to "engage in literate practices that extend their understanding of what it means to be literate and to succeed in life" (Smith, 2023, p. 31). With these elements, Smith's framework consolidates other previous theorization and conceptualization of literacies to architect a lens that centers the literacies of Black immigrant youth.

Stories and Counterstories

In a similar vein and as I have mentioned above, stories, counterstories, and narratives are definitely not new when it comes to centering marginalized voices and helping youth to reconstruct their agency (Curwood & Jones, 2022; Davis, 2018; Pender et al., 2022). Some theories and conceptual dimensions, such as Black and Latina girls writing (Flores, 2021; Flores, 2023b) and pedagogies of the home and community cultural wealth (Flores, 2023a), have allowed scholars to develop and implement critical literacy activities in third spaces in order to capitalize on culturally conscious pedagogies that complement youth's desirings, given their current life trajectory. These works also highlight decolonial perspectives (Torres & Medina, 2023) and involve addressing several publics. Although there are a few conceptualizations that have emerged with these marginalized population at its core (for example, pedagogy of *acompañamiento*, *testimonios*), in the final part of this section, I will elaborate on a lesser-known form of storying/counter-storying, at least in the North American context.

The Kuwento

One of the ways in which stories and counterstories are conceptualized is from the lens of the *kuwento* (Jocson, 2008; Jocson, 2009), a framing that highlights Filipino/a/x ethnicity specific storying and meaning making. Drawn from the Philippine folk and oral traditions, Jocson (2008) positions *kuwento*, or story, as a cultural and sociolinguistic practice mediated by the interactions of multiple parties (for example, students and teachers in classroom settings). Although its loose English translation is ‘story’, for Jocson (2008), *kuwento* is conceptualized by multiple stories that “(re)shape and contribute to larger discourses relevant to multicultural and antiracist education” (p. 245). *Kuwentos*, therefore, become public tools that do not only disrupt thinking processes of both insiders and outsiders of a specific public, but also act as destabilizing tactics to trouble stereotypical notions attributed to ethnic or racial identities. The performance and enactment of these *kuwentos*—that is through uttering or recounting—makes room for exposing hegemonic systems of power and is consequently a political endeavor (Matias et al., 2022).

Important in the conceptualization of *kuwentos* are community narratives which are generated through ethical and cultural practices that both produce and respect collective care in a space that centers kinship and relationality (Salinas, 2023). *Kuwento*, therefore, can be considered as both a theory and a praxis (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009) that methodologically disrupts Western constructs of research due to its emphasis on humanization (Morales et al., 2023) and its centering of the dynamics between the storytellers, the listeners, and the social lay of the land (Reyes et al., 2024). These dynamics, as opposed to one-way storytelling, prioritizes the co-construction of interactionally mediated stories (Jocson, 2008) shaped by broader sociopolitical and historical contexts (Gutierrez et al., 2023). Such mediations allow for critical discourse around identity development (Catalla, 2019; Jocson, 2008) and other struggles to flourish, while also highlighting how participants take ownership of their own narratives to preserve, or at least acknowledge, their cultural values and practices (Salinas, 2023).

It is imperative to acknowledge that *kuwentos* do not exist on their own. As with other discursive practices and activities, they are socially situated and co-constructed (Jocson, 2008) and aim to make connections between the global and the local (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009). Because *kuwentos* primarily highlight transnational people’s lived experiences and since stories are more often tangentially or directly generated and affected by racial constructs, these are potential avenues to hermeneutically explore critical discourses on race (Reyes et al., 2024) and its spatio-temporal interplays (Umel, 2022). Complementing the conceptualization of *kuwentos* with racial and ethnic discourses, as well as stories on shared histories and identity building, not only surfaces binding forces but also reveals affectations that complicate these discourses (Jocson, 2008).

It is interesting to note though, despite the more often heavy (and negative) discourses that permeate conversations on race and ethnicity, manifestations of *kuwentos* are framed from an emancipatory perspective and center emotions and relations. Jocson (2008), in her conceptualization, posits that *kuwento* is foregrounded on the premise of empathy. This essentially means seeing through and understanding someone else’s perspectives. It is through this empathy and understanding that a discourse participant or storyteller develops their awareness of one’s identity and their social reality. As a consequence, they affirm their identity

in relation to the construct of others and their social environment which results in empowerment. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, in the process of engaging with these discourses or storytelling, humor is at its core. This emphasis on humor in knowledge-making, identity negotiations, and community building takes entertainment to the forefront of *kuwentos*. Similar to other cultures, humor is an important component of the storying of the everyday lives of the Filipino/a/x. Prioritizing this cultural practice and form of meaning-making through humor “challenge[s] the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 30) and may also be considered as a form of radical self-care (Salinas, 2023). The conceptual framing of *kuwento* then, with its cultural elements and components mentioned here, could be a form of critical storying and counterstorying deployed by Filipino/a/x to speak back to a particular public.

Conclusion

In this paper, I attempted to synthesize established and emerging conceptual framings that put forward ways to understand, problematize, and take into consideration the complexity of literacy practices that youth deploy. My exploration of these concepts led me to three general categorizations: *literacies as ecologically and materially situated and enacted*, *literacies and their enactment as influenced by both physical and ideological borders*, and *literacies as medium and means for communal desirings and resisting*. In these conceptual framings, there are indeed intersections in terms of how scholars attempt to make sense of and widen definitions of literacies, specifically as deployed by transnational and minoritized youth. Expanding on the general sociocultural assumption that we perform our literacy practices as we participate in our social world, the ecological and sociomaterial framings of literacy aim to move forward from this view. One of my main takeaways from this framing is that materials and other non-human objects, as well as institutional and felt forces, must be taken into consideration as we attempt to rationalize organic engagements of humans with literacies. Secondly, the conceptualizations within these theoretical orientations highlight material entanglements instead of focusing solely on the humans.

On the other hand, through the concepts related to border thinking or pedagogy, theory building within this dimension underscores troubling the notion of time and space, identity construction, and even some harmful aspects of literacy. The notions of ideological borders also lend well to the conceptualization of literacy as medium for communal desirings and resisting. In concepts related to this framing, the binding principle is critical literacies engagements. This can be manifested or produced in various forms, either material or non-material representations. Although the presence of various social issues drives these communal desirings and resisting, the ways in which these are approached are both unique and similar when taken from ethno-racial perspectives. Nonetheless, theory building within this approach aligns with the conceptualizations of entanglements and assemblages.

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