The Destroyer & the Destroyed: The Testimonio of a Fragmented Mestizx Jota Entrapped inside a White Straight(jacket)

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ABSTRACT

Buscando compartir un "aja"/conocimiento, I follow the huaraches of Xicanx and Mestizx feminist storytellers by sharing theory in my flesh. A testimonio by a fragmented Mestizx jota entrapped inside a white straight(jacket) constructed by my internalized colonialism. I share this testimonio as a tool to situate my body and articulate the ways my entire being has been broken into pieces by hegemonic power structures. Following Anzaldúa's (2002) offering to redeem heart-rending memories and transform them into knowledge to empower our communities, I begin by navigating metaphorical/geographical borders of identity to reveal inside painful fissures a "papelito guardado" (Latina Feminist Group 2001). Through poetry and visual art, I uncover my self-inflicted fragmentation and discuss how internalized colonialism provided the tools to split my identity in two—the destroyer and the destroyed. I conclude this paper using a decolonial imaginary (Pérez 1999), by sharing a short story about how I wish my childhood had been in Mexico. An imaginary without the necessity of hiding my jotería and transness.

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Living Inside a White Straight(Jacket): Introduction

I honor Indigenous practices by first acknowledging the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səl̓ilwətaʔɬ (Tseil-Waututh) First Nations, from where I have the privilege of breathing. As I write this paper, I am reminded of my responsibility to bestow deep reverence to the land that sustains me and cultivate reciprocal relationships with its original stewards. I am a jota[v] Mestizx from Mexico, I am Nahua and Pur'epecha on my father's side of the family and of settler ancestry, Andalusian-Berber and French, on my mother's side. Through Nahua ancestors and community, I have learned we belong to Chicomexochitl—we are all but corn. A beautiful analogy where the corn cob is our collective community, and the kernels are individuals that make up the cob. Colorful kernels that are all different but lean up against each other bounded to one another. An understanding that even when diverse, we are still united and belong together—somos granos de la misma mazorca.

When I was born, I was assigned male at birth and raised to be the colonial construction popularly known in Mexico as a macho. Although I knew I would never fit inside that box, I tried molding myself to at least pretend. In the narrative that begins this text, I wanted to share an interior battle I continuously had with myself, a fight between having to be my authentic self and choosing to portray the norm of my assignment. My gender identity has never matched the colonial constructions of appropriate expressions for the gender I was assigned at birth. Growing up in Mexico, I felt the need to become someone different than myself, so I imitated cis-heteronormative ideals created by the colonial patriarchal narrative to feel accepted. As my abuelito used to say, "si quieres entrar al circo te vas a tener que vestir de payaso (if you want to play in the circus you have to dress like a clown)." Acting as a macho is a performance for self-preservation to blend inside oppressive binary frameworks that draw normative bounds and construct the margins of identity in Mexico. For many like me, becoming a macho has been an act of a lifetime where you constantly have to prove you are man enough.

Buscando compartir un "aja"/conocimiento, I follow the huaraches of Xicanx and Mestizx feminist storytellers by sharing theory in my flesh. A testimonio by a fragmented Mestizx jota entrapped inside a white straight(jacket) constructed by my internalized colonialism. I share the following testimonio as a tool to situate my body and articulate the ways my entire being has been broken into pieces by hegemonic power structures threaded within the political agenda of mestizaje. The colonial ideology of mestizaje within the Mexican nation-state has continuously oppress, neglect, and erase identities that fall outside the cis-heteropatriarchal white normative. Following Anzaldúa's (2002) offering to redeem heart-rending memories and transform them into knowledge to empower our communities, I begin by navigating metaphorical/geographical borders of my identity to reveal inside painful fissures a "papelito guardado."[vi] Through poetry and visual art, I uncover my self-inflicted fragmentation and discuss how internalized colonialism provided the tools to split my identity in two—the destroyer and the destroyed. I conclude this paper using a decolonial imaginary (Pérez 1999), by sharing a short story about how I wish my childhood had been in Mexico. An imaginary without the necessity of hiding my jotería and transness.

