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Special Issue

Inter/weaving, Inter/lacing Conscientização & Resistance: Decolonizing Practices, Intersectionality & Aesthetics

Editors:

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Rio Bravo: A Journal of the Borderlands is an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed publication of the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The journal publishes scholarly and creative works about Mexican descent communities in both South Texas and nationally. The journal promotes debate, dialogue, awareness, and insight into the U.S.-Mexico border experience.

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Inter/weaving, Inter/lacing *Conscientização* & Resistance:
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&
Rosalva Resendiz

Volume 25
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TIERRA, SANGRE Y RESISTENCIA

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The University of Rio Grande Valley

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For myself, art has been a way to explore my Chicanx realism a la Cheri Moraga. There are so many conflicting emotions I have experienced as a mestiza indigenous brown individual living on the borderlands. I have lived with much rage, having survived the colorism within my own family, the racism from both lands of the North and South, and the identity crisis that comes with learning to accept myself as de-tribalized and indigenous in a country which refuses to accept that we are natives and not immigrants.

My contribution to this issue is a painting for the issue's cover titled "Tierra, Sangre y Resistencia" (acrylic, 26x30) which represents violence, survival, and resistance.

TIERRA, SANGRE Y RESISTENCIA

The Rio Grande River/Rio Bravo is depicted as it flows into the Gulf of Mexico, with Tejas and Tamaulipas on both sides of the river painted in violent red brush strokes symbolizing the blood of our ancestors. At the forefront there is a nopal, which represents our indigenous spirit, surrounded by orange brush strokes representative of our fiery spirit.

We have survived colonialism and imperialism even when they have tried to starve us…

like the nopal, we thrive with minimal nourishment...

and like the nopal, we nourish/feed the future of our peoples of the land.

The painting is an acknowledgement of our resistance symbolized by the nopal with its fruits, which traverses across the river.

We exist on both sides of El Rio Bravo,

on land that has seen the colonial and imperialist attempts to eradicate us.

Yet, we still survive without much nourishment.

We still find ways to live and thrive.

The painting is also an acknowledgement that both the land north and the south of the river is indigenous…

con el nopal en la frente we face oppression valiantly even through the dispossession of our lands. Since the conquering of Americas, indigenous resistance was birthed by the processes of colonialism, settler colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. We have never forgotten that we are connected to our lands and indigenous roots. Our cultures have resisted and survived in various forms through food, art, poetry and spirituality. We have lived in conflict, resistance, accommodation, and compromise, but we still have maintained our connections to our lands. We still maintain our indigenous spirit and honor our ancestors.

The yoke of colonialism and imperialism has attempted to decimate our indigenous spirit but we continue to survive… we have never stopped resisting. Our native roots are planted on these lands as the nopal… and even in the desert of colonialism, we bear fruit.

This issue is very much a testament to our oppression, resistance and survival, as we try to make a stand against patriarchal white supremacy and colonialism/imperialism. Decoloniality is difficult as we confront and peel the many layers of colonialism – internal and external hegemonies.

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Rosalva Resendiz is an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Dr. Resendiz earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from Texas Woman's University. Dr. Resendiz's research focuses on social justice, critical criminology, critical race theory, decoloniality, postcolonial studies, Chicana feminism, Mexican American/Border studies and organized crime.

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ABSTRACT

Overall, the primary role in this issue was to create a space for scholars/artists/activists to share co-learned knowledges, testimonios, auto/biographies, stories, experiences, methods, research, as well as their own challenges and struggles while reclaiming, negotiating, or situating into their own paths. The issue works like our Borderlands, as a metaphorical terrain where shared information not only carefully addresses the paradoxical process of working towards decolonizing but also awareness that this work is being done within our own colonized/colonizing organizations, environments, and minds.

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listen
the silent scream,
a guttural silent scream
with no-sounds,
no vibrations,
no air-waves

listen
no!
not with your ears
with your soul,
with your guts,
with your heart

the scream is silent
we do not recognize its sounds

is full of past sounds
is full of forgotten words
echoing in our impotent vocal cords
vocal cords able
to sound only the tyrants' languages
those foreign noises
won't ever stop!
(Espinosa-Dulanto 2023)

DISPLACED

The host editors of this issue are faculty in a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). We met in the unsettling path towards working/understanding the process of decolonization. Like Tuck & Yang (2012), we believe that decolonization is not a metaphor to "improve our societies and schools [which is vital]" but "about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (1). In that spirit, our initial idea was to weave testimonios across disciplines to de-center white supremacy, white privilege, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and settler colonial logics. The hope was to create a space for scholars/artists/activists to share co-learned knowledges, testimonios, auto/biographies, stories, experiences, methods, research, as well as challenges and struggles while reclaiming, negotiating, or situating into their own paths towards understanding their own processes of decolonization. The task of building this special issue involved a lot more than academics. As editors, in the process of curating this work, we have learned to accept and embrace our own struggles, not only confronting and navigating academia as Latinx indigenous/Mestizo people. For them, Mestizaje is an identity on the flesh deeply tied to social and political structures and embodies multiple subjectivities and histories. It's tied both to a world of possibilities and a colonial history of racial, gender, social, economic and language hierarchies. More importantly, as Latinx indigenous/Mestizo people, we

must accept the paradoxical implications of being a part of the colonizer/colonized unit, like two sides of a coin,

> "the decolonial desires of white, non- white, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism" (Tuck&Yang, 2012:1)

Speaking our truths comes with challenges, including marginalization in an academia mired with paternalism, racism/colorism, sexism and homophobia. Speaking truth to power can be daunting, but it is liberating and necessary. As minoritized peoples, we have found multiple ways to do this, through art, poetry, testimonios (Espinosa-Dulanto, 2018) and by contesting the traditional Euro-centric methodologies of colonialist/imperialist indoctrination. We look to expand the archive of testimonio decolonial praxis toward a transcultural dialogue and conscientização (Freire, 1968). Thus, this special issue includes scholarly contributions that intersect the personal, the social, and the political, following the tradition started with Anzaldua's mestiza consciousness—that has full existence in the liminal/interstitial space of Nepantla (1987, 2015). It works with Perez's decolonial imaginary that seeks to reflect, situate, & negotiate the contradictions of coloniality (1999). Latinx/Chicanx/Afro/Indigenous feminist *testimonios* of decoloniality or decolonial praxis, in which testimonios are used as a tool to theorize oppression, resistance, subjectivity and agency (Latina Feminist Group, 2001) centering our conocimiento/knowledge in relationship to indigeneity and navigating the metaphorical/geographical borders of identity (Anzaldua 1987, 2015; Perez 1999; Delgado Bernal et al. 2006). It pairs with Quijano to expose the colonial passing of information, the genocide of knowledges, as well as uncovering the role of academia in perpetuating colonial mindsets devaluing indigenous epistemologies (Quijano, 2000). It interlocks with Lugones' positions on the coloniality of gender as well as her inquisitory embracing/sharing of women's worlds. To truly understand an "other," entails entering in their worlds as well as opening a door into ours. It involves an interaction, a game of give and take (1998, 2016). It is risky. C. Rodriguez's inquisitorial thinking voice and methods of decolonial expression, guides us to connect the stories, the testimonies with the decolonial efforts and practices (2018, 2023). With Lugones' and Rodriguez's guidance, we believe this special issue shares the efforts to decolonize our practices and is a step forward beyond theory.

The issue works like our ***Borderlands***, as a metaphorical terrain where shared information not only carefully addresses the paradoxical process of working towards decolonizing but also awareness that work is being done within our own colonized/colonizing organizations, environments, and minds.

> "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding." (Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963:36)

The issue is delivered in three sections, in the first section ***Inter/weaving, Inter/lacing: Consciousness & Intersectionality*** we start with Lomeli's metaphors of identity and resistance… as water that "molds itself …as immigrants flexible to change…like the river moving from place to place to or be forced into a container for containment, consumption, and evaluation." Continues with *Femtoring Trenza: Employing a Plática~Testimonio Approach to Co-create Knowledge and Survive Academia* (Río Lopez, Claudia Yolanda Casillas and Judith Flores Carmona) sharing plática methodology feminista testimonios to co-create knowledge, challenge the corrosiveness of academic spaces and foundational to surviving and navigating academia. Kennedy & Perez's *I See You: A Dual Testimonio of The Latina Doctoral Experience* share their testimonios of struggles as females, academic scholars, and human beings within a boxed academic society. *The Decolonial Offerings of Collaborative Autoethnography with the Nahui Ollin* of Davalos, Jadue, and Ibarra present how they have strengthened the power of a single story by reclaiming generative knowledge with the land. Furthermore, collaborative research disrupts settler colonial logics and power differentials on how research should be conducted. The complexity of our struggles continues and is expressed *In Testimonio of Cultural Homelessness Finding Flow and Harmony in Nepantla* where Guzman Foster disclosed not only painful memories of racialized trauma, but deep intracultural division in the Latinx group. *Honoring Rasquachismo in el Teatro Adriana* illustrates how exclusionary notions of colonized theater are challenged by the implementation and success of *rasquache* aesthetic, with its indigenous roots to foster creativity, collective creation, and intentional purpose. O'Donald, in *Telarañas: Untangling My Pain* is fueled by contradictions and chose to write words that have never been spoken in her *familia*. Drawing from Anzaldúa's Coatlicue stage, she connects feelings, thoughts and transnational academic knowledge all drenched in aching daughter's love. Based on Perez's decolonial imaginary and decolonial critical race feminism, Gallardo Zamora writes from lived experience as a queer mestizx jota that shares their "papelitos guardados" through poetry and art in *The Destroyer & the Destroyed: The Testimonio of a Fragmented Mestizx Jota Entrapped inside a White Straight(jacket).* To complicate further the decolonial imaginary of race and gender, Vasquez in *We Expected a Normal Latinx, Not a Chicano Like You* explores its own, Chicano identity within the constraints of the colonial logics imposed by White academia as problematic, filled with particular racist stereotypes, expectations and erasure. What we find is that the umbrella term Latinx hides a hierarchy of privilege.

The second section, ***Intersectionality & Aesthetics: Identity & Resistance*** begins with a creative piece, *Repast: A Collective Autoethnographic Process Of Meaning Making.* There, the authors display in conversations and writings what each member has processed in the momentous blink of their collective lived history. This connects with Doering's Latinx identity shaped by expectations and a history of colonization and neo-colonialism. The next reflection uses Lugones as a framework for understanding space, place and resistance by situating indigeneity and confronting colorism, *Complicating Space Exploring Lugones as An Odawa Native.* We also received several reflections which addressed the difficulties and prejudices academics encounter

as they navigate higher education in the United States, to find their identities assaulted by a white patriarchal culture, *La Encrucijada: Latina Consciousness, Academia, and Imposed Identity* (Doering), *Tales of an academic immigrant* (Calderon), and *How Doctoral Chicanas Resist White Supremacist Political Erasure Through Muxerista Mentoring* (Garcia, Gonzales, and Estrada). These reflections show how intersectional beings navigate binary categories within the U.S.A educational system. Another attempt to contest from within and develop new frameworks to deconstruct the racism within the institutions is *Exploring Awareness Through Race-Based Epistemologies* where Briseño shares a process of unpacking colonial/imperialist education through critical race lens, as her awareness that formal schooling in the USA has been a tool to maintain white patriarchal dominance. Family was an integral aspect as the authors reflected on generational knowledge, preserved through parents and grandparents. In *Remembering our Ancestors through Convivienza, Pláticas, y Testimonios* the authors share pláticas with their family as a form to create auto-historia teoria in praxis as they learned indigenous traditional healing practices which strengthen our bonds to our ancestors. *Beyond the Word and the Womb: Parenting as Anzaldúan Atravesade*, Danielson places her Anzaldúan atravesade parenting testimonio in conversation with decolonial frameworks to assert that "a queer of color lens can play a powerful role in the decolonization of restrictive and binary modes of parenting and family" as she shares her queer position with the mainstream "mother" role. Powerful and painful discussion.

As we stated earlier, this issue reflects the terrain of our USA/Mexico borderlands, as such, the sections are meant to organize extraordinary pieces for possible pláticas not to separate them in conventional divides. In this third section, ***Inter/weaving, Inter/lacing: Decolonizing Practices,*** the offerings highlight work based on decolonial methodologies addressing issues related to language/power, schooling/welfare system, gender/queer, and religion/spirituality. Settler colonialism is embedded in all institutions including foster care and the child welfare system, Ocasio's *Invisible Resistance: BIPOC Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth in Foster Care Resisting School Push Out* touches almost all these issues as she reflects on gendered racialized stereotypes that have created a school to prison pipeline, criminalizing the survival and resistance of BIPOC youth). Learning from the experiences in gifted programs, sadly, the foundation still racist; hidden curricula solely acknowledging Eurocentric perspectives, ignoring indigeneity, and languages other than English, Boley's *Gifted Programming Identification Procedures: A Hidden Curriculum* linked diverse ways of conceptualizing giftedness to decenter Western ways of understanding, informing, and ordering the field of gifted education. She calls to centering indigenous positionality and provides an educational model which includes Navajo perspectives. In *Science para El Barrio,* Peña reminds us that Western Scientific thought attempts to enculturate students into the culture, knowledge, techniques, values and worldview of academic Eurocentric science and far removed from the lived experiences of our youth. In his teaching, Peña encourages students learn from each other's' cultural knowledge, to develop a practice of science open to multiple ways of knowing and to include their indigenous epistemologies. In this issue we also explore language as it affects our detribalized identities which have made our original languages but a memory. Although indigenous languages still survive, for many of us, Spanish—if not English—was our

first language because of losing our native culture to Spanish colonization. Currently, under the colonial power of English for many, Spanish represents their mestizaje and indigeneity. Two pieces shared their successful efforts on conducting programas and research supporting Spanish as a decolonial language. *Hampering the Dogmatization Within the System by Building an Itinerant Practice in Bilingual Education and Dual-Language Programs* by Orozco & Whitacre reflects on dual-language programs and the transformation of implementation through curricularized language and personal pedagogies. Lozano-Soto, Wickert, Hernández, and Maldonado's *Affirmations of Bilingualism, Biliteracy and Binationalism in the Cali-Baja Borderlands:Transformational Politics of Liminality, Counter-Erasure and Borderizing* critically reflected on how their research group had support bilingual, biliterate and binational scholars to strengthening their identities and successfully navigate Eurocentric, white-supremacist, monolingual Institutions of Higher Education. Through Perez's decolonial imaginary and decolonial critical race feminism, Espinoza, Resendiz & Espinoza's *El Corrido de La Redada de los "41 Maricones": Decolonizing El Porfiriato and its Queer Signifier,* critically examine indigenous sexuality and the development of colonialist homophobia, in early 20th century Mexico, because of compulsory Catholicism and a Euro-centric government. On a different perspective, Martinez Prieto, *Spirituality among Mexican Transnational Teaching Youth: Towards Decolonialization and Humanization of Research* explores the spiritual trajectories of Mexican nationals as transnational students, how they connect spirituality and religion when faced with U.S. racism and oppression. The USA educational system clearly demarks and fosters marginalization, specially of people whose first language is not English. Nevertheless, community and cooperation, as emphasized in Garcia's *Think of the world we carry with us: Latina Women Changing the conversation of Parent Involvement* shared Latinx parents cleverly navigating their children's schools through community gardening and in connection to the land. Tied to our connection to the land, there is always a spiritual component. Domingues's *EntreMundos/Criss-Crossing Early Childhood Ecological Pedagogy(ies) with Nagualismo as Embodied Inquiry* proposes an eco-model based on Anzaldua's nagualismo for embodied inquiry by engaging with Mexica cosmology and incorporating indigenous spirituality.

> The colonial world is a compartmentalized world… the singularity of the colonial context lies in the fact that economic reality, inequality, and enormous disparities in lifestyles never manage to mask the human reality… The colonist is not content with stating that the colonized world has lost its values or worse never possessed any. The "native" is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. (8) The colonist makes history. His life is an epic, an odyssey. (14) The colonist's world is a hostile world, a world which excludes yet at the same time incites envy. We have seen how the colonized always dream of taking the colonist's place. Not of becoming a colonist, but of replacing him. (16)

This issue is all about struggle, it is all about intimacy, it is all about our negotiations in private and public spheres. All are messed up, contradictions and alliances where individual and collective identities begin with a birthing process at the crossroads of our embraced indigeneity or Mestizaje with the certainty of colonialism and imperialism. Decolonizing our identity is a never-ending journey as we face settler colonialism and Eurocentric patriarchal white supremacy every day. Navigating the decolonial process is different for everyone and we negotiate our identities as we move through white patriarchal colonial systems. Each of our contributors has faced similar traumas, but we are all in different stages of our decolonial journey.

We end this introduction with a quote from F. Fannon that has helped us not only to understand but also to embrace the fight and the difficult, shattering road ahead of us,

> The arrival of the colonist signified syncretically the death of indigenous society, cultural lethargy, and petrifaction of the individual. For the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist. Such then is the term-for-term correspondence between the two arguments. But it so happens that for the colonized this violence is invested with positive, formative features because it constitutes their only work. This violent praxis is totalizing since each individual represents a violent link in the great chain, in the almighty body of violence rearing up in reaction to the primary violence of the colonizer. (50)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto's teaching, research, and writing draw on decolonial indigenous feminist research methodologies. Peruana, inmigrante desplazada, con pasaporte azul, con raíces nómades y amores arrinconados, caminando al ocaso, con pasos de nostalgia, refugiada en la frontera mexicana, donde está aprendiendo, descubriendo, en español, inglés, tejano, peruano, y en valle-chingón. Miryam's work has appeared both in leading journals, handbooks, peer reviewed books, and regional/local publications that evidence the broad interdisciplinary, community based, and intellectual curiosity of her engagement.

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Section 1
Inter/weaving, Inter/lacing: Consciousness & Intersectionality

La Gente de Agua: Intersectional Metaphors of Identity and Resistance

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ABSTRACT

Berre: “Nombre, pinche Americana, no sabe!” And I didn’t know, because it had taken a long time not to be mad at not being able to pronounce words properly or using my translanguaging skills to create words in Spanish. Playing with cousins in Mexico was fun but challenging. They weren’t always the kindest or showed compassion. It was I who was living in the U.S. after all. The expectation was not to speak Spanglish. The idea that Spanish should be pure and learned properly kept being yelled at me when I didn’t understand the double-meanings and certain humor.

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THE SPACE WITHIN: DEFINING GEOGRAPHICAL AND IDENTITY BORDERS

Berre: "Nombre, pinche Americana, no sabe!" And I didn't know, because it had taken a long time not to be mad at not being able to pronounce words properly or using my translanguaging skills to create words in Spanish. Playing with cousins in Mexico was fun but challenging. They weren't always the kindest or showed compassion. It was I who was living in the U.S. after all. The expectation was not to speak Spanglish. The idea that Spanish should be pure and learned properly kept being yelled at me when I didn't understand the double-meanings and certain humor.

Can't say this didn't happen on the other side of the border. Throughout my schooling, I was also constantly monitored for a Spanish accent or for revelations of my immigration status. Once again, I was reminded that I wasn't one of them. I grew up knowing that they (students) wanted to make me different. Pointing out my clothes, my skin color, my choice of words. I didn't fit in. I wasn't assimilated. Maybe it was the reminder of where they came from but wanting to forget or a bad memory pushed to their core of the pain their ancestors felt. How could they not see we were the same? Only thing separating us was a piece of paper (citizenship).

Couldn't they see that we all were part of the river,

That we all were flowing together,

That whatever the world thought and taught, we were not filtered into different bottles.

Here at the Rio Grande Valley, the border for us, is the river. Every time you cross the bridge – halfway through – there is a plaque that highlights the dividing imaginary line between Mexico and the U.S. If walking, I'd often stand there and stare at it… it is an overwhelming sensation… a reminder of our histories… colonization/ imperialism/ indigeneity/ genocide/ dispossession/ war/ boundaries/ identity/ immigration … a river carrying stories… each story a waterdrop...

WATER BOTTLE: TAKING IN MY IDENTITY AND MAKING IT PALPABLE FOR THE MASSES

Water, they say, washes away so many things… blood, sweat, tears… but never the memories or the passing of time. Water carries … our history, the lives of our ancestors fighting for our sacred tribal lands, the Braceros who gave their lives, and the undocumented U.S. Veterans that were deported after their service. The water carries… our hope, the opportunity to make better wages, and to reunite with our family and the land that we once so freely crossed without protest. The water carries… our joy of the environment, the bathing and laughter of family celebrations along the river, but it also carries our fear… fear of being shot by Minutemen/vigilantes… Border Patrol… cartels. As the border became a war zone (created by U.S. policies), immigration became a crime. But the river's water still reminds us of where we once were and where we could be…

Water, after all, has the power to destroy anything in its path, but also to be flexible, calm, and life-giving. The ability to gracefully change the landscape of its inhabitants (all species) overtime and over great areas of land. Water makes up the human body. Water molds itself through where it travels and to where it is held. As immigrants, we must be flexible/ fluid to change like the river does as it moves from place to place or be forced into a container for containment, consumption, and evaluation.

…Forgetting at times that flowing water is living and water that is contained mostly dies… (and kills as well). Environmental scientists have learned that water-dams, if not provided with flow, will become dead zones for all that inhabit it. It kills the fish and the ecosystem reliant on the source. The water dies and provides no sustenance for the weary.

As immigrants, we are the water. We are often forced into these identity containers/ plastic bottles, where we must explain where and what we stand for…

But aren't we like the river, flowing through spaces? Fluid…

A flow that is a life journey…

A run that lasts until we reach the ocean...

An experience that ties us to time… to the before and after…

A flow that merges together walking beings, ancestors, and successors.

But we are still contained… only our holding is made up of layers of containment. We, like the river, hold our physical containment… The boundary between two countries. Like water, we are also contained by our labels and laws that identify what labels can cross its boundary. Are we not labeled like water bottles? … to know which is "acceptable" to be exported or imported, provided with value and acceptance or quite the contrary, rejected, and displaced. In this particular border crossing, we are told that we must be identified and assessed. The U.S. Government creates these labels and has done so over the years. They decide where the boundary is along the U.S.-Mexico Border. They define who, when and how it can be crossed. They decide if we are to get benefits or how long we can stay. Our indigenous ancestors lived on this land without borders, and now we hold a history of destruction: Texas Rangers, the Minutemen, the U.S. Border Patrol, and the Border Wall.

As a child, most border checkpoint crossings involved a light conversation with the Custom agents, who focused on questions about bringing in illegal plants and food. Years later, we see the river as a sphere of contention, where crossing without "papers" has become a crime. As you cross through the river's path along the U.S.-Mexico bridges, we pass this invisible demarcation of time and space that seems surreal at times. We step from a place where we are hard workers, family-oriented, spiritual people to a place that often labels us as criminals, lazy, and immoral. These labels affect our livelihood, our daily lived experiences, and our existence. As immigrants, we are labeled like plastic water bottles (to be easily discarded after use) … With the right label (documents), we are granted access to travel across the borders. But if we are labeled incorrectly, we lose the ability to reach our destinations... Instead, we remain in the same place, often in the sun, becoming more and more polluted as the plastic around us merges with the water… That is why it is so important that we are labeled as consumable. For many immigrants with the wrong label, crossing becomes a life-or-death experience. One where you must reach your destination by swimming across the river or walking through a desert and rough terrain. They risk it all because staying would mean death by cartel violence, or the daily struggle for survival with the almost non-existent exploitive wages brought on by long days working at local maquiladoras.

This didn't start recently, in 1848 Mexico lost the war and lost much of their land under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to the United States. It was during this time that border Mexicans on the

northern side of the river were given an ultimatum, you either stay with your land and become an "American" or leave with just your life. But as with many of the genocidal incidents that make up U.S. history (treaties with indigenous people were never honored), Mexicans were killed on the spot (beaten, scalped, lynched, shot), forced to leave their lands, and stripped of their wealth. I think this is why we are not taught this in school because even with compliance, you can't trust the U.S. government to honor their word (land, life, and liberty).

For me, I think the easiest way to visualize my identity is through the confinement of the water in a plastic bottle. Containment/confinement has been a way for the U.S. to place us in a more palpable package for the white bourgeoisie who have exploited their way to the top through manifest destiny propaganda and label-making. They have sold us an "American" dream of assimilation and hard work. They sell the propaganda freely through every facet of advertising (news, media, movies, ads, etc.). They sell white settler colonialism… white supremacy. So, in that sense, I had unknowingly internalized this shame. I hid. I wanted to blend into the system because I hated to be ridiculed. I didn't want to be associated with the characteristics or stereotypes they said I was because of where I came from. Who likes to be called "wetback" or mojada as a kindergartener? Certainly not I.

The teacher asked the class, where we were born. I remember I was so happy to share, I shouted, "I was born in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico!" It was heart-breaking to hear my peers calling me, "Roñosa… Mugrosa ..." because of where I was born. My little peers saw the city and myself as lower and dirty. As a border town, it was hard to appreciate, but for me, it was home. It was where my family grew up and shared beautiful memories. With two jobs each, our parents were able to take care of us, working, living, studying on one side yet taking us to Mexico if we were sick. Doctors could help us for low prices. My mom would say, "Bueno, Bonito y Barato."

I made many memories listening to my mom talking with other patients while we waited to see a doctor… Learning about life and having our own version of talk therapy. It was how we learned of other reliable doctors, specialists, and things to consider when someone was ill (on a budget). It was our network.

As a child, I was given allowances for not knowing how to speak Spanish very well, but my mom did not… "Debes enseñarle" they'd say. Like a plastic water bottle, there were expectations in being a member of the international community… perceived value. How could I be a good representative of our people if I did not know the language? How could I be permitted to hold this label of Mexican and not be able to hold a conversation in Spanish without interjecting English throughout. Maybe it was the reminder that Spanish was not valued in the eyes of the U.S. How ironic that we focus on which colonizer's language we should perfect. We should be grieving the loss of our indigenous languages, medicinal knowledge, and customs.

So how would this appear in the consumption of water? I'd have to say it would be a bottle of soda. Imagine, in most areas, a plastic bottle of soda is more expensive than a plastic bottle of water… but it comes at a great price. We must add chemicals, toxic amounts of sugar, and other preservatives to change. In the U.S.A, to be valued, assimilation is constantly pushed onto the

community. In this case, soda would represent those who had assimilated into society. They had to change who they were, their values, their symbols, language, and their traditions to fit in.

I can remember in so many ways, especially as a student, my teachers, school, and peers wanted me to pronounce words, behave, speak, and represent the classroom differently than our bilingual class peers. In their minds, it was what made "us" different from "them." It was assimilated vs. non-assimilated. It was model minority examples vs. who you should not want to be like. They were in the same grade, but learning at a slower pace. But they exploited them just the same. The schools were receiving money for each bilingual student and the more students they identified as bilingual, the more the school would earn. However, what the students received during this time was anything but beneficial. They were labeled, held to lower educational expectations, and treated badly by peers.

When I was in the 5th grade, my mom was a parent volunteer, and helped a kinder classroom. One day, I ran into my mother outside in the courtyard of our elementary. We began to talk. My mother knew some English but spoke mostly Spanish. The teacher who she was working with approached us and was shocked to hear me speaking Spanish.

"Are you speaking Spanish, Arlett?!" the teacher asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"I have never heard you say a single word in Spanish before!"

She was stunned. I hid in plain sight by avoiding talking in Spanish and not divulging where I was born after the kinder incident. This takes a toll, with a loss of opportunities to celebrate and rejoice in one's own identity.

By the time I turned 15 my skin had grown thicker, but the border was harder to cross. You needed to have your "papers/ papeles" with you now. Before the late 1990s, I only needed a verbal declaration in English, but now you had to show documentation (passport, visa, etc.). When it was time for my quinceañera celebration, we decided to have the church ceremony in Reynosa and the reception in Edinburg. It was a way of celebrating who I was at the time… my roots in both, Reynosa and Edinburg. This also let those family members and friends who could not cross respectively, the opportunity to celebrate with me. They are, after all, the drops that make up my existence. They have helped shape me. But now, instead of being a bottle with free water, it needed (more) documentation at an extra cost, it was as if they charged for transportation and distribution.

WHAT'S VALUED MORE: SPRING OR PURIFIED? IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU POLLUTE IT WITH HATRED.

As the bell rings, it is lunch time. A comer! We would say as we were heading to the cafeteria fooling around. I remember sitting with a big group of peers in high school. Each seat was filled and sometimes shared. Our lunch trays turned sideways to allow for more people to sit together. You'd think conversations would be safe, but they weren't… "Nombre, esos Mexicanos…," "Pinches Mojados," "Que bola de…" What do you say to people surrounding you saying things indirectly about you, your family, their families… it's devastating and shameful. How could they unknowingly hate themselves? I would look around and watch them say things. My only reaction

was a stare down, but not much else. It was elementary all over again. However, this time, I wasn't shocked. I was just disgusted. It turns into a cycle… each time losing yourself a bit more; each incident becoming a drop falling/spilling to the ground.

WE'RE POWERFUL TOGETHER. RIVERS CUT THROUGH MOUNTAINS.

Throughout my years in college, I continued to hear the same comments again and again. But something new also appeared… moments of celebration, of insights as to who we are and our indigenous Chicanx history. I was grateful for race, ethnic and gender studies during my doctoral program. We learned that there were people out there who wanted to talk about community and individual agency, counter narratives, social justice, and networks of knowledge we could reach out to (especially recognizing our family as networks of knowledge).

It was a whole new way of valuing my community and shining a light on my identity. I emptied the bottle full of "hate-o-raid" and re-filled it again when I got home. I realized the only way we create an opportunity for refilling our bottle with drinking water was by allowing for Nepantla spaces, where we could be ourselves, have deep conversations about what was happening in our sociopolitical environments and build social networks, celebrating our culture, and making changes to be more inclusive.

But I can't help but consider, I was so focused on not being seen as bad (Dirty? Mexican? Mojada? Wetback?), or as the foreign other, that I failed to learn about my indigenous history. What we did learn was that we were inferior and that we were criminals by default. We did not learn that we had an advanced civilization before Europe. That we had dominated math calculations and built complex gorgeous structures. I did not learn where we came from, or if we were part indigenous… the focus had been with not being seen as outsiders, and maybe that's the point (of the lack of education) … if we are so focused on assimilation, we don't get to find out if we are indigenous, and that they, the real foreigners, are the settler colonizers. I have seen our own people police our communities to fall in line and assimilate. The act keeps our minds preoccupied with things that don't matter. It's like an invisible brainwashing ideology that wants you to fight each other for resources. I decided I need to regain my own focus.

So now, I'm focused on other things, like learning/discovering my identity, our history, my family's history, and practicing the use of our own voices to fight for the community. Gone are the days where the goal was to stay hidden and go unnoticed. Here are the days of moving towards fighting against discriminatory stereotypes with our counter narratives. I want to share this new journey with others who'd like to do the same and help those who follow. Maybe with this new focus, we can all get our bottles recycled and return to the flowing waters of the river; being united (and living). They say rivers cut through mountains… let's see what we can do together.

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FEMTORING TRENZA: EMPLOYING A PLÁTICA ~ TESTIMONIO APPROACH TO CO-CREATE KNOWLEDGE AND SURVIVE ACADEMIA

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ABSTRACT

The three of us share how our praxis of plática methodology and our divulging of feminista testimonios allowed us to co-create knowledge and challenge the corrosiveness we have experienced in academic spaces. We center the foundational work of Women of Color scholars who have paved the way to discuss the role of community building and solidarity in higher education. This work weaves testimonios that speak to our lived experiences with femtoring (feminista mentoring) as foundational to our survival and navigation of academia's trenches. Further, we discuss the co-construction of knowledge resulting from our reciprocal femtoring relationships, naming solidarity, accountability, and concrete examples of transformative practice as foundational elements that comprise the trenza [braid] of femtoring. Through pláticas, we name the systemic barriers that have historically marginalized us as scholars whose identities/ways of knowing challenge hegemonic, epistemic, and pedagogical canons. We explicitly discuss how these forms of oppression fragment the mindbodyspirit. Further, we uplift femtoring as a practice of solidarity, accountability, meaning-making, and shared conocimiento [knowledge], allowing us to resist academic violence–staying mindful of our practice as professors and scholars.

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INTRODUCTION: A COLLECTIVE APPROACH

Our article has three main purposes. First, it outlines the contextual systemic barriers that exist in higher educational spaces (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga and Flores Carmona 2012; The Latina Feminist Group 2001). Second, it shares concrete examples of our direct experience with femtoring—a feminista praxis of mentoring. Third, it brings forth salient issues from a plática/conversation during our panel at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference in 2021, in which we wove and expanded our notions of femtoring and the required tools to survive in academia. We are three scholars, however, our embodiments and experiences of Mexicanidad and our positionality are not the same. We have found femtoring essential for our survival and growth, especially during pandemic times. In this work, we uplift femtoring as a practice of solidarity, accountability, meaning-making, and shared conocimiento [knowledge]. This has allowed us to stay accountable and mindful of our practice as professors and scholar activists. In this paper, the three of us, share our:

stories about living on the borders of [coming from] various classes, nations, regional cultures, languages, voices, races, ethnicities, migrations, sexualities, creative abilities, academic disciplines, and even cultures of resistance…. we sketch out the genealogies that have informed our individual paths to personal achievement. The complicated structures of inheritance and identity formation, legacies of colonial and patriarchal subordination influence our lives…. They have shaped our resistance and fueled our cognitive desires, the will to knowledge and comprehension…. More subtle but pivotal influences come from our families, friends, communities, and life events that have also helped us negotiate the markers of our achievements and validate our right to pursue our goals. Our genealogies of empowerment draw on these early lessons as the blueprints for a thriving process of self-created and self-defined freedom and independence. (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, 25)

During the fall semester of 2021, we co-facilitated a panel at the NWSA's virtual conference. Our conversation centered on the power of our relationship as colleagues and femtors as foundational to our navigation in academic spaces—as doctoral students and faculty members. We titled our presentation "Conocimiento Colectivo," which directly translates as collective knowledge, as after many years of working together and supporting each other, we saw the value of collectivity and relationships as critical tools to survive and resist the entrenched terrains of academia. Specifically, we discussed academia's values on patriarchy, lack of representation for students of color, the climate of violence, and gaslighting from the moment we become graduate students. Further, in our experience in higher education as graduate students and faculty, we realized that these spaces dwell on individualistic values, divide and conquer tactics, meritocracy, competitiveness, inflating egos, and mediocrity (Rodríguez 2016; Oluo 2020). In this work, we employ González et all's concept of femtoring, which challenges the "male-centered western etymology of mentor[ing]... Identifying as femtors and mentees gives us visibility as women, and thus empowers us while challenging the historical legacy and academic mentors/mentees being men" (2015, 148). When

we read and think about this concept, we understand and employ it as it applies not only to cisgender women but to individuals that embody dissident identities. Further, given our lived experience we know that the guidance and collaborative work with senior advisors is foundational for the completion of our degrees, pursuit of employment, and survival.

