How Doctoral Chicanas Resist White Supremacist Political Erasure Through Muxerista Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

Latinas in graduate education remain underrepresented as doctoral recipients. During 2014-15, only 7.3 percent of Latinas had received doctoral degrees compared to White (66.7%), Asian (12.7%), and Black (10.3%) women (National Center of Education Statistics 2016). Latina students experience the doctoral socialization process of cultural dissonance, which conflicts with their own ethnic or racial identity. As doctoral Chicanas, we resist academia's values of "individualism, competition, and emotional detachment" (Ibarra 2001, 101). During an isolating COVID-19 pandemic and a white supremacist political climate, we have managed to persevere against the odds. We have informally developed the process of Muxerista mentoring (Revilla 2004) by coming together to plan the annual MAS K-12 training program. We share our multi-generational testimonios to explore the multiple worlds we navigate while in our programs as nontraditional Chicanas learning and teaching in higher education. We argue that Muxerista mentorship is a genuine reciprocal connection and a commitment to building critical conciencia and collective transformation. Creating a Chicana feminist mentoring space that honors and values our unique experiences navigating a Eurocentric education system. Through testimonio, we tease out our survival strategies and what nurtures our vision as activist scholars.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increase of Latinas/Chicanas enrolled at higher education institutions. Latinas have made strides in doctoral programs with about 8% of this group completing degrees in 2017-18 compared to 6.1% in 2010-11 (National Center for Education Statistics 2019). Still, educational attainment for this group remains low, and Latinas are less likely to pursue graduate programs (Espinoza 2010). Due to white-middle class institutional norms, Latinas undergo a doctoral socialization process of experiencing tokenism, isolation, and marginalization (Patterson-Stephens and Hernández 2018). For us, first-generation Chicanas faculty mentorship was very limited or nonexistent in our cultural programs. This is the result of having limited access to faculty of color with an awareness of Muxerista principles grounded in community and cultural knowledge. Faculty women of color tokenized and exploited for their service, which leads to faculty mentorship burnout. Therefore, they are not at fault, because the institution's design burdens and evaluates women of color on doing research, teaching, and service that is not equally obligated for white and male faculty members (Alshare, Wenger, and Miller 2007). Latina faculty that prioritize service and student mentorship are penalized and are more likely to be negatively impacted on their opportunities for promotion (Kezar and Maxey 2016). This extra service work by faculty of color is often bestowed because of their race/ethnicity/gender which regularly goes uncompensated and unacknowledged by the very institutions that demand it. Padilla (1994) calls this phenomenon cultural taxation which is limited to faculty of color who are called on to be the experts and teach and translate in the matters of diversity in institutional organizations and ethnic communities.

THE CALL TO BUILD MAS *CONCIENCIA*

We crossed paths during the planning and preparation of the 2019 Mexican American Studies (MAS) training program. The MAS training program first hosted teachers in 2015. The founder of the program envisioned a space for secondary social studies teachers who would be teaching MAS for the first time, and it has now evolved to include most content areas at the K-12 levels. We were drawn to the MAS training program for various reasons but mostly, we were dragged. We were going through the journey without a purpose. We were just in the dark back alleys of academia. When the founder of the training program needed to recruit people to help organize, we did not know that our participation in building the training program was going to be a transformative experience. As we were undergoing our collective journey, we were also going through three intergenerationally different doctoral journeys with minimal support. In the MAS training program we found an organizational, intersectional Chicana feminist space that was inclusive of our marginalized identities. For us, the MAS training program gave us a sense of home and belonging. Specifically, the space was a place of comfort when you're all day in discomfort expected by academia. We were all assigned different roles and the role would shift in terms of what was possible, manageable, and needed. This space was one of few where we felt included and trusted with moving towards a collective vision.