Navigating Borderlands: Context

Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples around Anahuac/Turtle Island are incorporated into a tyrannical system through a combination of epistemic racism, forced binary ideologies, gendered violence, colonial assimilation and hegemonic control (Simpson 2017; Hunt and Holmes 2015; Driskill et al. 2011). These settler colonial logics have provided the tools to make us both the oppressor who reproduces colonial mechanics and the oppressed who suffers the harmful consequences. Conditioned to a non-belonging state, Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples are consumed by oppressive ideologies that force them to hide and at times, crush their identity. For some, existence becomes a double nightmare, as we have to conform to living in a place where the reflection of our identity should not be what we feel inside. Concealing who we are to play an assigned part, brews an internal war between our colonial self and our colonized other, provoking painful, traumatic and dangerous experiences that rupture our identity.

In Mexico, various scholars highlight that the crossroads between Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQIA+ identities is one of the most neglected intersections in scholarship (Bautista Rojas 2018; González Jiménez and García Contreras 2016; Nuñez Noriega 2011). Mexican scholar Nuñez Noriega (2011) explored the impact of colonial ideologies on the construction of identity by narrating the stories of four Indigenous men reflecting on their sexual diversity and vulnerability. One of the participants in the study expressed the impossibility of being Indigenous and 'maricon,' as this particular crossroad is too dangerous to survive. The study of Nuñez Noriega (2011) revealed that Indigenous 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples had to choose between being Indigenous or being 2S/LGBTQIA+ as their identities become mutually exclusive; they do not have the privilege of being both. Similarly, Driskill et al. (2011) contend that many times when Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit peoples "come out," they face the same choice—will you cut your roots to grow wings? Some of us had to.

Inside the collection of poems *This Wound Is a World: Poems* by Driftpile Cree poet Billy-Ray Belcourt, one of the poems, in particular, has deeply resonated with Indigenous queer scholars (Justice 2018; Simpson 2017). The poem *Sacred* (2017) is a narration of the heartbreaking fragmentation many Indigenous 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples experience when facing the impacts of settler colonialism. Belcourt remembers being refused by another man during a round dance and having to dance alone, he narrates, "i dance with my arm hanging by my side like appendage my body doesn't want anymore" (17). These painful feelings of fragmentation come from rejection and exclusion instigated and authenticated by colonial binaries. For Anzaldúa, rejection creates deep wounds, it "strips us of self-worth; our vulnerability exposes us to shame" (1987, 110). Equally, Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice highlights how Belcourt's poem emphasizes a "deep cultural wounding," an example of how settler colonial logics have worked to "police our embodied beings" (2018, 109). Colonial logics distort traditional cultural norms which work to impede the imaginary of Indigenous queer belonging. Belcourt ends *Sacred* by writing words that broke me into pieces. He reflects on the painful reality Indigenous queer peoples face, writing,

> "and even though i know i am too queer to be sacred anymore, i dance that broken circle dance because i am still / waiting for hands that want to hold mine too" (2017, 17).

I extend my arms looking to hold their hands, but imaginary borders prevent our embrace, so I'll keep waiting too.

For Mestiza Gloria Anzaldúa, people who are "othered" live in the borderlands, "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal" (1987, 25). Anzaldúa defines borders as open wounds with never-ending hemorrhages that create metaphorical/geographical partitions to distinguish humanity. Queer Indigenous peoples navigate through the borderlands trying to cross the normative bounds and limitations created by the dominant framework, but as soon as one crosses an alarm turns on to spotlight their deviance. As Driskill et al. remind us, "queer Indigenous people have been under the surveillance of white colonial heteropatriarchy since contact" (2011, 212). Settler colonialism has violently ripped open borders causing the unbelonging of any identity that moves away from the colonial matrix. To be Indigenous and queer means living in a constant state of fear, looking for the best hideout inside borderlands. And even when securely hidden, we perceived ourselves as incomplete humans due to internalized colonial mechanisms created with racist and sexist tools that make us believe we are deficient structures in need of a western fix.

