



Navigator, the “American” Bilingual Bridger¹

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First, there is a teacher
And it is usually a she,
And in this case, Latina,
Though she likely considered herself Salvadoreña, or Mexican,
Maybe Mexican-American,
Uprooted by parents who we can almost always say
Were only trying to survive by leaving their beloved lands behind,
Lands they would spend generations trying to return to.
This woman’s parents landed in Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Central Texas,
Before this teacher took on a pan-ethnic identity she may have felt
Ambivalent about,
But to share a Brown struggle
She didn’t mean to or understand was waiting for her
At the peak of White Supremacy soils
Where the Red of the flesh was forced into marches
Of death and genocides and into reservation corners
Over five-hundred years ago and still today.
Where Red would resurrect as partly Brown
In mostly women, who due to their own colonizations
Became subordinate and yet fierce advocates and daily transgressors
Once they entered U.S. school buildings as maestras
Of language and culture, molding Brown youth, though likely only partially,
Into the larger practice of schooling in a heritage language of Spanish.
There was cariño or even joy in classroom moments,
Despite the double pressures of teaching in an unjust system as Brown people.
Adults over café con pan from the Guatemalan bakery queried the
Teachers’ aides who worked as allies and relayers of community concerns;
Then the queasy White people sometimes also tried to *help*,
Though it was often cloaked in an interest convergence where they (we)
Could become property owners in a land where ownership
Took over an ethics of reciprocity with Mother Earth. The shame.

¹ *A reflection poem based on the collection of the special issue articles*

And there were real allies, co-conspirators, perhaps, who really did help.
We see the school board where Brown and Black and White children advocate,
Despite the young children whose teachers sometimes belittle their families
And what they are *not* reading at home,
Even when the young people can spin webs of advocacy
About Malala Yousafzai and Sonia Sotomayor;
All in the face of venture philanthropy and school “choice,” and the closures
Of bilingual schools because the test results weren’t “strong enough,”
(And how could they be when the Brown kids’ bilingual programs had literally been
Relegated to the basements?)
Despite resistance against English as a colonizing language and its attendant
Norms of racialization, of White middle-class performance.
There were marches and solidarities of *autodeterminación colectiva*
Of Brown communities, like their other non-White resistances in this country,
Who secured language education rights, perhaps to the exclusion of identity,
Starting in the 1900s and still today,
But how do you ever codify a right to *be who you are*
In a country bent on a myth that justifies its existence?

The Latina women (and men, and others) are tired from this struggle of navigations.
They are, in their words, exhausted. And yet they still feel joy.
Resistance is slippery that way. It bubbles up as, at times,
Critical consciousness,
Despite being pushed out, and it is not understood fully by those
Who are never forced to embody it.
There are all forms of researchers, too many of us, perhaps,
Some of us too ideologically White, some of us desperate for solidarity
In our torrent of words and actions,
And love and shared resistance, co-conspiratorship.
The language the children share,
The political struggles and activisms,
The love shared over a simple café
Will not be bought or understood while Gates
And shock doctrine money-makers label more children as at-risk.
At-risk of losing who they are in a land where the myth of progress
Has nearly spoiled a planet’s habitability for its humans.
The Latina (Salvadoran?) teacher feels the divide,
As if Anzaldúa had manifested herself
And persists, resists, creates the new bridges
While the banks of the shores collide and collapse.
A struggle worthy if not terrifying, if not riddled with glimpses of hope.