After 2020 the pandemic brought about an unexpected change of how we would manage the MAS training program because events were being canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a planning committee we had decided to cancel the summer program and at the same time we were going through a change in leadership. However, previous attendees were reaching out to the organization requesting professional development training for first time MAS teachers. After seeing the demand from the schools calling, we made the decision to go virtual. This decision was not easy because we were entering an indefinite lockdown and we were unfamiliar with the literacy needed to go virtual. This new virtual format was experimental in many ways. We relied on each other to piece together what we knew and trusted the creativity and innovation of each person to contribute in the best ways they knew how. This meant bridging the digital divide through activating the sacred knowledge *sobrevivencia* through *rasquache* tech. During this global shift, there were many changes that we as a society were not ready for and it disproportionately affected communities of color across social economic class and generational divide. We collectively chose to evolve and adapt new survival strategies to continue to organize and raise MAS *conciencia*.

As a result of the virtual format, we had over seventy participants attend and in previous years we usually averaged a dozen participants. This was a record-number of people in the training program's history. We were forced to enhance our online literacy by digitizing all materials and strengthening our online presence via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram out of our necessity to continue serving teachers. Our abilities as organizers to adapt new technological literacies through remote learning/teaching conveyed our willingness to continue adopting new survival strategies for the academy to thrive even during uncertain futures. This experience cemented our commitment to the MAS training program and thus ensured its survival and future sustainability. By going virtual we brought the MAS training program into the twenty-first century. We are better prepared for any crisis or pandemic that results in the future, because we are committed to passing down this knowledge through engaging *Muxerista* practices.

WHY *MUXERISTA* MENTORING?

The reason we have chosen *Muxerista* mentoring is because this has been our survival practice inside multicultural neolibral institutions that model eurocentric ideologies of individual success, tokenism, isolation, and marginalization (Patterson-Stephens and Hernández 2018). We use *Muxerista* mentoring as a tool to cultivate safe spaces within and beyond the academy, which validate our multidimensional cultural ways of being. *Muxerista* mentorship disrupts the eurocentric hierarchical norms of academic peer mentoring (Alarcón and Bettez 2017). The term *Muxerista* is defined by Anita Tijerina Revilla (2004) as an intersectional feminist concept that centers Chicana/Latina feminism(s). We believe that *Muxerista* mentoring speaks to the process of peer mentoring that we built informally while working in collaboration organizing the MAS teachers' training program. As part of the organization, we organically activated *Muxerista conciencia* through the following principles:

1) sense of belonging,

2) a safe space,

3) *confianza*,
4) acts of resilience,
5) community responsibility.

TESTIMONIO AS PEDAGOGY AND METHODOLOGY

We draw from Chicana feminist Dolores Delgado Bernal's (2021) use of *testimonios* as a liberatory pedagogy and methodology because it is the best way to make meaning of our complex multi-generational experiences surviving unsupportive spaces Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona 2012). As nontraditional track *Muxeres* in neoliberal multicultural institutions, we acknowledge that our commitment and service in academia and community is often rendered invisible. Using *testimonio* is how we validate our unique multi-ethnic feminist cultural perspectives, where we explore our Chicana feminist epistemologies and collective vision making (Latina Feminist Group 2001). *Testimonio* is a tool that allows us to express ourselves through messy writing and raw language that brings forward all our sensories where we connect the mind, body, and spirit. Specifically, it highlights our experience with isolation and the compounded loneliness that occurs for first-generation Chicana doctoral students. We want to take our *testimonios* beyond us talking and knowing about the struggle of survival and resistance with educational inequities as nontraditional *Muxeres* (Huber 2009). Our *testimonios* map our psychic wounds of existing in a place we know is not made for students/faculty of color and is not invested in teaching us to collectively survive or resist erasure. In sharing our *testimonios* we learned how to share our survival strategies through *Muxerista* mentoring and building *Muxerista conciencia*. In this process of writing our *testimonios,* we realize that we are three different *Muxerista* scholars with different approaches to doing our *testimonios,* which is telling of our methods of survival and resistant strategies. Our *testimonios* are unique to us but our journeys are not unlike other *Muxeristas* across academia.