It is critical to point out that in Anzaldúa's borderlands and mestiza consciousness rhetoric some intersections of oppression are not made visible, specifically in relation to Blackness. Black Mexican American poet Ariana Brown (2021) and AfroIndigenous (Coastal Zapotec) poet Alan Pelaez Lopez (2020) have raised issues within Anzaldua's work that bind mestizaje to anti-Blackness. They denounce how mestizaje positions Black people as the inferior other provoking an epistemological and cultural erasure of Blackness in Mexico. For Brown, "mestizaje means México without Black people" (2021, 84). Both poets remind us that the foundations of modern Mexico as a Mestizo nation began to consolidate exercising racist, patriarchal, white supremacist logics embedded and hidden within the ideology of mestizaje which silences and internalizes Blackness and Indigeneity. Mestizaje became a hegemonic ideology based on racialized hierarchies that are established by promoting the idea of white superiority, which emanated directly from colonialism (Moreno Figueroa 2010).

Similarly, Afro-Mexican scholar Monica Moreno Figueroa argues that mestizaje is "a racial counter-discourse, promoted by the ruling elites, to ideas of purity and 'white' hegemonic discourses emanating from European and US scientific racism, social Darwinism and eugenics" (2010, 390). This mestizo logic is exemplified in Mexican education. The architect of Mexico's postrevolutionary public education system, José Vasconcelos, implemented his philosophy of national mestizaje inside the schooling system using a Darwinian lens (Ocampo López 2005). Vasconcelos believed that the superior race of mestizos had to absorb the inferior ones, writing that "through this luck [superior absorption], Black people could even redeem themselves, and little by little, through voluntary extinction, the ugliest lineages will make space for the most

beautiful ones" (1948, 24). Vasconcelos makes it clear that the voluntary extinction of inferior races will come from a homogenous Mestizo nation. A theory Anzaldúa refers to as "one of inclusivity" (1987, 99). Schools became sites that perpetuate racist and eugenic logics by influencing students to internalize feelings of inferiority, self-hatred and shame for not falling into the normative white mestizo expectation.

Modern Mexico has been shaped by coloniality, whiteness, heteropatriarchy and capitalism; systemic structures of extraction that are woven inside the myth of mestizaje. Moreno Figueroa contends that the shadow to understanding mestizaje as the national identity is a history of racialization and privilege, for mestizaje "operates as complex form of whiteness…When mestizaje became 'the national', its characterization as historically racialized and national became blurred and the national prevailed, dominated, pervaded and consolidated a shift towards racelessness" (2010, 399). She adds that the oppressive logics of mestizaje facilitate "whiteness to be experienced as both normalized and ambiguous, not consistently attached to the (potentially) whiter body, but as a site of legitimacy and privilege" (387). The colorblind agenda of mestizaje comes as a response to the imposed systemic internalized colonialism in which Mexicans not only feel inferior for having Indigenous ancestry and black or brown skin but also believe anything white and foreigner is worth more. The invention of a Mestizo identity had sold false ideals of equality and solidarity when in reality, it has intensified violence towards identities that deviate from masculinity and whiteness. Mestizaje forms borderlands not only by fragmenting the country's people but also by provoking an internal battle where our identities are torn apart.

The Destroyer & The Destroyed: Internalized Colonialism

Inside the painful fissures of the borderlands, I reveal a "papelito guardado" (Latina Feminist Group 2001) which says: *"I am the Destroyer & the Destroyed".* This powerful phrase lingers in my head as I reflect on my damaged fragmentation and uncover my internal colonialism. I experienced a self-inflicted deindigenization process (Aguilar Gil 2018). I was forced to grow up in a neoliberal system that taught me to shame anything that was not white, Christian and of European ancestry. I have been complicit in the mechanisms of the power of coloniality and learned to hide both my Indigeneity and queerness to survive. Through violent acts, I understood that if I revealed who I truly was, I would be seen as less. I created a fantasy world and lied through a colonial imaginary about my identity, the heritage of my family and the things we owned. I wanted to paint the perfect family portrait, one that resembled the ones I saw everyone celebrate and cherish; I wanted to belong.

The term internal colonialism was introduced in Latin America by Mexican scholar Pablo González Casanova (1963) referring to the particular forms of domination and power relations that produce conditions of inequality, and exploitation between the Mexican state and Indigenous peoples since colonization. He emphasizes that the isolation and social exclusion of Indigenous peoples are maintained through structures of dominance that label them as an inferior race. Four decades after those initial explorations, González Casanova sustains that oppressive impacts of internalized colonialism are reproduced through capitalism. He traces the origins of capitalism to

the dynamics of colonial exploitation where social hierarchies directed to whiteness and heteropatriarchy are imposed using “god’s will” or “the natural order” narratives to maintain this violent phenomenon. González Casanova adds that internalized colonialism takes effect in economic, social, political and cultural terrains by moving from collective law to individual rights where everyone is presumed equal before the nation-state. He argues that “political Darwinism and the sociobiology of modernity” (2006, 417) aim for more capital progress and global development by implanting an inferiority complex where systemically excluded identities are "marginalized because they want to." Through this understanding, internalized colonialism want to make communities that are systemically marginalized think, we are all playing a fair game where everyone has the same opportunities and no one is subject to exploitation.