For this article, we draw from our collective memories as femtors—mentoring grounded in feminista awareness and consciousness. We highlight how our relationships allowed us to transgress and survive systemic barriers, acknowledge our privilege, and transform our pedagogies and relationships. We center the meaning-making process that stemmed from our work together during NWSA, the cultural roots of our values, and how these facilitated and resulted in our connection as sister-femtor-colegas. Presenting our process and approach, via our testimonios, to scholars and community members allowed us to share concrete and conceptual ways in which we enact a femtoring praxis in higher education. We share this work in an effort to prevent the fragmentation of the mindbodyspirit, in academia and beyond.

PREVENTING FRAGMENTATION

Drawing from the work of Women of Color who denounce and recount testimonios of violence and systemic oppression(2015, 148) documented in Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann and González's Presumed Incompetent (2012), Clelia Rodriguez's Decolonizing Academia (2018), and the 2014 Chicana/Latina Studies journal issue on institutional violence, we name the fragmentation of the mindbodyspirit, individualistic culture, epistemic violence, and foundational white supremacy in universities as elements that denote corrosiveness in academia. Some of the consequences of such violence in academic spaces are ingrained in values of competitiveness instead of solidarity and epistemic values that uplift and favor Eurocentric ways of knowing. For example, Rodríguez talks about the white gaze in academia, and how Indigenous and BIPOC knowledges are valued when they are {extracted} and regurgitated by white researchers, who convey this knowledge in a format that is palatable for accolades and the academic sphere. She writes "you need my opinion, my data, my story, my daily struggles to expose your brilliance. The presumption of your competence overshadows mine because your hands are dirty underneath your perfect manicure and sanitized gloves" (2018, 4). Herein, we recount our stories and make meaning of our lived experiences in academia recognizing that institutions of higher education in the US were not created for or by folks that look or have backgrounds similar to ours (Flores Carmona 2021). Yet, we recognize our privilege as documented individuals and how these interlocking identities play out in higher education. Hence, in the next sections we share about our process in retelling our testimonios through pláticas~testimonios (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016). We then share about our femtoring relationships and conclude by sharing how we braided our practices to arrive at what we term as femtoring (feminista mentoring) praxis.

THE POWER OF PLÁTICA~TESTIMONIO

Adopting a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective in educational research is more than just adopting a theoretical lens, becoming familiar with the literature, learning corresponding methods, and

analyzing data. It embodies who we are and requires us to grapple with our activist-scholar role, embrace alternative ways of knowing, and confront those aspects of ourselves that render us the colonized or the perpetrator, particularly if we are working with marginalized communities (i.e., the immigrant, the queer, youth, and people of color), even if we are from these communities. (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016, 102)

Plática can be directly translated as "talk" or "chat," due to the informality attached to it, yet it is a practice that goes beyond chit chat; plática allows individuals to share space and reflexivity through a meaningful conversation and has its roots in family and community traditions; or what Delgado Bernal (2001) refers to as pedagogies of the home. Chicana/Latina scholars have carved a space in academia for this practice to be legitimized, as it centers on lived experiences. "Our family pláticas allow us to witness shared memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart us with a knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history" (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016, 99). This approach facilitates the recount and analysis of testimonio as it is a process of reciprocity and shared vulnerability (Flores Carmona, Hamzeh, Bejarano, Sanchez and Ashmawi 2018).

Testimonio as a methodology/pedagogy, allows individuals to divulge their experiences with marginalization and oppression (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012; Calderon-Berumen and Espinosa Dulanto 2020; The Latina Feminist Group 2001). The Latina Feminist group proposed the exchange of testimonios between/among women in academia to co-construct their conocimiento [knowledge] as a "powerful method for feminist research praxis" (Anzaldúa 2005, 3). As colleagues who recount our experiences with the challenges we face as educators, we have been co-constructing knowledge in multiple ways and this is connected to our consciousness raising and awareness—essential in our feminista mentoring praxis.

Although we are situated in different educational environments, geographical locations, and sociopolitical realities, our conversations are often filled with recounts of interactions with students, our identity and positionality in our community, and the role of critical-self reflexivity. Our confianza [trust] facilitates vulnerability and space for each other to share fragments of our testimonio and make meaning together. Sharing has also informed and bridged our practice across institutional and metaphorical borders, and we continue to theorize from the flesh (Moraga 2015)—weaving our collective trenza of conocimiento with the intention and goal of healing. Yet, Anzaldúa reminds us that, "With the constant messages of the dominant culture, we have a struggle with the many borders we must cross" (2012, 200).

INSTITUTIONAL AND METAPHORICAL BORDERS

"The body speaks in languages left unread. Indeed, the body encodes the agravios, the assaults that sometimes lead to numbness and alienation, to depression and despair, to a desire for an endless night of sleep." (The Latina Feminist Group 2022, 263)

Our bodies have kept the record of exhaustive work in academia and scrutiny of our work. Our bodies physically react to the buildup of stress and heaviness that come with working in institutions

that dwell on capitalism and patriarchy. We have gotten sick and depressed, we have fallen into the rabbit hole of constantly wondering whether we are good enough, measuring ourselves with the metrics of academia. We reflect on the complexities of working and writing together at times of chaos and loss, in which each one of us is facing challenges related to work, immigration, health, and family. We talk over Zoom about how our responsibilities and workload have kept us away from our family and how we can hear inbox notifications, nonstop. Flooding emails from people demanding time and space from us, demanding a space in our agenda as our Outlook calendar is an open window to our availability. We talk about the borders that we are often trying to cross, how we need to repackage our language and make it palatable for students, colleagues, and supervisors. We struggle just by thinking, what would happen when and if we say "no"?

No, I will not take on your DEI workload.

No, I will not be your token employee.

No, I will not share my philosophy statement so that you can extract from it instead of developing your own.

No, I will not review the "cultural component" of your article and tell you what you are missing.

No, I will not change my language and writing to adjust to your comfort levels.

No, I don't think it is a good idea to invite and pay a "deconstructed" white man to take my class so he can convince white students to examine their racism.

No, you are not culturally responsive and anti-racist because you hired me, a white Latina.

No, I will not take notes while you direct and set the tone for this meeting.

No, I will not be in charge of the technical aspects of this meeting.

No, I will not teach your class for free.

No, your white students don't need a water break after listening to a presentation about ableism and white supremacy.

No, I don't want to serve in the doctoral committee of your bigoted student who claims to have a target on his back because he is a white man.

No, I am not interested in reviewing the research proposal of your student unwilling to examine their white savior complex.

No, I am not interested in leading your "culturally sensitive growth mindset" workshop.

No, your "kindness" is not enough.

When we attempt to cross these institutional borders, we are labeled as problematic; suddenly all the hype about our presence turns into an issue, una piedrita en el zapato (Flores Carmona and Rosenberg 2021). Our permanence and sense of belonging at the institution is not tangible; we are subject to complicity and adaptability. Oftentimes, we have said yes because we weigh the consequences of the white gaze, of being perceived as lazy, not being team players, or collegial. When will it be good enough? We were socialized and trained to say yes and to not speak up. Accountability is part of our femtoring relationship, and in our conversations, we remind each other of the importance of saying no, not only for ourselves, but for the students we work with.

The institutions we work at, both academia (Judith and Río) and formerly in corporate EdTech (Claudia) dwell in white supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. hooks (1986) refers to these

as interlocking systems of domination. By stating this, we recognize our own role and complicity in colonial practices, as they also live ingrained within us. We are accustomed to attributing value to canons of perfection and productivity that have been historically demanded from us. We too, embody privilege in multiple ways related to race and skin color, socioeconomic status, language, documented status, and professional power at our institutions. Yet, we have experienced the fragmentation of our mindbodyspirit. Patricia Williams (1987) terms this as spirit murdering. In her work, Williams sheds light on the oppressive and violent impacts of racism and white supremacy, particularly for/on Black women. As Latine scholars, we understand the complexities and different realities that we face in academia, as well as the privileges we hold. Williams' work and Tijerina Revilla's conceptualization of spirit protectors support our framing for how our experiences and our testimonios led us to define our femtoring praxis grounded in feminist thought and practice.

Someone who enacts femtoring understands that "to end patriarchy (another way of naming institutionalized sexism) we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action." (hooks 2000, ix) Working in higher education, for Río and Judith, means that we will be examined through the white gaze because institutions expect us to serve excessively and volunteer in spaces where we are expected to educate colleagues who supposedly hold horizontal relationships with us.

We have experienced alienation from colleagues who only want us in their spaces when we are serving them, enriching their knowledge, being their tokens. The three of us have been pushed to engage in reverse mentoring, to educate supervisors and individuals with power over us on issues that connect to our identity and work. We are asked to dumb down our work and present it as palatable and appeasing (Stewart 2017). Engaging in pláticas has allowed us to share fragments of our testimonio, and to hold space for each other's knowledge, experience, concerns, and pain (Flores Carmona et al. 2018). At different points in our careers, we have been asked to re-package our knowledge, to re-write research proposals, and to explain the relevance and validity of testimonio in academia to white colleagues. Committee members, and individuals who hold some sort of control over our transition in promotion, doctoral defense committees, and other constraining systems in higher education.

OUR JOURNEY: TRENZA/BRAID OF FEMTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Education, research, and other scholarly traditions have emerged from or been framed by debates relating to human nature. The separation between mind and body, the investing of a human person with a soul, a psyche and a consciousness, the distinction between sense and reason, definitions of human virtue and morality, are cultural constructs. (Smith 2013, 50)

We, Claudia and Río, met each other during our doctoral program at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in the US Southwest; we were at different stages of dissertating. Both of us had worked with Judith—Claudia's Chair and my dissertation committee member. We both employed testimonio methodology. Unfortunately, and even at HSIs, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and some

academics refuse to regard this approach as a valid/legitimate methodological and pedagogical tool. Although the work we conducted was qualitative in nature, testimonio methodology and Chicana/Latina frameworks were often questioned and contested by faculty members and review board members. We were asked to overly explain testimonio and to "make a case" for its worth in the academic world. We had to defend testimonio and decision-making for employing this work instead of "narrative inquiry" or "phenomenology." We were pushed to complement our work with qualitative "objective" scientific methodologies that were valid to their gaze and understandings.

Enrolling in Judith's multiple qualitative inquiry courses and culturally responsive education classes opened a world of possibilities for us. In these classes, we were presented with the work of Chicana/Latina scholars who paved the way for this type of work to transgress the rigid canons of research and education. Learning about testimonio methodology allowed the three of us to continue writing our testimonios, draw from our lived experience and incorporate critical self-reflection into our framework as researchers and educators. These interactions also strengthened our connections as co-collaborators, as femtors to and with each other, and centered lived experiences shared via pláticas that led to us divulging testimonios. More importantly, we became sister-colleagues that support one another and inspire each other to not merely survive but thrive in academia.

THE SISTERHOOD OF SURVIVAL: CLAUDIA'S TESTIMONIO

When I first entered the doctorate, I was assigned an advisor whose mistreatment left me perplexed. What I thought was an adequate relationship became an uncomfortable and humiliating one that left me confused and disheartened. By name the HSI I attended was meant to serve me, a first-generation Mexicana-Americana. Instead, I felt violated by her seething words and dislike of me. I kept my head down and followed the program requirements—eventually she left the university. I remained without an advisor for some time until finally seeking out Judith. I was startled by her genuine curiosity and heartfelt responses to my experiences as I kind of stumbled my way through the doctorate.

In my early years in the program, I lost my father to cancer and less than two years after, my mother left her physical body, too. The following year, a dear tío passed and my dear father-in-law with whom my wife, our son and I lived—also died. I became ill with some autoimmune issues. Throughout the doctoral journey, I experienced more loss with the passing of more family members and a dear friend. I had been ready to quit and without the aid and support of a femtor, not only would my work remain hidden but I would be lost. I am reminded that indeed, "nadie lo hace sola" (Flores Carmona 2019) and Río shed light on my doctoral journey, offering their sharp mind and open heart to read me as they read my work. I could be honest and open, healing while revealing.

We are all survivors of something! Namely the colonization of the mindbodyspirit and the frequent microaggressions (Delgado and Stefanic 2013) to the macro level and to our health. Whether it's the creation of my queer family or the expectations of who or what I will become based on my location [the Borderland] and gender. I employ Anzaldúan (2015) thought and the epistemology

of the imagination she describes with the concept of "idear" in order to read and write myself into being. I created my autohistoria teoría (Keating & Anzaldúa, 2015), the blending of cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling and poetics towards transformation, healing, and the reconciliation of my fragmented Self. This was a direct result of the femtoring relationships with Judith and Río.

My testimonio would not have been possible without the pláticas that began with Judith who then created/fostered/supported/held a beautiful space for Río and I to process as we worked to unravel and reconcile our research experiences in our doctoral programs. I was in awe of both of them and marveled at my inclusion. Our pláticas facilitated my writing process which Anzaldúa described as, "...a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, working from the inside out" (Anzaldúa 2015, 6).

MY MOTHER'S SOBREVIVENCIA AND BORDER CROSSING

As I connected more deeply with Judith and Río, I felt more in tune with my cultural intuition and the pedagogies of the home I could now name (Delgado Bernal 1998; 2001). Our pláticas reminded me of the many moments my tías and precious mother had in which they shared consejos regarding their children, their husbands, business matters and various family affairs including the acquisition of the "very important papeles" they often spoke of. Since my mother had made the crossing to el Norte at an early age, she was the guiding force for many. These papeles: green cards, visas, citizenship, I knew early in life held a value my mother understood and facilitated the procurement for so many family members. As I lingered and listened, I learned that women in my life had a source of power that was infinite and expansive and that my elders carried this knowledge not only in their minds but in their aching huesos. Their feet also carried this knowledge from years of standing at the stove, carrying and soothing babies, chasing children, working the land, shaping and walking rows of earth with seeds that would become family meals. This cultural knowledge imparted through these pláticas (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016) revolved around the deep connections my tías and mother made during her lifetime of the relationships with each individual and collective group. I felt the collective responsibility my mother navigated. I learned the familial responsibilities and obligations at an early age that the women in my life took charge of. The traditions of my lived experience could be appreciated in a new light; I felt a greater pride I knew was missing.

I am reflecting deeply on my doctoral journey as I write this and recall the moment of awakening when first reading from Telling to Live (2001). It was shocking and painful to read the words and to be invited to unearth my own papelitos guardados. I think about the pláticas Judith carved out time for and patiently walked with me on my journey, oftentimes carrying me. I did not know I could reveal what I held in my mind and body. My femtor, Judith, my professor, advisor and confidant acknowledged me in an unexpected way. These pláticas became treasured moments where the words of my story jumped out of my mouth before I could censor them. We would meet, share a moment to enjoy a meal and talk. Our pláticas centered around my research interests and wonderings but they were intensely personal moments that always left me feeling surprised; why

does this incredible scholar even care about me and my story? As I came to learn about qualitative research and the importance of studying the lived experience, I began to formulate new ideas for research based on my own teaching experiences; I was granted permission to connect on a personal level. Making my lived experience the focal point of my work in my doctoral program generated such an unsettling response in me. So, as I unearthed and opened and read my papelitos guardados, I became bound to continue to resolve the unresolved as my dear femtor taught me.

I drank eagerly from the well of knowledge Anzaldúa offered, the invitation granted through my dear femtor, Judith. The written words, I felt, were written for me that included the body, the mind, the spirit seared through my cerebro to forge the cohesion of the mindbodyspirit that mySelf needed. Anzaldúa allowed for the body and the spirit to be part of the learning journey of the doctorate. I found healing in naming the silencing I had experienced and was able to reconcile and heal mySelf through my autohistoria teoría (Anzaldúa 2015). I learned of the seven stages of conocimiento, morphing and shedding my skin, and relying on the Coyolxauhqui Imperative to heal (Anzaldúa 2013). I entered into Nepantla, the liminal and transformative site to write, to discover, and perceive to "produce(s) knowledge and conocimiento [insight]" (1) guided by the Coyolxauhqui imperative, "...calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us. (Keating and Anzaldúa 2015, 2). The pieces of my heart I leave at my parents' grave, I collect and carry as I continue to work to reconcile and reclaim mySelf continuously through my testimonio. At NWSA, I shared images to describe my doctoral journey; shards of glass in a whirlwind to bring to mind the brokenness I felt by reliving experiences I unraveled. I reclaimed mySelf through my testimonio. Another image shared was that of the Kintsugi in which the artistic philosophy of using gold to fill in broken pieces of pottery can be understood as the healing power of the re-membering I was enacting.

RÍO: GETTING THROUGH THE FOREST

Academia has given me understanding, language, and skills. However, I have also experienced harm and violence. I rarely questioned academia's expectation of me changing, getting better, producing more, becoming more fluent, or working on my English to make it more palatable for students and colleagues. I filled my schedule with activities, projects, writing, and teaching because I fell into the rabbit hole of endless tasks to prove my worth to my committee members. I did exactly what the institution expected and overworked myself. My family time was almost non-existent. Whichever time I had for my family, friends, and community was clouded by anxiety and guilt. I had learned how to quantify my worth in terms of time and productivity using the metrics of academia. Halfway through my doctoral journey, I collapsed. As I spoke about this at NWSA, I shared the image of a foggy forest, one in which I felt lost and as I was walking around in circles. I imploded during graduate school and became severely depressed. The disconnect from my family and ill father was unbearable.

Claudia and I met while simultaneously writing ourselves and piecing our testimonio together. We spoke about the challenges we encountered working towards our degrees while struggling with our mental health and the systemic barriers in front of us. Because of the confianza environment

that we co-created, we were able to share our stories, talk about our lived experiences inside and outside the university, specifically as they informed our testimonio work. We talked and theorized from the flesh (Moraga 2015), named our pain as it impacted our work in higher education. In this relationship, we cultivated solidarity. Along with our femtor Judith, we read each other's work, listened to each other's challenges, discussed very much-needed boundaries between our time and the university. The three of us were working on our writing, and although these were different projects, we were able to find intersecting themes and learn from each other's approaches to Critical Race Feminista epistemologies. Judith was one of my professors and committee members. Our pláticas were, and still are, a breath of fresh air for me during this journey. Her pedagogy pushed me to unlearn and commit to self-reflective practice. Our femtoring relationship continued beyond the graduate student-professor institutional bond and through my transitions into academia as a professor.

Judith and I had shared about the displays of "brotherhood" and white supremacy in one of my graduate courses while working at a "liberal" predominantly white school. On multiple occasions, my students expressed their resistance towards readings that shed light on systemic violence, white rage, privilege, and power. Some examples included statements such as "I feel like I am walking on eggshells," (when talking about race and racism), "I am a man of faith, but also a mandated reporter of the law" (while talking about immigration and undocumented students and their families, "I am hesitant to share my thoughts, but when I voice them I am talking to you, my brother," (a white man addressing another cisgender white man in the Zoom call while having a conversation on identity and situatedness). These rants and comments appeared in our discussion boards, group discussions, and throughout the assignments. "It is your class; take it back," those were Judith's words during one of our pláticas regarding this taxing course. Judith's advice did not allude to power dynamics or authoritarianism—that places the instructor as the sole decision-maker but to the relevance of pushing students to think beyond their comfort and, most importantly, to identify when and how whiteness is weaponized. My femtor sister-colegas generously shared their valuable time.

In collaboration and solidarity, we processed and supported each other, as García-Peña describes as "accompaniment" or "acompañamiento" which challenges the canons of isolation and competitiveness in an institution. Instead, acompañamiento "relates to the idea that social change is a process that is not given but emerges from the people" (2022, 73). Accompaniment allowed space to share and listen through each scenario, process, share similar experiences and ways in which we have interrupted racism, microaggressions, and white rage in our practice. We processed together then and continue to do so now. Following Judith's example, the focus of the class and the priority of the work had to be equity, and of course, the Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other students of Color that were in the space, and who were doing critical work.

JUDITH'S GENEALOGY OF EMPOWERMENT

I can trace my "genealogy of empowerment" (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, 25) to matriarchs in my family: my mother, who was the first to come to the United States in 1985, and my

grandmother, a strong mujer who was widowed by age 40. I am a first-generation student and scholar. I know that institutions of higher education in the United States were not created for or by folx that looked like the three of us. On the contrary, higher education has been created for and by white elite men. Policies and practices that are the foundation of higher education go against the very concept of being feministas, being collaborative, being a collective. These practices and the foundation of higher education also is contradictory to what Hispanic-serving alludes to—even at HSIs we are not able to center our epistemologies and pedagogies.

Nadie lo hace sola/nobody does it alone, and Río and Claudia have been as much my teachers and femtors as I have been theirs. We have stood up against the oppressive systems that have tried to literally erase us from particular academic spaces—spaces that have tried to push us out of academia. You have read Río and Claudia's testimonios and they have given me too much credit. It is learners like them who give me strength to fight back, to speak up, to speak back. Río with their fierce and profound intellect and Claudia with her powerful and sharp words—they have no idea of how much I have learned from them. Gracias. Your pain and intellect, your insecurities and fierceness—all melded together in your outstanding dissertations and in your current roles as administrator and pedagogue. Even though both of you struggled to complete your doctoral degrees—your dissertations are a testament, a testimonio itself. A testimonio of overcoming epistemic racism and of attempted epistemicide (Boaventura de Sousa 2005). You survived and thrived.

Our femtoring pláticas and connections have sustained our mindbodyspirits. It is amigues, colleagues like you who have femtored and empowered me along our respective educational trajectories. This includes our learning from the sisterhood and femtoring reflected in anthologies such as Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios (The Latina Feminist Group 2001) and Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, and Villenas 2006). It is also about creating and nurturing colectivas that enact a feminista praxis—like the national organization Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS). In critically reflecting on our encuentros and pláticas, we are each highlighting the essence of our femtoring, founded in strong sisterhood, reciprocal and intergenerational femtorship, and deep care for each other's feminista humanity (Burciaga and Tavares 2006). Your testimonios, Río and Claudia, remind me that even though the corrosiveness of academia has attempted to murder our spirits (Williams 1991), in every plática and testimonio sharing, we have created and sustained spaces that have allowed us to be our whole selves, mind, body, and spirit. Like the three strands needed to braid a beautiful trenza, the three of us are interconnected in a tight bond that will continue to grow and extend our genealogical femtoring tree—our genealogy of empowerment.

DISCUSSION: BRAIDING A FEMTORING FEMINISTA PRAXIS

It is critical to understand that femtoring does not mean helping each other to move up the ladder. Said practice is common and highly problematic; it already occurs among spaces in which white feminism predominates and the main goal of mentoring is limited to achieving power that

cisgender men hold, and to marginalizing individuals whose identities differ from the dominant groups. As we mentioned above, this practice also goes beyond the connection between two cisgender women as the femtoring should transgress the gender binary. Dr. Manal Hamzeh, one of our dear femtors talks about this in her lectures, femtoring too challenges colonial conceptions of gender (Personal Communication). Further, our understandings of femtoring do not equate uncritical approaches to "[cishet] women in positions of power." Instead, it pushes us to collectively question the power structures that minoritize and push non-dominant identities to the margins.

In a Eurocentric, male dominated space such as academia, femtoring relationships and practices work to undo power hierarchies and to put into practice a feminista politics. Femtoring, for us, has meant the development of relationships grounded on critical pedagogy, solidarity, accountability, and transformative practice. We exchange knowledge that has uplifted us when our mindbodyspirit has been shattered to pieces while identifying, naming, and challenging systemic violence. It has been an ongoing exercise of critical analysis and self-reflexivity whose scope must reach beyond personal gain or surviving and escalating ivory towers. "Like the trenza, when we are able to weave together our personal, professional, and communal identities we are often stronger and more complete" (Delgado Bernal 2008, 135).

THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF FEMTORING.

We highlight and uplift the pedagogical value of femtoring throughout our journey as sister colegas, spaces such as NWSA, and in this article. Our femtoring relationships have allowed us to share tools for survival in hostile environments—to share and show how to enact similar pedagogies. This is one way of enacting a femtoring praxis. With students of Color, we have open conversations acknowledging their whole selves and understanding that their lived experiences, like our own, are influenced by their identities and the power structures of higher education. Further, as Claudia mentions in her testimonio, the pedagogical scope of femtoring reaches beyond academic spaces and has permeated her work as an educator. Through femtoring, we can establish transformative pedagogies that challenge the dominant narratives in our work environments and community spaces.

Río and Judith's femtoring relationship has influenced their pedagogical approaches and engagement with Chicana/Latina feminista frameworks. They have been in each other's classrooms presenting our work and engaging with each other's learners, including pre-service teachers, students at the Honors College, and graduate students in the humanities. Not only have they shared their knowledge, but they have developed co-learning opportunities around testimonio methodology/pedagogy. For instance, co-designing and facilitating a workshop for community members from both sides of the Mexico-US border. This work presented an opportunity for both to think about trauma-informed considerations around testimonio work and generate several options and prompts open enough for participants to discuss their lived experience to the extent of their safety. The success and learning process that stems from our work permeates our pedagogies and work with students in higher education, specifically when we center on testimonio pedagogy.

SOLIDARITY.

Through pláticas, we offered support to each other during challenging times caused or exacerbated by the pressures of higher education. Platicar para sobrevivir. Claudia accurately names it as she cites Flores Carmona's emphasis on solidarity, "Nadie lo hace sola" (2019). Our femtoring relationships are grounded in solidarity, our understanding of each other's struggles even when our experiences are different. We hold space for each other and together make meaning of our experiences with systemic violence, microaggressions, struggle, grief, and loss. Our solidarity and dynamics allow us to enact and practice feminista politics, because as bell hooks writes, "there can be no such thing as 'power feminism' if the vision of power evoked is power gained through the exploitation and oppression of others" (2006, 6).

We understand and value our relationships beyond our "membership" to the institutions that employ us. Not working for the same institution does not impede us from connecting, collaborating, and supporting each other. For years, we have accompanied each other during challenging times related to our educational, academic, professional, and personal journeys. While academia wants to keep us isolated and divided (Burciaga and Tavares 2006), we build coalitions with each other and like-minded colleagues in order to resist.

ACCOUNTABILITY.

A relationship grounded in confianza and solidarity has allowed the three of us to hold each other accountable and share constructive criticism. Our shared trust allows us to have pláticas in which we share situations at work and openly embrace constructive criticism and feedback. However, it is important to note that we don't always agree. Because of the trust we have with each other—we can arrive at a teachable moment or to new understanding. Often, feedback stems from pointing out critical issues that we are overseeing or are clouded by our intersecting identities, positionality, or privilege. These pláticas allow us to grow as scholars, educators, and as community members. Said openness to grow and regard each other's feedback as an opportunity to unlearn has facilitated our connections with students and co-workers. That is, we can model femtoring and pedagogical approaches in horizontal relationships and dialogue, upholding this practice as key to our collective growth.

CONCLUSION: FEMTORING MOVES US TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS

A feminista femtoring praxis (or feminista mentoring) necessitates that we enact critical self-reflexivity to understand the power dynamics and challenge a top-down model of mentoring. The mentor-mentee dynamic usually alludes to the mentor being able to provide wisdom, knowledge, resources onto the mentee—usually a one-way relationship. The three of us argue that a feminista femtoring praxis is a reciprocal relationship. That is, through continued support and sharing of knowledge and resources, the order of authorship, the consejos imparted on the job market, on-going checking-in, and being there beyond "work" but connecting/merging the personal/professional/political. Re-telling our testimonio through pláticas has served us as a tool

to re-think our approaches to writing, teaching, and working in environments that center on education. Femtoring serves as the light for a journey wrought with highs and lows and sustenance to nourish the spirit. Femtoring runs through our roles in academia, education, and overall, our community. We also know that our consciousness raising and awareness is essential in our feminista mentoring praxis. As a result of femtoring, each one of us has transformed our praxis as we continue to learn from each other. Our solidarity allows us to remain connected with each other as we experience the heaviness of institutional violence in different ways, given our situatedness and positionality.

I, Claudia, learned to name my positionality, ground my feet in Nepantla (Anzaldúa 2001) as part of my epistemological understanding, and tap into my survivorship to tell my story for healing and reclamation. What femtoring offers is comfort, a space where I am uplifted in bodymindspirit to maintain what I call "my secret agency" that I enacted in the corporate world of EdTech and continue to do so in my current work at an HSI. The parallels of our lives while I worked in EdTech and while my colega-amigas are doing what I refer to as "the real work" in academia are that we deal with systems that rely on our bodies and minds to profit from. I am often conflicted in the workspace of education as a product; together we reflect on who benefits from our critical knowledge.

I, Río, learned to develop and establish a teaching philosophy grounded in Chicana/Latina epistemologies (del Alba Acevedo 2001). Namely, establishing congruency and critical self-reflection; I learned it from my femtors. Unlearning and questioning my practice and my ideologies' roots also stem from my relationship with my sister-colegas. Every plática is an opportunity to unlearn and unpack; our trusting relationships facilitate our communication without the rigid filters of formality that exist in higher education spaces. That is, the norms developed by and for white men. Femtoring and connectedness with my sister-colegas energizes me to engage in work that challenges Eurocentric canons and that puts students of color at the center of teaching, curriculum, and programming. My femtors have taught me to show up for myself and my students in ways that center their epistemologies and lived experiences. Through this collaborative work, we continue to learn about different ways to remove barriers in our pedagogy and presence at these institutions.

There is a saying in Spanish, "la estudiante superó a la maestra/the student has surpassed the teacher" and I, Judith, truly believe that. Both Río and Claudia have expanded on testimonio work and praxis. They continuously teach me that being critically self-reflexive must be accompanied by action. Through their writing they teach me about vulnerability as a site of resistance and empowerment. Our reciprocal feminista femtoring praxis is about telling to heal and theorizing from the flesh (Moraga 2015). As colega-amigas we bear witness together in academia and beyond.

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I See You: A Dual Testimonio of The Latina Doctoral Experience

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Abstract

This article is a dual testimonio of the doctoral experiences of two Latina doctoral candidates. It focuses on the context of the Hispanic community and the lack of Hispanic female representation in academia. It examines the influence of colonialism, sexism, racism, and socioeconomic disadvantages throughout their journey. These testimonios are a raw reflection of the struggle as a female, academic scholar, and human being within a boxed academic society.

Keywords

Latina, Hispanic Culture, Academia, Testimonio

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Introduction and Background of Key Latina Concepts

The journey of completing a doctorate degree is filled with highs, lows, and many twists and turns. A Latina scholar's journey is nothing less but is a very different experience from those of her peers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) advises women account for 47% of the employed population over the age of 16 years old, of that only 18% identify as Hispanic or Latino/a. Statistically, full-time academic faculty of black or Hispanic descent make up 3% of the total faculty population, and if broken down by gender Hispanic females only make up less than 1% of full-time professor positions in the United States (NCES, 2020, 1). The lack of female and Hispanic representation, however, has not been a deterrent for us Latina scholars to pursue a doctorate degree. Our unique experiences come together for a greater success model within the embodiment of our Hispanic community and culture.

Hispanic Community

Hispanic culture is a vast mix of individuals from Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central or South America, Cuba, or other cultures where decedents recognize Spanish heritage or origins (U.S. Census, 2020). It is a unique blend of dialect, food, dance, and religion to which each region of "Hispanic" is different but similar. Sadly, it is still a culture with many social injustices, educational flaws, and socioeconomic hardships. In the United States, there is a higher percentage of Hispanics living at or below the poverty line than non-Hispanic Whites (Lisotto & Martin, 2021, 19). The socioeconomic hardships were only amplified by the recent COVID-19 pandemic as 19% of Hispanics were not covered by health insurance (Lisotto & Martin, 2021, 19). The combination of 24% of Hispanics working in the service industry, food insecurity and a high prevalence to type 2 diabetes among other illnesses further increased the vulnerability of this community to COVID-19 exposure (Lisotto & Martin, 2021, 19-20). The Hispanic community, however, remains strong in its identity and familial roots.

Education Level of Hispanic Female Students

When it comes to education, 82% of Hispanics stated having a college degree helps their overall well-being living in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2021). While education is proven to be a window to new and/or better career and economic opportunities it is still a path many Latinas juggle in addition to numerous personal obligations (i.e., spouse, children, careers, and extended family). The expectation of what a graduate degree can do for a Latina is endless, but the academic expectations can become overwhelming, dreadful, and stress-inducing. Even within the 21st century, there is a stunningly low female scholar population, to which only 3% of college faculty self-identify as Latina (Pew Research Center, 2021). Mirror images like ourselves are hard to come by in academia as a student or even a future faculty member.