MUXERES ACTIVATING *CONOCIMIENTO CASERO* IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

It has been my experience to learn that there are two very important facets in academia one is teaching, and the other is administrative. Working with students is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Being on the organizing committee for a teacher training program for teachers of Mexican American Studies (MAS) is a labor of love that is also very rewarding. Knowing that we have better-prepared teachers to teach this content to high school (and also middle and elementary school) students is a great source of pride. The other facet is the administrative part. As frustrating as this can be, it is also a very important part of academia. Without it, we would not be able to bring the content to its intended audience.

Having worked in Texas schools K-12, I had not been exposed to the administrative side other than knowing whether events or activities were feasible or not. There were funds to do them or not. Upon arriving in higher education, I was exposed to a more detailed side of administrative duties. I imagined that working at a prominent university would be filled with unlimited resources. That is very much not the case. I learned that if the class you were scheduled to teach did not have

a specific number of students, it would be dropped from the schedule. Students would be left scrambling to find another class and unless there was another class available, the instructor may be left without a job. Since I am a part-time instructor, I am not guaranteed a job every semester. I only have a job if the course I am assigned to has sufficient enrollment which makes it feasible to offer. This was how I was thus introduced to university-level administration and finances. The most frustrating part is that all of this is out of my control.

In my role on the organizing committee of a teacher training program, I also learned about finances at the university level. The consequences of not having monetary resources are much graver. Teachers are ready to attend and school districts are willing to send and pay for personnel; the prospect of canceling the program is not a desirable option. Time and time again, we are told that resources are very limited. You must make do with what you have or go in search of resources. You must find ways to stretch the budget as far as possible: apply for grants, solicit donations, and find creative ways to raise funds. This reminds me of how women must always figure out how to find solutions and get things done. I call this our home intellect/*conocimiento casero*. Whether it be at home to make the money stretch for all the household expenses or come up with a solution for unexpected emergencies, women are always put in these situations—and we come through. Is it because the expectation is that we can find a solution? We do, but why is it always us? In most instances, when men get into those situations, they usually unload it on the women in the group. One of the most challenging situations I was involved with was the teacher training program of the summer of 2020. It seems that the world had shut down and so had the teacher training program.

THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

Up until 2019, the teacher training program had been held in person. In 2020, the COVID pandemic had made that impossible. The planning committee had decided that since in-person attendance was not an option, the program would be forgone that year. We received an email from one of the committee members that an instructional leader at one of the local school districts had contacted her asking about the program. She stated that the district had a group of teachers that they wanted to send to the training program because they were going to start teaching MAS in the fall. The only option was to do it virtually, but we were not set up for it and had no plan in place. It was amazing to see the group get to work and come up with a plan and put it in action. We decided to open it up to all teachers instead of just the ones from that school district. The consensus was "if we were going to do it, let's do it for as many teachers as possible." It turned out to be the most well attended teacher training program. It was a stressful week but also very much a learning experience for all of us. When we encountered an issue, we came together to resolve it in a timely manner and successfully. We discovered technology talents we did not know we had. It was a very rewarding experience, and because of that success, the teacher training program will have a virtual component going forward.