As the conceptualization of internal colonialism coincides with the colonial logics of mestizaje, I argue that being mestizo is an interior colonial battle of binaries. Mestizx writer, Rodrigo Chacón (2021), in an essay titled, El no ser mestizo, begins by articulating that he is not Nahua, he has ancestors that were Nahua, but he is not. He continues to explain how the Mexican state has operated in him just as planned and he was emptied, deindigenized and in return he obtained a relative Mestizo advantage inside the social hierarchy set to a white supremacist advantage. As Chacón, I share the same feelings, privileges, and perspectives for being a deindigenized Mestizx who is not Indigenous. I have Indigenous family and ancestors, but I am not. I had to leave behind community and land-based practices to be in a bricked place surrounded by privileges and opportunities, which according to the colonial/modern paradigm would make me successful. I also had to part ways from any aspect that would reveal the femininity and jotería in me. I had to split myself open and grab the parts that would float in the colonial heteropatriarchal sea while sinking the ones that deviated from that binary frame. Through modernity’s entrapment, I become both the destroyer and the destroyed of my own being.

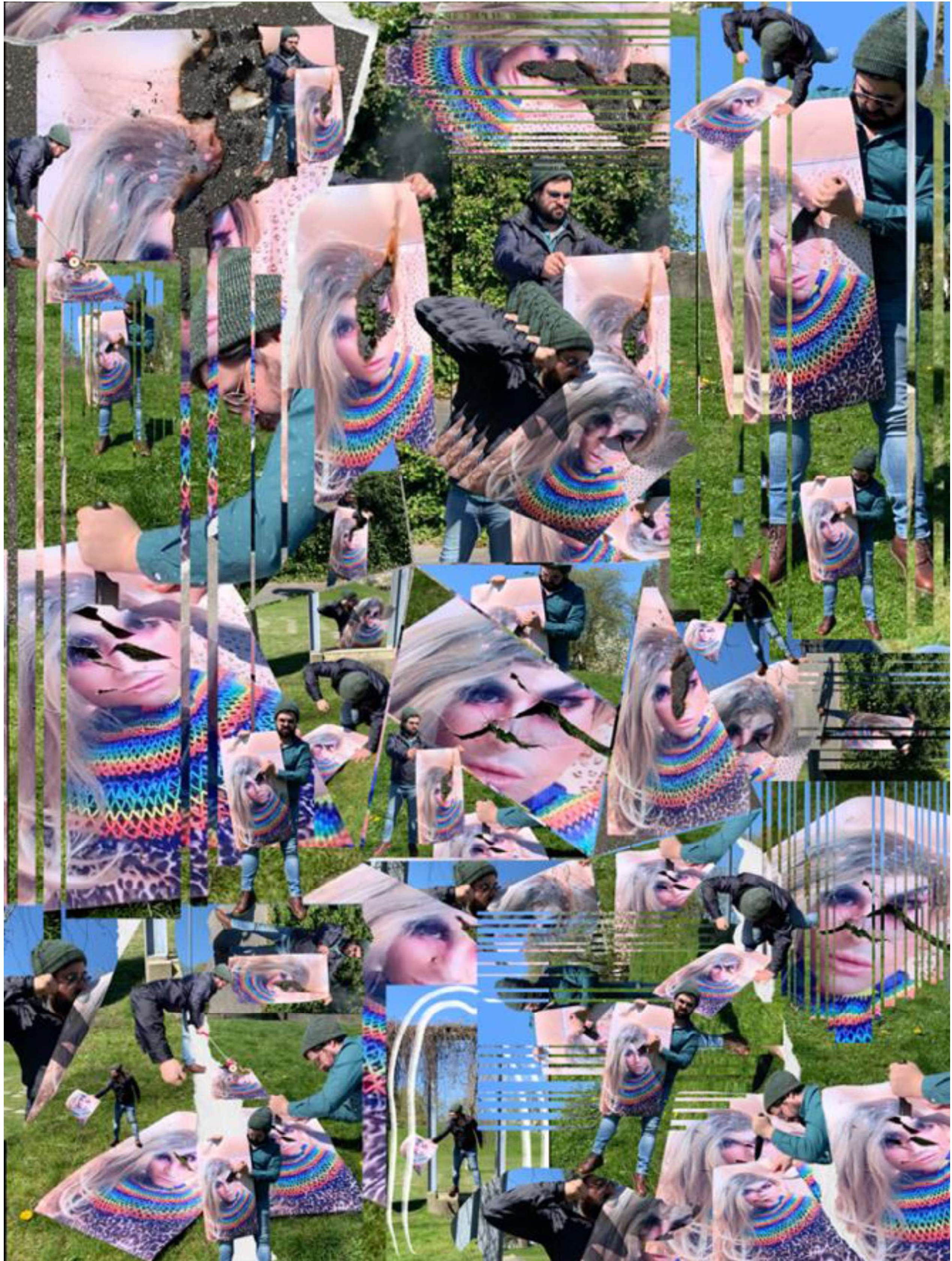

Figure 1 The Destroyer & The Destroyed, 2022 - Picture Collage by Daniel Gallardo Zamora

In the artwork, *The Destroyer & The Destroyed* (See figure 1), I tried to represent with a photo narrative the pain, the emptiness, the dispossession and the shame of being a Mestizx jota. Every hole was self-inflicted through a painful and violent process. I burnt, stabbed and punched all traces of Indigeneity, femininity, transness, and queerness in me. For Chacón (2021), being Mestizx is not a mixture of race but a painful fragmentation. He explains being deindigenized by the violent impacts of colonialism through the metaphor of a picture with holes that keep getting bigger with scissors cuts, leaving the face of the one who appeared unrecognizable. For Indigenous and Mestizx woman and 2S/LGBTQIA+ people those holes were done with bullets and knives, not only scissors. The colonial heteropatriarchy has made sure that enough weapons are produced to inflict the necessary damage to fragment us. I hope for the artwork to also represents and bring awareness to femicide states that allow the ongoing pandemic of the Missing and Murder Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit people all around Turtle Island. The ongoing denial regarding continuous race-based genocide permits gender-based violence within settler politics making Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit peoples immense targets of sexualized violence and genocidal policies (Palmater 2020).