Testimonios Background

Family, respect, religion, and gender roles are important values held in many Hispanic households that are influential in the doctoral journey (Corona, et al., 2016, 63). Though every educational journey is different, there are common themes that continue to emerge for Hispanic/Latina women as they struggle with living in between the worlds of culture and academia. The five themes that emerged in a 2020 testimonial study of Latina doctoral students include the value of family, impact on mental health, navigating the ivory tower, education as resistance, and healing (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020, 379). These themes within familial dynamics played a role in balancing support, taking brave steps towards education, and ignoring cultural judgment when pushing against cultural gender roles (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020, 382-383). Partaking and completing the doctoral journey, according to the participants, provided the strength needed to push doors of opportunity open through resisting the sociopolitical rhetoric (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020, 385).

THESE ARE OUR TESTIMONIOS:

I am a woman who has always been immersed in my Puerto Rican culture. I grew up to be a first-generation mainland Puerto Rican female which has never been a walk in the parqué. The experience of my identity is one influenced by salsa music and piqué on our breakfast table "normal" things in my Abuelita's haven where my family found refuge. While my physical features are light and euro-centric, the olive tone in my pigmentation is confusing to some or a questionable act to others. I am lucky, I have not experienced the extreme racial injustices of others in my culture who find their pigmentation a few shades different. Tainó, African, and Spanish run in my blood; our culture is alive yet hanging on by a thread. The Tainó culture is something that is still very much alive in the people of Puerto Rico. This still "colony" of land is our connection, it embodies us and has its own soul, as I look to Puerto Rico, I feel ways of knowing, we as humans, are connected through our surviving land. My work ethic connects me to colonialism while the indigenous side of surviving and "keeping your family alive" is harbored in my bloodline. El Tainó found ways to survive and adapt, I too have used their strength not to be the "statistic" I was once told I would become. The influences of mi Abuela and mi Madré are generational struggles I will not carry forward. As I forge my own way through a doctoral program meant for the "mans" world, colorless and dated, you find me. The young girl who was surrounded by struggles, but with a dream. A dream which has carried me to be more, do more, help more! The chains of oppression, egocentrism, racism, colonialism, sexism, and ageism are my drive to succeed in education and life. I resist these by using my gifts to teach financial literacy, reminding women of color they have power and should know their worth, and are able contributors to society. I am educated despite blatant racism; my eyes could not recognize as a young girl. I use my Tainá, Puerto Rican strength to remove the statistical influences that have surrounded the females in my family for generations. I use myself as the strongest weapon. I must change my own destiny. I do not see nor fit the "box" created for me, I see me a Latina, a Tainá, and "erudité" of knowledge. En mi, I see mi Madre and my Abuelita y mis amigas.

Raised on the west side of San Antonio, the s instead of a z in my maiden name are very important identifiers to this Latina with a "torn identity." An identity seeded in the historical context of the familiarity of San Antonio and daring to venture out. Always, fully aware if "I do not work hard, I will wind up back there." Torn between finding myself in two worlds, leaving my home to be confronted with "bad feedback," people thinking I am better, marrying into a different world of "bougie" and yet still not belonging. The deeply seeded generational strive for wanting better and more held on by the dreams of my maternal grandfather who uprooted my family for the American dream which I hold "reverent and close to my heart." Like my futuristic grandfather, I never look back, I look and learn. I pursue a Doctorate for "better opportunities in my career and in life." My doctoral journey is fogged by imposter syndrome. I am not a "stupid Mexican." A racist encounter in my early 20s remains the fire that ignited my desire to never have someone call me stupid again. My second racist encounter happened while shopping, mistaken for an employee by an Anglo woman with two young impressionable children. I told her I did not work there, as she stated, I looked like I should while walking away with a smirk. These experiences were specks in the rearview as women like Tia Rita showed me. Tia Rita, my 3rd cousin, was educated, with striking beauty, and wealthy. She, too, had made it out of society's "box" and gave off the impression she was free. Education for me meant freedom and access to living comfortably. Though I saw freedom in my Tia Rita, I also saw freedom in my grandparents. Though they never left the west side, they had freedom through their hard work and multiple retirement pensions. They lived a simple and satisfying life with the same 1972 suburban. Even if, I changed my name to my husband's Anglo-sounding name from my Hispanic name ending in s, it is my grandpa's work ethic that still drives me. It is the Anglo name that, unfortunately, gives me a bit more respect. My olive pigmentation, though not dark, still plays a decisive role in society. My ancestry and bloodline are guides, healers, and protectors in my journey. As I look to my ancestors for guidance and believe the younger generation has knowledge also. Comparably, the last two years of my doctoral journey I have experienced invisibility and microaggressions. As my Hispanic serving doctoral institution has a predominately white board, the shifting to silence has occurred. This shift is a prime example of how colonialism and imperialism are reshaping my institution from a primarily Hispanic community to a white impressionist. To resist colonialism, we must remember "we cannot do the big things until you do small things." Focus on "meaningful research" that "actually makes a difference." As older generations pass away it is important to keep cultural traditions alive. Like the smell of warm tortillas as you walk through the door, speaking Spanish, and bringing to fruition the dreams of our ancestors.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a Doctora is a combination and transcendence of connecting our two worlds: academia and culture. The iniquities of social injustice, prejudice, and those stereotypes are generational curses from which we have chosen to break free. The indigenous ways of knowing are felt through

the spirits of our ancestors to whom fewer opportunities were afforded. We are two women who have worked harder than some to be in the competitive academic ring. Two who were supposed to be a statistic or write off because of sex, race, pigment, and socioeconomics of our cultural identity. Two who identify as different, but with others like us. In future studies, there is still significant work to be done within the world of Latina Academic scholarship. The truth is society has taught women we are not meant to succeed. We Latinas have joined the resistance to the larger sociopolitical climate and rhetoric against minorities in the United States" and push those doors open for ourselves and others. (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020, 385).

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THE DECOLONIAL OFFERINGS OF COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY WITH THE NAHUI OLLIN

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ABSTRACT

Our stories do not speak for everyone, and they were never intended to. However, weaving our stories adds strength and weight to reclaiming the knowledge and ways of being that colonization sought to destroy. We used collaborative autoethnography (CAE) because it strengthens the power of a single story by weaving it with others to cultivate their medicine (Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 2016). When used with a decolonial framework, CAE can disrupt settler colonial logics and whiteness (Davalos 2021). Additionally, CAE with a decolonial framework challenges hegemonic power structures by disrupting dominant ideologies and power differentials in research as well as by reclaiming our generative knowledge with the land (Davalos 2021).

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Three women from different colonized lands in Latin America embarked on creating a CAE to explore what our stories as revolutionary community organizers can offer ethnic studies educators who struggle to bring this work into schools. Emily, the Xicana researcher in Arizona, began attending virtual popular education classes offered by a revolutionary organization in Florida during the Uprisings in the summer of 2020. That is where she connected with Valentina, the revolutionary organizer from Chile and Palestine, as she educated people on revolutionary work throughout Latin America. At the same time, Emily was learning from other Latin American revolutionary organizations and met Micaela, the researcher with Afro-Indigenous Colombian roots, who lives in New Jersey. Micaela was facilitating restorative conversations with people in Colombia, New Jersey, London, West Virginia, and Arizona after a rupture happened in two sister organizations. Emily brought the three of us together to create a CAE with a decolonial framework for her dissertation. We knew the lessons we gathered through our experiences as organizers had something to offer, but we did not know what collectively analyzing our stories with the medicine of the *Nahui Ollin* would offer us in reclaiming our power.

We used CAE to disrupt the dominant ideologies of objectivity, neutrality, and individualism (Solórzano and Yosso 2002; Yosso 2006). We also used CAE to disrupt hegemonic power structures with the use of power sharing through collective decision-making and collective data analysis (Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 2016). We drew from a decolonial framework of the *Nahui Ollin* (a.k.a. the four movements in the Aztec Calendar) to guide our stories by rooting us to the medicine of the earth. The Xicana researcher had been studying the powerful work of the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in Tucson, Arizona (1998-2010). The MAS program designed their curriculum with the medicine of the *Nahui Ollin*. As the central space of the Mexica/Aztec calendar, *Tonalmachiotl*, the *Nahui Ollin* encompasses the four movements of critical self-reflection, precious and beautiful knowledge, the will to act, and transformation (Acosta 2007; Arce 2016; Arce and Fernández 2009; Villanueva 2013). Importantly, different *danza*[i] groups across Turtle Island have variations in the *Nahui Ollin* in regard to the colors and directions associated with the four movements. The MAS Program worked with the *Calpolli Teoxicalli*, "an Indigenous community of several families who self-identify as *Tlamanalca*-Indigenous peoples of Tucson" (Arce and Fernández 2009). Rodriguez described the *Nahui Ollin* as an ethical map that carries a precolonial understanding of how to “be more equitable, accountable, and aware when engaging others in society” (2019, 29). The creators of the MAS program used the *Nahui Ollin* to guide their curriculum, and we used the *Nahui Ollin* to cultivate the offerings of our stories as revolutionary community organizers committed to the struggle for Black liberation and decolonization.

OUR STORIES

VALENTINA'S

Valentina's story begins with her roots in Chile after her mother's family had been forced to leave Palestine because of the British occupation and then the violent, settler-colonial project of Israel. Chile carries the memories of her childhood and her father's family. The myth of better

opportunities in the American dream led her family to migrate to Florida giving up professions, careers, and the land they were going to build a home on to be forced into low-wage, hourly work. Leaving Chile created a big gap between her connection to her family and to her Palestinian roots. Migrating to the US fostered a sense of not belonging because of being too Americanized to her family in Chile and here in the US not being American because of Chilean and Palestinian roots. Her work as an organizer began with an abolitionist organization, and her work doing court watch exposed her to how injustices in the legal system trap working-class, racialized communities. Her political education began by learning about mass incarceration and expanded to understand the connection between Black and Palestinian struggles. The pandemic amplified her education and organizing by helping with a service site for the unsheltered people of Miami, who have been significantly impacted by COVID and neglected by the County's Homeless Trust. People's tents were being destroyed without access to shelters, no access to PPE, and no food assistance all while COVID and police were attacking and murdering people. Beyond the work in the streets, she also worked with comrades to offer virtual political education classes. Contributing to a CAE project with the *Nahui Ollin* offered her a sense of belonging through reflecting on her roots and story.

MICAELA'S

Micaela's story was written during her unexpected, extended visit to her homeland of Cartagena, Colombia. She is an Afro-Indigenous Colombian woman who exudes an intuitive strength. She begins her story in reflection of how the culmination of the threads of her work have produced the tapestry that roots her to revolution. Her abuela and mama taught her about her mestiza roots. She recognizes that the term has been used to weaponize anti-Blackness because of its relationship to whiteness, but she remembers the validation and empowerment it offered her in embracing the vibrancy of her multifaceted roots. As an Afro-Indigenous Colombian woman born in the United States, she experienced never fully being Black in the North, and always feeling fully Black in the South. Her paternal abuelo began the migration to the United States, and after her father met her mother in Cartagena, he brought her family to their one-bedroom apartment in Union City, New Jersey. While her political education began as a first-generation college student, the murder of Philando Castile brought her to apply the theory she had learned to her work in the streets. The pandemic also amplified her praxis as she jumped into action with other organizers to develop mutual aid for racialized communities. Creating a CAE forced her to not only shift her focus to reclaiming power but also to returning it to where it is due. It's not about passing the mic or speaking for people who are silenced. It's about creating space for others to reclaim their power through throwing off the shackles of colonization in the spirit of Palenque.[ii]

EMILY'S

Emily's story begins with the first record of her paternal roots in the area of El Paso, Texas when it was a part of México. She speaks to the merging of colonizer and colonized spurred by the de-Indigenization of México through the genocidal practices of the Spanish. The insidious hold of the Catholic Church led her family to homestead with 116 other Mexican families under the

regulations issued in 1827 by the Congress of the State of Chihuahua. Her story speaks to the intergenerational trauma passed down through 500 years of colonization. Her father's generation was barred from using their language in school and the first generation to marry white spouses. Emily traces her path towards organizing, which grew from her healing journey to reclaim the knowledge that had been severed through assimilation. Her organizing work began with a struggle to disrupt student housing developers from displacing a mostly undocumented community. Her revolutionary consciousness developed through organizing work with undocumented women who worked in hotels. As BLM began to take shape in 2014, she committed herself to the struggle for Black liberation and decolonization. The pandemic led to the crumbling of plans for a community center, but it also amplified mutual aid work to redistribute stimulus funds and to distribute food to undocumented families. Creating a CAE with the *Nahui Ollin* offered a homecoming that gave her permission to be who she is while also nourishing continual growth through transformation. Because her connection to her roots had been severed through assimilation within a system and structures not designed to include her but to continually remind her to be other than who she is, connecting to the medicine of the *Nahui Ollin* showed her the strength of her ways of knowing and being through cultivating her story in relationship with others.

COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Stories carry vital medicine for decolonization because colonized communities have preserved rich storytelling traditions through 500 years of colonization (Delgado 1990; Bernal 1998). Autoethnography challenges dominant ideologies of objectivity and neutrality by centering experience as a vital source of analysis and a foundation for the production of knowledge. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand a cultural experience (ethno)" (2011, para. 1). Autoethnography disrupts the binary between researcher and participant because people share and analyze their own stories rather than someone conducting research *on* them. Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez explained that autoethnographers "use data from their own life stories as situated in sociocultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of society through the unique lens of self" (2016, 18). By situating knowledge production within personal experience to reflect sociocultural phenomena, autoethnography disrupts feigned neutrality that masks the systems and structures of society that shape oppression (Yosso 2006). CAE expands the lens of self because researchers work together to collectively analyze and interpret data in order to understand sociocultural phenomena (Chang et al. 2016). Through weaving our stories and integrating collective analysis, CAE offers "a unique synergy and harmony that autoethnographers cannot attain in isolation" (Chang et al. 2016, 24). The dialogic questioning in CAE along with collective data analysis produces knowledge that fundamentally disrupts objectivity, neutrality, and individualism.

In addition to collective data analysis and interpretation, CAE uses collective decision-making, which disrupts power differentials that are imposed with a distinction between researcher and participant; no single person has complete decision-making power. Collaboration in CAE

ranges from full collaboration in which all co-researchers take part in every aspect of the research process to partial collaboration. In partial collaboration, participation differs during the stages of writing, analysis, and interpretation (Chang et al. 2016). In our partial collaboration, Emily approached the other two after the research questions were determined and the research was approved by the university. In our collaborative autoethnography, we collectively created a shared writing prompt based on the four movements of the *Nahui Ollin*. We exchanged stories and then met to discuss common themes and distinctions. Due to time constraints, only one researcher conducted the coding and data analysis. We came together again for member-checking, to discuss the findings, and to collectively answer the research questions.

THE NAHUI OLLIN

CAE's pairing with a decolonial framework offers a means to disrupt settler colonial logics and whiteness while we reclaim the medicine that colonization has sought to destroy. The *Nahui Ollin* encompasses the four movements of *Tezcatlipoca* (critical self-reflection), *Quetzalcoatl* (precious and beautiful knowledge), *Huitzilopochtli* (the will to act), and *Xipe Totec* (transformation). Acosta maintained that the *Nahui Ollin* "emphasizes self-actualization and action to create a better community, a better world" (2007, 38). As a decolonial framework, the *Nahui Ollin* carries Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Villanueva emphasized that its medicine offers "an embodied experience of living Indigenous knowledge" (2013, 30). Through its use, we had the opportunity to reclaim our power with its medicine. Its medicine reinvigorated and nourished us in our work in service of Black liberation and decolonization.

Importantly, the principles of the *Nahui Ollin* are movements and are not static or unchanging; the movement creates space for decolonial cycles of transformation. The four movements of the *Nahui Ollin* carry "physical, spatial, scientific, and philosophical meanings" (Arce 2016, 31). Each of the four movements build upon each other; precious and beautiful knowledge builds on critical self-reflection, which is sustained through willpower, and the transformation of *Xipe Totec* encompasses each of the other movements. Moreover, this decolonial framework centers the medicine of nature to transform individuals and communities. Arce positioned the *Nahui Ollin* as a "map for strategic action" because it is "an epistemological tool that facilitates processes of resistance, decolonization, and rehumanization for Xicana/o-Mexicana/o people" (2016, 20). We used the medicine of the four movements to teach us what we need to know, how to connect, and how to use the information gained.

TEZCATLIPOCA

Tezcatlipoca corresponds to the element of earth and north, or *Mictlanpa*, and translates as the smoking mirror (Arce 2016; Villanueva 2013). Chicano elder, Tupac Enrique Acosta, described the smoking mirror as "a reflection, a moment of reconciliation of the past with the possibilities of the future—not a vision of light but an awareness of the shadow that is the smoke of light's passing. It is the 'smoking mirror' into which the individual, the family, the clan, the barrio, the tribe, and the nation must gaze into to acquire the sense of history that calls for liberation" (as cited in Arce 2016, 32). The medicine of *Tezcatlipoca* shows us that carrying a sense of history leads us to take

up the 500-year struggle for liberation. Arce (2016) explained that this critical reflection leads to regaining individual and communal historical memory. Regaining this memory takes discipline because, as Villanueva explained, "we must vigorously search within ourselves in silencing the distraction and obstacles in our lives in order to be warriors for our jente and justice" (2013, 32). Critical self-reflection is the initial transformative cycle within the larger transformative cycle of the *Nahui Ollin.*

Arce and Fernández described *Tezcatlipoca* as initiating a healing process when embraced in the process of storytelling. The authors maintain that *Tezcatlipoca* offers a "liberatory process of reconciliation through writing and sharing narratives" (2009, 21). CAE offers the opportunity to engage in a liberatory process of meeting *Tezcatlipoca* through collectively writing and sharing our stories. For this movement, our stories responded to the questions: Where is home? How do you think your idea of home has changed over the years? When I look in the mirror, what do I see? In our stories, the themes of home and family corresponded with the energy of *Tezcatlipoca* to illuminate the sacred nature of revolutionary organizing; it carries the intimacy of home and what is at stake in the revolutionary struggle against imperialism's destruction of homes and families. Our stories spoke to the complexities of physically being separated from our home, the trauma of colonization being associated with home, and the embrace of finding home in the revolutionary struggle.

Within the theme of family, our stories spoke to the strength of our multi-faceted roots nourishing us in the struggle as well as to the strength of our roots offering the vantage of *Nepantla*[iii] (between worlds) (Anzaldua 1987; Calderón, et al. 2012) as a tool of resistance we can draw from. The multifaceted nature of Micaela's roots as an Afro-Indigenous Colombian woman led Micaela to describe how Gloria Anzaldua's concept of *Nepantla* captures the experience of *ni de aquí, ni de allá,* existing neither here nor there, but rather the vantage and strength of being in between. Each of us mentioned having roots in multiple cultures and lands. Valentina reflects on her multifaceted roots in Chile and Palestine by recognizing the US will never be home because it actively destroys these roots through its imperialist warmongering. During our second meeting, we spoke more about her experience of being forced to silence and deny her Palestinian roots and told to only claim her Chilean roots. While both Micaela and Valentina highlighted the strength of these multifaceted roots, Emily's story shed light on when those roots are unable to nourish us when we lose connection. This lost connection can result in generational trauma being passed down through poisonous machinations of colonization. In connecting to the strength our roots offer, we reclaim ways of knowing and being that colonization has sought to destroy.

Our ancestral roots nourish our resistance, which commits us to the revolutionary struggle. While our interwoven stories provide a tapestry of offerings, our roots stem from very different places. Latinidad carries the potential to erase our orientation to the land as home. Severing this connection as a means of assimilation also severs us from Indigenous epistemology and ontology rooted in the land. Latinidad functions to mask the imperialism that forces people from the land of their ancestors and the vital knowledge contained therein. One researcher lives within 500 miles of the first written record of her paternal family while the other two are separated from their

homeland by oceans because of US imperialism. Under the label of Latina, the vitality of these roots is disregarded. Latinidad severs us from the roots of our ancestors when it racializes us to be the same. Culture, language, and land are places of strength that we draw from and carry with us. The medicine of critical self-reflection roots us to the land, our home, and Indigenous ways of knowing and being; severing that connection furthers the mission of US imperialism that claims we are all the same in its attempt to subordinate us by removing us from the land and the precious and beautiful knowledge of the feathered serpent, *Quetzalcoatl*.

QUETZALCOATL

Quetzalcoatl carries the energies of the air and the west, or *Cihuatlanpa*, and translates as the feathered serpent (Arce 2016; Villanueva 2013). The epistemological principle of *Quetzalcoatl* offered us the precious and beautiful knowledge of our ancestors, the land, and future liberatory possibilities. Arce explained that this precious and beautiful knowledge is a "merging of our critical self-reflection and the regaining of our collective memory with the obtaining of an awareness of knowledge (both historical and a contemporary understanding of our lived realities)" (2016, 33). This merging is a tool for developing critical consciousness, which is a crucial step towards liberation and community self-determination (Arce 2016). Berta-Ávila emphasized the aspect of choice when the medicine of precious and beautiful knowledge is offered. Berta-Ávila recognized that the choice to develop a critical consciousness "is a process of constant self-reflection. The easier path is to choose one of silence" (2003, 123). To illuminate the challenging path of developing critical consciousness, Berta-Ávila shared the wisdom of Indigenous Mexican elders with a creation story of Quetzalcoatl when he "had to make the decision to leave his people, the Mexicas" (122). He left them with this wisdom:

> I must go, but before I do, I want you to be prepared for what will come. You will face many struggles, but the hardest will be the loss of memory. As time goes by, who you are as a people, your traditions, your values, your language, will all be lost. This loss will cause pain and confusion, but don't despair, for the memory will come back. It will not be easy, many struggles will be endured, but slowly our people will begin to hear the drumbeat of their heart. The sound and feel of the drumbeat will be the signal to claim, that which had been lost so long ago. (122)

The drumbeat brings the embrace of the precious and beautiful knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and being as it calls us home. Arce stressed that the epistemological principle of *Quetzalcoatl* positions "students, their families, and their community [as] both bearers and creators of knowledge" (2016, 34). The combined nature of critical self-reflection and precious and beautiful knowledge offers a vantage to develop a radical imaginary (Stovall 2018) with a decolonial lens as we move towards Black liberation and decolonization.

The movement of *Quetzalcoatl*, the feathered serpent, carries the macro knowledge of flight as well as the embodied understanding of micro knowledge experienced through material

conditions. Tupac Enrique Acosta explained that "from the memory of our identity, the knowledge of our collective history, we draw the perspective that draws us to the contemporary reality" (as cited in Arce 2016, 32). The movement of precious and beautiful knowledge calls us home while guiding our steps forward. For the principle of *Quetzalcoatl*, we responded to the following questions: What radicalized you? When you first confronted the serpent, how did that transform your perspective? How does it differ inside institutions and outside institutions? What changed in macro and micro knowledge? During our first meeting, Micaela shared the insight she gained when she contemplated the energies of *Quetzalcoatl*: the colonizer's religion deemed the knowledge of the serpent as the original sin, but a decolonial framing embraces the knowledge of the serpent as precious and beautiful. This insight continues to offer medicine as we carry the intention to embrace the knowledge of the feathered serpent, which brings us home.

The embrace of the feathered serpent, *Quetzalcoatl*, developed our critical consciousness through the combined nature of study and organizing. Valentina was radicalized through the study of Black and Palestinian struggles while learning about Leila Khaled, Assata Shakur, and Claudia Jones. Valentina recognized that her struggles with reading and comprehension in white institutions were supported through collective study and showed her "the need to analyze economics and material conditions of the people through a historical lens" (Davalos 2021, 96). Micaela described moving from only studying theory to finding the courage to take up the risk entailed in organizing. After the trauma of Philando Castile's slaughter by police, Micaela explained, "his death and unjust treatment after his murder, turned my whole world upside down. It radicalized me. *En fin, nunca regresare*" (Davalos 2021, 103). Emily's embrace of the feathered serpent came at a time when she began learning from people with ancestors in Latin America and Africa, both inside and outside of white institutions. Her work in the community taught her that "the liberal approach of working within the legal parameters of an inequitable system reduces the struggle to individual injury. As a result, the structure remains in place without collective empowerment" (Davalos 2021, 116). Importantly, while the feathered serpent may have appeared in white institutions, our embrace and radicalization through embodied knowledge took place outside classroom walls where we were learning in community with others struggling for liberation.

HUITZILOPOCHTLI

Huitzilopochtli manifests as the will to act with the element of fire and the energy of the South, or *Huitzlampa* (Arce 2016; Villanueva 2013). *Huitzilopochtli*, the hummingbird to the left, locates the will to act in the place of our hearts not our heads (Arce 2016; Villanueva 2013). Tupac Enrique Acosta explained that our will to act begins "with the first breath taken by each newborn infant in the realization that this human life we are blessed with is a struggle requiring physical effort for survival. The exertion of this life-sustaining effort evolves into a discipline, a means of maximizing the energy resources available at the human command which in order to have their full effect must be synchronized with the natural cycles" (as cited in Arce 2016, 34). We carry the will to act from birth, and we sustain it when we embrace natural cycles. Arce (2016) adds that

Huitzilopochtli is also symbolic of the sun rising in the winter time. As the will to act, *Huitzilopochtli* develops conscientization through praxis with its integration of critical self-reflection, precious and beautiful knowledge, and the will to act (Berta-Ávila 2003). Reflection and knowledge are incomplete without action. Arce asserted that "the processes of reflection and obtaining and constructing knowledge [are] inadequate unless they [are] acted upon through direct individual, familial, and community action" (2016, 35). The hummingbird in the place of our hearts moves us to collectively analyze material conditions in order to transform them.

For this movement, we responded to the questions: What moves us to work in community with others to take up the revolutionary struggle and what keeps us going? The hummingbird has a 360 movement. Where is the hummingbird getting the willpower from and how do they sustain it? If the hummingbird can sustain their willpower, how can we sustain it in community? The weaving of our stories revealed that the radicalization we experienced through *Quetzalcoatl* is sustained through the gifts of *Huitzilopochtli*. The dialectical nature between individual and collective resistance feeds our willpower and propels us forward. In the spiral motion of *Huitzilopochtli*, willpower feeds an internal resistance that feeds collective resistance, which feeds willpower.

Because *Huitzilopochtli* is in the place of the heart, weaving our stories showed us that it necessitates interdependence cultivated by revolutionary love. We have to build caring communities in our organizing work to sustain our willpower; interdependence is how we combat the destructive individualism of capitalist ideology in colonial machinery. Moreover, we have a responsibility to nourish our willpower because the genocidal systems will suck the life out of us if we don't. Because our will to act depends on interdependence based in revolutionary love, when we lose connection to the hummingbird in the place of our hearts, the burnout that follows can have dire consequences. Ceremony and ritual can nourish our willpower required for sustained revolutionary struggle by developing our discipline. Ceremony and ritual position us to reclaim the health and well-being colonization has fought to steal from us and the land. Lyla June (2022) explained that "ceremony is how we remember to remember."[iv] Ceremony connects us with the generations who have preserved them through over 500 years of colonization while positioning us to pass them on to future generations. The solidarity required for Black liberation and decolonization relies on the interdependence in natural life cycles to sustain a revolutionary spirit. Berta-Ávila argued that interdependence is vital for liberation because "if individuals' purpose does not include working so others can be free, the individuals are only perpetuating the oppression the US government fosters" (2003, 125). The medicine of the *Nahui Ollin* paired with a research methodology that weaves our stories expands tools of solidarity with others by providing an ethical map to guide us in the revolutionary struggle for Black liberation and decolonization.

XIPE TOTEC

Xipe Totec manifests in the east, or *Tlahuitzlampa*, with the element of water, the imagery of springtime, and translates as transformation (Arce 2016; Villanueva, 2013). *Xipe Totec* is the culmination of the three previous movements. Arce (2016) explained that we engage the *Nahui*

Ollin for transformation because it is the culmination of the movements, which follow natural life cycles. Arce highlighted the importance of embracing rather than resisting the transformations that bring a shedding with growth. Arce offered "the new ways of being and knowing must be embraced, for to resist these transformations is to remain static and not develop, to be left behind, to be unevolving and out of synch with the natural life cycles" (36). The guidance offered by the *Nahui Ollin* is not static, which is why the four principles, elements of life, and directions are ever moving and offering growth.

Xipe Totec shows us that within growth is a shedding and releasing as movements flow. Villanueva also emphasized the release found in transformation in her description of *Xipe Totec* as "our source of strength that allows us to transform and renew. We must have strength to shed the old, which may hinder us while accepting and embracing our new consciousness in order to transform" (2013, 32). The transformative cycles offered in the *Nahui Ollin* are "fluid, adaptive, and transformative" because they are intimately bound with natural life cycles (Arce 2016, 35). Arce outlined the transformations offered at each movement, which together comprise a transformative cycle. He explained,

> Once [we] come to reconciliation of [our] personal, familial, and collective history that are liberated from that which was hidden (*Tezcatlipoca*), [we] are forever transformed; once [we] become aware of knowledges that have been subsumed through processes of colonization and have moved forward in constructing new knowledges through [our] developed heightened awareness and critical consciousness (*Quetzalcoatl*), [we] are forever transformed; and once [we] act upon [our] reflections and newfound knowledge in positive, progressive, and creative ways (*Huitzilopochtli*), [we] are forever transformed. (2016, 35-6)

Importantly, as we are transformed, we are called to work with others to collectively transform material conditions in pursuit of Black liberation and decolonization. This calling is the heart of a revolutionary spirit that sees the struggle as a duty to our communities rather than a choice of individual advancement.

For our collaborative autoethnography, we explored *Xipe Totec* by responding to the following questions: Many people ask about the light at the end of the tunnel, the horizon. But, how do we envision the march, the highs and lows? What no longer served a revolutionary purpose that we had to shed in order to renew and build resiliency? Thinking of the environment and the seasons, and how they transform our approach to knowledge, how do we learn to take knowledge from how things grow and die instead of colonialism's warping of the calendar? In the context of revolutionary organizing, our stories explored the shedding involved in transformation, which is found in the inherent risk in both direct action and sustained organizing. We each had to shed a naivete that did not understand the nuances of risk inherent in the work. We also had to shed naïve ideas that a person's identity determines their politics, that we could avoid harm by not putting

ourselves on the line for our people, and that nonprofits are able to walk their talk when their work relies on funding from capitalists.

The transformation offered through revolutionary organizing relies on a foundation of revolutionary love. Importantly, revolutionary love is not a passive love but a fierce love that moves us to continue to struggle; it grows along the dialectical nature between love for our people and anger at the destructive systems. Anger can be a potential catalyst for transformation, but sustained anger is not healthy. Anger is a common theme across our stories. As a result, we discussed how anger is often a symptom of loss, but we only touched on the loss that is behind the overt anger that appeared. Our stories speak to the need to heal to embrace the gifts of *Huitzilopochtli*. We have a responsibility to dig deeper into this loss to ensure anger as a catalyst rather than a stagnant anger that perpetuates harm and often derails the work. We struggle from a place of love for our people so that we may heal the trauma from generations of colonization. Revolutionary love enables us to heal the trauma of colonization and whiteness, and it becomes our bond with others. It bonds us to others before us, alongside us, and after us as we meet our duty to struggle for the liberation of people and land.

OUR DANCE WITH CAE PAIRED WITH THE *NAHUI OLLIN*

WITH THE ROOTS OF CHILE AND PALESTINE

Writing a collaborative autoethnography with the *Nahui Ollin* was a beautiful, empowering, and insightful experience. What impacted me the most was the tenderness of vulnerability and self-reflection of our identities and life experiences that have transformed us to who we are today and will continue to shape us as individuals in an ecosystem of struggle, solidarity, and resistance to achieve liberation. I was not familiar with the *Nahui Ollin* framework so moving through my story with the four movements was a new experience that brought anxiety but also empowerment and comfort. At first, I struggled getting in touch with the *Nahui Ollin* and my story mainly because focusing on telling my story is a challenge; it's a voice I did not prioritize because I did not find it important or interesting. The support I received through this collaborative autoethnography and the *Nahui Ollin* was a new way of embracing and reclaiming myself while shedding the externalized feeling of not belonging. This writing experience was a reinforcement of the organizing work I do and a motivation to continue building and learning with the masses to unite the working-class power. The collective process of sharing the similarities in our stories through collaborative autoethnography with the guidance of the *Nahui Ollin* helped me understand the desire I have to connect with the land of my ancestors. Through the experiences of my grandparents, parents, and myself, as generational immigrants, the connection to the land has been destroyed and purposely used against us.

WITH AFRO-INDIGENOUS COLOMBIAN ROOTS

When writing and using collaborative autoethnography with the *Nahui Ollin*, I recalled my words in my honors thesis that first led me to embrace new language, seemingly metaphorical, deeply spiritual, and exceptionally true. Residing in the borderlands, the new mestiza learns to shift

identities between contexts, to bridge cultures, and thus, to come up with new strategies. While the experiences of multiple shifting identities is painful, the mestiza not only sustains contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else, a perspective that includes rather than excludes. I remember thinking, "Could this be what resistance looks like within me? Would it be possible for me to turn this outward? To shape my surroundings?" These thoughts consumed me because it forced me to imagine and reimagine so many parts of me and how I understood the world around me. The *Nahui Ollin* embodies the same epiphany; it is possible to think of this world, its social and political suffering, and our place or role in it, through a radical imaginary. So much power and empowerment come from this deeply rooted, spiritual point of view. I could not deny how deeply awakened my consciousness felt. And it was only a beginning.

I came to see metaphorical and geographically created borders. See them, know them, and deem them absolutely unnecessary. I blame them for our diasporic separation. Seeing them through the *Nahui Ollin*, four movements, was almost like music. The epiphany was once again clear. If music could transcend borders freely, why couldn't we? Our Black and Indigenous ancestors? If the word 'radical' could have an image it would be this one, *Nahui Ollin Libre*: Four Movements Freely. I found another way to free myself. Maybe even outwardly free those in the world around me. It then became clear that 'me' and 'us' are intimately woven together. It was never about those who created the borders or truncated the *Nahui Ollin*. At this point, it was liberating to know I did not have to emphasize or center the pain, trauma, sadness, and anger of whiteness and its pervasiveness. Our ancestors are listening and they heard me call out for them—to be cognizant of the Mexica ancestors, of those around me, and to center our truth.

