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Silvia Caporale Bizzini & Melita Richter Malabotta

Teaching Subjectivity.
Travelling Selves for Feminist Pedagogy

Teaching with Gender. European Women’s Studies in International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms.

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I REMEMBER, THEREFORE I WRITE: THE VOICES OF CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN CANADIAN WOMEN WRITERS

Silvia Caporale-Bizzini (University of Alicante)

I REMEMBER
The Route to which I entered
The island, the snow.
The rooms in which I waited.
The food. Unspoken words…

I REMEMBER
Memories are not lost…
Canada is home.
Identities are regained.
Youth is all I have lost
(“PIER 21”, Bruna Di Giuseppe-Bertoni)\(^1\)

The theoretical interest that enlightens my research focuses on the study of the anthropology of the self and how this is represented through writing personal narratives in their multiple and complex manifestations. I strongly believe that it is not by chance that I became interested in theoretical matters and that the personal quest that brought me to theory originates deep within me and is due to my individual circumstances. My idea of “travelling selves” moves from my own autobiographical experience that, at some point, I felt I had to understand and delineate within intellectual parameters and personal boundaries; these conceptual and individual borders originate in a nodal point that regards as crucial the process of construction of identities of the “nomadic” subject informed by geographical and cultural dislocation, social class, cultural or transcultural hybridism, history, memory, storytelling and their effect in the psychic perception of the Real.

According to Hannah Arendt, the present time is a field force rooted within the flux of time, it represents a moment of self-discovery that becomes deeply and powerfully meaningful insofar as the individual consciously

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experiences it in-between her past and the coming future. If we loose the
connection with history or tradition, we become orphans of inherited ideas,
dislocated from our origins and an identity crisis occurs. This represents a
motivating point of departure in my approach to auto/biographical tales by
writers whose roots are partially situated in their “other” country, far away and,
at times, only imagined.

The issues that inform my target writings in this paper as well as my
theoretical approach are concerned with writing the experiences of the ontological “travelling” and the subject’s “dislocation”. Writers like, Gianna Patriarca, Penny Petrone, Caterina Edwards or Mary Di Michele share either the experience of emigration or the experience of belonging to the first generation of immigrants. This is what Gianna Patriarca, born in Italy and immigrated at an early age to Canada, writes in her “Birthday Poem”: “…there is the one story/we are immigrant girls from the 1960s/the in-between women who fit/nowhere very comfortably/but we are at home with each other…” On her side, Penny Petrone remembers how her mother used to knit red, green and white scarves, the colours of the Italian flag, that she, Penny, would firmly refuse to wear: “She made the girls tricolour toques, mitts, scarves and dickies. I refused to wear mine. ‘These are the colours of the Italian flag,’ she protested. ‘I am not Italian. I am Canadese. I am a Canadian. I am a Canadian,’ I tried to explain. It was no use.”

These autobiographical pieces, among others, are representative of a
duality difficult to come to terms with and of the every so often complex process of accepting a divided cultural identity. What springs out from these authors’ writings is that their splitting up, more often than not, does not materialise in abstract and complex theoretical issues, but in everyday life and experiences like cooking, playing, dressing or, as in the case of Penny Petrone, the religious rituals that marked the passing of the seasons and helped her mother to maintain emotional ties with her motherland and the family’s village in the south

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2 “… autobiographies are always a document of the set of historical conditions that made them possible. It is this same conviction that has allowed historian Diane Bjorklmed to build her study of autobiography: history shapes the self and it is thus directly related to one’s story of oneself”. Ilaria Serra, The Value of Worthless Lives. Writing Italian-American Immigrant Autobiography (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 150.


of Italy: “St Anthony’s Church at the corner of Banning and Dufferin was our parish church. It was here that Mamma felt at home when she arrived from Calabria. It was here she heard the familiar Latin and her native tongue.”