Blackfoot researcher, Leroy Little Bear (2000) articulates how colonization has changed the perspective and identity of Indigenous peoples, to a mixture of an Indigenous and settler worldview. I would argue the same for many Mestizx peoples and add that the view must resemble the story of *Coyote's Eyes* shared in Stó:lō scholar Q'um Q'um Xiiem Jo-ann Archibald's Indigenous Storywork (2008), where one of Coyote's eyes is big and dominant (colonial perspectives) and the other one is small and can barely see (Indigenous perspectives). Our view is distorted by settler colonial logics that have clouded the way we feel and think. Little Bear continues by stating that "[Indigenous] consciousness became a random puzzle, a jigsaw puzzle that each person has to attempt to understand" (2008, 8). Could solving our identity puzzle help us revitalize our severed sight? Could solving our identity puzzle be also a scarring process? I am reminded of an anecdote told by Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (1999) where he explains cultural schizophrenia through a clay piece a student had created to represent their experience of partition. The head of the clay piece was split in half to portray a rupture between opposing worldviews. The split was an analogy to show the anxiety and fragmentation the student was feeling for being both Indigenous and complicit to modernity. For me, this powerful broken image provides an example of internalized colonialism—the impossibility of being complete, a painful split that tears apart every day. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) asks us to examine how internalized colonialism serves to disconnect people from the land and ancestral knowledges by normalizing heteropatriarchal frameworks and the gender binary. As I reflect on my own journey, I realize how performing the macho part fragmented my being and required strapping myself inside a white straight jacket, wishing to be released even if it meant falling into pieces. I composed the following poem to represent my internalized colonialism:

White Straight(Jackets)

The day I was born I was put in a white straight(jacket)
To confine the fabulousness of my being
Tight boundaries on the allowance of my expression
Meant to restrain me to the normality of the patriarchy

What made me a man?
Is it the testosterone running through my body?
The Y chromosome that determines my sex?
A constructed box created for me to check?