WITH XICANA ROOTS

I doubted the worth of my story before I had the opportunity to weave it with others. I was intimately familiar with the power of story and had been studying the need for counterstories to disrupt majoritarian stories that normalize capitalism and US imperialism encased in whiteness (Delgado 1990; Stovall 2018; Yosso 2006). I still doubted the worth of my story alone because I couldn't see what my story in isolation had to offer others. A mentor had been encouraging me to write my story, and it wasn't until I stumbled upon CAE that I was eager to write an autoethnography. Using CAE with the guidance of the *Nahui Ollin* allowed me to not simply write my story but to reclaim it, and in turn, the medicine of the *Nahui Ollin* claimed me. I sent my story to the others on the first day of my fourth 13-year cycle. Later that day, I was unexpectedly invited into circle with Mexica women who carry the *danza* tradition. During the *limpia* they offered me, the blessing of their song welcomed me home into the arms of *mis abuelos* who never had the chance to hold me. In that claiming, I renewed my commitment to the revolutionary struggle for Black liberation and decolonization with the blessings of my ancestors.

The opportunity to write my story with the guidance of the *Nahui Ollin* has been the beginning of a journey to live intentionally with its medicine in all aspects of my life. The physical, spatial, scientific, and philosophical dimensions of its medicine bloom in ways that offer generative growth and healing. It becomes my center when I feel tossed about by the tumultuous intentions of capitalism and imperialism's limitless destruction in the name of profit. Embodying

its cycles of transformation enables me to draw a gentle strength from those who have sustained the revolutionary struggle while creating paths to expand its offering in collective ways whether it's in schools, community education and organizing spaces, or even virtual spaces that connect us to each other. The medicine that grows through the cracks in the sidewalks on the street where I live reminds me of future potentialities in weaving our stories with the guidance of the *Nahui Ollin* as we widen *el camino* for Black liberation and decolonization.

OFFERINGS

While our stories, in and of themselves, carry power, weaving them to cultivate their medicine strengthens their message and their reach. Using collaborative autoethnography with the *Nahui Ollin* offers a path to disrupt dominant ideologies of objectivity, neutrality, and individualism as well as oppressive power dynamics in research. This path also disrupts settler colonial logics by claiming the medicine colonization has sought to destroy for over 500 years. Moreover, CAE with a decolonial framework offered us the opportunity to grow within predominantly white institutions that seek to sever us from the knowledge that our ancestors have carried and that we continue to carry within the very institutions that sought to destroy it. During our collective data analysis, we all commented on the vulnerability required for claiming the worth of our story. The dominant ideologies in whiteness and settler colonial logics shape schools to tell us our stories have no worth and to disregard them when assessing learning. CAE with a decolonial framework teaches us how wrong they are while positioning us to use the interdependence in natural cycles to keep us rooted to the land and each other as we struggle for Black liberation and decolonization.

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Testimonio of Cultural Homelessness: Finding Flow and Harmony in Nepantla

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Abstract

The current racial pandemic has triggered some painful memories, not only racialized trauma, but specifically of intracultural division within my own ethnic group.

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Shame No More!

I will no longer stand for the loud gasps followed by:
"*You don't speak Spanish?," "You should be aShamed of yourself*."
They are Hurtful misperceptions about me.
You don't know All of me; my story; by being
How dare you linguistically Marginalize me!
I no longer will feel shackled by your words, instead I am Emancipating myself from those untruths you say to me.
You will SHAME me no more!

The current racial pandemic has triggered some painful memories, not only racialized trauma, but specifically of intracultural division within my own ethnic group. For a long time I experienced what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls cultural homelessness. I identify completely with my Mexican American heritage and I celebrate many of Mexican cultural traditions with my family. However, with the inability to speak Spanish fluently, because I never learned to speak the language, I cannot help but feel a cultural loss. Since I do not speak Spanish fluently, I am in a place of in-between. The dominant culture or the white world does not accept me fully, despite the amount of degrees I have earned and the amount of professional experience, education and knowledge I have gained over the years. Additionally, people in my own culture do not accept me because I am not fluent in Spanish. It's been a challenging **and painful** journey and one that I continue to face today. Many times I hear*, "You don't speak Spanish?,"* followed by, "*You should be ashamed of yourself,"* when someone asks me a question in Spanish, but I answer in English. This is ironic because in those moments, I am being shamed in English. Although I explain that I can speak some Spanish, but very little, and in broken Spanish (akin to broken English), it is **not** good enough. I am viewed as if something is wrong with me. There is a reason why I do not speak Spanish fluently but they don't know my story. They don't know that my parents witnessed and experienced physical and mental abuse for speaking Spanish in K-12 public schools in south Texas when they were young. As a result, they along with other parents at that time, made the difficult decision of teaching us English first when my siblings and me came into this world. The intention was to teach us Spanish at a later time because they feared we would experience the same anti-Spanish bias rhetoric in school, along with the harsh emotional and physical abuse they and their friends endured when they were in school. It was a matter of making sure we survive schooling; not to erase the Spanish language from our lives. When me and my siblings enrolled in public school, the system was still adamant on using only English as a spoken language. Consequently,

we were raised as English monolinguals. The plan to teach us Spanish later, never happened. Stories of Mexican American students being forced to sit on their knees on broomsticks, kneeling on rice, knuckles being hit with wooden rulers, and being paddled in front of everyone for speaking Spanish are visions I cannot get out of my mind.

The dominant culture and those who see Spanish as an inferior language continue to spread the message, *"This is America, speak English."* We see it daily in both covert and overt ways, via various kinds of media. Videos of racist individuals telling racialized Americans "to go back where they came from" and "to speak English" have increased exponentially since the last administration and still continue today, despite the new leadership. Shaming me for a system underlined with white supremacy; where our language continues to be denied across the country is wrong. "You don't know me or my story" constantly echoes in my mind.

Consequently, through self-reflective dialogue, critique and resistance, this writing is designed to dissolve the demarcations that divide me from others, and in turn create a common culture, while still celebrating the differences among the Latino/a communities. For me, I am living in the state Nepantla; living in-between cultures (Anzaldua, 2015). **Nepantla,** a Nahuatl word meaning "tierra entre medio," a constant state of transition **is how I feel as I try to negotiate my identity in context to my own culture and people. Differences defined by this in-between state, seen as abnormal, something wrong with me and not Mexican enough** is constantly highlighted and I am chastised for not conforming fully to the dominant culture **or to my** own culture. The goal is to unselfishly create a humanizing bridge for those living on each side of the normalized us/them binary that exists and, in some cases, invisible in Latino/a communities. This form of activism will create an opportunity for healing, transformation, and positive social change by building bridges over physical and psychological walls for all who walk the same path along with me.

HISTORICAL TRAUMA OF ENGLISH ONLY POLICIES

"English Only" policies are believed to be racially neutral policy, but they actually perpetuate institutionalized racism. Historical trauma that students of Mexican decent, like my parents, experienced with "English Only" policies in the 1950s through the 1960s has resulted in my current human condition and to the challenges I currently face when it comes to my language status and not only where I belong, but how I am perceived by people **from** my own culture.

Although "English Only" policies started in 1918, with the German population, they were also enacted with students of Mexican descent in Texas and continued through the early 1970s. School districts with large enrollment of Spanish speaking children adopted an implicit policy that promoted English assimilation and banned the use of Spanish in classrooms. This policy was called the "No Spanish Rule." Districts claimed that Mexican American students needed to be fluent in English in order to be successful for employment and education (Hurtado & Rodriguez, 1989). As a result, there are many people who identify as 2nd generation or more, and who are of Mexican decent, who do not speak Spanish and **only** speak English.

As a result of the Bilingual Education and Training Act (S.B. 121) enacted by the sixty-third Texas Legislature, the "English Only" policy was abolished. This law dealt a serious blow to the notorious "No Spanish rule." For decades Texas teachers had used "English Only" laws to sanction punitive actions against Mexican-American students who violated the "No Spanish" requirement (Rodriguez, 2020, par. 1). Despite this change, Latino/a students continue to be subjected to deficit ideologies that ignore the assets of our unique culture and history.

BEATING THE SPANISH OUT OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

"You are to only speak English in this classroom?" or "Spanish is not a good language; do you hear me?" were the words my parents and their friends heard over and over and on a daily basis. Schools, state sanctioned instruments, attempted to de-Mexicanize people of Mexican descent indirectly hoping to lead to a cultural de-identification (Valenzuela, 1999, 161). Schools in the United States have historically Americanized minority groups via assimilation practices, such as removal of language. The Indian Boarding Schools in this country and the stripping away of Tribal Nation's cultures, is proof of the practices of the erasure of language and other parts of students' cultural identities (O'Gara, 2019). In my case, the education system attempted to beat the Spanish out of my parents. The impact of this colonization and the pressures of assimilation has resulted in me not being able to speak Spanish fluently. Fond memories of hearing Spanish spoken by my tías (aunts) and tíos (uncles) my abuelas (grandmothers) and abuelo (grandfather) has resulted in my consciousness of how vital our language is in the continuance of Mexican American culture and identity.

Growing up as monolingual English speakers was a result of my parent's experiences in K-12 public schools; where they were discriminated, physically and emotionally abused, and publicly shamed for speaking Spanish. The trauma from these experiences trickled down to four generations that followed. Years later, our language is still not being used among my 3rd and 4th generation nieces and nephews. Fortunately, my parents still speak the language. It is important to me that I find as many opportunities to hear it. As a result, I often ask my parents to speak to me in Spanish so I can hear it and learn it. I don't want to lose what comprehension I currently have of the language. My students, who know my story, speak to me in Spanish as well as encourage me to respond in Spanish, even if it is broken Spanish, as they call it. They do not shame me. They also know I am not trying to play the role of a victim. That is not my purpose for sharing my story. There have been times where I have been accused of being a victim. It is during these times those who accuse me of playing victim, do not allow me to share my story. Instead, they immediately dismiss my attempts and continue to chastise and shame me. Internalizing this shame is their goal. No more.

These are the realities of my situation. Those who shame me, refuse to allow me to share the reality of what can happen when white supremacy ideology is embedded in our educational policies and practices, like "English Only" policies. My parents didn't know what they didn't know. All they knew was that emotional and physical trauma was synonymous for speaking Spanish in K-12 public schools in south Texas. This was their experience and they did not want

my siblings and me to have those same experiences. An unfortunate consequence of growing up monolingual in south Texas is that for many who do not speak Spanish, we are viewed as "not Mexican enough." Although I attended diverse schools with other people who looked like me, what I have learned is that it is not uncommon to get the "look" from those who look like me, who learn I do not speak the language fluently. The look of shame, disgust, and disappointment is unfortunately a look I often get from people who are from my own culture.

A LINGUISTIC NEPANTLA

I have been pushed outside of my comfort zone many times and experience the contradiction of these spaces. Transformation starts to take place as I search for change in perspectives so I no longer come up against the world's dictates; a linguistic Nepantla. Being in Nepantla (Anzaldua, 2015) allows me to recast the relationship between the center and the margins, and to reverse it completely by making it the center of political action. This position permits me to return to forgotten histories and a questioning of dominant narratives of oppression, specifically "English Only" laws that are still prevalent today. It allows me to undertake a subversive process that is inherent in claiming back my origins, my differences and my history. It allows me to qualify my position and subjectivity as political, to become visible within different movements by claiming a specific position and difference, and to question the modern political canon, which has sought to push people like me, specifically woman of color, out of history by identifying them as natural and apolitical subjects (Brown, 2020 as cited in Nassar, 2021).

As I continue to experience negative reactions for not speaking Spanish, I have learned to deal with such negativity. It is not easy; in fact I am exhausted from people making these outrageous assumptions based on one interaction at one time, with no background context. They believe they are teaching me a lesson when they shame me for not speaking Spanish. Yet, I am given no credit for understanding our language or speaking some of it, albeit broken. They only see that I am responding in English and not in Spanish. Instead they publicly shame me as if that will make me all of a sudden start speaking Spanish.

My experiences tell me I do not fit in any particular space. In this in-between space I have experienced chaos, anxiety, pain and loss of language. Some may think, "why do you care?" I care because I want to make sure I leave my mark in this world as someone who knows who I am, where I come from, and where I am headed. I am proud of the woman and the human I have become. I want to leave a legacy for those who come after me so they know they can stand on my shoulders, regardless of not being able to speak Spanish fluently. It is okay if someone of Mexican descent does not speak Spanish, despite what some members from my culture think and believe.

FINDING COURAGE

"Language is at the core of people and their cultures and is the vehicle for people to share their ideas, strengths and dreams for a better world" (Highlander Research Education Center, n.d., par. 1). To be of Mexican descent means we are not part of the dominant culture in the United States. If our lived experiences consistently align with our Mexican heritage and

culture, aren't we still Mexican? Ogbu (1991), as cited in Valenzuela (1999) identifies the term Mexicanidad (Mexicanity) as the experiences of ethnic minorities that have evolved (and continue to evolve) in relation to the dominant culture (p. 169). "The loss of language results in hearing painful words such as "gringa (derogatory epithet for white American), pocho (Mexican-American who can speak little or no Spanish), americanizada (Americanized), or agringada (like a gringa)" (Valenzuela, p. 169) from people in our own culture.

Language is an asset. Instead of seeing me as Spanish deficit, why don't they see me as a human who happens to speak in English. Knowing how to speak English has helped our 2nd and 3rd generation family members obtain an education at a variety of levels and jobs that are keeping us fed, clothed, healthy, and housed. **We broke the cycle of poverty. We didn't lose our cultural identity.** I may never be fluent, but I understand the language and I continue to learn it. However, without my language, there is a sense of cultural homelessness; living in-between; living in Nepantla.

This American experiment to assimilate students to speak English has detrimental effects for many children. Form many, these policies, both overt and covert, has led to a loss of language and a loss of place. I do not know where I fit, I am constantly in a state of Nepantla.

Shamed for speaking Spanish
Shamed for not speaking Spanish
Shamed for speaking "imperfectly"
Shamed for not being taught
Shamed for having an accent
Shamed by your own, by others
Shamed for trying
You don't have to prove your Latinidad (various attributes shared by Latin American people and their descendants without reducing those similarities to any single essential trait),
to anybody.
We exist.
Punto (period)
(Frohman, 2019).

Perhaps instead we interrogate a culture of white supremacy and "English Only" spaces that shame people who speak a second language. Perhaps we expand bilingual education. Perhaps, we don't fetishize about speaking Spanish. Perhaps we tell Latino/a (used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina) youth they always belong despite being bilingual, trilingual, or monolingual (Frohman, 2019).

Reflecting back on feeling a sense of cultural homelessness, it is aligned with "in-between" or "third space." There are times when I feel like I am "in-between" cultures; a disconnection from any culture. When I am shamed because of my lack of fluent Spanish, my identity is questioned (you are not Mexican enough, you are too Americanized, Pocho, etc.). In most cases I am not given

the opportunity to share my story. As Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal and Solórzono (2001) state, stories such as mine and many others are legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in systems like education.

It is important to note that historically, Spanish is not our native language. In fact, the Nahuatl language is the original language of Mexico which was once the southwestern parts of the United States. It was during the Spanish conquest when Spanish became the official language of Mexico. This is an example of how colonization can influence the indigenous languages of those colonized (del Castillo, 2012). In this case, it was the Mexicans who were colonized by the Spanish empire. I wonder if Mexicans who speak Nahuatl shame or chastise Mexicans for speaking Spanish.

Bhabba, identifies an "in between" or "third space" as a space of "resistance, negotiation, and articulation of new meanings in the face of ambivalences, normalization, and hegemony" (1990, as cited in Karanja, 2010, 5). In this space, hegemonic practices, such as the ones practiced in our schools, like "English Only" policies are challenged. Like Anzaldua (1987, as cited in Nassar, 2021, par. 3), I strongly believe this is an opportunity for my identity to be constructed and reconstructed on my own terms, resulting in new identities and possibilities. In fact, by living as an outsider in political movements and in different social realities, I have come to understand the alienating effects of the chaotic intertwining of different systems of oppression, belonging and allegiance, and I have been able to theorize the risks and the opportunities for my political and personal emancipation.

I know who I am. Non-Spanish speakers, like me continue to participate in many possibilities. The inability of not speaking the language fluently does not make me any less Mexican or any less human. I am who I am because of my culture. I am still able to identify with other aspects of my culture. Many of us, including myself, have become conscious of how vital Spanish is in the continuance of my Mexican culture and identity. What I decide to do is up to me, but I should not be discounted because **I am Mexican Enough** and no one can take that away from me.

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HONORING RASQUACHISMO IN EL TEATRO

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ABSTRACT

Supremacist, hierarchical and European ideology has dominated the field of theatrical study and performance, dictating process, learning, and purpose. Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekov, and Sophocles are often implemented in university theater programs as essential points of study and professional training without hesitation. Although these white men were part of the development of the traditional theater that is commonly accepted, they are not the only contributors to the art form. The notion that theater only "exists" once white men have explored it has led to a narrowing of the understanding and appreciation of work in the field. The exclusionary process of colonized theater must be challenged as this structure only serves to assign validity, resources, and viability to a narrow subset of the art form (Elliot and Dias 2018). This narrowing of the field is often only performatively combated; although theatrical training programs insist that they are expanding their programming, limited diverse theatrical contributions are showcased in educational settings (Ybarra 2018).

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AESTHETICS: RASQUACHISMO AS DECOLONIZATION

Supremacist, hierarchical and European ideology has dominated the field of theatrical study and performance, dictating process, learning, and purpose. Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekov, and Sophocles are often implemented in university theater programs as essential points of study and professional training without hesitation. Although these white men were part of the development of the traditional theater that is commonly accepted, they are not the only contributors to the art form. The notion that theater only "exists" once white men have explored it has led to a narrowing of the understanding and appreciation of work in the field. The exclusionary process of colonized theater must be challenged as this structure only serves to assign validity, resources, and viability to a narrow subset of the art form (Elliot and Dias 2018). This narrowing of the field is often only performatively combated; although theatrical training programs insist that they are expanding their programming, limited diverse theatrical contributions are showcased in educational settings (Ybarra 2018).

In stark resistance to this colonized idea is the implementation and success of the rasquache aesthetic that frames this testimonio. With roots in indigeneity, rasquachismo honors a collective and fosters purpose; it is necessary to defend and honor this aesthetic in el teatro to foster creativity, collective creation, and intentional purpose in the production of theatrical work. This testimonio investigates the experience of resisting typical modes of theatrical creation through maintaining rasquachismo and facilitating new opportunities for Chicanx/Latinx theatrical work via community programming outside the university's walls. Further, it must be noted that this testimonio is just that, a personal declaration of experience, process, and interpretation framed by the lens of a Chicana navigating exclusionary and colonized practices in educational theater in a university setting.

EMBODYING RASQUACHISMO IN PROCESS

Rasquache is a term of Mesoamerican Nahuatl origin which initially had a negative connotation in Mexico associated with poor taste. Through a classist lens, rasquachismo was (potentially still is) deemed as lower class, impoverished, and uneducated (Ybarra-Frausto 1991). During the Chicano (historical spelling) Movement of the 1960s, the term was embraced and reinvigorated, giving life to an empowering, intentional aesthetic (Broyles-González 1998). Although rasquachismo embodies an underdog perspective, it is an intentional proclamation and purposefully exists in the margins (Ybarra-Frausto 1991).

Rasquachismo in el teatro was widely utilized in the Chicano Movement by El Teatro Campesino to establish the framework of accessibility of the work for the people, collective creation, and keeping message prioritized ahead of technical elements with the specific purpose of connecting with the marginalized and exploited farmworkers of the 1960s (Valdez 2013). Rasquachismo invites one to be rasquache and embody a consciousness to subvert ruling paradigms (Ybarra-Frausto 1991). There is focus on the artistry, identity, and the motivation to create that which was not present before (Ybarra-Frausto 1991). Rasquachismo honors comunidad, dismantles the colonized ideals of hierarchy, and is intentional in purpose. In the theatrical sphere, the rasquache

aesthetic is in direct contrast to colonized Western norms that value a specific hierarchy within the creative team, has specific expectations of audience, and focuses on the final product.

TESTIMONIO DE ARTE

This testimonio includes the personal perspective of implementing the rasqauche aesthetic at the university level, defying colonization through the mentality of purpose over product in a Chicanx/Latinx Theatre Series that served la comunidad de la frontera, El Paso, Texas, for six years (2013-2018). The process embodied in this Series focused on the tenets of intentional programming, dismantling of the hierarchy, community access, and rasquache design. This Series did not have dedicated university funding, existed outside of the scheduled Department season of shows, and was an intentional choice to connect with the comunidad; all in direct contrast to traditionally expected and accepted theatrical programming.

Creative work by excluded and underrepresented artists must intentionally be at the forefront of programming choices, excluded voices deserve space and production; it is long overdue. The theatrical programming offered by the home institution of higher learning was not reflective of the community nor was it purposeful. As the institution is located en la frontera, the borderland of the United States and Mexico, it was necessary to combat this deficiency of programming. Work by underrepresented artists was not enveloped in season programming in a community that is 84% Hispanic (terminology utilized by the institution) (UTEP), therefore, an annual theater series was generated. In partnership with a colega, the Chicanx/Latinx Theatre Series was activated to promote culturally connected work for the Paso del Norte region.

The Chicanx/Latinx Series decentered the role of the director and validated the multiple centers of knowledge mentality reflective of decolonized practices (Jimenez Estrada 2012). It was an invitation to share; employing a rejection of the rewards of hierarchy (Sanchez Saltveit 2020) the team did not focus on a leader but rather, a collective. To honor the lives and experiences of those involved in The Series, rehearsals functioned as decolonized models. Instead of setting a strict, predetermined schedule, schedules were created around availability and were limited and efficient—bucking traditional industry standards and honoring more indigenous practices of respecting the lives of artmakers (Bonnell 2020). We acknowledged that this work was only a portion of the lives of the people involved; they had several other responsibilities as people and we had no right to demand of their time.

Further, as there was no direct funding, the team incorporated the rasquache aesthetic to create the world of the play. Fabric from another show became el rio, plastic bags transformed into las nubes, palos became swords, and often old Halloween costumes and personal wardrobe items found their way into the shows. Utilizing and reusing resources can often be confused with lower quality; that perception is inaccurate and clouded by the colonized model of theater making—a mentality that items have limited life and unchecked consumption somehow equates to value. Rasquachismo challenges that notion and embraces the ingenuity of reuse. Additionally, rasquachismo design creates the opportunity for freedom. This libertad in creation stems from knowing that costumes, props, set, sound, etc. do not have to be exact; they are merely there to enhance the purpose of the

piece. With reduced focus on the spectacle of the production, dedicated focus is on the connection to the story and the message.

Included in this invitation of embracing rasquachismo was the acknowledgment that the product was not the goal, it was the purpose of taking work to the comunidad. Energy was not spent on long, arduous rehearsals and meetings, but rather on communicating, sharing, and creating. The theatrical pieces created and/or produced through this series prioritized the purpose or message of the production. From inequality (Colitas de Rana) and education (Just Like Us) to immigration (¡Bocón!), these pieces had a direct purpose for the community for which they were to serve; intention was at the core of programming in the Chicanx/Latinx Series. The Series was not housed at one specific location. Rather, each May it would travel to community centers, activist centers, and libraries. Creating partnerships with local entities created opportunities for theater makers to exercise flexibility, adaptability, and a recognition of members of their comunidad. The key to this process was the admission by donation policy and the rejection of having the audience come to the art. Community members that may have never felt welcome at the university could find a renewed sense of comfort when culturally connected work was presented in a space that was near their home and they could decide if and what they wanted to contribute. The purpose was to take work to the people and ensure that the people could access the work. This reiterated Valdez's concept of "Theatre is a creator of community, and community is the creator of theatre" (2022, 141). The theater cannot and should not stand alone; comunidad is more than necessary, it is essential.

DEFIANT SUCCESS.

Each year, the Series grew in audience size and reception. The thousands of dollars raised through donations were dedicated to student scholarships and the thousands of community members that connected with the work were welcomed and honored in spaces they decided to navigate. Due in part to the success of such work, the theatrical programming at the home institution has shifted focus to increased Chicanx/Latinx work either in theme or playwright. Productions since 2018 have included: Real Women Have Curves, A Christmas Carol en la Frontera, Monsters We Create, ReUnión rEvolución Radio, Into the Beautiful North (National Endowment for the Arts funded project), Cenicienta, Zoot Suit, and Heroes and Saints. It is important to acknowledge that entities outside of the university's walls such as the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival have awarded ReUnión rEvolución Radio, and Cenicienta with regional and national awards for innovation and dismantling of hierarchical and supremacist models.

FEARS, FACING FORWARD

Although here have been successes and new developments within this specific context, there is a reality that must be addressed. Theater is deeply entrenched in colonized models. Hierarchies, supremacist models, a focus on the consumerism of creation and product, and the expectation of the audience bowing to the theater have been and still are very present in educational theater training programs. To continually combat these colonized models is exhausting and overwhelming. Resistance takes an energy that is personally and mentally draining.

As a Chicana in higher education, I am aware of my position and vulnerability. While navigating the academic sphere, I am often reminded of my otherness and the fact that the work that I champion challenges the colonized model and creates tension for those that are tied to antiquated and exclusionary practices. I resonate with Kidd, et. al (2018) in naming that opinions about representation in theater by artists of the global majority can be deemed emotional, insignificant, and threatening. The continued justification and mental exhaustion of educating my peers previously intensified my imposter syndrome. Yet, if I have been forced to navigate my passion (theater) which has diminished the contributions of so many for so long, it is necessary to continually challenge supremacist models and defend a creative process that honors comunidad, la colectiva, and innovative creation, especially while working with the next generation of theater makers. I still struggle with imposter syndrome, but through maintaining the purpose of my work in rasquache tenets I know that even if I may not get to see a fully decolonized model of teatro, my students just might.

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TELARAÑAS: UNTANGLING MY PAIN

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ABSTRACT
This is an exorcism, a purging exercise that presents me with the opportunity to make sense of a thirty-year-old lingering pain. It started with mother sharing the news that we were in the United States, to stay. That decision affected my relationship with both my parents and my sisters. We don't share our feelings, memories, or experiences. Now, we are not on amicable terms, which is collateral damage caused by the move.

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Conocimiento hurts but not as much as *desconocimiento*.
(Anzaldúa 2015, 137)

(DES)(RE)CONOCIMIENTO

This is an exorcism, a purging exercise that presents me with the opportunity to make sense of a thirty-year-old lingering pain. It started with mother sharing the news that we were in the United States, to stay. That decision affected my relationship with both my parents and my sisters. We don't share our feelings, memories, or experiences. Now, we are not on amicable terms, which is collateral damage caused by the move.

Based on Anzaldúa's work, in combination with infinite works produced by Chicana feminist epistemologies and ontologies, I have "taken inventory" (Anzaldúa 1987, 104) to explore my immigration process. *Nepantla* (Anzaldúa) has become my place of permanent residence. It provides me with both a contrasting isolation, a connection to myself and the world needed to evaluate the constant *sustos* (Anzaldúa) that have me returning to this space.

I have embraced *sustos* as they are reminders that the work of being and becoming is constant. Therefore, I accept the hurt and the confusion, but I recognize how to carefully welcome them and accept the process they set off. I have chosen to write unspoken words to expose the contrasting feelings and thoughts I have about an encounter with my father. Anzaldúa's Coatlicue stage that is fueled by contradiction, along with my transnational academic knowledge drenched in a daughter's love, empowers me to respond to the question my father asked that morning, "*Was moving to the United States a good decision?*"

Susto
I have been ripped wide open
by a word, a look, a gesture-
from self, kin, and stranger…
never realizing that to heal
there must be wounds
to repair there must be damage
for light there must be darkness.
Healing Wounds (Anzaldúa 2009, 249).

It is mid-morning, my father is his usual self: distant, quiet, judging, and inquisitive. He likes to grill me, to trap me with questions that highlight my shortcomings so then he skillfully could proceed to belittle me. I am managing the road when he suddenly utters a question in a soft smooth tone, "*Was moving to the United States a good decision?*"

His words, like waves of rabid thunder, resonate in my head. A bile taste fills my mouth. I grip the steering wheel with sweaty hands. I keep my eyes on the road, desperately trying not to lose

control. An overwhelming pain grips the center of my heart, and I can feel it moving through my body. It slowly rips through my every muscle, and I concentrate acutely on its path of destruction. I feel the birth of tears, so I bring the back of my hand to my mouth and bite it down, hard. My father scolds me and reminds me of my lack of proper hygiene; one sentence took me back to feeling five years old again. A classic *modus operandi*. His demeaning tone, his sarcastic words drive all my feelings away. Automatically and with urgent speed, I proceed with the short drive home… I just want him out of my car!

However, his question is important. I turn to watch him and capture a glimpse of the person that keeps hurting me. The image surprises me. The person sitting next to me is a fragile, tired, and very ill man. My heart shrinks with a strange, still unpleasant feeling. I clear my throat, and over my better judgment and self-preservation, I ask him to repeat his question. I slow down the car, take my eyes off the road, and concentrate on his face. Something overwhelming washes over him, his body has sunk into the seat. He repeats the question.

"*Was moving to the United States a good decision?*"

This time, I'm able to hear worry, melancholy, regret, pain, denial, and fear as the most palpable. I can see the words in my mind reminding me "learning to sit perfectly still, to sense the presence of the Soul" (Anzaldúa 2002, 351). I take a deep breath and ask about the source for his inquiry. His voice is an unrecognizable whisper that causes me an abrupt shift of emotions. I recalled "This disorientation compels you to rethink the situation and the people involved" (Anzaldúa 2015, 87).

I want to respond as clearly and sincerely as possible, but I am incapacitated. The patriarchal internalized superiority I was so deeply and proudly inculcated paralyzes me. It pushes me deeper into the deafening silence that is the foundation of our relationship. Therefore, I wish to share my *testimonio* guided by a deep "desire of solidarity" (Beverly 2008, 571), and construct a web of *reconcilio* that aids the treacherous path in and out of *Nepantlan* (Anzaldúa 2009) that hopefully, will keep me afloat from the waves created by the *remolinos* (Anzaldúa 2015) of my experiences and memories. I want my *testimonio* to become an act of sharing encircled by healing, and communal transformation. However, I cannot reach this *reconcilio* with him. Here is a new trying, sharing my *testimonio* in the form of an *epístola*, a letter. I will plunge into the *cenote* of my pain (Anzaldúa, 2015) to provoke *un cambio de mentalidad* to produce gifts and new ways of knowing and being in the world.

Learning once more that the path of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa 2002) is a tough road to travel. That we cannot do it alone. That we need extra support to deal with the *desconocimiento* it produces. I am lucky, as I am not alone in the continuous understanding of self within the migration stories and their re-learning of being in the world. Next, it is my reply to his query, a letter I will never send, and he will never read.

Padre

> In shadow work, the problem is part of the cure—you don't heal the wound; the wound heals you. First you must recognize and acknowledge *la herida*. Second, you must "intend" to heal. Then you must fall headlong into that wounding—attend to what the body is feeling, be its dismemberment and disintegration. Rupture and psychic fragmentation lead to dialogue with the wound. (Anzaldúa 2015, 89)

You must be kidding, dad. Now, is thirty years later. Why do you think, now, would be a good time to have this conversation? It is completely self-indulging on your part. Are you seeking reassurance because you feel vulnerable and weak? Do you want me to thank and praise you for your decision to move us here? Do you want me to recognize your decisive direction as the catalyst for our accomplishments? That we basically owe everything to you? Sure. We may have accomplished a great deal and are quite successful. So, yes. We have been privileged. However, you are forgetting something critical. At what price? You may see the external riches and accolades, yet you have failed to see who we have become. We will not use the word family to describe us. The few times when we interact, we don't know how to reach out or to connect to each other, and this is because of the awfulness (prejudice, racism, violence, pain, fear) that each one of us has experienced and has created deep divisions among us.
Añorar lo que hubiera podido ser y no saber cómo hubieran sido nuestras vidas en el mundo que destruiste al decidir venir, es una desgarradora ilusión.
One that haunts me.
We were drastically uprooted.
Transplanted somewhere foreign with no decision nor resources.
You chose it for me.
I was blindsided.
All my life I've felt unworthy, used.

Today, as a parent, I reflect on your decision, and I'm puzzled as why there was not even a conversation. A few words to explain the situation and share the reason for the move. *Hubiera sido suficiente decirnos que sería mejor para nosotros, que tenías miedo de no poder proveer por nosotras allá. Solamente un par de palabras hubieran hecho una gran diferencia. No soy y nunca he sido tonta, ciega, egoista. ¿Por qué no dejarme ver, sentir, tus razones? No es pedir permiso. Si hubiera querido venir o no, eso no importa. Una niña apenas adolescente no te hubiera entendido completamente. Con una sincera conversación tuya, yo hubiera podido crecer y poco a poco reflexionar sobre tu decisión.* But it never happened. Which made me an afterthought of your master plan, showing me that my feelings, thoughts, and opinions had no value, no importance. So, why after thirty years? What do you want to hear from me now? Why are you willing to listen? *La sospecha impregna cada una de tus preguntas y no confío en tus intenciones. Esta sospecha es lo que nos destruye, lo que nos separa. La que no nos deja vivir y gozar lo que hemos podido lograr en este país. Esta sospecha que me jala al vacio de la desconfianza y me ata a una horrible tristeza.* Dad, neither you nor I have been able to process what has been gained or lost due to the move.

