WE EXPECTED A NORMAL LATINX, NOT A CHICANO LIKE YOU

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51734/vq2y4y52

ABSTRACT:

While increasing the number of Latinx faculty in higher education remains a worthwhile goal, the term Latinx faculty carries its own dynamics of erasure, exclusion, and colonization. In this testimonio I explore the undertheorized tensions and contradictions embedded in the term Latinx faculty. By examining the reductionist and essentialist use of this term by faculty, administrators, and search committees in historically White institutions (HWIs), I show how this term reinforces colonial power structures through the erasure of complex and fragmented Chicana/x/o identities. Using testimonio as a method, I contextualize, analyze, and problematize the label Latinx faculty as an exclusionary term that defends racialized hierarchies by privileging specific types of acceptable or "normal" Latinx identities while upholding the hegemonic power structures of White supremacy. This testimonio adds to and challenges emerging literature on diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education by theorizing and problematizing the binary of Latinx/non-Latinx as deployed in HWIs by White faculty. Through this theorizing, I also generate space for exploring the complex performativity of my own identity within the constraints of the colonial logics imposed on me by White supremacy in the university.

Recommended Citation
Vasquez, R. (2024). We Expected a Normal Latinx, not a Chicano Like You. Rio Bravo: A Journal of the Borderlands, 25, 90-104

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INTRODUCTION

At this moment in which colonial racial configurations continue to mark Chicana/x/o scholars as inferior, much still remains unknown and undertheorized concerning higher education's appropriation of the term Latinx. For instance, little is known about the epistemological apparatuses, colonial rationalities, and ahistorical frameworks through which diversity policies, such as targeted hiring, simultaneously celebrate innocuous Latinx cultural identities while marginalizing Chicana/x/o faculty (Vasquez 2023). Much like other identity descriptors entangled with taxonomies from multiculturalism, superdiversity, and other "social justice" projects, the term Latinx homogenizes disparate cultural and social groups while promoting euro-centered conceptualizations of culture and identity (Jupp and Espinosa 2017).

In this testimonio, I argue that Chicana/x/o faculty who actively engage in decolonizing work by publicly questioning or disobeying the colonial logics of displacement embedded in the architecture of higher education, experience a specific type of epistemic erasure (Mignolo 2009). This erasure or marginalization of Chicana/x/o knowledge results from institutional demands and White desires for domesticated "happy" versions of Latinx identity (Ahmed 2012). In this case happy refers to not "making trouble." When tacitly supported by the university and employed by White faculty to promote a myopic vision of inclusion, the term Latinx leaves the euro-centered logics of domination, oppression, and exploitation unchallenged. In short, using the term Latinx to capture and constrain complex identities results in a suppression of newly hired Chicana/x/o faculty and their knowledge. Bernal and Villalpando (2002) refer to this as the apartheid of knowledge. This apartheid remains especially the case for faculty actively resisting hegemonic structures by interrogating racial and knowledge hierarchies (Castro-Gomez 2021).

In order to point toward a different approach, one that seeks to engage in decolonizing work rather than simply rehabilitating colonial logics, this paper discusses the meanings and

implications of the strategic abuse and misuse of the term Latinx in higher education (Burmicky 2022). The main concern of this paper involves examining the ways in which the descriptor Latinx, when adopted for targeted diversity hiring purposes, actually operates as a structural and racialized logic of erasure that can harm Chicana/x/o faculty.

By using a testimonio approach, I demonstrate how the attempted erasure of Chicana/x/o identities results from the intentional and strategic collapsing of multifaceted differences, political identities, and histories into a single comprehensive diversity category in order to fulfill the inclusion and neoliberal labor needs of the university (Vasquez 2023). This folding of multidimensional identities into a single mode constitutes an example of a colonial logic. When deployed in higher education, this logic defines culture, labor, and knowledge production while subsuming Chicana/x/o identities into a generic pan-Latinx structural category. Ultimately, this collapsing of identities serves the interests of the academy by contributing to a diminishing of the cultural heterogeneity, counter-knowledge, and dreams of peoples with different histories and relations to the settler colonial state (Sánchez and Pita 2014). Countering this erasure requires supporting and encouraging the disobeying of entrenched colonial logics by engaging with and amplifying subjugated knowledge. It also requires recognizing the emergence of complex identities. This paper outlines some of the meanings, tensions, paradoxes, and consequences of this ongoing erasure on Chicana/x/o faculty, particularly in teacher education programs with a superseding emphasis on protecting White supremacy in all its manifestations, including those forms embraced by White liberals.