I'm standing in front of a mirror
Hiding externalities that were assigned to me
What am I now?
Because I've never felt like a macho man

Invisible borders hold me captive
And as I try to dismantle my entrapment
Shame locks me in
So, I keep twirling around my own prison

I tear my straight(jacket) apart
I fly away from this binary oppression
As I look down at the world that bounded me
Am I truly free without it?

Plant me back to the land where I am not othered
Awaken the words that know no gender
Let me heal by belonging
Put my fragmented pieces back together

We live in a world made of straight(jackets)
Granting as little movement as possible
Forced to comply with colonial structures that immobilize us
We walk around feeling like abnormalities

How can we abolish categorizations?
When will we unstrap our sovereign sexual bodies?

How do we deconstruct our identity and transcend gender?
Could we move beyond binaries, borders and even further?

DECOLONIAL IMAGINARY: TRANSCENDING BORDERLANDS

I conclude by sharing a short story about how I wish my childhood had been in Mexico. An imaginary without the necessity of hiding my jotería and transness. A decolonial imaginary where the ones left at the borders find interdependent cultures of reciprocity and solidarity devoted to kinship, scarring and belonging; liminal spaces that transcend colonial margins and radically imagine otherwise. Queer Xicanx scholar Emma Pérez (1999) argues that the shadow cast by coloniality is a space that opens to liminality where a decolonial imaginary can be envisioned. This liminal shadow is created between the colonial self and our colonized other. To enter a decolonial imaginary, one must explore the discomforting and disturbing tension between embodying both colonized/colonizer subjectivities. For Pérez, "one is not simply oppressed or victimized; nor is one only oppressor or victimizer. Rather, one negotiates within the imaginary to a decolonizing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another" (1999, 7). Pérez speaks of a decolonial imaginary, as an oppositional political project enacted through third-space feminism that transcends imposed colonial limitations and moves in-between spaces guided by decolonial desires.

Pérez's notion of a colonial imaginary emphasizes our metaphysical entrapment to settler-colonial logics, in particular, our attachment to binary categorizations of subjectivities. A decolonial imaginary works to illustrate how colonialism inflects and alters knowledge, motivation, beliefs and feelings. It is a transgressive space that challenges heteropatriarchal dominant narratives by rupturing historical constructions and refusing linear notions of time. I use a decolonial imaginary as "a theoretical tool to uncover hidden…voices that have been relegated to silences" (Perez 1999, xvi). As a critical apparatus that imagines otherwise, a decolonial imaginary works to recover erasures, to bear witness to omissions and articulate silences that remain unspoken, holding the potential to dismantle mechanisms of settler-colonialism. For Pérez, a decolonial imaginary "is enacted as hope, as love, transcending all that has come before, all that has been inherited only to damage" (1999, 126).

The following short story, titled *Hiding in the Cupboard*, is a decolonial imaginary of a childhood memory. A retelling of events that happened and situations I imagine to be different, maybe how I wish they were. As a child, from everyday practices to ceremonies and celebrations, I was required to choose a gender, to choose where I belonged. During many traditional dances, I had to wear typical apparel for boys, a traditional white shirt and pants, sometimes with a morral (bag) and a paliacate (bandana). Before going out to the dance, I would watch the girls line up parallel to the boys. The girls would twirl with their colorful flowy skirts and I couldn't help but wonder if I was in the correct place. When I returned home, I would grab towels and bedsheets to imitate the dances the girls had just performed. By then I already knew I had to act like a macho and reject any form of femininity within me. The only way to twirl around was by hiding. My

imagination became the place where I could show the other side of me, the side I thought I could never allow others to see. I always felt in between, fluid, queer, someone who identified as something else, neither masculine nor feminine. Someone looking for another option even though it was never a possibility within the heteropatriarchal Mexican narrative.

