

Janine Radice
Freiburg 2007

Crossing Borders

I suppose that when you step from one country into another everyone feels a bit of excitement, insecurity or anxiety? How will it be? When it is returning to somewhere that you have lived before, it is filled with a set of expectations. Did things change, how is it now, how will I be received, how will I feel? The change throws you back into other moments of your life where you were you, but different. Sometimes I ask the question where do I actually live? I do still remember my address, so it is not Alzheimer's and I know the most accurate answer is in that I live in the present moment- in my body. I guess that can be anywhere and sometimes it is. As life passes we construct houses, careers families in physical places. Our children come out of these international biographies and grow up and move on-naturally into the wider world. Where are they-often toooo far away.!!

Most of us, cross international borders several times a year, but several times a day we do little boarder crossings in the town we live in. There are varieties of spaces we are moving through and we are a little bit different in every context. We put on a different hat at work, at home with the kids, with friends and in-laws. Those of us that have immigrated various times are confronted by bigger differences and sometimes real culture shock and the demands of adaptation which can bring up some pretty basic questions- like how is your name pronounced? A client asked me today what I say to people when they ask me "where do I come from?" I told her, it was a complicated question for me and my answers varied. Sometimes I am an ethnic or Italian American, Jewish, Brazilian, European, or a citizen of the world. I guess I am all of these things and which one I am at the moment varies depending on the context.

As we step across spaces,, we walk across the bridges we have built. Each place is connected with a phase of our lives, a language, culture, specific relationships and experiences we had. Some times it looks like a colorful rich

patchwork quilt, beautifully sewn together and other times it feels fragmented like a continental fault that has fissures that connect somewhat unevenly. These uneven levels are often products of empty spaces which exist as a consequence of having lived periods of life in other places. We lack the knowledge and the emotional bonding associated with a set of experiences. This creates a distance or unevenness in the topography of the story. We keep these representations or symbolic images in our mental library and they constitute the raw materials of memories, desires and fantasies. We collect them like etchings of people, feelings and specific places-as they were -when they were interjected into our archive. Since things constantly are in a process of transformation- these images can easily clash with the reality of how they are today. Time does not exist in the place where these images are stored, but as time does exist in the physical world, the encounter of two can create confusion, misunderstanding or a feeling of disorientation. The lack of continuity in my personal biography is a product of the lack of access of the others to my experiences in different parts of the world. The connecting of these fragments is a challenge for me that I don't always find easy. As our children enter the global world as young adults-they are also far away and living things that we do not share except over the e-mail and in short visits. All of this is very rich, but very difficult to adjust to and it does cause suffering. "Saudade"- is a Brazilian word for the nostalgic missing of people or something one is attached to.

Sometimes when I 'land' in one of those places where I lived, I feel a bit wobbly and it takes me days to feel the ground firm under my feet. Sometimes the transition is not so easy. Is that Culture Shock? We are immigrants who live our lives on borders or margins or overlaps have a very special perspective- the one of being an outsider from within. There is an article I read by a feminist theoretician Patricia Hill Collins who speaks of "Learning from the outsider from within." Border crossing creates a nomadic consciousness because of our dual or plural identities. These identities are connected to belonging to communities as well as being excluded from communities. Sometimes you might feel that you actually don't belong to any group or are member of complementary or

competitive groups. Outsiders within are able to gain access to the knowledge of the group or community which they inhabit or visit, but are unable to either authoritatively claim that knowledge or possess the full power given to member of that group. Collins is a black feminist Intellectual and sees herself as the ideal outsider-within. Multiplicity is fruitful and the occupants of this position can make very specific and special contributions due to the perspective that they acquire. This idea struck me as very interesting, as I spent the end of the year in Salvador , Bahia (Brazil) in an old familiar culture and I was again carrying ideas back and forth. Living on three continents is a challenge. Living on borders or overlapping areas or places where one is both an insider and outsider –at the same time that it is interesting and gratifying, the transitions are demanding and difficult. The separations and re-encounters, the border crossing it self and living in a Diaspora or living on margins are part of the gains and losses of the nomadic consciousness and of this International life style we live. UH HUH and so it is! Interesting, but.....

I guess the hardest part is just having people you love be so far away.

And so it goes “Oh bla di oh bla da life goes on Ra”