Surprisingly, much still remains unknown about the way some Chicana/x/o faculty may strategically and provisionally adopt the performance of this generic Latinx descriptor for themselves during the hiring process as a type of decoy identification to infiltrate the university with the intent of engaging in decolonizing work once inside. How the university recognizes and attempts to neutralize this type of infiltration by regulating and policing the boundaries and proximities to Whiteness of a "real" or acceptable Latinx identity also requires sustained investigation.

COLONIALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In this paper, I use the concept of coloniality of power as articulated by Walter Mignolo to name the ongoing continuation of colonialism and colonial logics (2009). These logics include hegemonic colonial knowledge production across sites of western modernity such as institutions of higher education. Identifying and naming the continuation of colonialism in higher education, albeit in different forms, provides an opening for Chicana/x/o faculty to engage with a sense of decolonial knowing and epistemic disobedience necessary for de-linking from euro-centered logics and patterns of power (de Sousa Santos 2008). The concept of coloniality also provides a necessary space and grounding for border thinking by people of Color whose lived experiences, collective memories, systems of reason, and categories of thought remain marginalized or tokenized in euro-centered institutions (Yang 2017). This border thinking, while fluid rather than static, refers to a conjoining or fusing of a politics of knowledge that is ingrained in the body with

local histories of Chicana/x/o dreams of decoloniality, epistemic disobediences, as well as possibilities for creating another world (Anzaldúa 1987; Mignolo 2009).

LATINX IS NOT THE PROBLEM

Although I examine the colonial logics of the term Latinx faculty, and how these logics impact and harm Chicana/x/o faculty who seek to disrupt euro-centered hegemony in the academy, I do not seek to suggest that hiring faculty who self-identify as Latinx constitutes a problem in itself. Nor do I critique the descriptor Latinx, which has value and resonates with many people who use the term to question and challenge binary notions of gender as well as language normativity (Salinas 2020). I also do not wish to suggest that all Chicana/x/o identities can be reduced, atomized, or essentialized into a single conceptualization. I do, however, argue that the social and institutional classification of Latinx, when deployed by White faculty in HWIs to celebrate the efficiency and success of diversity hiring, strategically gestures toward a collective solidarity or a shared understanding of identity and a commitment to justice which may not exist among all faculty (Pugach et al. 2019). While this commitment may not exist among all faculty, including those categorized as Latinx, this matter does not constitute my main concern in this paper.

AGAINST THE GRAIN

In this testimonio of my experiences as a new faculty member at one HWI in the East Coast, I describe how White faculty in the teacher education program (TEP) responded to my attempts to disobey the colonial logics of the university, including the logic of White ownership of faculty spaces and department agendas (Vasquez 2022). Using testimonio as both a process and product, I contextualize, analyze, and critique the term Latinx faculty by spotlighting examples of displacement and exclusion of Chicana/x/o experiences and knowledge. These examples, which include traces and fragments of memories, illustrate the ways the term Latinx operates as an exclusionary social category that defends the racialized hierarchies that privilege specific types of acceptable or institutionally palatable "Latinx" identities while upholding the hegemonic power structures of White supremacy in the university.

I offer my testimonio as a necessary intervention or provocation aimed at problematizing the rationalities of diversity and inclusion policies by underscoring the colonial nature of their logics. For this reason, I draw on the subjectivities of my retrospective memories as well as the concept of coloniality to show how institutional discourses and practices subject Chicana/x/o faculty and their knowledge to a double marginalization as both inferior and as a threat to established patterns of power (Anzaldua 2009; Castro-Gomez 2021).

Questioning the use of the category Latinx in higher education complicates the hiring approach that many HWIs rely on in order to make sense of and demarcate the relationship between faculty diversity and equity. Though attempts have been made by scholars to complicate DEI policies in higher education previously, much of that work stays close to liberal approaches to incremental change that ignore entrenched power relations rather than engaging with decolonizing work that seeks to build a different university (Yang 2007).