Anzaldúa wrote, “Because we operate in forward mode, we’re forced to absorb, in ten years or less, changes that usually take more than two generations to assimilate” (Anzaldua 2015, 86).
Then, how does one tally it all? Do the benefits outweigh the disadvantages? Do the positives erase the negatives? No. Impossible. Your illness and the changes your life has undergone, compounded by my new role as one of your caregivers, provokes you to question who we are to each other, and this has taken you back to ask this basic question. A question that cannot be answered because migrating to the United States was not good nor bad; it is just what happened. You may think of it as a decision because that is what it was to you, but it will never be to me.
My vacillation to respond fills you with uncertainty because your positivist view of the world will not let you accept the complexity of our existence. Anzaldúa writes, “Each of us lives in a fiction of our own construction, one supported by consensual reality” (2015, 185). I am an accomplice to your antiquated view of the world since I have never engaged you with the other possibilities that I know exist. I shared this knowledge with people that are willing to hear, and I know that you will not; your actions have proven this. So, silence, and consequently ignorance, defines our relationship. I have given up on trying to know you, and I protect myself from you knowing me. Again, suspicion prevents me from being myself with you. There are too many issues, too many years, and too much reticence for us to now converse.
Still, I do feel a sense of responsibility to answer your questions because I learned from you that every question is valid, and each one deserves to be addressed. Here, I share what I said to you that day:

Estuvo bien Papá. Tenemos muchos beneficios.

That was it. Silence returned. The framework of our relationship remains untouched. I do not want to change it because I am afraid of the pain needed to make sense of its boundaries. I think you know this too. Still, I am glad you asked. As I write about it now, my heart runs fast with the possibility of starting a new conversation with you regarding your inquiry, but hesitation grips me. Maybe I will be able to do it one day and hope that time does not run out on us.
Tu hija

(Im)Possibility

Largo camino te queda.
(Anzaldúa, 2015, 116)

We arrived home and my father exited the car. I sat stunned and took a few deep breaths. I repeated the latter after I finished writing the words above. I feel sorrow in the center of my chest. My mind is flooded with questions: Should I talk to him more? How bad is it going to hurt? Could we have a better relationship? Will he hear me? Should I try? I do not know.

I greatly appreciate the *sustos* (Anzaldúa) that come along with the *arrebato* (Anzaldúa) because as a *Nepantlera*, it provides me the opportunity for growth. I must now again “take inventory” (Anzaldúa 1987, 104), and start the process once more.

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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.

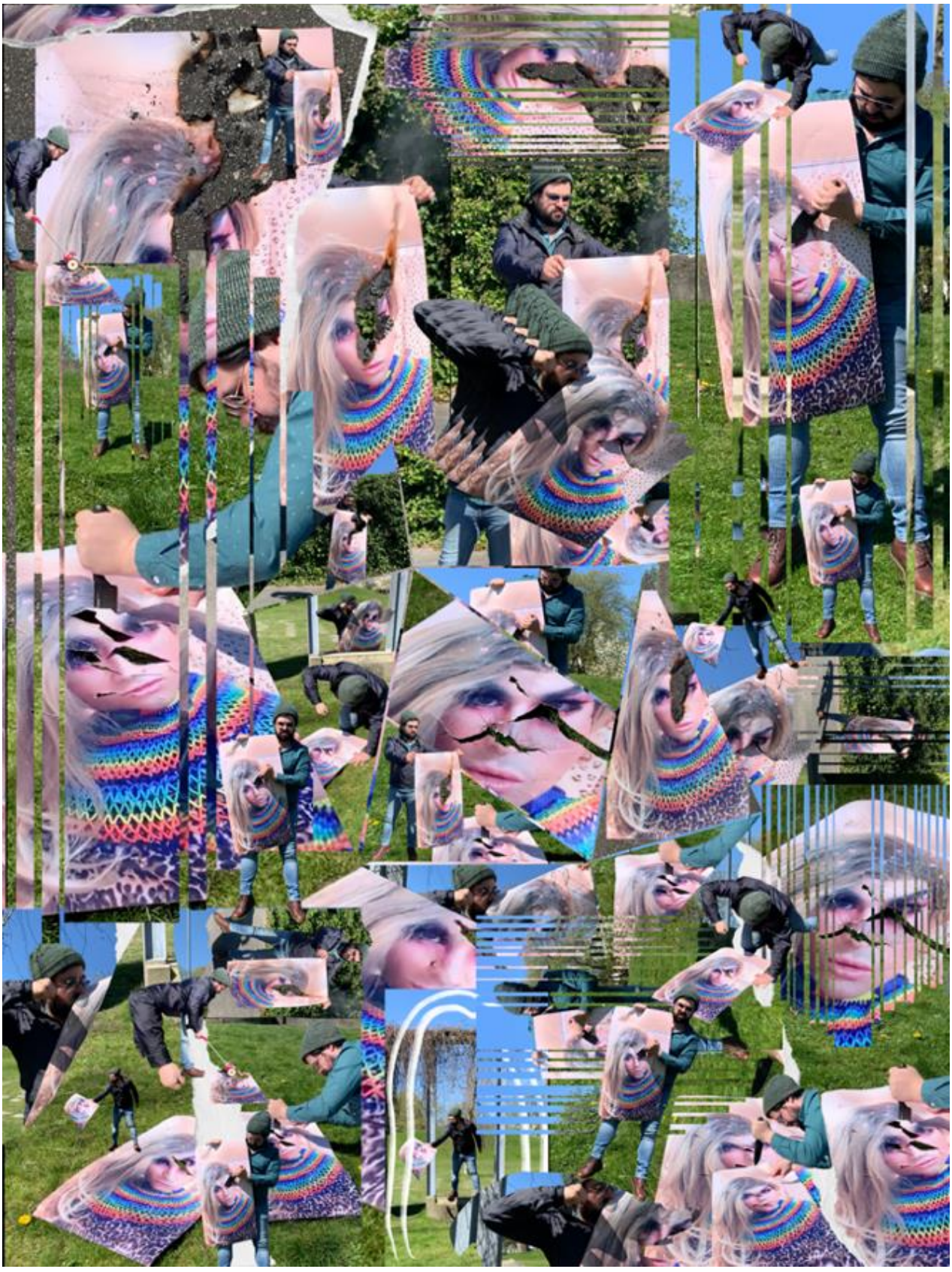

Figure 1 The Destroyer & The Destroyed, 2022 - Picture Collage by Daniel Gallardo Zamora

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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WE EXPECTED A NORMAL LATINX, NOT A CHICANO LIKE YOU

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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.

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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.

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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Section 2
Intersectionality & Aesthetics
Identity & Resistance

REPAST: A COLLECTIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PROCESS OF MEANING MAKING

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ABSTRACT

For over six years, our writing collective has drawn upon our multivarious experiences and existence to examine and question our presence, purpose, motivation, and place at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) at the USA Mexico border. We thrive in our plurality and our disparate discourses have created an enduring sense and space of safety and belonging.

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losing ourselves into a newness
that is foggy and uncertain
crossing has become a border
between known and unknown

for we are mighty,
we are powerful,
we acknowledge
we build our stage
and share it with ourselves

an open forum in a closed room
curtains drawn to protect us from the glare of an angry sun
as it shines down upon our gathering of self-appointed experts.

I is a part of the WE
I is a member of the guilty party

I-came, I-took what was there, and I-left
I-saved no one. I-didn't even try
I-save no one.
(Espinosa-Dulanto, ms. 2024)

For over six years, our writing collective has drawn upon our multivarious experiences and existence to examine and question our presence, purpose, motivation, and place at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) at the USA Mexico border. We thrive in our plurality and our disparate discourses have created an enduring sense and space of safety and belonging. However, this sense/space is not impervious and events as monumental as the global pandemic, as horrific as the images of wars, as devastating as the ravages of climate change, as destabilizing as divisive politics, as personal as new professional expectations, all have become intrinsic part of our bearings and may strain as our commitment to continue dialoging is challenged.

listen my friend
for we have a thousand-thousand stories to tell
stories to amaze,
stories to horrify.
stories that explain what true community is
and how it is built
and how it is destroyed
stories about place
and home
and devastation
and rebuilding
and characters
and hatred
and kindness
and food
and hunger,
of drink and addiction
of riches and desolation
come sit and listen
to our triumphs
and fears
and share your fears too
for it is through this that we can become friends
and let you leave a shadow of you here with us
and send you home with the phantoms of our collective memory. (Espinosa-Dulanto, Ms. 2024)

Through it all, our collective … four faculty members, four women, four mothers, four professionals … with no premeditation found ourselves at the table (at each other's offices or homes) introducing ourselves through food, literally and figuratively inviting each other to traverse cultural and gastronomical histories, expanding our palate while learning to tolerate, accept and respect, perhaps to yearn and weaving personal and professional experiences memories through the all-encompassing metaphor of … FOOD.

HAUNTING MEMORIES

el sabor de amá,
pozole, enchiladas, chiles rellenos...
yummy memories.
puro amor en cada platillo
love was served in each meal
amor que se traga, que se siente en cada bocado
learned that love could be swallowed, relished, savored
amor compartido en la mesa, con la familia
shared love at the family table
that was *el sabor de amá,*
mucho pozole, enchiladas, chiles rellenos...
hoy sólo me queda el recuerdo
el recuerdo del amor
el recuerdo de esa familia
no more *pozole, enchiladas, chiles rellenos*
amá, today I have only your memories
the emptiness in the kitchen
hoy sólo queda el dolor
to remind me that you are gone

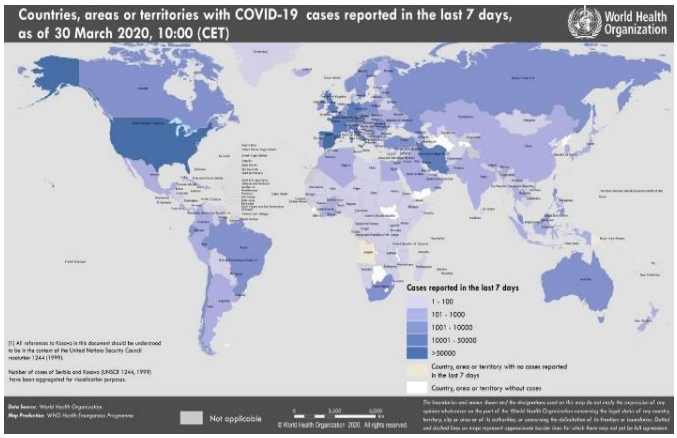
Specifically, through this creative piece we strive to share the organic process of our collective exchange during the Covid-19 pandemic. The piece captures the plurality of our voices, the tangential nature of our thoughts, the interwoven memories, the excruciating yet mundane nature of personal loss in the face of global pandemonium. It captures a single extended period of shared strife during the COVID-19 pandemic under the nurturing umbrella of FOOD, something that to a point, we were able to control. In this piece, the global pandemic is the background and food is the metaphor that helped us to bear witness to each other's struggles, suffering, survival, memories, and dreams.

Too much on too little
too much work/too little time
too much demand/too little resources
too much food/too few ingredients
too much pressure/too little support

Covid-19 and the ensuing urgent need for isolation created a crisis that went beyond the global fear of disease and death. Isolated in our homes, we missed the intellectual sustenance of gathering around food. Our meetings continued and we often raised a glass or a fork to each other on computer screens. The urgency to adapt our meals to the scarcity of food, the muffled guilt of privileged access was reflected in the urgency with which we adapted to the professional demands of work from home and virtual offices.

INTRO TO COVID

it took a plane ride
crossing the Atlantic overnight…
arriving into a different world
new words to rapidly learn
corona-virus, COVID-19, quarantine…
where did spring go?
Texas—my not home, home
shelter in place, work displaced
no longer **we**, just an isolated **me**
learning what to do next…



borracha de pasión
spring in London
touristing, all senses alive
warm weather allows leisurely stroll
Borough Market
farmers open air stalls
savory selections
paella pans
little paper boxes
steaming deliciousness
chose a bougie bistro in Portobello Road
we felt free, dressed in fancy clothes
intoxicated with smells, sounds, colors, feelings

giggling, cuddling, touching, sharing
unbelievably ignorant of the impending upheaval
we didn't know that was our last time eating out

The creative piece reflects in its formatting the stream-of-consciousness flow of conversations and writings as each one processed the momentous blink in our collective lived history. *"The poetic text is both a meal unveiled and proffered forth to the reader as well as a form of sustenance for historical survival."* (Abarca & Soler, 2013). Each individual expressing collective concern in distinct voices. The virtual tools allowing us to piece together that which is ours (the written word and art) and that which we collected (illustrations) in our meaning making process. We did not gather to talk about food but yet it found its way into our conversations, keeping us grounded and reminding us that, "*Food … is not about nutrients and calories. It's about sharing, It's about honesty. It's about Identity." (Louise Fresco, 2009)*. Talk about food invariably underscored the complicated nature of our coping with adversity.

Too much on too little
too much work/too little time
too much demand/too little resources
too much food/too few ingredients
too much pressure/too little support

without a schedule, a work agenda, a timecard
hours 've become even funnier
breakfast when getting up
permits a margarita on the rocks, top shelf
or a banana-split for the sugar deprived
while watches are just perfect decorations
no need for alarms
multiple functions counting steps and calories
for our sitting butts…

No longer ate on a schedule
no longer ate 'cause hungry
ate 'cause could,
ate 'cause couldn't
ate 'cause worried
ate 'cause helpless

stuck at home, churning out exotic meals
privileged access to bizarre ingredients

outside, COVID continued feasting
on the sick, the dying, the dead
migrant workers around the world
the jobless, homeless, devasted
hallucinating of rotting crops on fertile soils
grieving at the failed harvest
starving

The memories of Covid-19, even for the grieving, are fading. The world continues its trajectory toward environmental, political, and humanitarian crisis. The incredible resourcefulness that the world showed in meeting the needs created then is not perceived as a singular draining moment of resilience but has become established as a pre-requisite for all future success. We adapt, change, and chase a continuously moving goal post because we have shown we are capable of it and we will not be allowed to forget it.

This piece celebrates the inherently timeless and simple act of cooking and eating. The understanding that "Food is our common ground, a universal experience" (James Beard, p. xi) was never more true as during the pandemic. We rediscovered the remarkable ability of food to heal, to mend, to bring succor, and a sense of connectedness in a time of isolation.

too much on too little
too much work/too little time
too much demand/too little resources
too much food/too few ingredients
too much pressure/too little support

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Vejoya Viren celebrates her plural existence as a transnational *Indian Texican* living at the USA-Mexico border. She relies on compassion and empathy in navigating both personal and vicarious experiences.

Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto's teaching, research, and writing draw on decolonial indigenous feminist research methodologies. Peruana, inmigrante desplazada, con pasaporte azul, con raíces nómades y amores arrinconados, caminando al ocaso, con pasos de nostalgia, refugiada en la frontera mexicana, donde está aprendiendo, descubriendo, en español, inglés, tejano, peruano, y en valle-chingón. Miryam's work has appeared both in leading journals, handbooks, peer reviewed books, and regional/local publications that evidence the broad interdisciplinary, community based, and intellectual curiosity of her engagement.

Karin Lewis A native of Massachusetts, Karin Lewis cultivates her transplanted roots in the USA-Mexico borderlands with keen appreciation for transcultural understanding. In all her endeavors, she is grounded by gratitude and an ethic of care.

Eunice Lerma is an Associate Professor for the UTRGV Counseling Department. Dr. Lerma has been an educator for 20 years. In her research, she focuses on investigating the factors and practices that impact the mental health, career development, and academic success of Latina/o individuals. Additionally, she studies the dynamic of teaching and learning in post-secondary and its impact on Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI)

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COMPLICATING SPACE: EXPLORING LUGONES AS AN ODAWA NATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Growing up, I clearly understood my connection to indigeneity and being Odawa Native.

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Growing up, I clearly understood my connection to indigeneity and being Odawa Native. Although, as a family, we were not embedded in traditional cultural practices, my father (who was Odawa) and my mother (who was white) ensured from a young age that this was a central component of my identity. As part of the Anishinaabe people, the Odawa are one of the original caretakers of the Great Lakes area of the United States where I grew up. Knowing this from a young age, I have always had a sense of belonging to a community spatially situated. However, balancing two identities was never an easy topic to approach with others outside and sometimes inside my home. Like many Indigenous Americans who may not fall into a Western conception of indigeneity, I often receive confused looks when telling others that I am an Odawa Native. I was seen as too light-skinned or not Native-looking enough for others to believe I was indeed Odawa, which stood in contrast to my father and sister, who are darker than I am. As a form of colorism, this followed me across my life, personally, professionally, and into spaces I have traveled through.

I am intentional with how I present my identity to others. Preferring to use the Anishinaabe spelling Odawa versus its anglicized spelling Ottawa, I am not only subverting linguistic expectations but asserting an authentic self through language. I also choose to wear my hair in two braids to connect to my culture and those who came before me. In doing so, this becomes one of the few physical signifiers of my identity I can express, and push normative conceptions of how men present themselves.

I use this brief introduction as a point of departure to critically reflect on my identity in relation to space and place, shifting the focus of inquiry and positioning myself as the subject of discussion. As space and place are contested areas, identities that challenge normativity are an act of decoloniality, which as an ongoing process, decenters hegemonic power relations and knowledge. Decoloniality asks us to disrupt and critically reflect on what identity means in relation to those we engage with and the places we travel through. As an Odawa Native, I complicate space by intentionally inserting my identity and authentical self into place and space. By examining Lugones' idea of motion and stasis (1998), I consider the following questions: What implications of physical presence in a place are there when a place is unwelcoming to those outside the normative identity? By examining place, power, and mobility, how do we consider entering and engaging with place as an act of resistance? Place becomes a site contestation that is ripe for further exploration.

Maria Lugones states that, "One walks from place of identity to place of identity, one's own and others'. One builds stakes in each place and complicates and challenges each place and is challenged by it and its inhabitants" (1998, 51). Lugones is direct in offering a decolonial moment. In discussing movement in/through space and place, we situate ourselves in a way that disrupts and challenges. She states that this includes "the adoption of several new attitudes as well as a different way of living: moving in and out of communities without thinking that these are places just to pass through as tourists" (51). Lugones' ideas motion/stasis are useful in imagining how individuals and spaces are never the same after engaging with or passing through them. Motion offers us the ability to move through engagements as an overt act of resistance, by inserting oneself

into an environment for the sake of disruption or a subtle articulation of language that changes one's perception. The same can be said of stasis. We can enact an oppositional stance to a hegemonic space by standing still.

As an Odawa, engaging with people and spaces has interesting implications concerning what remains after leaving. Using Lugones, we as individuals embed a piece of ourselves in any given space or person. Nothing is ever genuinely singular in its entirety but an amalgam of everything and everyone that came before. We ultimately embody a piece of everything we encounter and leave behind a part of ourselves after we are gone. This becomes a living memory of people and places. As a decolonial move, this asks us to consider how our engagements with a space or person disrupt and ultimately break down any hegemonic barriers or ideologies. By entering a space as my authentic, Odawa self, I am challenging normativity and conceptions of how Indigenous Americans are perceived and how I am embedding a piece of my existing self in a space and through others. As Lugones' states, "motion is always for the sake of understanding and for the sake of connections with political movement" (52). As I move through space and with people, at the core of my traveling is always a willingness to work toward a decolonial understanding of identity.

Identity work is rarely easy and rarely clear cut. As an Odawa who has faced colorism and erasure of identity, my movement may not always be politically oriented. However, I would be remiss to say this type of engagement was not inherently political. Suppose we apply Lugones' ideas of motion/stasis toward a framework of decoloniality. In that case, we can, as she states, "have a movement that creates space for rearranging one's own identity, for making the complexity of one's own subjectivity explicitly, for articulating it, for making it public" (52). By articulating and making my Odawa identity explicit, I work in and through the margins toward a decolonial mindset. One that places normativity under examination and imagines a better future.

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La Encrucijada: Latina Consciousness, Academia, and Imposed Identity

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ABSTRACT

Latinx identity is complicated and shaped by a history of colonization and neo-colonialism. Living in the U.S., this history is sometimes lost to non-Latinx people. Expectations of what it means to be "Latinx" are created and imposed on to Latinx people living in the U.S. As someone who grew up on La Frontera, I have my own idea of what my identity as a Latina, specifically a Mexican American, is. Having moved away from the border to the Midwest, into an academic context, other peoples' interpretations of my identity as a Latina are constantly shifting and being reshaped. This shifting and reshaping simultaneously casts me as Latina, but not Latina enough to be "legitimate." Using Gloria Anzaldua's "Borderlands/La Frontera," I examine what it means to be a Latina, but not a Latina, at home, and far away in hostile spaces. Using the concept of "La Encrucijada/The Crossroads," I examine how interpretations of my identity shape my place in academic spaces (Anzaldua 1987: 80).

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Racial construction, or "race-making," has the potential for complicated discussions (Omi and Winant 2015, 105). Defining race is a means of categorizing people into groups based on things like culture, class, and religion that provides people with an outline for how to interact with members of different races (Omi and Winant 2015, 105-109). Race-making has a base in history, geography, politics, as well as more personified categories, such as ethnicity and class (Omi and Winant 105). Race in the U.S. has usually been thought of and defined in relation to legal definitions of Blackness (Lopez 2006). While these laws establish a firm Black American identity, they also show the complicated process of creating race and racial identity (Lopez 2006, 84). Groups of people who do not fit into a "Black" or "white" racial binary disrupt the basis for American identity (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Latinidad falls into this category of racial disruption. In the Black and white racial binary, it becomes hard to untangle the results of hundreds of years of colonization that have resulted in a collapsed Latinx identity (Gomez 2020). This Black and white racial binary boils Latinx identity down to "mestizaje- the racial mixture across Spanish, African, and Indigenous ancestors" (69). This collapsed Latinx identity is portrayed as indigenous yet Spanish speaking, central American, immigrant, and definitively not American (Casarez 2022, Chavez 2013).

The American construction of a Latinx identity does little to acknowledge the U.S.'s own place in carving this definition (Gomez 2020). The creation of the Monroe Doctrine led to U.S. intervention and presence in Latin America, which resulted in the destabilization of several countries from the mid-1800s and onwards (Tombs 2003). In the U.S., the Mexican-American war and the idea of American expansion west led to the ceasing of parts of northern Mexico to the U.S., which displaced a large and varied Mexican population (Rathbun 2001). This displacement allowed white settlers to colonize the western territories that formerly belonged to Mexico. White settlers began to construct Mexicans and Mexican descendants in the west as foreign competition, while also questioning the validity of any Mexican claim to land in the area (Chavez 2013, Cummings 2003). These historical moments that have led to the construction of Latinidad through an American lens have resulted in a foreign Latinx identity oppositional to the white portrayals of Americanness (Cazares 2022, Chavez 2013, Cummings 2003). In contrast to this, the construction of Latinidad in areas with high concentrations of Latinx people, such as the border, allows for a more flexible interpretation of identity that recognizes the history of border areas, but still pulls on the American construction of Latinidad (Anzaldua 1987, Chavez 2013). Latinidad in these places is constructed through visible signs, such as accent and hair texture, that non-Latinx individuals have little to no knowledge of (Sowards 2021).

When it comes to my own construction of identity as a Latina, I pull from both the signifiers that Latinx individuals use, as well as the collapsed Latinidad constructed by white Americans. I grew up on the U.S./Mexico border with a white American dad, and a Mexican mom of obvious indigenous descent who had recently migrated to the U.S. My mom's more recent move to the states, her lack of fluency in English, her work as a domestic helper, and her obvious indigeneity resulted in a relational construction of my identity. I was white, until my mom came into the

picture. Because I had a white dad, I was whiter than my Mexican American friends, until they met my mom. My mom's noticeably non-American identity resulted in a Mexican identity for myself that was more validated than the ones my friends held. Of course, this validation was due to anti-indigenous biases held in Mexican American identity. This, like the construction of Latinidad, is due to a collapsed Latinx identity.

These relational signifiers of Latinx identity do not transfer into a midwestern, academic context. I chose to continue my academic path in the Midwest, were Latinx identity holds firmly with the American construction of Latinidad. In the Midwest academic context, I'm not brown enough or foreign enough to be considered Latina, and my research interests do not reflect a Latinx identity. Whiteness gets imposed on me in ways that it did not at home. Outside of this academic context, I am interpreted as foreign. I am not white, I am not Black, I am "other". It is only in the academic space that I am not Latina enough. I am only a Latina when the space calls for it. In times of department and university recruitment, I am Latina. When it comes to questions of diversity, I become Latina.

The oppositional construction and imposition of a white identity on to me creates a crossroads of sorts. Gloria Anzaldua writes about the crossroads (La Encrucijada) that mestizas face, stating:

> Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings (Anzaldua 1987, 80).

My identity is not one dimensional. It is the result of historical forces that continue to shape it over time. The perceptions of my identity are not indicative of my experiences as a Latina. The imposition of whiteness on to my identity does not negate any racism I've experienced outside the academic sphere. Just because I am white in an academic context does not mean I've never been told to "go back to my country" or that people like me "belong in service jobs because we can't do anything else." While it may not always be physically obvious, my identity as a Latina is still my identity, even when questioned. There are parts of Latinidad that I always carry with me, such as my bilingual and bicultural perspectives (Bernal 2001). These parts of my identity provide me with an understanding of the world that allows me to question definitions in place that are treated as fact, something that I am truly grateful for.

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TALES OF AN ACADEMIC IMMIGRANT: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

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ABSTRACT:

I've struggled for quite a bit with my urge and reluctance to write about my experiences as an immigrant in the south and how they shifted when I came to the northeast. I am working within the resistance to better understand my self and positionalities within and outside of the social, cultural, and political context of the academe, both as a graduate student and now as a faculty member. I have been compelled to work on this piece with the hope that the process helps me theorize and understand what it means to be [perceived] as a racialized woman. I theorize the possibilities that spaces create for me (or any other person) to freely express the self, to be/come and grow, or the constraints such spaces could impose that erase and silence us.

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[T]he woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self.
Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios,*
the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits.
Gloria Anzaldúa

Working toward a decolonial feminism is to learn about each other as resisters to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference, without necessarily being an insider to the worlds of meaning from which resistance to the coloniality arises.
Maria Lugones

I've struggled for quite a bit with my urge and reluctance to write about my experiences as an immigrant in the south and how they shifted when I came to the northeast. I am working within the resistance to better understand my self and positionalities within and outside of the social, cultural, and political context of the academe, both as a graduate student and now as a faculty member. I have been compelled to work on this piece with the hope that the process helps me theorize and understand what it means to be [perceived] as a racialized woman. I theorize the possibilities that spaces create for me (or any other person) to freely express the self, to be/come and grow, or the constraints such spaces could impose that erase and silence us.

In this autoethnographic reflection, I work dialectically with "impossible knowledge" (Haig-Brown, 2003) emulating the work of the Latina Feminist Group (2001) exploring ways in which my identities express and represent the complexities of the communities I am part of, and the perceptions that others may have of me. Autoethnographic stories demonstrate "how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experiences" (Adams et al 2015, 3). Thus, I portray how I know and interpret the lived experiences as I embody my intersectionalities and the significance of the collective work in those communities to help me better understand my roles, belongingness, connections, and positionalities. Following Audre Lorde's advice about seeing poetry as "a vital necessity of our existence" (2007, 37), I use poetry to convey the theorizing of this exploration. I share the radical and daring reflections through poetic testimonios interweaved in this autoethnographic work in the efforts of unsettling the performative-I, as a polyvocal being (Spry 2016).

De Donde Vengo – Be/coming

Two aspects from my upbringing, among others, influence my teaching practice and scholarly work. First, being raised by two extraordinary women whom, by example and unconsciously, taught me about feminism and indigenous experiential knowledge. The second was my first teaching job. It was at a non-traditional school based on a humanistic personalized pedagogy focused on developing autonomy and responsibility. Its philosophy was based on respecting students' potential and decision-making by learning at their own pace. These events set the foundation and my interest in decolonizing epistemologies and pedagogy – although I didn't know

those terms at that time. Understanding there are other ways of being and doing in educational settings and knowing the crucial role of experiential knowledge was critical as a teacher, but even more vital as a transnational educator. Thus, it has been one of the issues I embody and advocate for as I became an immigrant.

Leaving a life behind is not easy
I came with hopes and optimism
    Ilusiones y aspiraciones
    con ganas de trabajar y "triunfar"
    con la idea del famoso "sueño americano"
What I encounter is no paradise
Nothing is familiar
The first barrier is the language
that barrier never lifts
    but by no means is the only one
    there's another invisible barrier
the omnipresent prejudice
that comes with being "otherized"
I became an "alien"
always a foreigner
    many times invisible
    other times noticeable just to be outcast
    I learned to live in the borderlands
    developed a new consciousness
I became a mestiza.

Being a foreign graduate student in a predominantly white university is not easy. As Haig-Brown indicates I had to deal with impossible knowledge "knowledge that is beyond our grasp because of the limits of our language and our lived experience" (2003, 415). Learning to navigate such spaces, to legitimize my background and experiences, and to create "a new story to explain the world and our participation in it" (Anzaldua 2007, 103).

Going to graduate school is a scramble
juggling multiple roles
meeting expectations
proving I'm worthy
learning the language and the "right" moves
to play the game of white, westernized academia.
Being a outsider puts me on the spot
having an accent makes scrutiny more rigid
professors carefully questioning and examining
my knowledge and experience

because it’s from another country, from the Global South
my grammar is more important than my ideas
my articulation is more significant than my elaboration
students want proof that I can actually teach them something
but they don’t pay attention to the content
or the pedagogical approach
or the educational tools and resources I bring to class
they only hear my accent
not my words
Vacillations constantly haunt me
the imposter syndrome whispers
las dudas siempre están ahí
gritando, ahogando
cuestionándome, volviéndome frágil, vulnerable
me pregunto si vale la pena
todo el esfuerzo, la fatiga, la nostalgia… para qué?

How to describe the systemic oppression since it is so subtle and elusive, yet so vivid and conspicuous? Every single interaction could be an aggression, from the squinty glances, sharp looks, or sneaky peeks. To the innocent comment, intense inquiry, or acute inquisition full of animosity disguised as politeness. The feeling of being under scrutiny is endless and inescapable. I am keenly aware of my foreignness, my accent, and my speaking mistakes because people around me have forced me to have this permanent awareness. Their judgement of me is what sets the bar higher and higher every time. The standard goal set for a stranger is to become part of the mainstream with or without his/her consent. In this case, the ideal goal for an immigrant in the U.S. is to assimilate and try to be as white as possible in the least amount of time. Kendi (2019) suggests that assimilationist ideas are racist because they position a group as a superior standard that other groups should be trying to reach. Resisting assimilation was one of my biggest learnings as an immigrant. My language, culture, and experiential knowledge are an invaluable asset, and I must keep legitimizing it.

Resisting, persisting, surviving,
in their eyes
I was what they wanted me to be
another Hispanic
        invisible, dismissible
Resisting, persisting, surviving,
        in my eyes
I was another success story
        I became part of the 2%
        the two percent of Latina women in academic settings

The three letters at the end of my name (PhD) are supposed to make a difference? In westernized academe the degree is what validates my knowledge. However, I didn't have the opportunity to teach in the South after I graduated. The academic job took me to the Northeast, a small town, completely different context.

Resisting, persisting, surviving
moving to the Northeast
    another migration
    more foreign
still alien
with the cold
the alienation feeling goes deeper
embodied difference is evident
still sometimes invisible
no more dismissible
but I continue
resisting, persisting, surviving

The new context was unexpected. Still a predominantly white institution. Yet, people around me are not jumping to their judgements immediately. The racialization of my being switched, and I can't quite fully describe it yet. My students are predominantly female, white, middle-working class. They come from rural, semi-rural and suburban settings with Christian values and Eurocentric ideologies from mostly homogeneous communities, and almost all of them overtly expressed not being exposed to any diversity. Students don't seem to be bothered by my accent or mistakes. They never even mention it. Are the three letters after my name making this difference? Is that their way of complying status or showing "respect"? Do they even care about different accents and speeches when they are not exposed to them frequently? How is the white privilege working here? I always thought I would work with students from minoritized and diverse groups. Thus, situating my teaching practice in this new context has been both challenging and rewarding. Still, enacting my philosophy of teaching, that is, following my beliefs and ideas about teaching and learning that includes decolonizing and indigenizing my praxis as teacher educator is a permanent endeavor.

My epistemological and pedagogical approaches to my academic work repeatedly challenge dominant paradigms and traditions in education. As a mestiza, woman of color, and teacher educator my scholarly work aims at developing critical consciousness and enacting decolonial epistemologies and pedagogies that are centered in the values and principles of indigenous ways of knowing and being (Rodríguez 2021; Kulago 2021). Certainly, in this process I must constantly work on decolonizing my own ways of thinking, being, and doing.

Academic freedom
but don't go too outside the box
Be creative
but within the limits of traditions and standards

Think and teach critically
but don't disturb students
Academy is a site of resistance
as long your student's rates are good
and meet the requirements for tenure
produce innovative scholarly work
but within the limits of hegemony

My college students, as many others in this country, come from at least 12 years of schooling, training within a western, capitalist, hegemonic knowledge and traditions, such as benchmarks and standardized testing, accelerated reading programs, and pressure to achieve and meet curriculum standards. This indoctrination does not pay attention to theories that urge us to consider and include individual interests, abilities, pace of learning, and diversity among other aspects that will help learners to develop to their full potential. Hence, my pedagogical approaches are perceived as foreign as me. Inviting students to think critically, to engage in analytically demanding discussions, or to design their own path for learning without specific step by step directions and/or a single "right" answer becomes challenging. Doing this work is uncomfortable, pushing them out of their comfort zone. Ahenakew (2016) warns us that indigenizing and decolonizing teaching practice is only welcome when it does not try to change the status quo. This way of doing school is not the standard for them. So, now students' comments are not about my accent or my knowledge. They complain about the lack of structure because there are no benchmarks. It is hard for them to engage in a relationship with the content, with me, with the context, with other learners in a meaningful and intimate way that allows us to being-in-relation (Patel 2014). I, along with the students, am coming into being in this decolonizing learning process. I am learning how to be/come an indigenizing and decolonizing teacher educator, disrupting traditional westernized ways of knowing and being, valuing and acquiring relational knowledge as we walk side-by-side (Chung 2019) grounded in our realities to transform our subjectivities and creating other ways of existing.