Narratives of remembering

I will approach these narratives from a twofold standpoint: the first originates in my partial identification with their experience of inhabiting a “third space”, a kind of identitary heterotopia. The second approach starts off in my understanding of the act of writing and/or telling a story also as political accomplishments and within a political theory of identity that belongs to the realm of the “polis”, the democratic dialogue that grants the individuals access to the public sphere and to visibility, namely the opportunity of being fully considered as a rightful citizen. For such reasons, my aim in this essay is to associate the praxis of autobiographical and memoir writing to the (self) definition of difference in a context of cultural hybridism within the experience of immigration.

The idea of dislocation I am concerned with, is related to the material as well as to the psychological experiences of emigration, adjustment, assimilation and the issue of language. I understand autobiographical writing (in its wider sense) as an instrument that facilitates to the displaced subject coming to terms with her apparently floating and unstable self or, as Paul John Eakin asserts: “… as an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation.” In her study on memoirs written by Italian immigrants, The Value of Worthless Lives, Ilaria Serra states that: “Immigration and autobiography have several connections. Immigration works as a kind of Copernican revolution that destabilises an individual’s sense of self: one is severed out as a single particle from the rest of the universe of countrymen [sic]; that individual is no longer at its centre”. At the same time, autobiographical writings become a way to re/construct the Real, negotiate with one’s

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7 The texts quoted in this essay are mostly autobiographical. In some cases, as in “Home and Away” by Caterina Edwards or “Stealing Persimmons” by Gianna Patriarca, they only retain a strong autobiographical authorial input which originates in autobiographical experiences that are eventually transposed into the biography of literary characters.
life experiences and heal the wounded “I”10: “Preserving the testimonies of these individual experiences from permanent erasure gives another face to history (…) As Antonio Gramsci, a scholar of the people, summarised, ‘Autobiography certainly has a great historical value in that it shows life in action and not merely written as written laws or dominant moral principles say it should be’.”11

Ilaria Serra also points out how the need for redefining one’s self through autobiographical discourse by keeping, for example, a diary, emerges during times of personal crisis. There is no doubt that the experience of emigration is an essential moment in a person’s life, it is marked by fear and uncertainty about the future and by the – still unconscious at this point – rupture with one’s past. Angela, the main character of Caterina Edwards’s short story “Home and Away”, while writing a letter home, remembers that: “Years ago, Nonna told me, when people emigrated, their departure was marked by funeral rites. When they left the village, they ceased to exist. Maybe that explains what I felt was a lack of interest in what kind of life you have made for yourself in Canada.”12 In her moving short story “Espresso, Camaros and Gianni Morandi”, Gianna Patriarca narrates the day she, her mother and her baby sister left their village in the south of Italy to start their journey to Canada:

   My very gentle, rotund grandfather, leaned on his home-made wooden cane … I locked my arms around his knees, like a trap, and held on tight. I would not let go, I could not let go, screaming like a wild thing until I felt my small lungs explode as my heart climbed towards my throat. At that very moment, while my uncle and mother tried to tear me away, kicking and screaming, from my grandfather’s knees, I knew I had no choice. The decision had been made for me. The choices would go on being made for me for a long time to come.13

   Self-writing can then become a survival strategy to heal the grief of the separation and mend the loss of those basic points of identitary self-reference. Self-writing also aims at making and re-making one’s self; it represents our chance of coming to terms with an external reality that seeks to mould our responses while setting us in a pre-definite subject location. We are obviously free to accept such a process of relocation or question it; both ways we become

10 “To speak of narrative identity is to conceptualize narrative as not merely about identity but rather in some profound way a constituent part of identity, specifically of the extended self that is expressed in self-narration”, Eakin, Ibid., 115.
11 Serra, Ibid., 3.
agents and look at “the birth of narrative as a metaphor of life” (Hyvärinen 2006, 21). Broadly speaking, the outcome can be a more complex form of identification and/or affiliation with both countries, Italy and Canada, resulting from a cultural reformulation of a psychic reality which deals with a hybridised family romance. In an autobiographical piece of literary criticism, “Discovering Voice: the Second Generation Finds Its Place: a Polemic”, Caterina Edwards, the Canadian writer and daughter of an Englishman and an Italian woman, explains her cultural and painfully accepted “travelling” between cultures: “I started to write of Italy and the Italian Canadian experience to find my place, to determine where I belonged. Yet I found I could not write myself into belonging. My split was only emphasised. Now I see that I will be ever obsessed with the split person: the Canadian in Rome, the Italian in Edmonton, immigrant and emigrant. I have found no physical place, but I have found another kind of place.”

