Review of *Abolitionist Intimacies: Queer and Trans Migrants Against the Deportation State* by Eithne Luibhéid

Filimon Fregoso — California State University, San Bernardino

In March 2025, media coverage turned to Andry Hernández Romero, more commonly known as the "gay makeup artist," who was deported to El Salvador's mega-prison. In the events that shaped the aftermath of Hernández Romero's detention, what became notable was the reaction from social media users and activists. Some worried over his safety, questioning whether he was alive, while others called out how Andry was not, as the state was alleging, a violent gang member. Whether these social media users and activists identified as LGBTQ+ or not, they managed to practice a form of queer resistance as they expressed solidarity with Andry. They recognized the dangers prisons pose for queer people of color and contested the nation-state's narratives of criminality. At a time when literacy practices of resistance remain vital for the well-being of those most targeted by the nation-state, it is this form of queer resistance—one that stands against the increasing powers of policing and incarceration—that brings a sense of hope for the futures of empathy, care, and justice. And it is this particular hope that resonates across Eithne Luibhéid's *Abolitionist Intimacies: Queer and Trans Migrants Against the Deportation State*.

Although situated outside of literacy studies, Luibhéid draws on public writings by and about queer and trans migrants to trace how abolition is practiced in response to exigencies brought on by the nation-state's deportations. Offering a framework for an abolitionist reading of these writings, Luibhéid considers how queer and trans migrants build relationships, or what she formally calls "intimacies," with their audiences to contest the deportation state's infrastructure. In particular, she explores how these queer intimacies challenge the "individuals, institutions, discourses, laws, policies, practices, built environments, and funding streams" (Luibhéid 5) that coalesce to dehumanize, displace, and confine undocumented people of color. For Luibhéid, centering the intimacies queer and trans migrants foster is important because they stand against the state-sanctioned intimacies that enable deportation. In highlighting the significance of these queer-driven intimacies, Luibhéid organizes her book around four case studies that illustrate what becomes possible when queer migrants, and their allies, shift the intimacies of their audiences away from the state's deportation logics and toward abolitionist practices.

In Chapter 1, "Pathways: Coproducing Citizenship and Deportation," Luibhéid examines the involvement of queer migrants in a group led by undocumented people that described themselves as a blue-ribbon commission. Consisting of individuals who were the most affected by immigration policymaking, this group organized to

have undocumented and formerly undocumented people share their expertise and offer a more human-centered approach to US migration policy. Luibhéid explains that this commission sought to challenge commonly proposed immigration reforms that increased the deportability of people of color and fostered "white, settler colonial, heteronormative, and capitalist relations" (48). Analyzing a report wherein the commission addressed then-President Obama and demanded an end to migration-control policies that increased state violence, Luibhéid examines how the group queered pathways to citizenship by advocating for the well-being of undocumented people, the preservation of communities, and the end to as many deportations as possible. By putting the demands of the commission into the foreground, Luibhéid draws significant attention to the policies and ways of life that become imaginable when the intimacies of undocumented people and their communities are foregrounded over the impulses to punish. And it is the close attention to these practices that makes Luibhéid's work relevant to literacy scholars interested in studying alternatives to state-sponsored literacies—literacies that, in spite of their promises, do not fully guarantee incorporation into the citizenry (Cavallaro; Shelledy; Vieira; Wan).

The attention to these queered practices remains one of the book's many strengths. And part of that strength is Luibhéid's situating of these practices as a response to the inequalities embedded in common pathways to citizenship. For example, Chapter 2, "Love, Marriage, and Deportation," looks at marriage and its involvement in deportation practices. Analyzing federal laws and immigration policies, Luibhéid describes how immigration officials deploy a heteronormative definition of love that disproportionately affects queer marriages between undocumented spouses and people of color. Because these marriages have queer, undocumented, and racialized components to them, the people in them face questioning and other barriers, such as encounters with law enforcement, that subject them to what Luibhéid describes as the "moral and penal logics within which practices of detention and deportation [have] flourished" (57). Thus, Luibhéid adds crucial context as to why queer and trans migrants see marriage as insufficient in anti-deportation efforts and instead decide to advocate for "collective action grounded in visions of radical love" and community (77).