I deliberately selected the word cupboard in the story's title instead of closet, as it better represents the reality of Indigenous and Mestizx LGBTQIA+ in Mexico. I borrow the use of the term "cupboard" from Driskill et al. (2011) as a metaphor for the limited spaces Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples have to express their authentic beings and desires. For Driskill et al., the cupboard not only represents the marginalization of Two-Spirit and Indigenous queer peoples but also the continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land. Simpson makes a similar point by adding that these identities have the most "experiences with acute heteropatriarchy as expansive dispossession" (2017, 144). The cupboards become entrapments of Indigenous queer imaginaries but also, the only place we express our authentic selves and feel a sense of belonging. Indigenous queer peoples "do not have the space of a closet to hide our sexualities, since we have been physically, culturally, mentally, and spiritually pathologized and forced into modern representation by scientific and philosophical discourses" (Driskill et al. 2011, 212).

At times I like going back to the cupboard; it is a safe place of fabulousness where I feel I belong, where I'm my most authentic self. Justice reflects on a similar experience when being safe at home, he would immerse himself "in fantasy worlds and imagine belonging someplace else, someplace where geeky misfits of diverse heritage could be lauded as heroes, where genderqueer boys could love gentleness and beauty without shame" (2018, 184-185). I would also deeply immerse myself in these imaginary places, dreaming of the time I would be part of a community of misfits that were fantasizing about finding someone just like me, a broken queerdo who was forced to comply with a settler neocolonial perspective and continuously is deindigenized by the politics of modernity but everyday resists and disrupts the systems that oppressed them. In a short story titled *The Boys Who Became The Hummingbirds,* Justice (2016) imagines how dancing in unexpected belonging gives us the opportunity to find others with similar experiences and cultivate cultures of reciprocity and kinship. So, I try to spread my wings as far as I can and twirl as long as possible, hoping that others who have endured the same will find me—hoping to find my kin.

I acknowledge that many Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples don't have the possibility of coming out of anything. For me the journey, not the destination, has been completely accurate, one which reflects on my experience as a Mestizx jota who allowed my feelings of shame to drench my entire being into the sameness of settler colonialism. Fluid possibilities were left inside the cupboard and my expression of self was contained through a heteropatriarchal white standard that dictated my way of being and thinking. Coloniality has been doubly violent in creating both a nostalgic past of unity and an impossible future of colonial oneness which situates the colonized in the ineffable gulf between two un-realities. Being out in the borderlands brings shattering feelings of desolation, uncertainty and unbelonging, but when finding others outside in the margins a collective opposition of chosen kinship and belonging starts to grow and prosper.

The collective testimonios of Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples can restore the harmful imaginaries that have entrapped our identities to sameness. Embodying decolonial imaginaries fuels a transformative power that may ignite a shift in our consciousness towards scarring our fragmented self and cultivate a desire for mutual accountability and reciprocity. For Justice, the fundamental reason why Indigenous stories matter is because stories "remind us that we're the inheritors of heavy, painful legacies, but also of hope and possibility, of a responsibility to make the world better for those yet to come" (2018, 210). Stories that nurture Indigenous queer belonging and intend to give back, don't shy away from the violent and harmful impacts of the coloniality of power. These stories instead bring hope by revealing the scars and by forming collective support for the ones who are still violently entrapped. The knowledge shared from these stories is meant to start a rumble of opposition where systemically silenced voices, such as Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQIA+ peoples, resist and push back against places designed to exclude and neglect our existence. My hope in sharing the following decolonial imaginary through a short story is meant to support others to put back together fallen pieces while encouraging them to find places that transcend borderlands—places where we are left to appreciate each other's scars.

HIDING IN THE CUPBOARD

They are standing center stage when all of the sudden the lights blind them. As the first track starts to play, they immediately know which song it is: a Nahua classic, "Icnocuicatl," a song of nostalgia, written by Nahua poet Natalio Hernández Xocoyotzin and interpreted by Mixtec singer, Lila Downs. They know the words, but they do not know their meaning. It will be a set of 8 songs that will end with a powerhouse, "No Me Queda Más" by Tejana icon, Selena—a fabulous concert. As they finish the performance and open their eyes, the fantasy fades away and they are left alone inside the cupboard. They hide in the cupboard to create a place where they belong, a place where they could express parts of their being that on the outside, they were taught to be ashamed of. An imaginary place of fabulousness that would always disappear when hearing someone else coming. They had learned that sometimes you can't express who you truly are and that it is best to conceal that which makes you different.