Mary Di Michele, one of the most acclaimed among contemporary Italian Canadian poets and writers, painfully states her inner fight against a feeling of double belonging in one of her poems “Life is a Theatre (or to be Italian in Toronto Drinking Cappuccino on Bloor Street at Bersani & Carlevale’s)”: 

Back then you couldn’t have imagined
yourself openly savouring a cappuccino,
you were too ashamed that your dinners
were in a language you couldn’t share
with your friends: their pot roasts,
their turnips, their recipes for Kraft
dinners you glimpsed in TV commercials…
you needed an illustrated dictionary
to translate your meals, looking to the glossary (…)

(…) What you had was rare and seemed to weigh
you down as if it were composed of plutonium,
What you wanted was to be like everybody else.
What you wanted was to be liked.


15 Mary Di Michele, “Life is a Theatre (or to be Italian in Toronto Drinking Cappuccino on Bloor Street at Bersani & Carlevale’s)” In *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing*, ed. (Toronto: Guernica Editions, 1998), 296-97.
As Di Michele illustrates through her words, the ongoing dialogue we keep with the past, understood as a time continuum projecting onto the present, permits us to develop an interior and silent conversation with ourselves that, according to Arendt, is what characterises the human conscience: “… the first thing to be noticed is that not only the future – ‘the wave of the future’ – but also the past is seen as a force, and not, as in nearly all our metaphors, as a burden man has to shoulder and of whose dead weight the living can or even must get rid in their march into the future.” In the words of Faulkner, “the past is never dead, it is not even past”.16 In her poem “Returning”, Gianna Patriarca builds an imaginary bridge between the land she left in the 1960s as a child and the land she considers as her own as a grown woman; the woman is now a poet who writes in English, but she is at the same time that little girl who crossed the ocean with her mother and sister to meet a nearly forgotten father (“We held on/two more nights on a stiff, cold train/headed for Toronto/where the open arms of a half forgotten man/waited”17), Patriarca inhabits both places at the same time while she declares that: “We don’t discuss the distance anymore/returning is now/the other dream/not American at all/not Canadian or Italian/it has lost its nationality.”18

The past cannot be negated, it does exist and constitutes the interrelational autobiographical self that both authors need and that has to come to terms with the present moment; as already anticipated, the negation of the past, the breaking of the relation between what happened and what can happen as a result of previous actions, brings us to live a “biological existence lacking in depth” (Khon in Arendt 2006, xviii) and suffer, in the wider context of a generational standpoint, an identity crisis: “Immigration and autobiography even share the same narrative discourse. Immigration is a physical journey through space in a specific quest for a place. An autobiography is basically an immigration of the soul;”19 accordingly, both collective memory and personal remembering construct our perception of self,20 but I reckon that this is not the

16 In Arendt, Ibid., 10.
18 Ibid., 206.
19 Serra, Ibid., 19.
20 “The point of the matter is that the “completion”, which indeed every enacted event must have in the minds of those who then are to tell the story and to convey its meaning, eluded them; and without this thinking completion after the fact, without the articulation accomplished by remembrance, there simply was no story left that could be told”, Arendt, Ibid., 6.
only aspect to consider. In the negotiation that must be carried out between the narrating subject’s feeling of pertinence to a collectivity and the personal and psychic insight, memoirs become a fictionalised transcription of past events that does produce a meaningful tale.

The social life of emigration/immigration is an important part of these narratives that do not exist in a social vacuum but within a common dislocated perception of one’s identity. Self-writing narrates one’s own history in relation to other people’s experiences; it constructs a text which is at the same time personal and relational. As Mink suggests: “Stories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles, or ends; there are meetings, but the start of an affair belongs to the story we tell later, and there are partings, but final partings only in the story.”