ASPIRATIONS TO TEACH

Teaching has always been something that I wanted to do but was afraid to try because I did not believe I would be a good teacher. Since playing school as a child, I always wanted to be the teacher. Working in a public school only strengthened that desire. Working with at-risk students exposed me to the not so good side of public education. I saw how some of the teachers did not really care about the students' success. Whether they passed or failed, it was all the same to them. They assigned those students to me for tutoring and once they saw the improvement they were impressed. All the students needed was a little one-on-one or just knowing that someone believed in them and cared. I know that teachers are stretched for time and may not have a lot of time to spend with each individual student, but to not have the time to spend with students and not wanting to take the time to spend with a student even if only for a few minutes are two different things. Students are very much aware of this, trust me on that. Seeing this, I knew I could do better. I went back to college and got my master's degree in bilingual bicultural education with the intent of teaching bilingual education at the elementary school level. The pre-K to second-grade levels have always been my favorite and that was my plan. During my student teaching I was assigned to a third-grade bilingual class. I loved the students but learning about the restrictions to teaching totally changed my desire to teach. By restrictions I mean *teaching to the test*. Seeing the students drilled and seeing their anxiety levels was very hard. They were told all semester long that if they did not pass the test they would be held back. I think the teachers saw this as a form of motivation but to me it was more like instilling fear in the students. It seemed to be more traumatic than motivational. The day of the tests some students got physically sick. No elementary level student should have to deal with such stress. Once the other students found out you did not pass the standardized state test, they all knew you would be held back in the third grade. To me that was like a public shaming of sorts. Making them believe that they would be held back seems downright cruel because that is not the case. If they fail, they are pulled out of class the remainder of the semester for intense grilling by appointed instructors. They go to summer school and get more grilling then take a modified version of the original test. Most of the students pass it the second time and those that do not, in many cases still get promoted. So why all the pressure? After witnessing that, I decided that I wanted no part of it. It was then that I decided to pursue my doctorate. Funny how life takes you to where you need to be.

Teaching at the university level has its constrictions but nothing like what I saw at the public-school level. Being able to teach students MAS has been like a dream come true. Seeing their faces light up as they learn something they did not know or seeing their faces express frustration because they have been denied access to knowledge about themselves is rewarding in knowing that they have been enlightened. Most leave the class hungry for more information about themselves personally and about their history. I am always amazed that the students are so hungry to learn about their roots. It is also a source of sadness that very few are exposed to our history earlier in their education. Every semester the one comment that is most repeated is "why did we not learn this earlier?" I always wonder, why indeed.

Conclusion

Muxeres have a natural problem-solving instinct. Our home intellect/*conocimiento casero* serves us very well. I argue that this is both a blessing and a curse. Men rely on us to solve problems they do not want to confront and, in most cases, have no idea how to solve, although they will not admit it. When put in a corner, we find our way out. We have been doing this for as long as any of us can remember and will continue to do so.

Muxeres have played an important role in all the experiences I have talked about in this *testimonio*. It was the third-grade bilingual teacher next door to my office that convinced me to go back to school for my master's degree. We carpooled to classes one day a week after work some ninety miles one way. We took most of our classes together and helped each other. Two of my female professors encouraged me to pursue my doctorate. A female professor helped recruit me to my doctoral program. She was also the one that helped me navigate through the entrance process. As a first-generation doctoral student, I was not sure what some of the procedures required me to do and she helped me navigate this intimidating process. The expectation is that if you got this far, you should know what to do. It was a female professor that convinced me that my topic was academic enough for a dissertation, contrary to my belief. It was also women who were willing to share their experiences that allowed me to do my research for my dissertation.

Working on the teacher training program, I was introduced to a group who taught me so much about working for a cause you truly believe in. The group was mostly made up of *Chicanas* except for one or two men. The work on the program was done as a labor of love, because there was no money until last year that we were given a small stipend because of a grant. Up until then, all the labor was pro bono in order that all the expenses necessary to bring the academy to fruition were covered. Everyone believed in the cause, and no one brought up compensation of any type for their labor. This fact did not stop any one in the group from giving their all. It was very inspiring to witness all these persons bringing their talents, ideas, and efforts to put together the best possible teacher training program. Doing this year after year is a testament to everyone's resolve and dedication to this program.

This amazing group of *muxeres* has also afforded me the opportunity to make friendships that are personal not just work related. These women are trustworthy confidants that I can call on and unpack my feelings when life gets too burdensome. We share our trials and victories, our sad moments, and our joyous moments. As a group, these *muxeres* are fierce, a force to reckon with, and unstoppable. They are a great example of home intellect/*conocimiento casero* in the face of adversity. Above all, they are an inspiration.