Reminders of how queer and trans migrants practice abolition through community-building never get lost in Luibhéid's work. In Chapter 3, "Driving While Undocumented: Circulating Fear and Fearlessness," Luibhéid highlights how queer and trans migrants utilize community-building to challenge the insertion of immigration enforcement into everyday life. Luibhéid, more notably, cites how the state inflicts racist terror through traffic stops to further "attrition practices [that] not only target everyday activities in an effort to make life unlivable but also foster fear" (80). However, this racist policing can falter, especially when met with the queered practices of community-building. This is demonstrated by Luibhéid's analysis of undocumented activists who refused to be intimidated and, instead, mobilized a queer-inspired "coming out" campaign through the UndocuBus project. Luibhéid explains that the UndocuBus project allowed over 40 undocumented people to ride a bus from Arizona to the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. Noting how the side of the bus said "Sin Papeles Sin Miedo: No Papers No Fear," Luibhéid describes how the UndocuBus allowed undocumented

people to "circulate 'undocumented and unafraid' as a framework to build networks, intimacies, and demands for change" (81). It was this campaign that allowed activists to build, and garner support from, a national audience that had a chance to hear about undocumented people outside of the state-sponsored discourses that criminalize them. Such an analysis harkens back to Karma Chávez's work, which explores how the rhetorical practices of queer people and migrants coalesce in disrupting the silence that state power expects from those it seeks to oppress. Luibhéid's work can help scholars think through the ways that queer and migrant rhetorical practices not only coalesce in style, but also in their abolitionist aims.

One of the reasons why Luibhéid's work is a valuable resource for exploring abolitionist practices is because it significantly considers the interconnections between race and incarceration. This is evident in Chapter 4, "Cities as Chokepoints and Resistance," where Luibhéid describes the protests that organizers led against the city of Santa Ana and its plans to expand a LGBT pod for detained migrants. Luibhéid examines how organizers called out the city's loyalty to profits over the well-being of its constituents, most of whom were people of color. These organizers managed to point out how the expansion of the pod meant the increased detention of LGBT people and the continuous racial profiling of constituents by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). By focusing on the messaging of these organizers, Luibhéid demonstrates that abolition could be mobilized in campaigns that seek to restructure relationships between city officials and their constituents of color. For those looking to bridge community literacy with abolition, Luibhéid's analysis can be of great assistance, especially when viewed alongside Glenn Hutchinson's work. Also focusing on anti-deportation efforts, but more so around the work of student immigrant rights organizers, Hutchinson resists a community writing model that seeks to teach students how to become "active citizens," and instead argues for a pedagogical shift that "acknowledge[s] the rich rhetorical skills that many students possess in challenging racist, neoliberal policies" (Hutchinson 39). Both Luibhéid and Hutchinson present works that illuminate how anti-neoliberal practices are very much alive in our communities, reminding us of the important first step of listening when doing community-engaged work.

As I reflect on Luibhéid's work as a whole, I find that one of its many significant achievements is the balance that it strikes between hope and urgency. Luibhéid successfully illustrates how queer and trans migrants, along with their allies, work to overturn the intimacies that the nation-state sponsors, while also emphasizing that these intimacies continue to be embedded in our everyday lives. It is through this balance that I see Luibhéid echoing Amy Wan's call for literacy educators to "deliberate on the habits of citizenship that are being cultivated through our actions so that we may respond more effectively to current and continuing changes in the concept and reality of citizenship" (178). The precarious state of citizenship that Wan reminds us of could not be felt more today in the militarization of American cities, the criminalization and brutalization of protestors, and the racial profiling of individuals for the purposes of deportation and/or incarceration. As the deportation state grows more powerful, every part of American life, including academia, is being pressured to embrace indifference over empathy. It is no coincidence that in recent years there have been institutional

demands for academics to self-censor, distance themselves from human-centered work, and embrace artificial intelligence in their pedagogies—all practices that contribute to the deportation infrastructure that Luibhéid discusses. As literacy scholars grappling with these exigencies, Luibhéid's work provides a framework that invites us to question the intimacies we may be building with the nation-state, both in our personal lives and through our teaching, research, and service. And, equally as important, it provides a framework that invites us to imagine what is possible when we deviate from ever-shifting norms and build intimacies with those most targeted by the nation-state.

Works Cited

Cavallaro, Alexandra. "Making Citizens Behind Bars (and the Stories We Tell About It): Queering Approaches to Prison Literacy Programs." *Literacy in Composition Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–21, https://doi.org/10.21623/1.7.1.2.

Chávez, Karma R. *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*. U of Illinois P, 2013.

Hutchinson, Glenn. *Writing Accomplices with Student Immigrant Rights Organizers*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2021.

Luibhéid, Eithne. *Abolitionist Intimacies: Queer and Trans Migrants Against the Deportation State*. Duke UP, 2025.

Shelledy, Maggie. "Precarious Citizenship: Ambivalence, Literacy, and Prisoner Reentry." *Literacy in Composition Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2023, pp. 61–77, https://doi.org/10.21623/1.10.2.4.

Vieira, Kate. *American By Paper: How Documents Matter in Immigrant Literacy*. U of Minnesota P, 2016.

Wan, Amy J. *Producing Good Citizens: Literacy Training in Anxious Times*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2014.