Giovanna Del Negro stresses that life stories are an example of how people use words to thread a textual net that draws a picture of their past within a wider existential project whose final aim is to give meaning to their present (2003, 14). One of the women interviewed by Del Negro, Filomena Azzuolo, states very clearly that it is because of her leaving Italy and migrating to Canada that: “What I didn’t do, maybe my children will do”, the other women’s stories, one way or another “...offer insights into how subordinate groups have developed, and continue to develop, creative survival strategies for coping with repressive social conditions”. In Diario di una emigrante (Montreal 1979), published in Italian under the pen name of E. MacRan and translated into English by Joseph Pivato, Elena Maccaferri Randaccio narrates how, during the 1940s, a woman educated according to tradition becomes a different person when her husband is sent to a prisoner camp in the north of Canada for participating in a fascist rally. She is then obliged by the circumstances to take care of the family business, a farm, and the children; eventually, she not only manages to do it, but she succeeds in increasing the family income and wealth. Once she is told that her husband has been released and will be coming home, she suddenly realises that she cannot accept to go back to the way things used to be:

22 Giovanna del Negro, Looking Through my Mother’s Eyes (Toronto: Guernica, 2003), 40.
23 Ibid., 13.
I learned that Beppe would soon be coming home. We now owned a farm and a motel. But I was not really at peace. Maybe for this reason I always worked so hard; I had seen many sunrises and worked 'til the stars came out. If I stopped working a long pain would grab my heart, a pain which came from many problems and from nothing. Then I felt I was a stranger to myself, to my children and to the place where I lived. And I was not satisfied with my life. And when I learned that Beppe would return I no longer understood why, after having waited for him for so long, I felt so full of anxiety...In fact, he had changed little from the time he had left. Instead, I had changed a lot, he said to me after we first embraced.24

Elena Maccaferri finds herself located in-between cultures and languages, and away from her native country, she is forced to reflect on how she positions herself and how she interrelates with the world that surrounds her. Her everyday life epitomises the inevitability of looking for answers in relation to feelings and sensations often misunderstood or even negated by most people close to her; in this sense, Mary Di Michele writes that: “If art imitates life, it is as true that life imitates art. Which brings me back to the idea of “l’imaginaire”, and the social and psychological role of culture, to define us as it reflects us, to examine our lives, to give us perspective, to illuminate our existence, to create that map, that psychic landscape by which we can find our way and not be lost to ourselves or to each other.”25

Now, Di Michele’s autobiographical (and theoretical) approach to the meaning of literature and writing is appealing to me as, like her, more than twenty years ago I underwent a (geographical) journey that unexpectedly brought me away from my home country, so far. As a “travelling subject” – and/or as a subject dislocated from her emotional roots – I learnt that the inner quest becomes a way of coming to terms with a set of norms that belongs to a reality defined by “different” standards from those of the subject’s original ones. A new learning process has to be carried out: (a) new language(s) to master, new codes to mimic (I have used the word mimic and not “interiorise” on purpose), public, personal and psychic spaces need to be reconceptualised and deeply and painfully negotiated. As in the theory of the Foucauldian Panoptic, the “outsider” (that is “me”) is subject to scrutiny and is the object of curiosity. She is then classified and defined as “self” by the gaze of people

25 Mary Di Michele, “Writers from Invisible Cities”. Canadian Woman’s Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme, Vol. 8, n° 2 (Summer 1987), 38.
that, in general terms, share a familiarity in habits, culture, language, history, memories, schooling, smells, savours, jokes ….. It is a gaze that, consciously and/or unconsciously, does not define you as another, but as other. As stressed above, negotiation becomes then one of the strategies of survival that the dislocated subject has to develop as a way to come to terms with a reality that tends to regard you (me) as something other than itself. Within this ontological context, the self is subject to tensions that originate from the outside as well as from the inside of the individual’s daily experiences; on the one hand, we stumble on the external field forces that define you as “other” and that tend to see you as a “fixed identity” which belongs to the “collective imaginary” of what a “foreigner” is, should do, should say and which social role she should perform. On the other hand, we become aware of the resistance that the individual herself is constantly carrying out to retain her right to be a “subject-in-progress/changing/ floating subject” and to reflect on the inevitable and unstoppable process of hybridising she is undergoing as a social and psychic self.