Scholar *Mamá* Creator

Throughout this journey of life, I deeply believe that we cross paths with others for a reason. All the connections and the experiences we share are like puzzle pieces; eventually they will fit together. I have learned to trust the Creator with the big picture. As I reflect on the events of 2018, I understand how each moment, each piece, has a purpose. At that time, I was a doctoral student enrolled at Suntown University (SU), pseudonym, a Research Institution, and a newly

designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). I longed for home as SU was located hundreds of miles from my community in South Texas. My husband and toddler were and remain my sources of motivation. My child, who I endearingly call "Baby," reminds me why I must continue forward with my program. He is why I go through day-to-day life.

During the spring of 2018, I visited Minneapolis to attend the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) annual conference. I had mixed emotions as I looked forward to facilitating a panel with three Latina colleagues, yet I dreaded the Midwest's 30-degree weather. As we exited the terminal, the cold air immediately greeted us. We said only a few words to each other as we waited for the hotel's shuttle, conserving our energy to pace and to periodically tiptoe over people near us. When the shuttle slowly approached, I felt a burst of energy and a sense of relief. We quickly grabbed our luggage and noticed that the shuttle had parked closer to the group of people ahead of us. I hoped we all could get a seat because the next shuttle would be another 20 minutes. At that moment, I was only concerned about feeling the warmth of the shuttle's heater and getting to the hotel. That simple ride would be quite significant to my doctoral journey and engaging in the initial process of *Muxerista* mentoring.

The shuttle was nearly full of passengers, but I spotted an empty seat next to a woman. When I plopped on the seat, she initiated the conversation and introduced herself as a doctoral candidate at South Texas University. I was pleasantly surprised that I met someone who was from my home state and familiar with my community. As we described our dissertations and research interests, it felt like I was catching up with a long-time friend. The woman said she was hopeful about nearing the end of her doctoral journey as she planned to defend her dissertation the following year. I congratulated her on the future milestone. With a smile and firm nod, she assured me that I would make it to that point too. As we neared the hotel, the woman paused and was in thought. She was certain she had a friend that recently transferred to SU. She added that his name was Roberto (pseudonym) and that he's in SU's Interdisciplinary Program. "Oh yes, I know Roberto!" I was thrilled to learn we had a friend in common. Roberto was one of the first people I met during SU's graduate student orientation. After orientation, we remained in touch and even tried a local eatery known for its Sonoran-style hot dogs. As we entered the hotel, my new friend invited me to join her roundtable session to learn about the Mexican American Studies (MAS) training program that she and her colleagues organized annually. I knew it would be a great way to (re) connect with someone I felt I had known for years, even though it had only been for a brief time.

When I arrived at the roundtable session, I was a few minutes early. I skimmed over the program while she and her colleagues reviewed notes. They had reached a stopping point when the women from the shuttle walked over to me and thanked me for attending the roundtable session. Throughout the session, I was intrigued that a group, coordinated mostly by Chicanas, centered on the needs of social studies teachers who were teaching MAS for the first time. I decided to follow up with the founder of the training program to attend that summer's MAS training program.

I attended the 2018 MAS teaching program as planned, and I was the only out-of-state participant. Still, the MAS teacher training program's founder and all the faculty made me feel welcomed and right at home. As a self-described introvert, I was comfortable sitting at an empty table to observe. It was the morning of the first day of the teacher training program, and the planning committee members were sitting at another table discussing the schedule for the day. You see, at my institution, I felt there is a distinction or hierarchy between faculty and students. This was not the case at the teacher training program. I still recall the founder of the program saying "Hi, come sit with us." That inclusivity remains consistent during all of the training programs. Throughout each of the teacher training program days, they valued my opinion and asked for my thoughts and feedback in between presentations and activities.