This testimonio adds to and complicates emerging scholarly literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) hiring in higher education by pinpointing specific limits and contradictions of current policies. Through this testimonial theorizing, which rejects efforts to essentialize the voices and experiences of Chicana/x/o faculty, I also generate space for exploring and analyzing the complex performativity of my own Latinx faculty identity or decoy identification within the constraints and violence of the colonial logics imposed on me by the White supremacist university.

TESTIMONIO AS AN APPROACH

A word about testimonio as a research approach. Testimonios constitute personal biographical narratives that focus specifically on unsettling and confronting injustice (Sanchez and Hernandez 2022). The form developed from Latin American struggles for justice and provides a space for multiple voices demanding justice while working toward decolonizing academia (Huber 2009). While testimonio as an autobiographical method provides a valuable subjective nonlinear approach for questioning and interrupting dominant narratives, especially by maneuvering around the bureaucratic limits imposed on subaltern voices in official spaces, it still must deal with the limits of using words to bear witness to White supremacy.

For instance, embodied knowledge presents a different way of making sense of the effect of White supremacy on people of Color (Ahmed 2009). The experience and feeling of alienation in White spaces constitutes a type of embodied knowledge. In this work, I attempt to affirm my right to exist in a space that positions me as a token or an object to be tolerated. This affirming of my right to exist involves attending to different ways of knowing and being, including ways systematically and historically ignored by academia (Doharty et al. 2021). The healing of colonial wounds, as described by Walter Mignolo, requires delinking from prevailing traditions of dominant western epistemologies and ontologies (2009). As such, by problematizing conceptualizations of objectivity and the universality of knowledge, my testimonio avoids reproducing hegemonic knowledge.

COMPLEXITIES OF POSITIONALITY

Some “Latinx” people spend more time than others wondering about where they belong. I am a descendant of Indigenous peoples whose connection to their land and culture in what we now call Mexico was forcibly severed through invasion and colonization. This geographic area also includes parts of what we now call the United States. This land still contains many different Indigenous peoples. I do not know, however, and likely will never know with certainty from which Indigenous communities my ancestors came from or how they ended up in Southern California. For this reason, the questions of identity and positionality remain fraught with tension and melancholy for me even today. Naming my positionality in relation to power, in this case coloniality, while the main thrust of my work, can still feel at times like it unintentionally obscures the rich history and enduring communities of Indigenous peoples who continue to live and thrive on these lands. This is not my intent. I do not self-identity as Latinx, but as Chicano.

In many ways, this project was inspired by my desire to understand, confront, and disrupt the lack of transparency and the extractive logics of my condition as a diversity hire. This desire also included seeking a different path, perhaps through a decoy identification, as a way of working toward changing the terms of the conversation of DEI work. The incongruity between the university's publicly stated attention to Latinx people, articulated on more than one occasion as "of course we care about our Latinx folks" as was said to me, with the reality of the conditions and colonial structures that sustain and protect White supremacy, have concerned me since engaging with the academy as a doctoral student.

As the only Chicano man working at this particular university, my first academic appointment after completing my PhD, my positionality made me vulnerable. By marking me as a triple anomaly in the teacher education program (TEP), White faculty sought to tokenize and compartmentalize my existence into a niche for their use. As a former elementary teacher from urban Los Angeles, as well as a first-generation high school and college graduate from an inner-city community, my social location and trajectory differed significantly from that of my faculty colleagues. This difference also set me apart from those Latinx people in the larger university community from privileged backgrounds who sought to "fly under the radar" on the campus. My positionality and engagement with Indigenous thought, for instance, by questioning the assumptive frames of property and acceptance of displacement as a natural consequence of progress, also comprised an epistemic difference resulting in friction with White faculty. This friction was made worse by my moving among and across intellectual and cultural borders and disciplines as a way of delinking from dominant western modes of compartmentalized being and existing. In short, making my intellectual commitments difficult to categorize into a single stream caused my peers much consternation.