Being a foreigner is no longer a sin
still resisting, persisting, surviving
still an alien
I am not afraid of discomfort
I welcome challenge and impossible knowledge
I push to ways of knowing outside the mainstream
I go out of the frame of western epistemologies
resisting, persisting, disrupting

Coming from the field of curriculum studies that claims to be praxis-oriented with a subjectivity-focused perspective, my teaching uses a decolonizing and indigenizing framework in which learning begins from personal experiences and it is filtered through students' identities. Therefore, we need to explore and analyze their own ways of knowing and being challenging the traditional notions of knowledge producers. It also means making visible what has been

unnoticeable, like the lack of diverse representation or the indoctrinating school practices that they/we are/have been subjected to.

This autoethnographic account reflects on the ways I make room for other ways of knowing, doing, and being, centered in and supported by indigenous knowledges, embedded in my teaching and scholarly work. However, doing decolonial work disrupting traditional practices and exploring other ways of knowing, being, and doing is diving into the unknowning (Ortega 2017). These indigenizing and decolonizing pedagogies create space for other possibilities of being, feeling, doing, thinking, looking, listening, knowing, and existing (Walsh 2013). Enacting decolonizing praxis and indigenizing teacher education is an ongoing endeavor that I embrace and embody to not only resist but also exist.

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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.

Recommended Citation

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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.

CONTRIBUTORS:

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EXPLORING AWARENESS THROUGH RACE-BASED EPISTEMOLOGIES

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BUILDING BRIDGES FOR ALL

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ABSTRACT:
Awareness is the ultimate goal of a truth-seeking individual. Some reach that stage early on in life; however, some of us never quite get there. Yet, can full awareness ever be reached? Is it an illusion or a mirage of the human mind? This is something I cannot answer. It is up to an individual to decide what awareness or truth is and means to them and when they've reached that point (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995) if they ever do. Nevertheless, awareness or truth is not definite or a set destination, but rather a dynamic, evolving and open-ended process that occurs throughout life. It is a process of decolonization of the mind, heart and soul (Henrichs 2020) that allows us to reframe our perspectives (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and leads us to discovery, understanding, and transformation (Freire 1970).

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Awareness is the ultimate goal of a truth-seeking individual. Some reach that stage early on in life; however, some of us never quite get there. Yet, can full awareness ever be reached? Is it an illusion or a mirage of the human mind? This is something I cannot answer. It is up to an individual to decide what awareness or truth is and means to them and when they've reached that point (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995) if they ever do. Nevertheless, awareness or truth is not definite or a set destination, but rather a dynamic, evolving and open-ended process that occurs throughout life. It is a process of decolonization of the mind, heart and soul (Henrichs 2020) that allows us to reframe our perspectives (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and leads us to discovery, understanding, and transformation (Freire 1970).

As my exposure to physical, worldly, and intellectual experiences have increased a new world of understanding has opened for me. Truth be told, prior to entering a doctoral program, my mentality and views were narrow and complacent as a result of limited experiences and exposure with like-minded people in my upbringing. Although, having grown up along the Texas-Mexico border, experiencing Mexican traditions in my youth from frequently visiting relatives, and living in various cities across Texas and in the Middle East in my adulthood broadened my horizons and allowed me to develop new perspectives of knowledge and understanding. However, it wasn't until I was exposed to literature on various theories and epistemologies in education that my views expanded. This new and developing knowledge has given me a fresh and divergent way to look at the world, the people in it and their interactions. It has helped me develop a new understanding of what a life-long learner means and given me some understanding of the process of unpacking one's perspectives to understand one's behaviors and actions. In other words, it has allowed me to initiate a process of unpacking my lived experiences that have cultivated my views to decolonize and discover new ways of being (Tuhiwai Smith 1999) in a journey of healing.

Thinking back to my childhood learning experiences, I never really thought of them as oppressive, patriarchal, or colonized (Freire 1970; Kohli 2008; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; McLaren 2009). Most of my experiences and understandings were attributed to cultural and ethnic upbringing and not to an oppressive and racist society. I thought my childhood living conditions and experiences were due to my parents' lack of education, immigration status and financial deficits. Basically, this was just the way it was and that was the life we were given. However, in my naivete, I viewed life as full of opportunities ready for the taking and, those that didn't take chances were lacking in desire and grit. After all, the United States of America was the land of freedom and opportunity. All you had to do was want it regardless of your background and social status (Delgado Bernal 2002; McLaren 2009; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman 2008). It never occurred to me that as Mexican-Americans, we were products of a passively oppressed ideology that were bred to think that way. As Kohli (2008) puts it, "…the dominant culture can penetrate the way we see ourselves and the world around us" (177). Growing up, I often thought of myself as special because in my mind my overcoming of struggles was due to grit and hard work (Delgado Bernal 2002). To put it simply, you get what you work for. While that may be

somewhat true, it is also true that the system is imperceptibly built for us to feel that way. The American Dream is within arm's reach!

Exposure to critical race theory and epistemologies as a doctoral student, has evoked childhood memories, flooding me with images and feelings of insecurity, denial, shame and rejection. Although I grew up in a community where everyone looked and talked like me, there were evident differences in social, economic, and immigration status. These differences justified the treatment of students and certain members of the community as empty vessels (Freire 1970) and inferior beings (Delgado Bernal 2002) by those in authority positions. These same experiences filled me with pride most of the time, yet, also provoked shame. Even though I had pride in my Mexican heritage, culture and roots, I felt shame of where I lived, our immigration status, our lack of transportation, our lack of resources, my inability to learn English quickly enough according to my teachers, and most of all my name, Martha Maria. It was the epiphany of my Mexican-ness. The Mexican-ness that I embraced, but also rejected. Fully accepting it would be a setback to my achieved assimilation and perceived notion of Americanization. Hence, many of my insecurities as a female, a Mexican, an American, a Latina, a learner, a teacher, and a mother stem from the experiences in my schooling and the perplexity of my identity. Exposure to literature on critical race theory and related theories and epistemologies that expose the inequities of schooling, and identity have helped me understand the feelings of inadequacy I often experienced in my youth and as an adult.

Delgado Bernal (2002) stated, "although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal education settings" (106). There are many intersecting factors that contribute to a colonized mind that manifest as an individual's identity, self-worth, and values. Race for example continues to be a prevalent factor in modern-day colonization. An individual's race determines the struggles and opportunities you will face in your life journey whether they are related to education, economic or socio-cultural factors. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) race, "continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States" (48). Power is another prevalent factor that moves the world and contributes to colonization. The dominant group maintains power over other racial groups, economic, educational, and social structures in overt and covert ways. They also claim that power "…has been the central feature" in America and it involves the notion of "property rights" (53). It is often justified and unnoticed by both the oppressor and oppressed. Jupp (2021) defined whiteness as hegemonic normativity as "…the racial-ontological structuring that establishes the commonsense humanity or normality of White-skinned people against which racialized others are measured as less human or deficient" (225). It provides fair-skinned people with privileges or advantages, often unacknowledged, unconscious, and unearned, "…like an invisible knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (McIntosh 1988, para. 5). These factors shape traditional curricular foundations, development and practices that perpetuate the control of the power holders (McIntosh, 1988). Therefore, education serves as a "tool of

oppression" to "maintain White dominance" and "create hierarchies of power" (Kohli 2008, 179-181).

Thus, how can this master narrative of power and privilege in education be interrupted and transformed? Critical Race Theory (CRT) and race-based epistemologies challenge the traditional scholarship and dominant discourse to give ethnic minorities their humanity back. These frameworks have the ability to "…understand and improve the educational experiences of students of color" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, 109). In addition, race-based epistemologies "…speak to the failures of traditional patriarchal and liberal educational scholarship and examine the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Delgado Bernal 1998, 556). CRT as defined by Kohli (2008) is a framework developed "…to acknowledge race and its intersections with racism as a first step to combating the daily oppression of racial injustice" (181). It is a method to bring awareness about racism and inequities in education. Wing (2014) provided essential tenets of CRT in educational research, which are used to support race-based epistemologies that stem from CRT's basic foundation.

> The first is that racism is a normal and ordinary part of our society rather than an aberration. A second tenet is that the subordination existing within the white-over-color hierarchy is a critical aspect of how our society develops both psychologically and materially. Third, race is a social construct and is not a fixed or biological reality. Fourth is that race is constructed and reconstructed to meet the needs and demands of the dominant society. Fifth is that identity is unique to the individual and should be considered holistically. A sixth tenet is that there is a 'unique voice of color' among groups who have faced oppression. A seventh tenet is that law may be a necessary but not always a sufficient approach to resolving racial hierarchies. (164)

As researchers and educators, it is our moral obligation to unpack our experiences and our bias in an effort to bring awareness to the marginalization of minority groups by acknowledging, accepting and incorporating their lived, multidimensional and intersecting experiences in the educational curriculum and teaching practices. Critical Race Feminism (CRF), Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), and Critical White Studies (CWS) provide an emancipatory framework that highlights students as knowledge holders and creators (Delgado Bernal 2002). Centralizing the storied individual and collective storied experience (Berry 2010), and emphasizing a "new politics of knowledge" that denounces and challenges traditional educational methods (Jupp 2021, 224) to achieve conscientization in educational research, teacher preparation program development, teaching methods, and curricular development.

By adopting a race-based epistemological approach to teaching, educators are able to use their experiences in conjunction with student's past and present experiences to inform pedagogical decisions for the present and future. It leads into the creation of reflexive pedagogy or the ability to engage with students' intersectionalities critically in education (Jupp 2021). Lastly, race-based epistemologies provide the framework that acknowledges and validates the susceptibility, resiliency, and multiplicity of human beings (Evans-Winters and Esposito 2010).

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REMEMBERING OUR ANCESTORS THROUGH CONVIVIENZA, PLÁTICAS, Y TESTIMONIOS

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ABSTRACT:
The grave is the final resting place for our physical remains, yet in our culture, we continue to visit the grave to be reminded of our ancestors' spirits. *Coco, Encanto*, and *The Book of Life* stand as examples of how our customs and rituals have been exploited in mass media for the world to consume and misuse its aesthetics. This reflection is not about a particular holiday, but how our Xicanx Texanx ancestors passed down knowledge from generation to generation, keeping our stories alive, and shaping our future—it is autohistoria-teoria in praxis (Arfuso 2021). In three broad approaches we explore and explicate our constructions of value in the context of our borderland experiences (Anzaldúa 1987): Convivienza, Platícas, y Testimonios.

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The grave is the final resting place for our physical remains, yet in our culture, we continue to visit the grave to be reminded of our ancestors' spirits. *Coco, Encanto*, and *The Book of Life* stand as examples of how our customs and rituals have been exploited in mass media for the world to consume and misuse its aesthetics. This reflection is not about a particular holiday, but how our Xicanx Texanx ancestors passed down knowledge from generation to generation, keeping our stories alive, and shaping our future—it is autohistoria-teoria in praxis (Arfuso 2021). In three broad approaches we explore and explicate our constructions of value in the context of our borderland experiences (Anzaldúa 1987): Convivienza, Platícas, y Testimonios.

CONVIVIR CON FAMILIA

Convivir con familia—defined in the context of our individual stories, become one (Bhattacharya and Keating 2018). It is the product of our familial influences and struggles against hegemonic ideals which surround us. Exposing and immersing ourselves and our children with extended family and sharing stories of our ancestors can happen in different forms (Parra-Cardona, Córdova, Holtrop, Villarruel, and Wieling 2008). Privileging pláticas, we discuss dream interpretations and presentimientos, remedios caseros and curanderismo.

Ojas

En la madrugada of the start of the work week; the cold moist air clinging to the leaves, I lay in quiet
En el nombre del padre, el hijo, y el espirito santo
Peacefully watching mi abuela Connie before the oppressive heat of the day
The soft illumination of the lamp, a 30-watt yellow haze surrounded her
Creating a soft aura around her head, reminiscent of the images of saints
Decorating our church windows
She turned the soft worn pages of her bible and expressed the first joyful mystery
En el principio ya existía la Palabra; y la Palabra estaba junto a Dios y era Dios.
Padre nuestro que estás en el cielo She whispered
her inner hopes and fears, of her sons and daughters, carried away on the whisps of air emanating from her lips
Dios te salve, Maria. Llena eres de gracia
Her fingers deftly and assuredly caressed the smoothed crystalline beads, minute by minute more accurately than the hands of the kitchen clock
The hour of her watch fulfilled, breathing out her last message, Ruega por nosotros
the last words spoken to her late husband and begging for mercy from her Jesusito
the leaves blew across the grass as the sun warmed the earth and her soul rejoiced for another day

My grandmother passed in the early days of COVID, succumbing to this virus contracted while in the hospital. Isolated from family, away from her bed at home; I did not get to pray with her, say goodbye to her, even attend her burial. I still converse with her though. Connie is every day present in my prayers, wishes for my sons and wife; she is in every memory of life; she is in every page I turn of the Bible, her soft fingertips gently guiding mine as we recall that His love, which she shared with me too, is with us both and that she is no longer of this world and that we should never have been.

My grandmother was a strong woman, widowed with two boys at home still in the 1970s. She taught faith to me more than religion. She was not going to sink away from a belief in her abilities or her rights. She opposed the priests in her parish, reminding them that this was her community, and they were visitors passing through. She was a Valley Interfaith worker, reminding the politicians that they too were transient practitioners of power in the community where her influence held power. Never one to back away from what she believed to be proper action she offended because of her straightforwardness. I have taken her examples and applied them to success and detriment in higher education. Failing to obtain a PhD because I did what was right, reminding certain academics that what was important to study and what was of value to know were what comes from the researcher, not the popularity of journal articles. I lost academic positions fighting for the rights of students and community rather than bowing to the system and its self-aggrandizement. I have lost research and prevented others from conducting "research" holding them not just to ethical compliance but to moral and just causes. All because Connie modeled approaches to life passed to her from generations before, the whispers she delivered were those also emitted in Las Rusias of her parents Hilario y Fidela Trevino, and her grandfather Hilario.

NUESTROS HIJOS

We use arnica to alleviate bruising, and sangre de chango to sterilize wounds. They understand that mama's medicine can come in the form of pills, but also a walk on the beach or a cup of coffee. They understand that sometimes we are doctors, and at other times we need to rely on other doctors to help us. They have learned to recognize the northern winds moving through campus by the smell of the maize from the Maseca plant north of town. They understand humility as hand-me-down clothes, sharing meals with the homeless, and knowing that we at any time could be asking for help from our community.

Our sons watch and analyze our habitual patterns of everyday life, and we live life knowing we are watched by them. Every action was scrutinized and questioned. We carefully craft our words and actions. They understand that our work is not contained in an office, but it is dynamic—work occurs in different settings, meetings, and formats, and we include them at every opportunity—conferences, protests, marches, poetry readings, lectures, social functions. We talk about injustices in terms they understand—and we limit their access to first world entitlement. We function without internet access at home, without televisions, without electronics—instead, we teach them to rely on newspapers, radios, books, cuentos/stories, and letters to communicate.

Testimonios—we (re)tell our stories of struggle in the academe and the conflicts which arise and privilege because of femininities/masculinities, standing as güera/prieto, advantaged / disadvantaged, and the realm of Mexicanidad/Latindad/Xhicanidad (Orelus 2020; Saldana, Castro-Villarreal, and Sosa 2013).

TESTIMONIOS DE PRESENTIMIENTOS

Having been raised by a family who rejected and moved past our Indigeneity in public, a hallowing shadow cast upon the many rituals, beliefs, and stories of our ancestors was very much present in our private lives. My family, nuclear and extended, were converts of a protestant, Christian fundamentalist group, Church of Christ, during the 1960s in the Borderlands of Texas and Tamaulipas. The rules of this conservative denomination governed our behavior—complete abstinence of alcohol, foods cooked in blood, and all religious and mystical paraphernalia amongst other things. The people of the Borderlands are prevalently Catholic and partake naturally of the undertakings that were forbidden to me. I consumed and thrived upon any access to the culture and knowledge of my ancestors and their traditions. The repressed curiosity and yearning were placated, but not satisfied, with the stories passed down, the remedios and sobadas that I learned for healing, and the paraphernalia I kept hidden in my mind. Hierbas, crystals, twigs, twine, eggs-things of the everyday—manifested in my mind the paraphernalia I could not hold or touch, and much less own.

Because I could not hold the things I wanted, my mind held on tighter to every word and ritual of Indigeneity and culture. I was raised as a single child in my formative years in a multigenerational home, and this gave me much space to become a wanderer of my own cognitions and psyche—but also, a voyeur to the uninhibited behavior of my family and the muscle memories their minds and bodies created prior to their conversion to this nouveau morale. My maternal great-grandmother, the mother of my mother's mother had the greatest influence and gave the greatest insight. She was the matriarch of her ten living offspring, their children and their children's children. She was the original convert to this new way, but I learned many of the old ways from her.

I learned the art of her matriarchate, the power of her influence. I learned the harmless, palatable recipes of the malleable maize—the sustenance of our ancestors. The many traditional dishes of our people. I observed and learned the science of healing with hierbas: arnica, marijuana, manzanilla, romero, cola de caballo, pelos de elote, estafiate, y mucho más. I learned how to release bolas during a sobada using a pulling technique with the wrist, index finger and thumb, also tronar anginas. I also learned in sobadas about empache, pulling up the skin on the lower back with olive oil to cure indigestion, abrir la cadera—to align the spine. I learned cranial and sinus massages; I learned how to release toxic energy with ramas, the pirul, and eggs during a barrida or limpia. I learned so many things that my hands and digits can still replicate to this day.

The things I learned from my Mama Coco go beyond the nurturing and healing of the body. I learned the need for convivio with our family, also the need for pláticas. Pláticas go beyond just conversing. There is so much art in the embodiment of plática, the power dynamics that occur

during the plática, and the empowerment that the members receive from the dynamic interaction. There was a special connection I felt with the pláticas I had with her—they were often with 2 other women—my mother and grandmother. We were all the oldest daughters born 20 years apart from each other: 1931, 1951, 1971, and 1990, las cuatro generaciones. We would talk about our insecurities, our dreams and presentimientos, and the history of our family.

The sueños and presentimientos were always the pláticas that gave you chills down your spine. Interpreting dreams that foreshadowed death, pain, longevity of life, tribulations, and chismes never failed to amaze me when they became real in just a few hours or weeks. I learned to observe the color of death on a person's countenance, the sudden twisters of dust and butterflies which meant death was near, and the distinguished sounds of the chariot that could be heard at night—a donkey drawn cart with the sounds metallic clinking on asphalt stopping in front of your home to knock on your screen door at the witching hour.

As a child I often suffered from fever-induced seizures and hallucinations, and I also sleepwalked regularly. Mama Coco would always listen receptively to the description of the people I would meet and talk to in these other worldly experiences. To this day, I have many of those meetings through vivid dreams. For the past several years I have managed to suppress these encounters through prescribed anticonvulsants.

Growing up, I was never ashamed of my culture, but I lived in a narrative that told me that my culture was subpar and had to be hidden. Academia has been very much like religion for me—painting the same narrative—hiding behind the third person and peer-reviewed articles. Things fell into perspective for me when I began reading about my culture from outsiders claiming to be the experts, academics who claim to be the experts. I understand that there are many layers of colonization that exists between me and Indigeneity, and I acknowledge them openly—colonized primary, secondary and postsecondary schooling, religion, growing up conditioned that my Indigeneity was not valued, my language—English and Spanish being the colonizers' languages and very few indigenous words that have managed to survive genocide—making everyday choices, from food to clothing, that help me assimilate with white Academics because I want to advance my career. I am also a wife, a mother of two young boys—being raised in academic circles—furthering removing them from the fountain of Indigenous sources. My sons, however, are being exposed openly to our culture, values, and beliefs. I refuse to hide behind white masks, I acknowledge the parts of my life that have been whitewashed and bleached, I do my part in reparations—I connect community to academia and acknowledge my community as a knowledgeable source, participants, but also co-researchers.

Pláticas—as parents, a mother and father, we interrogate our relationship in the light of our faith, culture, and levels of colonization. We do this as BIPOC members of a community in the borderlands of the Rio Bravo attempting to navigate both academia, family with its own struggles of occupation, and raising two boys to know how to treat people (Hurtado and Sinha 2008).

CAMINANDO CON LOS ANCIANOS

Walking is my life and gives life. A gift I learned to ignore in this western dominated existence I have had for too long. When I was young, I walked with my grandmother in the yard, making thousands of little circles as I lifted fallen leaves from her tree and petals of the rosebush. I carried each with the reverence one is taught as a child for all living and gentle creatures. I carried them to the wheelbarrow and laughed, cheered, and cried. I knew, both from the gentle urges presented in her teachings and from genetic memory, that with the quiet and peace of nature came the opportunity to converse with our creator.

Just a few blinks later, I walked to school, enmeshing with the coal dust and sulfur of the industrial market. Warned to stay away, I did the opposite. I always ventured toward the unknown, the dangerous, the ignored. It offered me the opportunity to be me. Feeling alone in a dangerous world, ignored as a foreigner in a foreign land. The same feeling granted me back home because of language barriers. Netito habla Inglés bien; ¿pero que quiere, esta pidiendo por Chicharras con huevo? I began to learn not to hear, because I was incapable of listening. They spoke to me here too, but I failed to listen. Thus began my run away from family values. I heard the stories but failed to listen to them at all.

Walking became a task, a chore to accomplish the goal of arriving at a spot. I walked through the blinding and freezing snows of the mile high city in the aftermath of two blizzards. I walked among the barricades, entrenchments, and bunkers of the coastal artillery in the jungles of the isthmus of Panama. I walked in the red clay of the south Georgian pine woods, staining my shoes and pants. I walked among the stone embankments of the Hudson River valley with ice floes as my companion. I walked with the rolling tumbleweeds on the hardpan floor of the Chihuahuan Desert in the shade of the Franklins.

While walking I saw the shadows of violence carried in the winds of the dark woods. The branches spoke to me of the bodies strung from their limbs. The dirt clung to me as it desperately sought a listener to understand the blood that it absorbed out of pity for victims of other men. The rocks bore witness to me of the bodies smashed against them in war and crimes. The wind, ever present, danced with nature to carry their words to my heart and soul, but my ignorance and depravity led me to only feel the cold chill of these deaths or the warm humidity of their last breaths and to ignore them.

It was the chilly wind of the April north, the last of the cold evenings, that brought the news to me. I had not paid any attention to this wind. But it spoke to me, the chills on my neck and arms spoke to me. The eeriness of the light spoke to me. But it was the words released from my mother's mouth that passed my ears. My grandfather had died. I was wounded, though the blade that entered did so with the precision of a scalpel. It carved out the malice of my heart and reinvigorated the cry for justice and mercy which I had abandoned as a child.

The stories flooded my memories of the man who listened to AM radio in the dead of night, to hear of the people's plight for equality and justice. My name given to me through his influence, his adoration of Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Memories of the man who had as a child come to the Frontera for work. The stories of his hardness and loving appreciation for his son came

to my heart. Memories of his letter writing to my own father came back to me. Memories of my callous approach to him and the fact that I had only seen him four times in my conscious memory haunted me.

I see the mariposas and feel my grandfather there, returning to Mexico each spring as he so desperately wanted to do in life. Crushed in the oblivion of life centered in work and survival, he was buried in the inner city of Houston while still alive. But he has spoken to me, and I have learned to listen. His wishes and dreams carried on the gusts of wind that I can now appreciate and relate with. Rushed to move beyond the countenance of existence they drive us and motivate us. When we listen to them, we are emboldened by the spirit of our maker. We are made humans again as He has created us, master and grateful respecter of life.

I now walk with my sons, carry them as much as I can with the intent do so for as long as I can. To map within them the spirit of our ancestors and the value of the steps we take. To converse with them without words in a way that only their body and soul can know together. I walk with my sons to demonstrate how it is done. The way my father did with me. Now four generations speak together as my grandfather's plight and my father's sacrifices come to my mouth and shape my every deed—how I can now understand what was told to me and appreciate the steps each of them took walking. I can now feel their steps, those of my grandfather nearly 100 years ago as he came here to work and live, to walk along the canals as he struggled in his employment and to watch for his children's illicit attempts to swim in the flowing waters. I can feel the steps taken in lugged boots from my father's drafted service to the army and those he took to plant a new path before me. I can feel the innocence of the first steps my sons have taken, toward greater heights than I can imagine or ever hope for myself.

Walking is my life and gives life. A gift I have finally come to accept in my rejection of the western-dominated existence I have enjoyed for far too long. Esta es nuestra autohistoria-teoria en praxis; nuestras experiencias son nuestro testimonio vivo. Our only hope is to be to our children what our ancestors were to us and do all in our power to encourage them to pass down this knowledge.

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Ernesto is of and in the borderlands; his poetry interrogates life en la frontera and privilege in the academe - he is the Rascuache Academic.

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BEYOND THE WORD AND THE WOMB: PARENTING AS ANZALDÚAN ATRAVESADE

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ABSTRACT:
It's a glorious desert winter day. My baby[vii] is on the slide, belly flat, snaking his way down. At the bottom he pops up to his toes and flings his arms to the sky. He is dancing to music only he can hear.

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It's a glorious desert winter day. My baby[viii] is on the slide, belly flat, snaking his way down. At the bottom he pops up to his toes and flings his arms to the sky. He is dancing to music only he can hear. The warm sun and my love are his audience. And then I hear a deep voice, another nearby parent, excitedly cheering:

Córrele! Córrele![ix]

My baby stomps and spins faster, loving the attention.

¿Es tu único?[x]

The magic spell of this impromptu playground performance is broken.

Más o menos sí, pero no. No es mío.[xi]

Ah. ¿Entonces cuidas a otros niños?[xii]

In my compulsion to be truthful about my non-motherhood, I become nanny, family friend, babysitter, aunt. It is a brutal reminder of the ways I do not exist in other people's eyes.

Just say yes. That's what I would do. Who cares?

My baby's co-parent, and only legal guardian, encourages me to just claim my status as mom, and maybe someday I will create a space where motherhood feels like mine. But what if there is a transborder middle space between mother and everything else, and that space is where I belong? How does my "just saying yes" erase the interstitial space of home and belonging I've carved out in four years of love and life in the name of shoving myself into a box that other people can recognize?

Gloria E. Anzaldúa's intellectual work bears witness to powerful modes of interstitial existence, mapping both crossers and crossing as beings and acts of trauma, resistance, and survival:

> A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary… *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal" (25).

Anzaldúa names "los atravesados" as subjects imbued with both wisdom and wounds. This model of knowledge born from the trauma and knowledge of border crossing underlies my parenting testimonio. By placing my Anzaldúan atravesade[xiii] parenting testimonio in conversation with decolonial frameworks, I assert that a queer of color lens can play a powerful role in the decolonization of restrictive and binary modes of parenting and family.

I sit in an Urgent Care at 3am with my infant's raspy lungs pressed against my chest. I engage in a familiar performance of my impotence:

Are you mom?

No. I'm a… family friend. She's on her way.

Ok let us know when she gets here. We can't do anything until then.

But I have a copy of her driver license and his insurance card. Can we at least get checked in?

I'm sorry. We can't do anything without the mother.

In her mapping of a decolonial feminism, María Lugones posits the devastating impact and efficiency of colonial frameworks upon the bodies and being of colonized peoples:

> Under the imposed gender framework, the bourgeois white Europeans were civilized; they were fully human. The hierarchical dichotomy as a mark of the human also became a normative tool to damn the colonized. The behaviors of the colonized and their personalities/souls were judged as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful (743).

Like Anzaldúa's notion of atravesades, Lugones elucidates how colonization promotes a version of humanity accessed by aligning oneself with existing systems of power, meaning that in the Urgent Care lobby, mother equals human. The way to make myself human and ultimately intelligible to the systems of power around me as a nonbiological and nonadoptive parent is to assume the role of mother. The presumption that because I am a woman parenting a child, I must be his mother, or that I should accept or aspire to embody that role and that label is undoubtedly a colonial vestige. In the middle of the night when my child is at his most vulnerable, my invisibility damns us both.

The truth is, claiming mom scares me. Not because I'm afraid of the responsibility, I've taken all that on already. I am afraid of someone seeing that I've chosen this label and casting me out of a community to which I do not belong, because legally I don't. And above all, I am afraid that in choosing "mom" I erase myself and the parenting reality that I've lived for almost half a decade. The cost of claiming "mother" is my outsider status—saturated with the alienation of Anzaldúa's atravesades. "Just say that you're mom" erases the complexity of my queer care outside that label. It collapses the architecture and tears at the roots of my queerly crafted familia. I haven't yet come to terms with motherhood, nor do I have a sustainable alternative. I'd simply like to posit that the spaces outside motherhood—the margins, footnotes, and breaks in the page—yield equally interesting and important knowledge about the ways queer brown folks form familia and the truths we pass along.

With the blessings of my child's mama, I make an appointment with a lawyer to see what options exist to secure my rights and role in his life. In a moment of exhausted delirium, I let myself daydream: What if my story ends with a triumphant moment of motherhood? What if the legal channels open up to me and I fill out the forms and attend the appointments and snap the photographs, and in the end, we are both recognized as his parents, in love and law? How would that change this story? I wrestle hopefully with the blanks on my pre-consultation form:

> Other party's name _____
>
> Last address where you both cohabitated _____
>
> Married _____ Divorced _____

I go three rounds with the receptionist, asserting that there is no "other party" because I am not trying to take this child away from his mama, but to formalize my place in our family.

> Sorry, but we have to have these forms. If you could just fill out what you can…

But there is no form for our family. There are blanks for marriage, divorce, mom, and dad. There is no blank for me or the four and a half years I've dedicated to raising a beautiful being from birth.

There may never be one. But I am still here. My love stays. It curls around the sharp edges of those gendered binaries and presses into the gaps in people's assumptions. My love melts into the queer possibility of familia as act, not law.

I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but there is no second party adoption in Arizona.

In the end, the triumphant conclusion is not mine to perform. I will never be my child's legal parent. The only way to maneuver around the statute is marriage. The state will not validate my existence in my child's life unless I am first wed to his only legal parent. The irony that a gay marriage is the one thing that will allow me to be legally recognized is just one more in a series of painful slashes. I hang up the phone furious, not at the compassionate lawyer, but at my ever-present desire to align myself with a system that seems to exist solely to press me into gendered binaries and marital bonds.

In mapping out the difficult path towards decolonization, Sandra Styres suggests that "There is a general unwillingness to engage in the uncomfortable process of decolonization because decolonizing is an unsettling process of shifting and unraveling the tangled colonial relations of power and privilege" (Smith 30). I cannot deny that there is power and privilege associated with the legal rights of motherhood, just as I cannot ignore my desire to be recognized, seen, and understood as a parent by the same systems that push and pull at the inertia of my unintelligibility. I want to release myself from needing those affirmations, but parenting without them creates palpable risk for my child and me. That risk speaks to something beyond motherhood. I am not a mother. Daily I parent in a space of the unknown and unspoken, of holding our breath and hoping for the best and prayers that today won't be the day my unintelligibility stands in the way of caring for my child.

We've never really seen a case like this.

There is no joy in being this rare. Theorizing about the unique erasures of Asian American women, Mitsuye Yamada declares: "To finally recognize our own invisibility is to finally be on the path toward visibility. Invisibility is not a natural state for anyone" (Moraga 40). Much like Yamada's decolonial path to visibility first necessitates a reckoning with the trauma of colonial erasure, I must acknowledge the way "just saying yes" to motherhood performs an erasure of my own interstitial experience. Without that realization, a decolonial mode of parenting is impossible.

In articulating her concept of the decolonial imaginary, Emma Pérez also cautions of the tendencies of individuals, communities, and cultures to veer towards assimilation as equality, suggesting, instead, that: "Perhaps our only hope is to move in many directions and knowingly 'occupy' an interstitial space where we practice third space feminism to write a history that decolonizes the imaginary" (20). Pérez envisions a theory with which to explode colonial binaries and forge spaces of interstitial survival. When paired with Lugones' vision of languaging as a "moving between ways of living in language" I see a path toward decolonizing my experiences of parenting and family (750).

Certainly, there is loss associated with my release of the word "mother," but there is a wealth of wisdom born in the between, as my queer familia challenges words and ways of living,

loving, and forming community. Lugones illuminates these possibilities as decolonial contradiction:

> Thus to see the coloniality is to reveal the very degradation that gives us two renditions of life and a being rendered by them. The sole possibility of such a being lies in its full inhabitation of this fracture, of this wound, where sense is contradictory and from such contradiction new sense is made anew (751-2).

I feel this rendering of the binary of mother and not-mother in daily life with my child. We walk the halls and haunt the corners of the spaces in between. I speak of my queer familia as a kind of birth beyond the womb and a parenting from within the wounds of violence and erasure of brown and queer bodies and lives. Shifting away from normative definitions of parenting and family, I am invested in mapping a language of queer familia outside the colonial limits of biological and legal constructs of family. I wish to hold space for the mapping of decolonial queer familia as imperfect community, vulnerability, reciprocity, healing, and hope.