RETURNING TO HOME

The 2019 summer program was very impactful in my life as a mother of a toddler. My husband and I were in the middle of moving back home to South Texas. I had committed to assisting with developing and disseminating the program's evaluations. Before returning home, my husband and I had researched child care centers in the area. During the first day of drop-off, we realized the child center was negligent and irresponsible. As we were entering the center, a worker was chasing a child that had run a few steps out the door. The staff were not friendly and appeared exhausted, and upon witnessing the lack of supervision in the daycare, we immediately decided it was not a good fit for our son. I decided to miss the first day of the teacher training program to research additional childcare centers.

Because of time constraints, I was not able to immediately find an adequate daycare center. I decided to take my son to the training program the following day. However, I was worried how the training program's faculty would respond to a toddler being in the same space where the training sessions were taking place. My worries were eased as my son and I were welcomed in the training session space. This was a different experience from my institution, where institutional norms demand that family life and academia be separate. I had previously worked at my institution with two Latinas advocating for more family spaces and accessible lactation rooms on campus. The change came about only because we voiced our concern over the lack of these family spaces on campus, which created barriers for parenting students.

Working with the teacher training program was not only sort of a homecoming but it also allowed me to see the contrast of how the student journeys can differ at institutions of higher education. Being part of the training program has allowed me to develop genuine and nurturing relationships with *Muxeres* going through a similar educational journey which dispels the academic norms of individualism, competitiveness, and detached relationships.

SURVIVING THE DIS/ORIENTATING *REMOLINOS DE IDENTIDAD*

When I decided to embark on this academic journey as a Queer Chicanx doctoral student, I was still processing a trauma that radically changed the trajectory of my life. On Labor Day of 2017, I was involved in a rollover accident with my cousin driving and my now ex-partner on the

passenger side. I had suffered multiple fractures on the right side of my body, which required two major surgeries to repair a fractured humerus and femur; the recovery process forced me to rethink my own self-preservation. I had initially felt betrayed by my body because I wanted to heal quickly. Not accepting that the collision disabled me, the sudden change in my body sent me spiraling into a major depressive state. I felt a loss of power not being able to walk without excruciating pain and the assistance of a walker, especially the damage to my nervous system that I could not lift my wrist or write with my dominant hand. Although eventually, my body slowly began to heal physically, I was left with the *susto*, the trauma resulting from the accident, and being in the hospital for a week.

When I woke up from a surgery at the sight of my parents hovering over me, it was so unreal I broke down in tears; I had only felt the pain of my broken bones and the discomfort of metal rods and screws. I felt a terrible pang of overwhelming guilt and shame that my parents stopped vacationing in Florida and had to see me in this frail state. To help with the spiritual distress, my sister sent over her reverend to tend to my spiritual wounds and provide prayer. However, he only intensified my guilt by asking me what I would change about my life or what sins I would repent. I could not think of anything to repent as I did not think God was punishing me for being queer or letting my teenage cousin drive that day. My family's conservative religiosity felt like inserting salt on my already open wounds.

During this time, I also had to feel the thickness of conservatism by my partner's parents, who drove in from out of town. Still, upon arriving at the hospital, her mother refused to see me, which was not a surprise because she was already dismissive of me and disapproved of our partnership. After all, it went against her conservative Christian beliefs, and she wanted to take her daughter back with her. Aside from feeling rejected by my partner's mother, my partner also considered leaving me during this difficult time because she was unhappy, and I could not see how transactional and toxic our relationship was. Before moving in together, we were previously in a long-distance relationship, and during that time apart, I had been unfaithful. I was honest about cheating, and I felt extreme guilt, and I would respond by trying to compensate by pleasing her with anything she wanted. She was possessive and manipulative, and I financially and emotionally gave her a lot of time and energy to make her comfortable and happy. In addition, she could not get past feeling a lot of resentment and hard feelings towards my cousin about the accident and totaling her vehicle. In the three years we lived together, I took on a caregiver role. I put her needs first, which alleviated her housing insecurity and financial stress to focus on her bachelor's. Instantly, when I was no longer able to provide, she could only think about herself and how my temporary condition affected her financial and material needs.