For example, navigating the historical and epistemic dislocation produced by colonialism in what we now call the US Southwest, made me openly express my ambivalence and skepticism toward formal education and public schooling. This marked me as disobeying the core purpose of teacher education. During more than one department faculty meeting, when I challenged the purpose of schooling by calling attention to the ongoing socialization, acculturation, and savior functions of mass schooling, I was advised by my faculty peers to simply "be grateful" for being in the academy. I was also told "school worked for you, so stop complaining." The ways I traversed space in the department, both physically and metaphorically, also provided a constant reminder to my colleagues that people like me, those who question the underlying logics of empire and the settler colonial state, fall outside of the normative cultural categories embraced by the university.

TESTIMONIO OF MY EXPERIENCES

I was hired by this university during an attempt to address a lack of diversity in the school of education, particularly in the teacher education department. During the interview process, search committee members asked me general questions about preparing future teachers to work with diverse populations. When I asked them to elaborate, they provided their narrow definition of Latinx students by referencing pernicious cultural stereotypes about language and home life. For

example, some comments included, “we have to help them get away from learned helplessness.” By drawing on liberal White savior narratives of “saving” the children from the problems of the local schools, without ever mentioning any sense of accountability to the community, they also reinforced the colonial notion of ownership over the people of the community. “We really need a Latinx man to help us on our campus” was a phrase used more than once to indicate my role as a commodity for the university. Ironically, I was interviewing for a position that primarily involved teaching a required teacher education course called Multicultural Education.

The lack of faculty and student diversity in teacher education has been well documented in the past by a range of scholars (Beauchamp 2023; Vasquez 2023). This university, a comprehensive public school that produces a significant number of new public-school teachers every year, sits approximately 75 miles from one of the larger and more diverse metropolitan centers in the East Coast. Although situated in a suburban area, many pre-service teachers seek field placements and eventually professional teaching careers in surrounding urban school districts. Some of these districts, labeled by the university as problem or at-risk communities, include considerable numbers of students classified as Latinx, Latino, or Hispanic.

EVERYDAY INVOLVEMENTS

From the start of my academic appointment, the dimensions and fragments of my identity, as well as my discernable commitment to decolonizing work, simultaneously marked me as both hyper-visible and invisible depending on the context and needs of the school. For example, in attempting to maneuver around the possibilities and limitations of my subjugated status as simply another diversity person who should “be grateful,” I agreed to participate in several departmental anti-racist discussion groups during my first semester—this despite teaching a full load of classes. Several White faculty members organized what they referred to as social justice meetings to examine curricula and policies in response to demands from some students of Color. At the time the school of education had three faculty of Color out of approximately thirty members across two different departments.

At different times, this discussion group consisted of approximately fourteen White faculty members and approximately two new faculty of Color. I was encouraged by two White faculty members to attend the meetings to contribute my “Latinx perspective” on the issues. After participating in one session, I was lectured by more than one White faculty member. The complaint, articulated in a condescending and patronizing tone, suggested that my comments reflected too much negativity, hopelessness, and anguish rather than a “Latinx take on things.” When I cited specific decolonial authors and ideas to support my claims, such as by referring to the work of Dolores Delgado-Bernal (1998) to show colonial logics of dispossession, I was told I was “veering out of my lane” into too much negativity instead of providing “real or practical answers” for our teacher candidates who will need to work with Latinx children in urban public schools.

Overt racism, as well as implicit racism, I was informed, was not a problem in “our” school of education or even something that Latinx faculty needed to address. This logic of ownership and

control, manifested in the idea of "our" school, operates as a tool of erasure that displaces my knowledge or even the possibility of discussion. Even after sharing my personal knowledge and understanding of systemic racism based on years of personal and professional experience, as well as sharing the experiences of my former elementary students, I was told to remain silent unless I could provide real evidence. In short, I was told in a friendly manner that racism was an issue for other groups to take up. This even though I had already experienced overt racism in the form of harassment at the hands of another faculty member in my department who insisted that I share my immigrant story with her. For this faculty member, I was clearly a type of product, much like food or music, to be consumed for her benefit. This same faculty member had previously asked me if I had a green card despite the fact that I had told her multiple times where I was born. The possibility of having multiple roots at once, born in the US and still Latinx, was something novel to this person. This idea of all Latinx people as migrants was expressed often in the department.