In such a complex and bewildering personal context, remembering as healing becomes an essential part of everyday life and a necessary strategy of resistance as it works both as an active and conscious way of retrieving memories and reconstructing wounded parts of one's self through words. In a touching short story whose title is “Stealing Persimmons”, Gianna Patriarca narrates the story of Rosa, an old woman that can neither walk nor speak (“Her voice. Why her voice? Rosa thinks. Why not her eyes? She could still see without her eyes. But this cruel, cruel silence … No more long conversations. No more stories in any language.” ), she spends her time close to the bay window of her Canadian house and uses memory as a tool of survival: “The bay window is her world. It is her memory.” It is by remembering her past in the Italian village that Rosa is able to live again gone feelings and sensations and regain a lost, but not forgotten, identity: “Rosa turns to the bay window. Tomasos [sic] is shovelling potatoes deep into the ashes of the fireplace. “We need salt Rosa.” She lifts the heavy wooden top of a chest, opens a brown bag and scoops out a spoonful of

26 Contemporary developmental psychology has now accepted and developed the distinction between “involuntary memory” and “voluntary memory”. The first is a kind of unconscious activity, an involuntary act, while the second is defined by the rational act of remembering. John Kihlstrom points out that: “…..memory is not a thing, represented by a noun, but rather an activity, represented by a verb. Memories might be things that people have, but remembering is something people do. In terms of the library metaphor, then, memory is not like a book that we read, but rather like a story we tell anew each time we remember”, John Kihlstrom, “Memory, Autobiography, History”. Proteus: a Journal of Ideas, Vol. 19, nº 6, 2002, 1.
28 Ibid., 62.
salt. The potatoes open and smoke while Tomaso sprinkles the coarse granules over them. “Mangia Rosa, sono buone.”

John Kihlstrom\textsuperscript{30} points out that the use of autobiographical memory associates moments of our life experiences to a determined psychic representation of ourselves, this means that the subject is converted into an active agent in the process of re/definition of her individuality. He also stresses that memory is a process that not only involves a mere act of recollection, but also of re/interpretation of past events: “… explicit memory entails conscious recollection of some past event, as in recall or recognition; by contrast, implicit memory is represented by any change in experience, thought, or action which is attributable to that event.”\textsuperscript{31}

Language as storytelling is then an important part of the displaced subject as she lives in-between languages and interprets, at the same time, various semiotic codes, linguistic as well as cultural. Homi Bhabha defines this state as the anxiety of translation\textsuperscript{32} of the subject that lives in-between languages (“being-in-difference”\textsuperscript{33}). The question of identity is thus interwoven with the issue of language(s) as these codes represent much more than a linguistic exercise for the individual that is obliged to learn a new way of communicating: “Anxiety represents an ongoing, vacillating process of translation that iteratively crosses the border between external/internal, psychic/somatic, between the ego “as the actual seat of anxiety” and the inner attack of id and superego”.\textsuperscript{34} Interpretation becomes a way of life, it is ever present in the individual’s daily experience; these daily acts of interpretation characterise a process of acculturation that develops into an “I” that together with autobiographical memoirs re/defines a person’s identity while bridging her past, her present and project her on to the future.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{30} http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~kihlstrom/rmpa00.htm.
\textsuperscript{31} Kihlstrom, Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 438.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 442-43.
Licia Canton sees this state of being in writing and in translation as a hyphenated representation of a subjectivity that is composed of two or more languages; anyway, this hyphenated linguistic positioning can become an emotional burden and a reinterpreting of the binary code that is hidden behind the concept of a hyphenated subjectivity is required: “Two important issues are raised here: the necessity of free choice and the possibility of cumulative as opposed to dissociation identity. The latter notion, cumulative identity, involves the deconstruction of the binary and exclusionary mechanisms of opposing the Self to the Other.”