My parents have always told me that if I was ever to stay with them, I had to go to school or work towards a career-focused goal. On the other hand, my parents had shown me unconditional loving support; however, I had already internalized a massive amount of shame and guilt because of my physical condition, which I felt burdened my family. I also had internalized an ableist worldview that I had to get a job and regain my financial footing no matter if it jeopardized my physical and mental health. As I tried to troubleshoot my problems and plan my reintegration into

being a “productive” citizen, I applied to multiple jobs and universities in San Antonio. I applied to graduate school after visiting my high school mentor. She asked me why I was not going for my Ph.D. as she could picture me being a strong voice for students on the Southside. Of course, at that moment, I had not thought of a Ph.D. as a possibility because I was still burnt out and disillusioned with going through a Master's program in Border studies with no mentorship or representation to do Joteria studies. I could not see nor appreciate the significance of a Chicana 12th grade educator I trusted and respected to plant the seed of envisioning the possibility of obtaining a doctoral degree. At each pivotal educational milestone of my life, I had been mentored by *Muxeristas* all my life, and it took losing my friend and mentor to COVID 19 in September of 2021 to see the ways she illuminated my path in becoming a professor. One of the last words chiseled in my memory is her telling me, “I am proud of you, and don’t forget us, come back and teach.”

Academic Isolation and Trauma bonding

Dissertating and teaching queer studies during multiple pandemics and unsupportive political conservatism has been emotionally draining and isolating. I felt lost and disorientated as wanting to do queer and feminist studies, mainly because my doctoral program—although it proclaimed to “do” cultural studies—the program emphasized traditional approaches to research and a hyper-focus on bilingual education in K-12. As a doctoral student/professor I was left with the deep-rooted desire to cultivate inclusive academic spaces for future Ethnic Studies students and rising scholars. Being many times the token Queer Chicana representation, I was forced to be the bridge and teach through my vulnerabilities because not doing so would only further my sense of queer academic isolation. I found that sharing about myself was a way to connect with other *muxeres* to build supportive and sustainable academic relationships. I trauma bonded with other *muxeres* over the lack of university support, mentorship, tokenism. Operating from scarcity forced many of us to adopt harmful survival strategies. Specifically, neoliberal multicultural value systems uphold eurocentric notions of individualism and colorblindness.

My experience with having no institutional support forced me to rethink my use of energy and intentionally cultivate new bonds with *muxeristas* who genuinely are committed to a collective sueño of empowering community through consciousness-raising. I needed to go beyond just trauma bonding with problematic Chicanas/ Latinas in higher education. I wanted to understand the way colonial trauma informed our approaches to academic *sobrevivencia*, and for *Muxeres* adopting disempowering cultural norms and how it forced us into these transactional bonds. In many of these transactional relationships, I was mosquitoed for my intellectual and creative queer *conocimiento* which felt like a direct violation of my whole self—mind, body, and spiritual sovereignty.

Each time I was betrayed or disappointed by another Chicana/Latina, cutting ties and making boundaries felt heavy on my heart. It felt like a romantic breakup because I mourned that loss. I was forced to reckon with feelings of *desconocimiento*, questioning the seduction of these relationships and the dystopian reality that sisterhood is a false consciousness. In many ways, we continue to be the analogy of Chicana/o/x’s being like the “Crabs in the bucket,” each clawing

their way to get out of the bucket and in the process pulling each other down. As a result, none of the crabs successfully make it out of the bucket because they focus on their individual survival and sabotage the collective well-being. The competitiveness prevents us "the crabs" from finding creative intergenerational and innovative ways of collaborating on our collective academic survival.