Despite what would seem obvious, the White faculty continued to assert that racism does not affect Latinx people because everyone just loves Hispanic culture and food. Instead, I was encouraged to find a space for Latinx problems like immigration, bilingual education, or other cultural issues. When during one meeting I mentioned the concept of LatCrit (Solorzano and Yosso 2001) as a useful heuristic, I was questioned and harassed again for being too negative. Even my use of the word "colonial" was singled out as too negative a phrase for a place that they claim loves Latinx students. I mentioned LatCrit in the context of saying that perhaps White supremacy in the department was too deeply entrenched to be overcome by merely adding more anti-racist readings. Again, I included examples from my teaching and life experiences in Los Angeles to no avail.

White faculty also informed me that I did not know the school that well since it was only my first year. The insinuation being that I needed to serve my time, and serve them perhaps, before having the right to engage in speaking or thinking. During these meetings few White faculty members engaged with the content of my comments in any substantive way. Instead, most focused on the "you need to focus on Latinx stuff." This was repeated in different ways over the course of meetings, as was the comment, "we thought you were Latinx not Chicano", after I self-identified as Chicano.

The current system "works for most people; it just needs tweaking," was another sentiment expressed by faculty. Another White faculty member told me in private that perhaps I just need to "let go of all the race stuff" so we can focus on "keeping the train going." Soon after the start of my first semester it became obvious that my status in the teacher education program was limited to serving as a type of Latinx window dressing for the university. I had detected signs of this during my interview but had continued with the process, as part of my decoy identification, because of the possibility of working with diverse student and community populations on decolonizing projects.

MAKING ME ANOTHER COMMODITY

Without asking me to submit a biographical statement, or even consulting with me, the university created a statement for me and posted it on the statewide website designed to promote and celebrate the hiring of new faculty of Color at public state universities. One of my areas of expertise was listed as acculturation even though I do not research or write about that topic. On the contrary, I write about dismantling systems of domination that perpetuate inequality through neutral sounding discourses of meritocracy.

My initial reaction to seeing this blurb on the official state-wide website was annoyance. Upon further reflection it occurred to me that university clearly values efficiency above accuracy or honesty. To insert Latinx in my profile without consulting me makes sense given that I was positioned as an object rather than a scholar or person. The box was already created and was just waiting for a generic Latinx person to fill it. Creating a false notion of my work, with state-wide advertising, positions the university as caring about inclusivity. The type of Latinx faculty member the school was interested in hiring was one that focused on acculturation, since that aligns with the narrative that the university seeks to advance. That narrative, namely that a cultural mismatch of sorts, explains why so few Latinx faculty have been hired in the first place. This idea that to be Latinx in academia means to write about acculturation clearly shows the priorities of the university. At no point during my time at this school did anyone bother to ask me about my research or my professional trajectory. Instead, every interaction with White faculty involved a type of extractive exchange. I provide labor in the form of my presence, which they celebrate as a sign of progress, while the university takes credit for diversifying the school.

The performativity of my Latinx faculty identity initially did involve doing different work. While the university expected me to simply fill a Latinx slot, especially in visible spaces such as committees, I was able to also connect with the local communities. For instance, I was able to conduct professional development for local schools on the use of ethnic studies in the classroom. In other words, the surveillance and scrutiny I experienced in faculty meetings did not necessarily extend into the community or the local schools. In meetings with teachers, I did not just meet with them to recycle and repurpose "official knowledge." Instead, we worked together to create new knowledge based on Chicana/x/o ways of being. My decoy identity did allow me entry into spaces to engage in decolonizing work. Had I not "performed" my role as a Latinx person during the interview process, I may not have had this opportunity. The need to perform an identity, however, does involve contradictions and tensions that require more analysis.

DISCUSSION

Through a disingenuous and self-serving promotion of "official" cultural identity markers devoid of historical, epistemological, or political context, the academy reproduces itself and assures that existing systems and colonial relations remain unchanged. As my vignette shows, HWIs thwart attempts by faculty aimed at confronting the racialized colonial logics that uphold White supremacy. By blunting the work of Chicana/x/o faculty, HWIs continue to sustain the apartheid of knowledge that positions non-western knowledge as inferior in the academy (Bernal and

Villalpando 2007). They do this, in part, by emphasizing and celebrating only the acceptable version of Latinx identity that meets the extractive colonial logics of the university.