This process, the feeling of “being-in-difference” and its projection on the way language represents us and what surrounds us are, for example, poignantly stressed by Mary Di Michele in a short piece of writing where she describes the sensations she feels walking around the small town of Duino in the north of Italy: “Colours, though singularly bold in Italy, here seem demure, horticultural, not of the open field afire with wild poppies, but of plots, of containment …vivid evidence of how the Latin can so easily be tempered by the Teutonic. The expatriate from Canada empathises. You too are hybrid, you too are hyphenated.” But immediately after this sentence she is firm in rejecting a hyphenated identity and accepts her own cultural and linguistic hybridisation: “Hybrid yes! Your species comes from the evolution of everything that lives by adding on. Hyphenated no! Hyphenated subtracts both ways, bears the sign of its division at the centre.” Now, to avoid hyphenation, we can read Bhabha’s “anxiety” as a way to get to a linguistically focused interaction with another culture and a way to give voice to a chosen hybridity as a part of a linguistic “third space”, a linguistic as well as cultural heterotopia.

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37 Mary Di Michele, “Passeggiata di sogno”. In *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing*, ed. Joseph Pivato (Toronto: Guernica Editions, 1998), 289
38 Ibid.
The definition of a “third space”

In his essay “Different Spaces”, Michel Foucault introduces his definition of heterotopia, “a placeless place” that has “…the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves”.39 The floating subject occupies an emplacement where she is and she is not at the same time; she ends up belonging to the third space that materialises in the metaphor of the mirror: I am there reflected in it, but I am not there as what I see is at the same time myself and my reflection. I simultaneously occupy both spaces but I do not truly belong to any of them. The “floating I” comes to represent a self that, while retaining her points of conscious and unconscious references, moves on to “different” negotiated positions that, also through the writing process, enters into a dialogue between the wounded self and a reinforced sense of identity and pertinence not to a single reality, but to a multiplicity of “heterotopic” spaces: “In the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am over there where I am not, a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to look at myself there where I am absent—a mirror utopia. But it is also a heterotopia in that the mirror really exists, in that it has a sort of return effect on the place that I occupy.”40

As suggested above, to facilitate and fix the individual’s process of adaptation, or acceptance of her ethnic origins and dual feelings of pertinence, she has to go through a double array of ontological re/definition. On the one side, the writing subject needs to recuperate and come up with her own (dual) history, in cultural and family terms; on the other side, she has to negotiate with the environment and a reality that influence our understanding of ourselves and the relation we maintain with the people and things that surround us:

The disclosure of the “who” through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact … These stories may be then recorded in documents and

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40 Ibid., 178.
moments, they may be visible in used objects or art works, they may be told and retold and worked out into all kinds of material … In other words, the stories, the result of action and speech, reveal an agent.

Telling one’s story means that the speaking subject becomes part of the public world through storytelling. Hannah Arendt relates “speech” to (political) public “action”; she says that our humanity is defined by our capacity of telling stories and establishing a biography. Words and speaking as an act of identitary statement represent the origin and the answer to the question “who are you?” As already suggested, the emigrant and/or dislocated person who tells her story, by becoming an agent, puts back together the pieces of her broken story and can thus overcome the feeling of being divided between two continents or countries and, as Antonio D’Alfonso points out, she can consciously accept a “composite” identity, a “cumulative as opposed to dissociative identity”. The voice of autobiographical memory is the way to a rebirth in a new country and in a new language without erasing the past and without rejecting the former identity and cultural background.

**Implications for teaching**

When I approach a new course of literature, my starting point always focuses on the importance of understanding the construction of identities through discursive practices, or how discursive practices play a basic role in our understanding of who we are and how society defines our selves in relation to gender, race and social class. As I have already suggested elsewhere (Caporale Bizzini 2006), students must understand how cultural practices help to define our perception of self and other and the fictitious boundaries that mark this perception. One of the main aims of a class of literature is to demonstrate how theory and praxis are interrelated and cannot be studied one without the other. Autobiographical practices help students to better understand this and relate it to life experiences as well as to their own personal story.

