

Book Review *Writing for Love and Money: How Migration
Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families*
by Kate Vieira

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Writing for Love and Money is a nuanced account of how increased global migration affects literacy learning in transnational families as they write for both economic survival and emotional connection from miles away. Kate Vieira explores how “migration-driven literacy learning” appears in the lives of transnational families in three contexts: Latvia, Brazil, and the United States. This is an account of the literacy practices not just of those who migrate, but also of the family members they leave behind. Vieira examines how print and digital technologies act as “writing remittances,” or “the communication hardware, software, writing practices, and literacy knowledge that migrant family members often circulate across borders” (4). How do those migrants’ family members take up these remittances in pursuit of both money and love? This book explores that question. Through her three ethnographic case studies, which make up three of the book’s chapters, Vieira finds that homeland residents experience digital literacy learning because of the remittances that their migrated loved ones send home, together forming a well of literacy resources. By tracing the way writing remittances travel across borders, Vieira outlines a complicated view of literacy. *Writing for Love and Money* suggests that literacy for transnational families is both something that is converted into economic growth and something that cannot be quantified: an emotional act between loved ones.

The traveling of the texts, technologies, and knowledge among transnational family members creates circuits across geopolitical borders. Transnational families do not build these circuits only as a response to injustice and pursuit of economic advancement. Yes, the motivation to migrate can involve the pursuit of economic mobility. However, the families that Vieira worked with also created these circuits for love—to provide support for migrated family members and to maintain kinship bonds across distance. In this way, Vieira powerfully shows how the literacy of migrants operates both outside of and in response to the economy: human connection and intimacy. Vieira presents three case studies: the first describes how migrated families members send technology home (Brazil), the second explains how writing remittances create political activism (Latvia), and the third shows how these transnational communications provide support in the physically and emotionally difficult act of migration. Together, these studies bring Vieira to a theory that writing remittances are one example of how familial motivations drive transnational literacy practices in both economic and intimate ways, contributing to collective digital literacy learning for homeland family members.

The first case study describes her interviews with transnational family members in Jau, Brazil, a place marked by moderate out-migration. Ultimately, Vieira finds that “literacy and social class do not determine each other. Rather . . . class-based ideologies of literacy and the material realities

of stratified access to literacy often interact, texturing people's experience of learning (or not) to write in new ways to negotiate transnational family life" (79). Maria's experience illustrates this point. Maria's son, who had migrated from Brazil to Japan, sent her a laptop for them to use to communicate. Her local children helped her learn to use Skype. Together, this family, by way of sending, learning, and using digital literacy technology, formed a transnational circuit of literacy learning. The laptop represents both love and money, as her son's ability to buy it showed the economic pay-off for his migration, while it also represented a way for them to maintain their bond as mother and son. While remittances aided in migration-driven-literacy learning in this instance, Vieira is careful to note that these technologies did not transform homeland resident's material circumstances wholesale. Remittances functioned as one practice in a larger critical literacy about inequality that Vieira saw in the families she interviewed, noting how this circuit meant something different depending on the socioeconomic class of the family and the reason for their loved ones migration.

In the next case study, we turn to Vieira's time in Daugavpils, Latvia, a place marked by mass out-migration. In addition to writing remittances ability to "unite transnational families in an economic and emotional exchange," as the last case study showed, she argues that "the pedagogical experiences promoted by such exchanges often gain force, meaning, and urgency from the historical and contemporary political challenges that people use literacy to meet" (95). Drawing from several literacy history interviews, Vieira describes three ways that literacy experiences shifted historically and contemporarily based on Latvia's political shifts: 1) letter-writing during the Soviet regime to maintain contact with family members, 2) digital literacy practices that resulted from Latvia joining the European Union and subsequent migration to Western member states, and 3) anticipatory literacy learning, in which migrants "stockpiled" languages and literacies to prepare for seeming inevitable migration westward due to a post-2009 recession economy (95-96). Complicating the idea that homelands experience a loss of literate resources, Vieira argues that the transnational circulation of writing remittances that her participants discussed can "be viewed as one grassroots answer to unjust political economic policies" (126). This chapter shows the way that transnational families based in Latvia respond to political shifts: by finding new technologies and practices to make literacy a resource for them to pursue love and money.

The final case study turns from examining migrants' loved one's literacies to demonstrating the complexity of migrant's own literate lives in the US. Vieira's story of the way migration-driven-literacy-learning formed transnational circuits between family members continues. She explains,

The act of sending literacy remittances seemed to order the otherwise potentially chaotic trauma of separation, especially separation undertaken under circumstances of economic injustice, persecution, and fear. Literacy remittances appeared to form a connective tissue to homelands, a kind of reparative suture that aided in constructing a viable U.S. existence under state repression. (154)

Vieira reveals that the value of literacy was bidirectional in this chapter. For example, she observes how Oksana, one of her participants, both remitted and received literacy as she participated in her distant grandchildren's language education (151). She explains, "the act of sending literacy remittances seemed to order the otherwise potentially chaotic trauma of separation" by forming

a collective wealth of literacy resources from which all family members drew in their economic pursuits (Vieira 155).

Vieira ends by posing important questions for researchers, such as how the rise in technology since the time of her fieldwork might affect the use of remittances in Latvia, or how Brexit has affected Latvians learning of English (163). These questions show Vieira's commitment to putting individual and family literacies in their nation-state's political moments, such as war and economic decline, as well as contextualizing them through history. I add that future projects might question the relationship between transnational economic values that circulate across nation-states, such as neoliberalism, and families literacy practices. Vieira's contribution—that mass migration contributes to digital literacy learning by family connections—presents a way for literacy scholars to see the adaptive power of these families' literacies amid not only mass migration, but also all too frequent anti-immigration rhetoric and marginalizing policies. Vieira ends by writing directly to social-justice oriented educators, calling for them to draw on the love that already runs through students' out-of-school writing practices for cultivating "political subjectivities, critical awareness, and dialogic practices of literacy" (165). These calls make *Writing for Love and Money* a particularly useful piece for social-justice educators and those interested in transnational literacy practices to read. More than that, the at once beautiful and painful portraits of these families' literacies is a story that audiences who may not be familiar with the complexities of migrant families' material and literate lives would benefit from reading.

WORKS CITED

Vieira, Kate. *Writing for Love and Money: How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families*. Oxford UP, 2019.