In this case, for instance, acceptable refers to a domesticated diversity that frames culture as the food, fun and festivals and immigrant stories recognized only during Hispanic Heritage Month. This framing disregards and erases Chicana/x/o decolonial subjectivities and desires for what Antonio Escobar refers to as otherwise worlds (2007). While much has been written about diversity in higher education, including the idea that equity and justice await just beyond the horizon, much of this previous work continues privileging White perspectives, emotions, and interests (Matias 2016). This privileging of Whiteness celebrates a linear progress toward an inevitable "non-divisive" multicultural future (Ahmed 2012; Vasquez 2021).

This ahistorical future, however, only promises a homogenizing neoliberal unity that obliterates Chicana/x/o collective memories of the past as well as traces of other systems of reason and sense making. Reducing Chicana/x/o faculty into forms of property to be consumed by the university requires the erasure and suppression of histories, epistemologies, and ways of being in order to produce a "safe Latinx" object of labor. For Chicana/x/o faculty, imagining and building otherwise worlds, which involves healing the colonial wounds, requires resisting epistemic violence in the academy in all its forms, including in the way the university prioritizes, orders, and racializes faculty and their work (Ahmed 2012; Vasquez 2022).

RESISTING SIMPLE ANSWERS

DEI hiring initiatives continue to frame the issue of the paucity of Latinx faculty predominantly around notions of incremental progress, representation, and a narrow vision of cultural awareness. These notions celebrate a non-threatening, defanged, and White washed Latinx identity acceptable to the university's mission of happy multiculturalism (Ahmed 2007; Huber 2009). In short, the standard DEI framing emphasizes promoting a friendly and welcoming environment for new Latinx faculty, so long as new faculty refrain from engaging in any substantive critique of White spaces and ideologies (Melaku 2022). Specifically, any critique of western individualism and upward mobility through middle-class assimilation, which the university advocates as the solution to Latinx social problems, will incur angry responses by White faculty (Vasquez 2018).

The use of targeted hires for the specified purposes of diversifying faculty may not seem controversial upon initial consideration, yet this practice requires additional analysis. Targeting hiring constitutes a form of technical surveillance, which further mechanizes the process of being a person of Color in a White space. For example, White faculty sought to confine me to Latinx issues as a way of excluding me from contributing to school-wide debates on systemic racism. These types of policing actions, which have a silencing effect on faculty, risk weakening the trust between students and faculty of Color. In other words, faculty will be less likely to confront the hegemony and toxicity of the university in their own teaching. It can also (mis)lead faculty into thinking that their survival depends on acquiescing to the demands of the university.

FINAL WORDS AND THOUGHTS

Although most universities and colleges publicly proclaim some type of aspiration for institutional change, the superficiality of this discourse serves an important strategic purpose in maintaining the status quo (Hamer and Lang 2015). The hollowness of this aspiration, manifested by the hiring of "normal" or acceptable faculty who avoid confronting euro-centered logics or upsetting White interests, supports and celebrates a narcissistic liberal narrative of linear temporality and steady progress. This narrative ignores the way existing institutional structures harm Chicana/x/o faculty. The disregard of Latinx faculty from working class and Indigenous backgrounds who do not match White preconceptions, desires, projections, and feelings about the "Other" produces an especially toxic situation. For instance, despite calls for diversifying the academy, most hiring practices aimed at addressing the absence of Latinx tenure track faculty function at a "first world" university level of commercial efficiency (Yang 2017) They operate in this way in order to protect the façade of higher education's version of happy multiculturalism (Ahmed 2007) This type of liberal multiculturalism privileges White feelings and experiences, while simultaneously silencing dissent and upholding the uninterrupted continuity of imperial "first world" colonial structures embedded in HWIs. (Yang 2017).

Many social categorizations in higher education constitute euro-centered inventions that serve and protect colonial logics, world views, and White political interests rather than representations of actual people or groups (Mignolo 2009; Wynter 2003). In the case of the concept of Latinx identity, a contested term and idea in many spaces and communities, HWIs strategically manipulate and control the terms of representation. They do this by establishing the boundaries and delineations of social categories in order to uphold the underlying assumptions and matrix of beliefs that sustain the illusion of plurality or "diversity" in teacher education (Vasquez 2023).