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Section 3
Inter/weaving, Interlacing: Decolonizing Practices

INVISIBLE RESISTANCE: BIPOC GIRLS & GENDER-EXPANSIVE YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE RESISTING SCHOOL PUSH OUT

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ABSTRACT:
This article explores that girls and gender-expansive youth who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in foster care resist oppression in schools. Research demonstrates that this population is disproportionately impacted by systemic oppression which contributes to poor academic outcomes. The child welfare system, largely operating on gendered and racialized stereotypes, targets women of color, resulting in higher rates of foster care involvement for girls and gender-expansive youth. In schools, the same stereotypes are used as reasons to surveil and punish youth, channeling them into juvenile detention. However, BIPOC girls and gender-expansive youth in foster care are rendered invisible in school discipline literature. This paper, adapted from my dissertation, utilizes observations in K-12 education to explore youth resistance to hegemonic power structures in school, and illuminates the importance of leveraging positionality when supporting youth. While my research is ongoing, this piece demonstrates that youth in foster care are made to protect themselves in school in ways that are deemed unacceptable, and subsequently criminalized. Ultimately, this work indicates the need for both school reform and structural social change to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

KEYWORDS: foster care, school-to-prison pipeline, school discipline

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INTRODUCTION

School-to-prison pipeline scholars, who explore the movement of youth from schools to detention, largely agree that girls and gender-expansive youth, such as transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary individuals, are excluded from research and literature (Meiners 2011, 550). Consequently, these populations are excluded from resources aimed at supporting youth who are frequently targeted by formal exclusionary school discipline, such as suspension and expulsion, or who experience more subtle forms of punishment and push out. While increased research on the effects of school discipline on Black, Indigenous boys of color (BIPOC) has, justly, resulted in increased programs and resources supporting boys' education, few resources exist for girls and gender-expansive youth in the same racial and ethnic demographics. Even fewer resources exist for youth in foster care, the majority of whom exist at the intersection of multiple oppressions and are frequently perceived to be problematic due to cultural stereotypes and misinterpretations of their behavior. As such, this population is often alienated and isolated from the school community, and faces extensive barriers to success in school. This academic landscape, and my personal experience as an educator, inspired me to explore these issues further, employing counternarratives to investigate the ways that youth in foster care experience, and resist, punishment, exclusion, and push out.

The following piece, adapted from my dissertation, utilizes observations from my time as a Foster Youth Liaison at a small school district in Los Angeles. Through these observations, I explore youth resistance to hegemonic power structures in school and illuminate the importance of leveraging positionality when working within oppressive systems to stand in solidarity with youth. These observations illustrate that youth consistently find brilliant ways to assert their autonomy and protect themselves in systems that seek to control and stigmatize them. Ultimately, this work indicates the need for dramatic cultural shifts to put an end to the school-to-prison pipeline for BIPOC girls and gender-expansive youth in foster care.

BACKGROUND

BIPOC girls and gender-expansive youth are highly impacted by educators' implicit bias, zero-tolerance discipline practices, and school collaboration with the criminal justice system. Statistics show that in recent years, Black girls, in particular, have experienced a considerable rise in suspension rates. The Department of Education reports that during the 2011-12 school year, Black boys were suspended four times more often than white boys, while Black girls were suspended six times as often as their counterparts (Crenshaw, Ocen and Nanda 2015, 18). Meanwhile, very few studies have been done, exclusively, on the disciplinary experiences of trans youth, as most do not disaggregate by specific LGBTQ identities despite their unique experiences. Even so, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health reports that LGBTQ youth are 1.25 to 3 times more likely to experience expulsion, interactions with police, and conviction in court (Palmer and Greytak 2017, 167). Furthermore, a 2013 Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) National School Climate Survey reports that 46 percent of Black LGBTQ

youth, 44 percent of Latinx LGBTQ youth, and 47 percent of multiracial LGBTQ youth experience exclusionary school discipline, compared to 36 percent of white LGBTQ youth (Palmer, Greytak and Kosciw 2016, 26). The situation is even more complex for BIPOC girls and gender-expansive youth who are also involved in the family regulation system.[xiv]

Girls and gender-expansive youth who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in foster care are among the most heavily surveilled and neglected populations in public schools. Research shows that youth in foster care and BIPOC girls and gender-expansive youth are judged as deviant, troubled, and aggressive, stereotypes rooted in racism, and cisgender heteronormative patriarchy, especially when responding to perceived injustices (Romano, Babchishin, Marquis and Frechette 2015; Blake, Butler, Lewis, and Darnsbourg 2010; Snapp, Hoeing, Fields, and Russell 2015). These characterizations manifest in very real challenges in family regulation, criminal and juvenile justice, and public education systems. The family regulation and criminal justice systems have a history of patronizing women of color, as they are often viewed as unfit to care for their families within the norms of white motherhood (Brown and Bloom 2009). These systems then inflict strict surveillance, control, and punishment over BIPOC women by imprisoning them, and removing their children under the false premise that their children would be better off in foster homes (Brown and Bloom 2009, 158; Haney 2014; Saar, Epstein, Rosenthal, and Vafa 2015). Once involved in the family regulation system, Parents report feeling as though they have a target on their back; every mandated reporter they come in contact with knows they have been impacted by or surveilled by the system and are waiting to report the parent again (McMillan, Jihad, Washington and Grier 2021). Girls and gender-expansive youth, once removed from their families, are penalized for what these systems perceive as their personal shortcomings: their "failed" family lives, contentious attitudes and gaps in education due to the transient nature of juvenile justice and foster care (Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda 2015; Wun 2014; Carpenter and Clyman via Villegas, Rosenthal, O'Brien and Pecora 2013).

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Before I present my findings, I am going to situate myself and the context in which I came to this work. I consider myself to be a person of many privileges and although most of my professional and academic work centers youth in foster care, I have never been involved in the system myself. However, learned values and past experiences put me on a path to working with youth in foster care and to approach this work with a radical, social justice lens.

My family history is heavily marked by migration, struggle, and resilience. My paternal grandparents Mary Louise Woods and Antipatro Ocasio endured Operation Bootstrap, the Great Migration, and anti-Black racism while living in Chicago, IL. My maternal grandmother, Ofelia Palos, navigated Operation Wetback, the Bracero Program, and raised nine immigrant children alone in San Diego, CA. Despite having little formal education, Ofelia fought for bilingual education in a time when her children were being corporally punished in school for speaking Spanish. The generational trauma and resilience born out of traversing interpersonal and systemic racism, and finding ways to thrive despite it, has had profound impacts on the way I maneuver the

world. As a non-Black presenting bi-racial person, I believe I have a duty to be an accomplice to dismantling anti-Blackness and a responsibility to be in solidarity with the most oppressed in my community and around the world. My family ingrained these values in me as a child and my community gave me the tools to act on them.

I cut my teeth organizing as a student at UC Irvine (UCI) with Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A). Through the informal education I received in M.E.Ch.A, I became more aware of the injustices around me and involved myself in youth programs in neighboring communities. After college, I fell into working with youth in foster care by chance, but before long it became a passion. I found that despite the immense challenges facing these students and the subsequent resilience they demonstrate, their experiences remain invisible, both in mainstream and social justice education spaces. As I transitioned to graduate studies, using my platform to share my student's stories, to illuminate their struggles, ingenuity, and strength, became an important use of my privileged position.

Despite my good intentions, having never been in foster care limits my ability to relate to individuals with lived experience and often presents barriers to trust. This reality forces me to constantly reflect on my positionality, implicit biases, and the privilege that I bring to this work. Conversely, I am also moved to use my privileges to intervene when I see youth being harmed and to advocate for their needs.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Working with youth in foster care has been, simultaneously, immensely rewarding and incredibly draining. I love building relationships with young people and seeing them thrive in their ways. But, navigating bureaucratic school systems, more concerned with attendance rates and grades than the holistic wellbeing of its students, is mentally, spiritually, and emotionally exhausting. Much of this will be evident in Hannah, Brianna, and Maria's stories. The following narratives include occasions where I was able to successfully support my students, as well as occasions where I lacked the knowledge, and/or institutional power to make a change.

HANNAH

California has the largest family regulation system in the country, with 12 percent of the nation's youth in foster care, 35 percent of whom reside in Los Angeles County (Williams 2020; Kids Data 2021). A 2018 study of LA youth in foster care found that 19 percent of youth in care identify as LGBTQ (LA County 2018, 23). Of these youth, 5.6 percent identify as trans, an overrepresentation when compared to the 3 percent of trans youth in the general population, and 94 percent identify as youth of color (23). The intersection of diverse racial, gender, sexual identities, and involvement in family regulation results in significant disparities in treatment both on school campuses and foster care placements. Given these realities, Hannah, a brown, trans girl in foster care and a freshman at Monroe High School, learned first hand the importance of self-preservation when navigating school.

…….

“Hi, Mr. Johnson, I want to talk to you about Hannah, is this a good time?” I say as I move to sit down across from him at his desk.
“You know that’s a boy right?”
I take a deep breath, count to 10, and prepare myself to argue. Hannah just transferred to a new high school and is struggling to adjust. She faithfully attends my weekly group meetings for youth in foster care at the school, and while she is quiet, she is always quick to participate. I came to find out that Hannah is failing most of her classes and stopped showing up to PE altogether. I ask her to stay after one of our meetings and ask what is going on. Hannah tells me that she hates her classes, they are way too big, and that PE is the worst. Even though no one says or does anything to her and she has been given her own changing room, she is scared that someone will bother her for being different. She would rather walk around campus alone than go to class. Hannah tells me that she loves singing, and if her counselor, Mr. Johnson, replaced PE with choir, she would definitely attend class. When I suggest that she talk to Mr. Johnson about making the switch, she flat out refuses, but she accepts my offer to meet with him on her behalf.
I reply to Mr. Johnson, “No, *she* is not”
We go back and forth a few more times and Mr. Johnson becomes visibly agitated. I decided it’s not worth the argument.
“Well, whatever we think, Hannah uses she/her pronouns and she is having some problems with her class.”
Mr. Johnson concedes but continues to misgender her throughout the conversation. Mr. Johnson brings up Hannah’s transcripts only to see F’s next to each class title.
“Looks like we’ve done all we can for Hannah. If he doesn’t want to go to class, that's on him.”
He goes on to explain that the school has given Hannah all the accommodations they can; they gave Hannah her own special changing area for PE and switched her into a small class to help with her anxiety. Mr. Johnson becomes increasingly agitated and resentful of Hannah’s unique needs. Finally, he states that he is unwilling to accommodate Hannah’s request to move from PE to choir even though this class would fulfill the same requirement, has space for more students and would ensure that Hannah attends at least one of her 7 classes. Days after I give Hannah the bad news, I find her hiding from campus security behind a building on the very edges of campus. She doesn’t feel comfortable going to class. Nothing I can say will change her mind, and to be honest, I don’t feel particularly compelled to try.
…….

In my experience, students in foster care with unique needs are frequently treated like burdens and their behavior is rarely understood within the context of how they navigate the world given their race/ethnicity, ability, gender, or sexuality. In general, LGBTQ students are labeled as deviant and their behavior is regulated in ways that their cis and/or heterosexual counterparts are not. Youth expression of LGBTQ identity is frequently policed in schools to force conformity by banning rainbow-themed clothing and Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, penalizing students for public

displays of affection and wearing *supposed* gender-inappropriate clothing, and refusing to use preferred names (Palmer, Greytak, and Kosciw 2016; Palmer and Greytak 2017, 167). The excessive regulation of LGBTQ youth's existence creates hostile school environments which breed violence among students. A 2011 Human Rights Campaign national study found that 60 percent of youth surveyed had been bullied because of their gender expression, and many gender expansive youth report school as the location of their first experience with physical violence (Palmer and Greytak 2017, 164; Toomey, Card, Russel, Ryan, and Diaz 2010, 1582).

From my observations and interactions with Hannah, it is evident that she could expect nothing more than the lowest, most basic levels of safety and comfort at school. Legally, California Assembly Bill (AB) 1266, passed in 2013, mandates that trans students are allowed to use facilities consistent with their gender identity (Maryam 2014). In giving Hannah her own changing room, separate then those designated for, presumably cis, girls and boys, the school signaled to Hannah, and her peers, that it is acceptable to isolate her and treat her differently than other girls. Moreover, given the microaggressions I witnessed from Mr. Johnson, such as his refusal to use Hannah's correct pronouns, fixation with her gender identity, and frustration with accommodating her needs, it is unsurprising that Hannah did not feel safe talking to him on her own. Although to my knowledge, Hannah had not yet faced any physical violence, these factors created a hostile environment in which Hannah knew her safety could not be guaranteed. The fact that she felt safer wandering the school campus alone than in classes with adults who are supposed to support and protect her speaks volumes. While school staff frequently characterized her refusal to attend class as defiant and academically irresponsible, I believe it is more accurate to reframe her behavior as a self-defense mechanism to safeguard against potential violence and harm.

Hannah and I do not have much in common, but I empathize with her instinct to take care of herself when no one else will. I was fortunate to build a good relationship with Hannah and when I would catch her wandering around campus, rather than chastise her, I would ask her to hang out in my office to talk, read, doodle, or, on a rare occasion, to do homework. While avoiding class is not exactly a behavior that is conducive to school success, I preferred that she be with a trusted adult instead of roaming campus alone. Our relationship allowed me to intervene on her behalf with Mr. Johnson and while, ultimately, this did not result in having her needs met I was able to use my positionality in my interaction with Mr. Johnson in a positive way. First, educators need to receive pushback from their colleagues when expressing transphobic sentiments or misgendering students. Mr. Johnson may never change his opinions, but with enough friction from fellow educators, he might change the way he talks about trans students. Additionally, as youth in foster care frequently have few adults to advocate for their needs, educators and youth must see that trusted adults are willing to advocate for these students. Conversely, given my position in the district, had I been better versed on the laws protecting trans youth, I would have had more leverage to ensure that Hannah's needs were accommodated, and I could have ensured that this particular school staff received additional training on these laws.

BRIANNA

Of the many challenges that youth in foster care face, one of the most prevalent is human trafficking, also known as the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), which includes child sex trafficking, child pornography, and survival sex (Dierkhising and Brown 2018, 6). Traffickers frequently target youth who have experienced trauma, homelessness, or unstable living situations (Dierkhising and Brown 2018, 6). A 2018 LA County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) report found that from 2014 to 2018, a task force recovering CSEC survivors from LA city streets found that 85 percent of youth had prior referrals to the family regulation system (Fithyan, Guymon, and Wegener 2018, 6). The overwhelming majority of these youth were girls, 71 percent of whom were Black (Fithyan, Guymon, and Wegener 2018, 6). Survivors of CSEC are likely to have disruptions in their education, and can greatly benefit from reconnecting to peers and a school community to develop skills and relationships that support healthy development and reduce recidivism (Dierkhising and Brown 2018, 11). However, the combined stigma of being in foster care, and a survivor of trafficking, can cause immense barriers to academic success. Unfortunately, this is a reality that Brianna, a Black girl in 8th grade at Hoover Middle School, CSEC survivor, and expecting parent, had to face.

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I am sitting in the Hoover Middle School library with Brianna, who looks less than pleased to be meeting with me. This is the first time I am meeting her in person, but I am familiar with her case. This school year, Brianna has numerous school and housing placement changes, despite School of Origin Laws, which dictate that youth in foster care have the right to stay enrolled at any school they've attended within the past year, regardless of changing placement, to maintain a semblance of stability ("Foster Youth Education Toolkit" 2016, 19). Weeks earlier, when I was notified by Brianna's social worker that she would be coming to live within my district boundaries for the second time that year, I coordinated a meeting with Brianna and her stakeholders to determine if she would stay at her current school or enroll at the school closest to her new home, which she had already attended earlier in the year. Typically, in these meetings, administrators of the schools in question take the time to share any previous experiences with the student and the resources and support they can offer. This case was different. The Hoover Middle Assistant Principal, Ms. Charles, was adamant that Brianna should not return to campus, but she had no evidence to support this conclusion aside from a poor attendance record. However, Brianna decided she wanted to return to Hoover, and her stakeholders agreed, so regardless of the administrator's feelings, we had to let her enroll. Once Brianna had enrolled, I stopped by Hoover Middle to see how she was acclimating.

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When I call Brianna into the main office, she does not want to meet with me. As soon as I introduce myself, she walks out. Her special education case carrier catches her in the hallway and I watch them from afar, coaxing Brianna to meet with me while I eavesdrop on the front office staff gossiping about Brianna's contentious attitude and altercations she has gotten into in her short time back at the school. Finally, Brianna agrees to meet with me, and though hesitant, she is pleasant.

She shares with me that she is having trouble in school but that she is motivated to do well and is excited about participating in 8th grade promotion. We make plans for her to attend tutoring and set a date to check in again later in the month. While walking through the hallway on my way out of the school, Ms. Charles calls out to me,

"Hey Franchesca, thanks for putting an 8th grade prostitute on my campus!"

Confused, I turn back to her to find out what she means.

Ms. Charles goes on, "Oh you didn't know? Brianna is a prostitute and she's pregnant. She's been recruiting other little girls to be prostitutes too. That's what you put on my campus. That's OK though, we'll find a way to get her out of here."

I know Ms. Charles fairly well, and this response from her seemed out of character as she is typically caring and compassionate to her students. I attempt to talk to her further about the matter, but she brushes me off.

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Black women and girls are subject to a variety of controlling images, which are stereotypes designed to normalize oppression, that dictate their interpersonal interactions and how they navigate dominant society (Collins 2000, 69). Controlling images, such as the mammy, the welfare queen, and, most relevant to Brianna's story, the jezebel, has deep roots in slavery, under which Black women were portrayed as sexually aggressive to rationalize their sexual assault by white men (Collins 2000, 81). Contemporarily, images of the jezebel can be found in stereotypes of Black women as "hoochies" and "hoes," who participate in "deviant" female sexuality, such as sleeping with women, non "normative" sexual practices, or trading sex for money (Collins 2000, 81). Furthermore, in dominant welfare discourse, the jezebel is used to characterize Black, pregnant women who receive public assistance as irresponsible, and even entrepreneurial, about their fertility (Masters, Lindhorst, and Meyers 2014, 122). These stereotypes place Black women in direct opposition to the standards of white femininity, which favor docility, and obedience (Blake, Butler, Lewis, and Darnsbourg 2010, 91).

Controlling images are seen in school settings where Black girls are characterized as loud, hypersexual, confrontational, and manipulative (Morris 2016; Blake, Butler, Lewis, and Darnsbourg 2010, 100). Concurrently, Black girls are also adultified in ways that leave them with fewer opportunities to make child-like mistakes and fewer protections from adults (Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez 2017, 5). As a result, Black girls experience higher rates of victimization in schools, and when interacting with the child welfare system. Black girls make up 35.6 percent of girls who experience ten or more housing placement changes while in foster care, which impacts developmental progress such as memorization, focus, the ability to process information, boundary setting, impulse control, and the formation of peer relationships (Patrick and Chaudhry 2017, 1; Day, Somers, Baroni, West, Sanders, and Peterson 2015, 1088; Baynes-Dunning and Worthington 2013, 341). In comparison to their non-Black peers, Black girls report higher rates of sexual

harassment on school campuses, and their perpetrators experience fewer consequences (Tonnesen 2013, 5).

I never found out if any of Ms. Charles' accusations were true. Regardless, taking into account the historical context at play, this interaction demonstrates how educators employ controlling images to criminalize youth who have experienced trauma. The term "child prostitute" has largely fallen out of favor as children cannot consent to participate in sex work in the same way that adults may be able to (Saar 2014). Ms. Charles' use of the phrase '8th-grade prostitute,' when referring to Brianna demonstrates that she is viewed as an active participant in her abuse, and not allowed access to victimhood. Additionally, the accusation that Brianna was recruiting her peers to participate in commercial human trafficking, as unacceptable as that places her in the position of a villain, rather than a child who should have been afforded compassion, and space to learn from her experiences. Lastly, Ms. Charles' attitude in regards to Brianna's pregnancy is indicative of dominant viewpoints that characterize teen mothers, particularly Black teens, as careless, irresponsible, and undeserving of protection. This attitude does not take into account Brianna's autonomy and life circumstances that may have led to the decision to have a baby, as studies show that youth in foster care sometimes choose to have children at young ages to create the family and stable relationships that were not provided to them (Love, McIntosh, Rosst, and Tertzakian 2005, 13). Youth in foster care also identify their children as a source of motivation to reach their goals, while recognizing that there are some challenges associated with being a teen parent, such as the loss of social life (Love et al 2005, 13). Given the attitudes of school staff, it was clear that Brianna was being ostracized due to her complicated history and the school administration did little to hide the fact that they were actively pushing her out of the school community. Unfortunately, as is the case with many youths in Brianna's situation, she ran away from her foster home days later and never returned.

In Brianna's case, being a person who feels more comfortable keeping people at arms length myself, I identified with Brianna's mistrust of strangers. Additionally, given the difficult circumstances she has been put in, I would never have expected her to behave any different. As such, I felt particularly moved to use my position in the district to ensure that Brianna would be enrolled in the school where she felt that she was going to thrive, despite knowing that this would jeopardize my relationship with the school administrators. Ms. Charles was fully prepared to fight this decision, and the conflict would have kept Brianna out of school for days, or even weeks. However, given my relationship with Ms. Charles and given what little information I know about CSEC survivors, I missed a significant opportunity to help my colleague to better understand Brianna's situation, and ideally, encourage Ms. Charles to treat Brianna with more compassion. Additionally, while I informed my supervisor of this issue, I let the bureaucratic obstacles get in the way of coordinating additional training and technical support for school staff in this area.

Maria

Youth in foster care are expected to be parented by the family regulation system, a role it routinely fails, as its main function is to react to crisis situations rather than to nurture. Consequently, youth in foster care are more likely to face criminalization than their non-systems-

impacted peers. A young person living with their parents might get into an altercation with their sibling and get grounded for a week, whereas a young person in foster care might get into a fight with a sibling, or housemate, and have the police called on them by their caregiver (Wang and Kohn 2016). A study on delinquency in the family regulation system found that 40 percent of arrests of youth in foster care occur in a group home setting, where the threshold for police involvement is much lower than in a family setting (Ryan, Marshall, Her, and Hernandez 2008, 1096). Educators are active participants in the criminalization of youth in foster care, as these youth frequently lack biological parents to advocate on their behalf when altercations occur on campus, and stereotypes of youth in care as 'troublemakers 'converge with over-policed schools (Anspach 2018). In LA County, Black youth in foster care, in particular, are highly criminalized at school, with a suspension rate of 17 percent in the 2018-19 school year (Harvey, Whitman, and Howard 2020, 1). Consequently, youth in foster care constitute 28 percent of youth in juvenile hall (Harvey et al 2020, 2). Maria's story illustrates how easily these harmful stereotypes can lead to this trajectory.

Maria is a brown girl in 8th-grade special education classes at Wilfred Middle School, with nervous energy about her. She is easily distracted, energetic, charismatic, curious about the world around her, and has experienced home placement changes ranging in the double digits. At the time this incident took place, she was residing in a group home. Her energy and easily distracted nature often result in challenges to complete classwork and homework and I frequently help her frantically complete mountains of makeup work. Although I find Maria to be as pleasant as a young person in middle school can be, when I bring her up to Wilfred Middle School staff members, I am regaled with stories of her lack of discipline, and defiant, confrontational temperament. When I visit Maria at school at the end of the semester, I find her in a highly anxious state. While pacing around our small meeting space, she tells me that she lost her district-issued Chromebook, the second one this school year, and now she cannot borrow a new one until she pays the school $600 to replace the other two. Maria is close to tears and fixated on coming up with the money. I try to tell her that because she is in foster care, state law absolves her of any financial accountability for lost school property, such as books or computers. But, I cannot get her to calm down enough to hear me out. Instead, I go looking for the Assistant Principal, Ms. Chatsworth.

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I'm sitting in Ms. Chatsworth's office as she launches into a tirade the moment I say Maria's name. She believes that Maria did not lose the two chrome books, but is hiding them away and that Maria does not deserve a new computer unless she can produce $600. Despite explaining the rights of youth in foster care to school materials, Ms. Chatsworth is fixated on her suspicions and I cannot get her off of this subject. So, I try a new tactic and ask how Maria's schoolwork has been adjusted to accommodate the absence of a computer:

Ms. Chatsworth says, "Her teachers are supposed to give her everything in paper"
When I respond, "Maria tells me that this has not been happening. She says that she's been sitting in class for two weeks with nothing to do."

Ms. Chatsworth concludes, “Well, she wouldn’t have that problem if she wasn’t hiding that other laptop. We could solve this problem real easy if Maria wanted to.”

After realizing that getting through to Ms. Chatsworth is hopeless, I decided to let my supervisor handle the situation and return to Maria. I find her crying in the main office, still obsessing over the money. When she finally decides to go back to class, I tell her that I will take care of everything, and she leaves looking defeated and demoralized.

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In schools, BIPOC girls and gender-expansive youth are over-disciplined for behaviors that transgress the standards of white femininity and the gender binary, such as defiance, profanity, and dress code violations (Wun 2014). This becomes problematic for youth as reliance on zero-tolerance discipline leads many schools to utilize police to intervene in incidents that could be dealt with by school staff. As such, during the 2013-14 school year, BIPOC girls were arrested on school campuses at rates double their population size in the general school population, leading to higher rates of juvenile detention, especially for youth in foster care (Onyeka-Crawford, Patrick, and Chaudhry 2017, 3; Irvine and Canfield 2016).

Maria’s story illustrates the stigmatization of youth in foster care as delinquent, while little is done to take into account the circumstances which influence their behavior. Youth placed in group homes, like Maria, typically experience an average of seven previous housing placement changes and eight school changes, which impact their ability to build connections with peers and trusted adults (Boyle-Duke 2015; Sullivan, Jones, and Mathiesen 2009, 165). Examining Maria’s behavior in this context aids in understanding why she might struggle to meet her teacher’s behavioral expectations. Additionally, youth who receive special education services are typically perceived as being intentionally defiant, rather than having their conduct understood in the context of their neurodiversity, and the structural barriers acting on them (Erevelles 2014, 95). In response, punishment is frequently used as a tool to force conformity to normative standards of behavior (95).

Maria’s energy and curiosity should have been seen as positive indications of her intelligence. Instead, these characteristics were met with irritation and punishment from Maria’s teachers and school staff, which informed their refusal to accommodate her technological needs and their willingness to penalize her for a mistake that is typical of a child of her age. These attitudes from educators communicate to youth that they are inherently bad and, therefore, disposable. Though this situation sent Maria into panic mode, she immediately began to strategize how she was going to come up with $600, planning to sell her belongings and borrow money from friends. Her ability to think on her feet when confronted with a crisis demonstrates that Maria has likely been forced to take care of herself for quite some time. While she should never have experienced that kind of stress, her reaction is emblematic of her intelligence and sharp-wittedness. While being in foster care should not absolve youth from being held accountable for their actions, the extenuating circumstances under which they live require more compassion and empathy from educators; without which they will continue to be isolated and pushed out of their school communities.

As group home staff, social workers, and special education case carriers are commonly overworked and understaffed, they can rarely respond quickly to urgent situations. Without someone to intervene on their behalf, like a parent would, youth in foster care are often left to navigate school alone, despite having many stakeholders involved in their case. If Maria had a parent to advocate for her, it is unlikely that the situation would have reached the level of severity that it did. I believe that Ms. Chatsworth's frustration over Maria's behavior affected her ability to treat Maria with the level of respect she deserved. Fortunately, because of the close working relationship Maria and I developed throughout the year, I was able to step in on her behalf. Once I turned my attention to Ms. Chatsworth to solve the problem, I leveraged my position as a district employee with knowledge of the legal school rights of youth in foster care and with direct access to an Assistant Superintendent, my supervisor, to have Maria's technological needs taken care of. Ms. Chatsworth and Maria's teachers were resentful, which, again, compromised our relationship. While this incident was solved without issue, I missed a clear opportunity to develop compassion and understanding among my colleagues, as it was clear that the school staff needed a more in-depth understanding of the laws protecting youth in foster care, and youth in special education.

CONCLUSION

These narratives demonstrate how BIPOC girls and gender-expansive youth in foster care are punished for threatening the status quo. However, these accounts also illustrate the ways that these youth, and no doubt others like them, resist marginalization and harm in schools by prioritizing themselves when adults around them deny them safe educational spaces.

While Hannah, Brianna, and Maria were identified by school staff as defiant troublemakers, all three young women demonstrate a drive to take care of themselves when no one else will. Black feminists have long valued the struggle to survive as a form of activism on par with confronting institutional power (Collins 2001). Through this lease, we can reframe all three students' actions as acts of resistance, where they claim their space in school, on their terms. Hannah's refusal to endure potentially harmful situations by avoiding class, Brianna's drive to succeed in school while pregnant and Maria's tenacious impulse to solve her money problems on her own, serve as confrontations to a dehumanizing school system that actively pushes them to the margins. Furthermore, we can reframe Brianna and Maria's attitudes, perceived by school staff as confrontational, as rational responses to harm. Black feminist activist Audre Lorde implores us to understand women of color's anger as a justified response to racism, uncontested privilege, and stereotyping (1981, 7). The constant surveillance inflicted on BIPOC girls, women, and gender-expansive individuals by the family regulation and public education systems are exhausting, and, legitimately, anger-inducing. However, youth who express their anger are read as out of control and met with discipline to force compliance to standards of behavior laid out for them by dominant society (Meiners 2007, 29). Through this lens, we can interpret Brianna and Maria's attitudes as resistance to oppressive behavior, and as reclamations of their autonomy.

Despite growing up in vastly different circumstances than these students, I see myself in each of these girls. As a teenager, I felt misunderstood as too inquisitive, too moody, too confrontational. I used my anger as a shield to protect me from hurt, especially when I did not have

the tools to communicate the challenges I was experiencing. I often wished that the adults around me would see beyond my attitude to try to understand the feelings underneath. As a result, I feel a certain kinship with students who are read as difficult by school staff and Audre Lorde's approach to navigating anger has become a guiding principle in my work:

> It is not the anger of other women that will destroy us, but our refusals to stand still to listen to its rhythms, to learn within it, to move beyond the manner of presentation to the substance, to tap that anger as an important source of empowerment. (1981, 9)

Lorde reminds us that anger is not only a valid response to oppression but a tool of communication that should not be dismissed. Understanding this as an adult, developing meaningful connections with youth who are often misunderstood as delinquent has become an important aspect of my work. Consequently, I can draw from my personal experiences, and privilege, to intervene in disputes involving these students to bring compassion and alternative perspectives to the table, sometimes at the risk of professional relationships. While I tried my best to alter the outcomes of these situations, there were several missed opportunities as well, either due to a personal lack of knowledge or a lack of institutional power. These occurrences illustrate the need for both systemic and interpersonal changes in education.

IMPLICATIONS

Hannah, Brianna, and Maria's stories illustrate that stigmatization and isolation of youth in schools can be the result of structural violence which often manifests in the form of interpersonal harm. When faced with such barriers, these narratives demonstrate the nuanced ways that girls and gender-expansive youth in foster care subvert and resist the systems that seek to push them out of school, and attempt to find ways to thrive despite them. However, youth should not have to bear this responsibility alone. Instead, these narratives indicate the need for both short-term reforms, such as additional programs and resources and long-term shifts in society as a whole to address structural violence inflicted on systems-impacted youth, such as prison abolition.

Sociologist, Loic Wacquant describes schools as "institutions of confinement" (2001, 108), as they are frequently more concerned with preparing poor, Black, and brown youth for incarceration, low-wage work, and participation in underground economies, than shaping young minds (Meiners 2011, 550). Limited access to recess, sports, or extracurricular activities and reliance on surveillance mechanisms such as cameras, metal detectors, and school resource officers to impose control facilitates irritability, disruption, and aggression and prepares students' minds and bodies for institutionalization (Wacquant 2001, 108; Morris 2016, 83). Hannah, Brianna, and Maria's stories illustrate the unique ways in which Black and brown girls and gender-expansive youth in foster care are punished when they behave in ways that defy gender norms dictated by white femininity, and the gender binary, and do not have biological parents to advocate for them (Wun 2014). Scholar, Erica Meiners contends that the funneling of youth from schools to prisons requires a "both/and" approach, necessitating both school reforms and social change (2011, 550).

Some of the challenges that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline can be mediated by increased services for both educators and students, but I would argue that the systemic oppression rooted in public education can only be mediated by prison abolition. Conditions on school campuses would invariably improve if more school staff were proficient in trauma-informed approaches, and better educated on implicit bias and youth's educational rights. Students would also benefit from an increase in extracurricular activities, mental health services, and alternatives to suspension and expulsion policies. However, these services do not provide the paradigmatic changes necessary to alter the carceral foundations of public education which associates school safety for all with the punishment and exclusion of some (Meiners 2011, 559). Education research consistently demonstrates that educational opportunity and engagement are the strongest indicators of academic achievement, while alienation and low academic expectations result in higher levels of school discipline (Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams 2014, 553). Prisons, and school discipline, are concerned with addressing the issue of safety by removing those who have done harm from the community. However, in many cases, the perpetrators of harm are synonymous with the most undesirable, and therefore disposable, populations according to the social norms dictated by white, middle-class cis-heteropatriarchal dominant society (Meiners 2011, 560).

Prison abolitionists, like Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2020), contend that envisioning an abolitionist future requires us to understand that a safe community can only be created by changing the conditions under which harm occurs, not with additional state or interpersonal violence. Many abolitionists argue that violence stems from a lack of jobs, education, housing, and health care and that alienating individuals who cause harm by warehousing them in prisons does nothing to solve these structural issues (Kushner 2019). Similarly, criminalizing and alienating youth from the school community does little to address the structural challenges that students face, as can be seen from Hannah, Brianna, and Maria's stories. (Kushner 2019). As such, challenging mass incarceration through prison abolition are essential pathways to creating safer schools for all students. School disciplinary policies mirror mass incarceration policies, which are steeped in gendered and racialized stereotypes (Meiners 2011, 559). Only by shifting the paradigm away from punishment-based approaches to safety by abolishing the prison system can we move away from similar approaches in schools. Envisioning an abolitionist future gives us the freedom to envision approaches to harm and misbehavior that focus on strengthening relationships, such as restorative and transformative justice practices. However, these practices cannot just be another option on the menu in response to harm, right next to suspension and exclusion, as it exists currently, but as replacements to exclusionary discipline.

Hannah, Brianna, and Maria demonstrate that youth who live at the intersection of many oppressions, and whose lives are impacted by many systems, can fight and resist oppression in schools to thrive on their own terms. But, imagine what they can accomplish if they did not have to live with that burden? The abolition of prisons would require us, as a society, to shift our understanding of harm and punishment and would require us to surround youth with community, care, and compassion, rather than pushing them away.