42 Ibid., 97.
43 Ibid., 178.
44 Chanady, Ibid., 33.
In a diasporic context, it is not uncommon to have in our class students from a number of different backgrounds. The feeling of displacement does not only belong to the postcolonial identity but to all individuals who are forced to redefine themselves within “foreign” identitary parameters and see themselves through the gaze of the dominant other. Foreign students, or first generation Spaniards, soon understand this by reading autobiographical pieces from emigrant women while recognising their own identitary vulnerability; we do not have to forget that Spain relied heavily on emigration until the Seventies and that many Spanish citizens were obliged to look for a job far from their homeland. This means that many of our Spanish students are aware of what exile or emigration mean, and many of them belong to families were the experiences of exile after and during the dictatorship and/or emigration are strongly felt. This eases the teacher’s approach to the chosen texts.

There are a number of discursive practices that can be analysed and discussed when reading a text that relates any of the stages of the autobiographical experience of emigration and that help some of the students to better understand and voice their subject position while helping others to develop a process of identification that inevitably leads to comprehend the other’s identitary location. After the reading of the assigned text, students are asked to identify a number of concepts that pave the narrator’s story and answer questions such as: how is memory used in the process of redefinition of a new identity? How does the narrator interrelate with her actual situation and how does she refer it to her past? Does she reassemble her past in order to bridge it with her possible future? What are the cultural elements (clothes, foods, habits, family jokes…) that she stresses in order to either accept her hybrid identity or to reject it? How is the original mother tongue, if so, used in relation to the new situation?

Students, at this point and following the patterns discernible in the text, can write either their own story or a story of identification. As Michael Smith points out: “Our students can only make a political commentary on a literary text if they understand the codes and conventions that text invokes (…) The potential for political critique confounds the hierarchy because political critiques are not grounded in literary knowledge, a kind of knowledge that will certainly be unequally distributed”; by answering the above suggested questions, students will give shape to the understanding of what displacement means in matter-of-fact terms.

Bibliography


Teaching with Gender
How can educators (teachers, professors, trainers) address issues of gender, women, gender roles, feminism and gender equality? The ATHENA thematic network brings together specialists in women's and gender studies, feminist research, women's rights, gender equality and diversity. In the book series ‘Teaching with Gender’ the partners in this network have collected articles on a wide range of teaching practices in the field of gender. The books in this series address challenges and possibilities of teaching about women and gender in a wide range of educational contexts. The authors discuss the pedagogical, theoretical and political dimensions of learning and teaching on women and gender. The books in this series contain teaching material, reflections on feminist pedagogies and practical discussions about the development of gender-sensitive curricula in specific fields. All books address the crucial aspects of education in Europe today; increasing international mobility, the growing importance of interdisciplinarity and the many practices of life-long learning and training that take place outside the traditional programmes of higher education. These books will be indispensable tools for educators who take seriously the challenge of teaching with gender. (For titles see inside cover.)

Teaching Subjectivity: Travelling Selves for Feminist Pedagogy
This collection of essays moves from a nodal point that regards the process of constructing women’s “nomadic” identities as informed by the notions of geographical and cultural dislocation, transcultural hibridity, history, loss, memory, contamination and their effect in the subject’s perception of the Real. Within this frame of thought, writing the experience of the ontological “travelling” and “dislocation” is also understood as political narrative and as one of the essential tools for promoting critical knowledge and feminist pedagogy. The teaching of autobiographical narratives becomes crucial either as a starting point of investigation or a field force of analysis. The book reveals that political meaning and identity-construction are extremely important to understand how the Self moves from the inner sphere to the public one, searching for recognition and autonomy while developing the awareness of interdependence and vulnerability.

The books are printed and also published online. Contact athena@uu.nl or go to www.athena3.org or www.erg.su.se/genusstudier to find out how to download or to order books from this series.