BUILDING MAS *CONCIENCIA*

When I was told I would be a Cultural Studies Graduate Assistant, I knew it was going to alleviate some of my feelings of academic isolation because of the queer feminist Chicanx embodiment of my scholarship. I was introduced to two colleagues through a program for K-12 teachers implementing Mexican American Studies in the summer of 2019. One was nearing the last year of finishing her dissertation, and the other was also on the dissertation path but affiliated with an out-of-state university. I remember meeting them through a mutual mentor and core organizer of the training program. Before my mentor retired, she passed down a lot of history of the fight to get Ethnic Studies in Texas Schools and the challenges set forth to building teachers' critical awareness in MAS. I enjoyed working with her because she felt familiar, and I felt comfortable sharing with her about my life and asking about her academic journey. When we were not working on putting the teacher training program together, she would take the time to listen to me try and tease out my dissertation ideas. She always offered me a meal, wisdom, and food for thought. She was mindful about taking breaks to avoid burnout. Coming from an Ethnic Studies undergraduate program, I was used to calling professors by their first names and disrupting the student/teacher power relationship, making it easier to teach and learn through intergenerational dialogue where we both reciprocated the sharing of grounded ideas in our lived experiences. After coming out of a toxic working environment working for the immigration for-profit complex, it was healing to work in an environment where I could be my Queer Chicanx self.

However, this position was only offered in the summer, and I was always unsure if there would be a position available depending on the department budget. I fought to continue working as a summer Graduate Assistant. I even took on a hybrid position as an adjunct professor and graduate assistant, and although this was even more work and femme-exploitation. I stuck around because I believe that the work we were and continue to do is urgent and matters. They relied on me to learn this new virtual platform of creating, marketing, and organizing a conference on a virtual platform. Amid complete pandemic chaos, state shutdown, and mandated quarantine, I adapted us to an accessible platform to connect teachers all over Texas to learn about Mexican American Studies and reflect on the challenges of teaching in the middle of a global health crisis. I believe that the *sobrivencia* of the teacher training program was only possible because we already had an existing relationship from previous summers organizing and we collectively evolved, it awoke a queer, racialized, and gendered knowledge of survival that was always within us, all along and that was our ability to move collectively and trust each other to communicate and problem-solve.

I like to think about this ancestral knowledge within us as a creative life-affirming energy that we activate to empower us to continue to build critical consciousness across the educational pipeline. Since white supremacist, heteronormative institutions do not teach us *Muxeres* how to nurture *sobrevivencia*, we must build relationships across multigenerational approaches to cultivating *conciencia*. I cannot survive without building *conciencia* and unfortunately, this means being vulnerable and trying to connect with like-minded critically conscious activist scholars that allow me to be my authentic self. Working together on the summer teaching training program for the past three years has been a labor of love grounded in intergenerational inclusivity. The teacher training program is a *Muxerista* third space, and a collective orientation that re-roots us. It is a sense of home for diasporic women of color that have generationally been displaced and silenced and in most cases erased by heteronormativity within a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

THE FUTURE OF *MUXERISTA SOBREVIVENCIA*

We have awakened a *Muxerista conciencia* that has been intuitive to our academic survival. Through reflection, we have learned that our ancestral knowledge is valuable and worthy of being shared—whether it is in our teachings or to our families, it needs to be passed on. We are worthy and we are strong, yet we cannot do this work alone or in isolation. We nurtured our confidence, we deepened our trust and strengthened our collective vision of building *conciencia.* Aside from our existing professional relationship as members of the planning committee, we also formed a personal connection centered on nurturing each other. This affirmed the *Muxerista confianza* to put our messy *pláticas* and tease out our raw feelings on paper, to make them public, and move through the process of submitting to a journal. In sharing our stories, we hope to inspire other *Muxeres* to support each other in moving collaboratively and resist the white settler colonial norms that do not acknowledge how we embody a caregiving role in all aspects in our lives. Through this journey of navigating higher education, we also learned to value ourselves through this work, because it is usually devalued and unseen labor. The *Muxerista* mentoring that we do is an act of radical care, we do this with *corazón*, a love for ourselves, each other, and our community.

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