Leaving the cupboard was always difficult, especially during ceremony days, but they knew it was time to come out and start helping with the preparations. Today was the last day of a sacred ritual to feed the land, an act of deep reverence to ask for rain and good harvest. Everyone in the pueblo would go up the hill to the milpas to give thanks to Chicomexochitl. Abuelita had already begun cooking the food to offer to the land. She was making atole, tamales and their all-time favourite, mole negro. The delicious smell made them hungry but today they had to fast, so they quickly left the kitchen. On the other side of the house, Abuelito was outside preparing some of the flower arrangements used for the celebration. The arrangements reminded them how much they dreaded the dancing portion of the ceremony. During this particular ritual, women would carry the hand flowers, while men carry maize stalks wearing a collar of flowers. The dance forced

a separation where they would end up on the outskirts of their assigned side feeling out of place and wanting to disappear.

As the time for the celebration got closer, they had to change to a more traditional white attire. They ran back to their cupboard to look for the new clothes Abuelita had sewn, but as soon as they opened it something was wrongly right. They run to the kitchen and eagerly ask Abuelita if this was a mistake. Abuelita looks into their eyes and smiles confirming that it wasn't. With nervous excitement, they change into a beautiful dress with flowers on the collar and the hem, it fits perfectly. As they leave the house, Abuelito gives them hand flowers to carry to the collective ritual. The flowers are beautiful and even resemble the ones embroidered in the dress. Reaching the base of the hill, they start listening to music in honor of Chicomexochitl. A magical music trio is playing, Tacuatzin (tlacuache) with the jarana, Coyotl (coyote) with the violín, and Tochtli (rabbit) with the huapanguera. After Huehuehtlacatl (the Elder) begins the spiritual ceremony with prayers and smudging, everybody starts dancing along with the beat of the music, yet this time, there are no divisions, they are all standing at the center, surrounded by one another, twirling around with the land.

WEAVING OUR TESTIMONIOS: CONCLUSION

In this paper, I tried to follow the huaraches of Xicanx and Mestizx feminist storytellers by sharing theory in my flesh. The flesh of a Mestizx jota that was entrapped inside a white straight(jacket) constructed by my internalized colonialism. I argued that mestizaje provoked this internal colonial battle through heteropatriarchal structures and racial capitalism that move mestizxs towards whiteness and masculine superiority. I shared my testimonio as a tool to situate my body and articulate the ways my entire being has been broken into pieces by hegemonic power structures that continuously oppress, neglect, and erase identities that fall outside the settler-colonial cis-heteropatriarchal normative—the ones who live in the borderlands. I began this paper by navigating metaphorical/geographical borders of my identity to reveal inside painful fissures a "papelito guardado". Through poetry and visual art, I uncover my self-inflicted fragmentation and discuss how internalized colonialism provided the tools to split my identity in two—the destroyer and the destroyed. I concluded this paper using a decolonial imaginary by sharing a short story about how I wish my childhood had been in Mexico. An imaginary without the necessity of hiding my jotería and transness, a decolonial imaginary where the ones left at the borders find interdependent cultures of reciprocity and solidarity devoted to kinship, scarring, and belonging; liminal spaces that transcend colonial margins and radically imagine otherwise.

I hope to braid my testimonio to stories of Indigenous and Mestizx 2S/LGBTQ+ that subvert settler-colonial logics intending to amplify our collective voice. Using the husks that have entrapped our beings, we can interlace our stories to enable others like us to critically reflect on how modernity-coloniality and racial capitalism have reinforced internalized colonialism. Weaving our testimonios strengthens the fabric of our peoples and communities as together we thread knowledge towards a transformative praxis "through which the colonized come to shed their colonial identities" (Coulthard, 2007, 449). I stand in solidarity with people who refuse to

follow the colonial narrative. I am looking to scar through relations that embrace mutual respect and reciprocity. I uphold my responsibility to act with deep reverence towards the land and bear witness to the hidden truths that are changing the dominant narrative, as Justice has taught us, "shame and silence were no match for story; the suppressed truths couldn't remain hidden forever" (2018, 85). The violent holes created by the colonial/modern arsenal can start to scar with stories of self-determination and survivance—decolonial imaginaries that extend far beyond hegemonic boundaries and put back together our fragmented pieces.

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