By positioning diversity as an issue of opportunity, this superficial institutional discourse whitewashes the ongoing brutality of White supremacy and coloniality in higher education. It also minimizes the legacy and continuing practice of intentionally devaluing and marginalizing Chicana/x/o knowledge and ways of being in academia while upholding the arrogance of White institutional power (Bernal and Villalpando 2007; Vasquez 2023). I experienced that violence at the hands of my colleagues. In this testimonio, I offer a critical assessment of the limits of targeted hires as a remedy for racism. The remedy paradigm, as I refer to it, does little to address the use of Latinx as a tool of erasure. On the contrary, the practice of targeted hires allows the university to assign faculty to their lane or box, which meets institutional needs, while appearing sensitive to social justice concerns (Vasquez 2022; Zemblyas 2022). Amplifying these concerns, particularly about the problem of erasure, must involve putting into conversation different intellectual projects with common interests in decolonizing higher education. For Chicana/x/o faculty who value collectivity and the theorizing of the interconnectedness of our experiences, the academy's emphasis on individuality erases the way we incorporate multiple perspectives and knowledges into our lives and work.

CONCLUSION: MOVING TOWARD A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Why do universities have DEI hiring initiatives? For whom do these policies exist, and who are they against? One approach to answering these questions necessitates developing a more expansive vocabulary to articulate the complex dimensions of identity and knowledge erased by conventional euro-centered DEI work. These questions also require reconsidering the purpose of diversity hiring, especially in light of the vignette in this testimonio. As a decolonizing practice, I suggest that we start thinking about identities as embodied practices that create possibilities for re-orienting structures of domination through a rearticulation of collective demands.

In particular, faculty in teacher education should rearticulate the meaning of Latinx identities as forms of sense-making which provide marginalized people, including Chicana/x/os the ability to shift existing discourses and power relations. By considering the relationship between DEI hiring and coloniality in this paper, I reveal the way DEI exists as a gatekeeping function that maintains close ties to White supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. This work questions the contradictions of DEI hiring for the purpose of considering other approaches to dismantling colonial systems in HWIs. These approaches must be accountable to historically oppressed communities, rather than to desires and material interests of White faculty.

A different diversity hiring approach, one that situates Latinx identities within a non-euro-centered context of collective resistance to oppression could provide a new catalyst for transforming teacher education spaces into more humane places (Beauchamp 2023). Asked from a place of radical dreaming, the question of a different approach to hiring, invites teacher education faculty to go beyond merely imagining the possibilities of resistance to oppression. By providing a starting point for fracturing the monopoly held by White faculty on conceptualizations of terms such as Latinx, which they linked to "positivity and cheerfulness," this paper seeks to create a space for reconsidering how we might envision Latinx identities differently in the hostile spaces of the university.

This work might involve increasing awareness of different possibilities for new ways to see Latinx identities through a prism of delinking form dominant epistemologies as a way of obliquely confronting White supremacy rather than "getting along." Developing approaches to understanding the flattening of differences remains a significant challenge in teacher education. By forcing Chicana/x/o faculty to see themselves as "others" for "not doing the Latinx thing," and positioning getting along in the form of accommodation as the solution to that problem, White faculty strategically absolve themselves of any responsibility for racism while reaping the benefits of diversity. Solidarity across differences, for instance with Black faculty, cannot thrive in such a state that forces Latinx faculty into their lane (Zemblyas 2022).

Since the events of 2020, a range of anti-racist writing has sought to convince remaining doubters, including White liberals, that racism represents a continuing threat to all people of Color. Rather than understanding racism as an aberration or relic from the past, White racism de-humanizes its victims and works to justify the cause of preserving White supremacy. While the continued racialized violence against "Others" has drawn renewed attention to the work of naming

and confronting racism, much remains undertheorized about targeted diversity hiring approaches in teacher education, especially when they fail to live up to their rhetoric of justice (Vasquez 2023).

The collapsing of identities to benefit White institutions is no virus, and no experimental vaccine can prevent its infecting all faculty. Rather, it constitutes a behavior directed at de-humanizing its victims, which, in turn, works to justify marginalization of Chicana/x/o faculty in the cause of preserving White supremacy. Universities, like other sites of coloniality and racial domination, have been slow to come to grips with their legacies of colonialism. The wounds caused by coloniality cannot be healed by targeted hiring that seeks to domesticate those who refuse to conform to euro-centered logics and social categorizations.

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