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GIFTED PROGRAMMING IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES: A HIDDEN CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT
What is giftedness? Centering research on Diné (Navajo) perceptions of giftedness (Hartley 1991), this paper posits that gifted programming identification procedures often epitomize a unique and dangerous hidden curriculum founded on White, Westernized narratives surrounding intelligence. Drawing from theory on critical positionality (Johnson-Bailey 2012) and hope (Duncan-Andrade 2009), two tables are presented: one to examine hokey versus critical gifted programming practices, and one to examine dehumanizing versus humanizing gifted identification procedures, with corresponding implications and questions to consider further. Toward decolonizing the field of gifted education, these tables are intended to generate discussion on what happens when diverse ways of conceptualizing giftedness decenter Western ways of understanding, informing, and ordering the field of gifted education.

KEY WORDS:
gifted education, giftedness, intelligence, hidden curriculum, Indigenous

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> The issue at the heart of racist schooling is not whether or not there exist individuals who are dedicated, talented, and successful. The issue is that our educational institutions, policies, and practices are structured by White supremacy, and as such they deny Black and Brown youth the myriad resources necessary for equitable schooling. It should not be an accident or a stroke of good fortune that a Black or Brown child receives a good education. It should be a systemic, structural guarantee. (Vaught 2011, 208-209)

What is giftedness? Numerous complex definitions of giftedness exist (Sousa 2009). Giftedness is often associated with a person who demonstrates, or has the potential for demonstrating, an exceptionally high level of performance in one or more areas of human endeavor (Sousa 2009). The purpose of gifted education is not only to identify gifted students, but to ensure they receive appropriate support for their complex cognitive, affective, and behavioral needs toward the goal of developing their unique gifts and talents (Delisle and Galbraith 2015). However, many working understandings of giftedness exist within dominating Western frameworks, often rendering gifted identification procedures that take the form of a hidden curriculum, gatekeeping gifted programming from students who do not "fit" inside such frameworks (Owens et al. 2018; Rinn et al. 2020). Consequently, the underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) students plagues gifted K-12 programming throughout the United States (Cross 2021; Rinn et al. 2020). In a large study of gifted identification practices, Hodges et al. (2018) identified the "risk ratio" for BIPOC students being identified for gifted education as 0.34; In other words, these students are about one-third as likely to be identified for gifted education as White students. Instead of examining culturally incongruent philosophical perspectives and philosophies of giftedness (Herring 1996), many educational policy makers are eliminating K-12 gifted programming entirely (Silverman and Davies 2021). Thus, as Battiste posits, a critical approach to illuminating such a hidden curriculum begins with "the unpacking of Eurocentric assumptions of education, the normalized discourses and discursive practices that bestow ignorance on students, while it bestows layers of meaningless knowledge on to youth that hide the social and economic structures of Eurocentrism, white dominance, and racism" (2013, 106). Accordingly, critical understandings of positionality and hope may lend toward decentering Westernized narratives surrounding giftedness, decolonizing gifted programming and identification procedures, centering attention on non-Western conceptions of giftedness as valuable, as well as acknowledging the cultural dimensions of giftedness toward more culturally responsive approaches to gifted education in both theory and practice.

POSITIONALITY WITHIN THE FIELD OF GIFTED EDUCATION

At the beginning of the 20th century, giftedness was conceptualized as high intellectual functioning, often aligning with eugenicist Lewis Terman's revision of the intelligence test published by French scholars Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon (Brookwood 2016). Terman asserted that intelligence tests would be used to further the agenda of race hygiene, eliminate

degeneracy, and prove non-white races possessed limited intelligence (Brookwood 2016). Thus, since its conception, the field of gifted education has systematically encapsulated a position of ethnocentricity rooted in white, Western traditions and definitions of cultural heritage, history, values, language, and beliefs (Owens et al. 2018). Now, monocultural, racially biased notions of intelligence (hooks 2003) deteriorate the field of gifted education (Cross 2021; Rinn et al. 2020) and often, whether explicitly or implicitly, perpetuate inequity and disproportionality throughout the field in both theory and practice, especially regarding *how* children are identified as gifted (Hodges et al. 2018). Many gifted K-12 programs are being eliminated in the name of providing more equitable educational experiences for students; however, sacrificing gifted education programs is a misguided attempt to reduce racism and ultimately prevents brilliant, talented members of diverse cultural groups from being discovered, nurtured, and valued (Silverman and Davis 2021). As such, considering positionality in conversations surrounding the ethnocentric education canon may lend toward critically questioning, and subsequently transforming, said canon (Johnson-Bailey 2012). Without such a transformation, many gifted BIPOC students are left unidentified and passed over for special programming and subsequent learning opportunities (Hodges et al., 2018). Therefore, before examining the hidden nature of gifted identification procedures, it is essential to first consider positionality as it relates to overall gifted education, namely gifted programming and services throughout K-12 schools.

CENTERING INDIGENOUS POSITIONALITY TOWARD EDUCATION AND INTELLIGENCE

Considering positionality allows stakeholders in the field of gifted education to ask questions such as "what position/perspective informs gifted education and what position/perspective is omitted?" as well as "what happens when diverse ways of conceptualizing giftedness meet old ways of understanding, informing, and ordering the field of gifted education?" (adapted from Johnson-Bailey 2012, 261). For instance, taking a closer look at the positionality of one of the most under-identified, underperforming, and overlooked groups of students, Native Americans, (Gentry and Fugate 2012) lends profoundly toward examining gifted identification practices. Specifically, the terms *gifted*, *education*, *science*, and *art* do not exist in many Indigenous languages (Cajete 2000; Hartley 1991). The Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk of the Hoopa Valley describe giftedness as *k'winya'nya:nma-awhiniw* (the human way) and consider it to be manifested through *niltsit* (an inherited gift), *xoL-diniL'ay* (a learned gift), and community contributions (Lara 2009). Rural Kenyan conceptions of intelligence fall under four domains, including *rieko* (knowledge and skills), *luoro* (respect), *winjo* (comprehension of how to handle real-life problems) and *parao* (initiative) (Munro 2011). The Alaskan Yup'ik community deeply values practical intelligence and tacit knowledge of outdoor navigation skills (Sternberg 2007). In the Shona Indigenous communities of Zimbabwe, Bantu philosophical thinking emphasizes the innateness of giftedness as "given" at birth, in which the giver is the Spirit-God, and the ability to succeed against odds and adversity through vision, passion, and wit (Ngara, 2006). Often, "knowledge among Indigenous people is acquired in a completely different way" from Western approaches, in which "the value of the effort, the coming to know, is found in the journey, in

addition to or rather than, the end result" (80-81). Unlike many Western philosophies surrounding education, intelligence is often considered conceptually as a "coming to know," which metaphorically "entails a journey, a process, a quest for knowledge and understanding" (Cajete 2000, 81). In this regard, unlike Western approaches to conceptualizing intelligence that prioritize achievement in some tangible form (such as a degree), the aim of education is not the target but the act of hitting the target (Dewey 1916/1944).

Accordingly, Indigenous processes, practices, and reflections surrounding education organically embody "the natural system, characteristics of diversity, optimization, cooperation, self-regulation, change, creativity, connectedness, and niche," which certainly should inform Western approaches to gifted education (64). To further contextualize positionality within education and ways of knowing, Robert Yazzie, the chief justice of the Navajo Nation (1996 as cited in Cajete 2000, 64), explains:

> Navajo philosophy is not a philosophy in the Western sense of the word; it is the lived practices of cultural forms that embody the Navajo understanding of their connectivity in the worlds of spirits of nature, humans, animals, plants, minerals, and other natural phenomena. However, explained in terms of Western thought it may be viewed as the practice of an epistemology in which the mind embodies itself in a particular relationship with all other aspects of the world. For me as a Navajo, these other aspects are my relations. I have a duty toward them as they have a duty as a relative toward me.

Moreover, in considering positionality in approaches to education, Cajete clarifies that "elders provide guidance and facilitate learning, often through story along with artifacts and manifestations of traditions, but it is the individual's responsibility to learn," noting that "even the 'trickster' (chaos) may facilitate creative understanding, and this role in whatever form it is played is highly respected" (2000, 66). Thus, the process of "coming to know" of Indigenous positionality "revolves around the natural creative process of human learning" (65). As such, in examining positionality within the field of gifted education, one must ask whose is the "main" in mainstream and whose experiences are normalized as center (Battiste 2013)? Furthermore, while Westernized positionality toward intelligence and education tends to lean more individualist, with students being singled-out, so to speak, for gifted programming, Indigenous positionality often emphasizes connectedness and community (Cajete 2000).

DINÉ (NAVAJO) CONCEPTIONS OF GIFTEDNESS

To further examine positionality in the field of gifted education, it is crucial to acknowledge the way in which knowledge, knowing, and domains of giftedness exist at the intersection of the child and their context (Dai 2021). For example, in their study examining Diné (Navajo) perceptions of giftedness, Hartley (1991) found that Diné children were often identified as gifted by their communities when they a) appeared humble; b) demonstrated aural/oral memory; c) were quiet, observant, and non-competitive; d) only asked enough questions to efficiently guide a task;

e) rarely expressed feelings openly; f) used traditional ways of knowing and community connections to self-regulate and guide problem-solving; and g) were multilingual. Using Hartley's community-engaged research findings, it can be said that many Diné children identified as gifted by their teachers, parents, and community members are thus those who rarely asked questions, respected and internalized rules and rituals, were quiet, observant, and perceptive, rarely outwardly expressed emotion, desired long periods of rumination on ideas, and used Indigenous ways of knowing and being to approach problem-solving, both personal and educational (Hartley 1991; Peterson 1999). These findings on gifted characteristics differ from many Western interpretations and characteristics of giftedness often used to identify students as gifted, such as a) persistent questioning, b) obstinance in task decisions, c) leveraging of extroverted humor, d) expressive emotion and intensity, e) desire for rapid pace of instruction, and f) individualist approaches to self-regulation and problem-solving (Delisle and Galbraith 2015; Sousa 2009). Furthermore, similar to other Indigenous groups, Hartley's research revealed that "there [is] no general term for 'gifted'" in the Diné language (1991, 61).

Hartley's (1991) study also revealed that some manifestations of giftedness, such as intense interests, original thinking, problem-solving, and imaginative expression, *are* characteristics of giftedness that seem to transcend cultural groups; however, researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders (such as parents of gifted children) in the field of gifted education also need to consider and acknowledge how those characteristics are anchored to, once again, the intersection of the child and their social and cultural context (Dai 2021; Sternberg 2007). For instance, the deep imaginative expression of a Diné child might look different than the imaginative expression valued within a mainstream population; however, the Diné child's gifted imaginative expression is of equal reverence and such talent deserves to be identified, developed, and valued. While one Indigenous group is not representative of all Indigenous groups, such research findings certainly reveal just how aligned with Western, mainstream culture the purpose and practices of gifted education often are, particularly in regard to understanding the characteristics of giftedness.

Yet, educators may not recognize students who do not demonstrate individualistic, assertive, and competitive behaviors as gifted, resulting in fewer opportunities to be "nominated for scholarships, leadership experiences, special positions on teams or committees, or gifted programs" (Peterson 1999, 375). Moreover, "educators may not recognize that considerable comfort in the [classroom] is likely a prerequisite for many or most of the gifted behaviors they are looking for and that cultural differences may inhibit or even preclude those behaviors" (375). Thus, the nature and needs of gifted children not only differ from their typical peers, but within the gifted capacity based on social and cultural context as well (Sternberg 2007). Once again, such a situation demands that the field of gifted education consider "whose is the 'main' that is 'streamed?'" (Battiste 2013, 107). To identify gifted potential equitably and inclusively, the sociocultural context of the child must be considered (Munro 2011).

GIFTED EDUCATION: A HIDDEN CURRICULUM?

Many gifted K-12 programs and services are systematically designed around Westernized educational philosophies that inherently promote a monocultural narrative surrounding notions of intelligence (Duncan-Andrade 2009; Owens et al. 2018). These K-12 programs often boast inclusive, dynamic gifted education philosophies, but their actual day-to-day programming practices tend to be dehumanizing rather than humanizing in nature (see Table 1). Specifically, such programs generally claim to use humanizing, culturally responsive criteria for gifted identification, but ultimately fall back on dehumanizing criteria, such as IQ scores and standardized testing data, to act as all-defining indicators of giftedness (Ford and Grantham 2003; Hodges et al. 2018; Owens et al. 2018). By nature, the idea that a standardized test and/or test data can single-handedly identify something as dynamic as giftedness supports a reductive, mechanistic approach to education and promotes a "one-size-fits-all paradigm" (Hodges et al. 2018; Salazar 2013, 124). While such "pedestrian approaches [to gifted identification] are easily routinized," they are "an embarrassment, representing shallow attempts to identify students who think deeply" (Sternberg 2007, 165).

Table 1

Gifted Programming Practices

Hokey programming practices	Critical programming practices
• District/school gifted education philosophies that do not match with operational practices—hokey hope vs. critical hope (Duncan-Andrade 2009; Wells 2021) • Surface-level inclusion of diversity, inclusion, and social-justice within gifted programming (Salazar 2013) • Use of narrow, standardized testing to identify students for gifted programming (Salazar 2013; Wells 2021) • One-size-fits-all gifted programming (de la Ruz Reyes as cited in Salazar 2013) • Programming that emphasizes cultural replacement, particularly of native languages (Salazar 2013) • Use of reductionistic, decontextualized, and fragmented gifted curriculum and services (Bahruth 2000 as cited in Salazar 2013) • White-centric relational images attached to overall notions of giftedness that are consistently sustained by programming (Salazar 2013)	• Programming as a community of cultural wealth (Yosso 2005 as cited in Salazar 2013) • Interrupt patterns of exclusion (Giroux 2004 as cited in Salazar 2013) • Honor "cultural funds of knowledge as resources for academic success" as part of the gifted experience (Salazar & Fránquiz 2008 as cited in Salazar 2013, 134) • "Problem-posing education" evident throughout programming and services (Salazar 2013, 133) • Emphasize student interests, experiences, and emotions (Dale & Hysop-Margison 2010 as cited in Salazar 2013) and opportunities to co-construct knowledge (Salazar 2013) • Actively seek ongoing critical reflection and dialogue to better programming and services (Salazar 2013) • Seek mutual humanization among program teachers and gifted students (Freire 1970 as cited in Salazar 2013)

Moreover, Munro (2011) explains that traditional intelligence, achievement, and standardized tests used to identify middle-class White students as gifted may be less effective for gifted students from Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous backgrounds for a number of reasons. These students may be 1) unaccustomed to answering questions simply for the purpose of showing knowledge; rather, they display their knowledge in response to authentic problems or issues; 2) perform poorly on paper-and-pencil tasks conducted in artificial settings; 3) perform poorly on culturally loaded tests, particularly those structured in a culture other than their own; 4) have learning and/or cognitive styles that differ from White students; and 5) have test anxiety surrounding stereotype threat (Munro 2011). Thus, due to their narrow and unidimensional focus, many definitions, perceptions, and theories of intelligence and giftedness based exclusively or extensively on intelligence tests close many doors, so to speak, for diverse students (Ford and Grantham 2003). In many ways, the issue of gifted programming philosophy versus gifted programming practice relates to Duncan-Andrade's notion of hokey hope versus critical hope. School districts imploring hokey hope often project "some kind of multicultural, middle-class opportunity structure that is inaccessible to the overwhelming majority of working-class, urban youth of color," in which their espoused gifted education philosophies do not align with their practices (2009, 183).

As a result, in school districts where gifted identification procedures do not align with espoused humanizing gifted philosophies (see Table 2), identification procedures become a unique and dangerous hidden curriculum that gatekeeps access to gifted education. "Inequality doesn't look like Jim Crow laws of the pre-Civil Rights era. Instead, it takes the form of seemingly benign institutional practices or structures that reduce and limit opportunities for people of color, poor people, and immigrants" (Hammond 2015, 29). Such a hidden curriculum centers gifted identification within in a Western narrative, creating a circuitous effect in which gifted programming, post-identification, is also designed to better serve White, middle-class populations of students (Owens et al. 2018). Battiste explains that, in this respect, "whiteness is hidden in [the] system" and becomes "the measure for success or failure" (2013, 106). Consequently, the "rewards for whiteness are not critiqued for the benefit and rewards it gives to a few and the kinds of punishment and low outcomes it gives to those who are different" (106). It is often the case that K-12 public education routinely approaches cultural responsiveness from a deficit-orientation, often "giving" students the opportunity to "catch up with Johnny" (Herring 1996).

However, through an asset-orientation, the more humanizing the gifted identification procedures and/or processes are, the more culturally responsive they are likely to be (Herring 1996; Salazar 2013; Sternberg 2007). Specifically, critical hope, as opposed to hokey hope, encourages a synergistic alignment between gifted philosophies and practices, in which both harmoniously aim for ongoing development of program quality, resources, and networks students are able to successfully, equitably, and inclusively access (Duncan-Andrade 2009). In this critical regard, gifted programming better engages in a sharing, re-visioning, and enlargement of learner narratives while also expanding current understandings of what giftedness is conceptually outside of White,

Western ways of knowing and being (Charaniya 2012; Wells 2021). Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) describe such a sharing, re-visioning, and enlargement of learner narratives as a culturally responsive framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills of diverse learners. Such an approach "seeks to develop a philosophical view of [education] that is dedicated to nurturing students' academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well-being" (Ragoonaden and Mueller 2017, 23). Thus, critical hope informs recognizing differences, validating cultures, asserting cultural congruence of classroom practices toward increasing student success in school, and pushing back against conventional, Western school structures that tend to exclude the distinctive cultural habitus and cultural capital of many students.

IMPLICATIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

What happens when diverse ways of conceptualizing giftedness decenter white, Western ways of understanding, informing, and ordering the field of gifted education? Unlike many Western approaches to conceptualizing intelligence that often prioritize a tangible achievement of intelligence, the aim of education in many cultural groups is found in "the value of the effort, the coming to know… rather than the end result" (Cajete 2000, 80-81). Moreover, Westernized positionality toward intelligence and education tends to lean more individualist, with students often "singled-out" for gifted programming; however, non-Western positionalities may emphasize connectedness and community (Cajete 2000). Thus, the intersectionality of positionality, critical hope, and cultural perspectives disrupts the ethnocentric status-quo, advancing the disorienting dilemma critically necessary for transformation and growth within the field of gifted education (Charaniya 2012; Johnson-Bailey 2012). Instead of eliminating K-12 gifted programming entirely (Silverman and Davies 2021), educational policy makers should examine the culturally incongruent philosophical perspectives and philosophies of giftedness (Herring 1996). In pondering this decentering of Westernized approaches to gifted education, the author poses the following possible implications and questions for further examination.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

It is imperative that researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders within the field of gifted education acknowledge the way in which some gifted characteristics may apply to all gifted children, but that drastic, dynamic, and diverse differences in how giftedness manifests may exist within the context of those characteristics (Hartley 1991; Peterson 1999). Moreover, there is a very evident need, in both theory and practice, to consider the cultural dimensions of giftedness (Sternberg 2007), such as the Diné conceptions of giftedness discussed in this paper (Hartley 1991). The concept of giftedness is bound to cultural context (Peterson 1999). Giftedness is manifested in different ways throughout cultural groups; the aptitudes, attributes, and characteristics associated with gifted knowledge are culturally embedded, and cultures differ in the ways of knowing and thinking they recognize and value (Munro 2011). Such cultural dimensions of giftedness differ from many Westernized understandings and thus serve as critical

pointers not only in guiding gifted identification procedures, but in thinking about the overall purpose of gifted programming, which often appeals to predominantly White, middle-class students (Owens et al. 2018).

TABLE 2

Gifted education identification procedures

Dehumanizing	Humanizing
• Use a standardized test as a singular marker of giftedness (Wells 2021; Salazar 2013) • Place emphasis on memorization and conformity (Giroux 2010 as cited in Salazar 2013) • Actively put up "gatekeepers" in the way in which tests are constructed, written, and delivered (Wells 2021) • Push a discourse of whiteness (Salazar 2013) • Seek to replace native languages (Salazar 2013) • Support and sustain deficit perspectives (Salazar 2013)	• Include "cultural funds of knowledge as resources" in the identification process (Salazar and Fránquiz 2008 as cited in Salazar 2013, 134) • Include student interests, experiences, and emotions as part of the gifted experience—this may look like considering student-work portfolios, artwork, leadership skills, etc., as markers of giftedness (Dale & Hysop-Margison 2010 as cited in Salazar 2013) • Understand that the dualities of giftedness may manifest in positive *and* negative ways—such as leadership skills (Wells, 2021) • Provide opportunities to demonstrate talent and gifts through the co-construction of knowledge (Salazar 2013) • Honor resistance to the status-quo as a characteristic often evident in gifted eminent individuals (Salazar, 2013) • Acknowledge that giftedness exists on an ongoing, developmental spectrum (Wells 2021)

Toward developing more culturally responsive, humanizing gifted education practices, researchers should assume a steadfast engagement in community-engaged participatory gifted education research grounded in the context of community partnerships that acknowledge the knowledge, expertise, experiences, and contributions of all members (Steinhauer 2002). Such research not only centers non-Western narratives as valid, but better supports the translation of evidence into practice, produces actionable change, and eliminates disparities affecting both individuals and communities (Steinhauer 2002). Moreover, researchers may also consider how the inclusion of non-traditional data collection may reveal important, meaningful information toward decolonizing Western ways of seeing and understanding anti-oppressive education (Battiste 2013). For instance, Indigenous methods of data collection, to be included as Indigenous participants see fit, may offer extensive "textual and structural descriptions of experiences (Creswell and Poth 2018, 79; Steinhauer 2002, 79).

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

In alignment with the nature of this paper, the author poses the following questions for further examination: How do non-Western ways of knowing, being, and doing recognize giftedness? How might such non-Western ways of knowing, being, and doing inform the design of gifted K-12 programming and services? How might non-Western ways of knowing, being, and doing inform Western understandings of giftedness? What role does reciprocity and the co-construction of knowledge play in establishing humanizing, critical positions in understanding giftedness? What kind of asset-based auditing approach(es) might such researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders use toward continual work in decolonizing attitudes toward gifted education? What role do educator preparation programs play in ensuring K-12 educators understand the impact of value orientations in the identification and selection for gifted programs; for creative approaches to affirming culturally valued gifts and talents in the classroom and in special programs; for employing teaching strategies that accommodate the cultural values of nonmainstream, and often systematically excluded, students; for involving community in the identification and selection process (Peterson 1999)? What role might *the pedagogy of listening* (Rinaldi 2001) play in understanding culturally responsive gifted identification practices?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is through socio-cultural context that the phenomenon of giftedness is recognized, acknowledged, defined, and nurtured (Ngara 2006). The practice of true diversity, equity, and inclusion requires vigilant awareness of the work that must be continually done to undermine the colonized socialization that leads society to behave in ways that perpetuate the domination of Western cultural heritage, history, values, language, and beliefs (Battiste, 2013; hooks 2003; Owens et al. 2018). Placing attention on Diné (Navajo) conceptions of giftedness, this paper briefly explored what positions and perspectives inform gifted education and which positions and perspectives are left out, thus positing that K-12 gifted programming identification procedures often epitomize a unique and dangerous hidden curriculum founded on Westernized narratives. Drawing from theory on positionality and critical hope, two tables were presented; one to examine hokey versus critical gifted programing practices, and one to examine dehumanizing versus humanizing gifted identification procedures. To avoid gifted identification procedures that epitomize a hidden curriculum, gifted education should honor the cultural dimensions of giftedness and talent, in which identification and programming supports diverse ways of knowing, understanding, and being as valuable and worthwhile. Moreover, in concert with the inclusion of more culturally responsive conceptualizations of giftedness, the field of gifted education might also advocate for the examination of existing programs in both concept and theory, rather than focusing on simply refining methods for identifying students for existing programs (Hodges et al. 2018; Peterson 1999). However, the reader is left with one last question to ponder—is the concept of *giftedness* in-and-of-itself emblematic of White, Western ways of knowing and being?

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SCIENCE PARA EL BARRIO

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ABSTRACT:

I am the son of my mother. My mother, among many other attributes, is a protector of earth. I am a science educator. While growing up in NorthEast Los Angeles, my mother taught me science. She did not sit me at a desk and lecture me, she showed me. She did not deposit knowledge for memorization, rather she engaged me in practice. She is a healer, she is a chemist, she is a physicist, she is a botanist, she is a biologist. My mother only completed three years of formal education. From a western perspective of education this might mean that she is illiterate and does not possess the adequate qualification to be considered a knowledgeable individual. That belief however, is wrong. It is a byproduct of a mindset within a colonial framework. That belief is a byproduct of colonization. Colonization is a violent, insidious process that harms everything it touches. Present conditions for what is considered valid knowledge are not natural, but unnatural and built on the belief that certain knowledge is valuable and other knowledge is not.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

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¿Quién Soy?

I am the son of my mother. My mother, among many other attributes, is a protector of earth. I am a science educator. While growing up in NorthEast Los Angeles, my mother taught me science. She did not sit me at a desk and lecture me, she showed me. She did not deposit knowledge for memorization, rather she engaged me in practice. She is a healer, she is a chemist, she is a physicist, she is a botanist, she is a biologist. My mother only completed three years of formal education. From a western perspective of education this might mean that she is illiterate and does not possess the adequate qualification to be considered a knowledgeable individual. That belief however, is wrong. It is a byproduct of a mindset within a colonial framework. That belief is a byproduct of colonization. Colonization is a violent, insidious process that harms everything it touches. Present conditions for what is considered valid knowledge are not natural, but unnatural and built on the belief that certain knowledge is valuable and other knowledge is not.

My mother is a product of her parents and that means that her knowledge and practices descend from my grandparents'. My grandparents worked the land in their native Mexico, they nourished the land with their blood and sweat. They were sustained by the land in their small rural town in Michoacan. My grandparents' knowledge and practices descended from those that came before them and so on and so on. Those that came before me depended on the land to live, therefore they respected the land, learned from the land, and protected the land. The term indigenous to me means to respect those that came before you, to carry their knowledge and practices and to take up their struggle. And so being raised by my mother, I learned from her. I learned from her daily practices. I learned from our conversations.

I learned what western science calls Biology through gardening, through raising animals, and through caring for our loved ones. I remember my mother showing me how to clone a savila (aloe vera) plant by snipping off a lead and rooting it in another part of the garden. Then she explained to me that it would grow just as the mother plant, as long as we provided it with space to grow, water and sunlight. I recall that the first plant I ever grew from seed was a strawberry plant. My mother showed me how to dig a hole, prep the soil, place the seed, and water away. As the weeks passed I checked the growing strawberry plant on a daily basis and was fascinated by the first stem, then leaves, then flower, then strawberry fruit. My mother explained how life goes in cycles and through the process of growing a strawberry plant I understood a life cycle as a characteristic of living things.

I learned what western science calls chemistry and medicine through the remedies that my mother made from plants in her garden. She showed me how the ruda plant can be soaked in rubbing alcohol and then used as an anti-inflammatory if a bandana is soaked in the solution and then applied to the aching part of the body. I also learned that you can take leaves from the ruda plant and make it into a tea that helps with upset stomachs. My mother explained that there was medicine in the plant. I came to understand that alcohol is a solvent and placing the ruda plant in alcohol, allows for the medicine in the plant (i.e. the medicinal chemical) to be released. I came to understand that boiling the leaves in water has a similar effect.

I learned what western science calls physics through taking care of our garden. When a plant was growing at an angle and my mother wanted to change the direction she would plant a stake in the ground in an upright manner and tether the stake to the plant. She explained that the weight of the plant or the angle at which the sun hits the plant might cause it to grow in a different direction. I came to understand that forces could cause a change in direction.

What I learned from my mother was taught through a purpose. She was passing on to me knowledge that was passed to her. She did not call it science, but that's what it was. She was teaching me how to understand the natural world through a relationship of respect, not through one of exploitation.

CONTRADICTIONS OF THE SCIENCE CLASSROOM SPACE

Traditional science education is far removed from the lived experiences of our youth. Western Scientific thought is a framework of colonialism, which attempts to enculturate students into the culture, knowledge, techniques, values and worldview of academic Eurocentric science (Aikenhead G.S, and Elliott, D. 2010, 322). As a framework it values certain knowledge as scientific and disregards the knowledge of the "other." Within traditional science education we are taught to value western perspectives of science and to disregard others. The dominant view of what counts as science through a western scientific perspective regularly promotes a limited view of the world we live in. As a child going into a science classroom, I recall learning topics that were abstract and removed from my lived experience. As I grew older and continued my studies of science, I began to see that many of the concepts that were taught played a role in my everyday life. Why did it take so long for a connection to be made?

Eurocentrism as an epistemic framework is foundational to the maintenance of colonial power structures within schooling. According to Kincheloe (2008), there is a standardized view of knowledge in traditional schools, based on a Eurocentric worldview (75). Such a curriculum then has a certain "valid" body of knowledge, which it seeks to pass on to students. Battiste (1998) has described cognitive imperialism as a process of colonization where people are denied their indigenous knowledge when only one form of knowledge is legitimized through public education (20). The science curriculum of traditional schools can be seen in this same vein. Specifically, within the traditional science curriculum, eurocentrism allows for non-western knowledge to be invalidated and cast as inferior. Indigenous knowledge, if not valued in the science classroom space, reinforces the colonial structures of the classroom. What does it say about the current state of science as a tool, when students are asked to devalue the knowledge they bring from home because according to Eurocentric standards it does not qualify as science?

As an educator we must live in a constant state of critical reflection. We must understand, acknowledge, and at the same time resist a system of acculturation that we are a part of. Yes, as an educator we are part of a system of oppression and at the same time a potential source of liberation. As a science educator I must never stop being critical, I must never stop being reflective, I must never stop asking the questions: whose knowledge is valid knowledge? Whose knowledge is being centered? Whose knowledge is being silenced? However, I must continuously work to

deconstruct power dynamics within my classroom and encourage a space where young people would be empowered. As an educator I am part of the system of schooling that has caused harm to so many young people. I must accept this reality, I must acknowledge this reality, I must resist this reality.

My work is related to indigenous ways of knowing because at the center of my practice as a science educator is the understanding that what is taught as a traditional science curriculum stems from a western scientific perspective. A perspective of science that is rooted in a Eurocentric worldview. A perspective that is rooted in enlightenment thinking. The same thinking that was foundational to imperialism and the colonization of indigenous people around the globe. The same thinking that developed and justified racial hierarchies as a means of subjugation. The same thinking that promoted the study of Eugenics. The same thinking that promotes a false narrative of intelligence as measured through I.Q. The same thinking that developed technology based on the exploitation of the earth for capital gains. And at the core of my practice is a purpose, to deconstruct the violent beliefs that ground western scientific thought.

A Science Learning Space Where Many Knowledges Fit

How do I, as a science educator, resist colonialism? The same way that my mother has, the same way that her mother did, the same way that those that came before her did, I struggle. Every opportunity I get to struggle toward the destruction of colonial systems, I do. Within my classroom, I acknowledge that the practice of education has been used as a tool of colonization and struggle to create a space where young people are able to reconnect with indigenous science. Science Para El Barrio is a concept that seeks to decolonize the space of science learning. Science Para El Barrio seeks to use the lived experiences of youth as the context for science knowledge creation and youth empowerment. Within the science classroom space, we do this by understanding the current state of science and the perspective of the world that is encouraged by western scientific thought. We ask the questions: Who does science benefit? Who does science harm? Who does science forget? Can there be a science built on love and respect? Can there be a science that is truly human? Can there be a science that struggles for justice? Students collaborate to develop a philosophy of science that is grounded in respect for the natural elements of earth. At the heart of the resistance to colonialism within our classroom space is the struggle to create a world where many worlds fit (Enlace Zapatista, 2016). Within the classroom space I encourage students to respect and learn from each other's' cultural knowledge and to develop a practice of science that is open to multiple ways of knowing, not just a western perspective.

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Anthony Peña is an Assistant Professor of Environmental & Science Education and researcher from Northeast Los Angeles (Unceded Tongva Land). Before joining the Liberal Studies Department at Cal Poly Pomona he taught for 12 years in alternative high school spaces, supporting youth who had been pushed out of their traditional high schools. His research background is in critical pedagogy and science education.

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HAMPERING THE DOGMATIZATION WITHIN THE SYSTEM BY BUILDING AN ITINERANT PRACTICE IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND DUAL-LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on dual-language programs and the transformation of implementation through the lens of Itinerant Curriculum Theory (ICT), curricularized language, and personal pedagogies, and how it impacts the way educators work within a dual-language program. The pedagogies of educator practices and influences included individuals with different ideologies, education, experience, distinct backgrounds, methods, and aspirations were part of the interactive mechanisms and educator practices that were analyzed. Thus, it concludes that the mindset and pedagogical approach affects the implementation of any program or model and shows how disparate agendas shape the program, its implementation, and the effect on the child.

KEYWORDS: curriculum, subaltern voice, linguicism, itinerant curriculum theory, evasion pedagogies

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These are accounts of observations and discussions with educators. Their sentiment is that changing the system and the learning experience under this attested guise model of progress while using the same practices in the organization perpetuates the hegemony and linguicisms of Westernized epistemologies prevalent in bilingual education.

The selection of forms of knowledge, traditions, and educational values creates, hastens, and preserves epistemicides in education, exercising power that maintains current hegemonies. Dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs could succumb to the cultural perspectives and performance rituals that strengthen one group's political and economic ability at the expense of the rest. These influences can continue to replicate the inequalities that "disproportionately serve and represent the interests of white English speakers at a policy-level and classroom level, and it can reproduce the social and linguistic disparities it is intended to disrupt" (Bernstein et al. 2021, p. 384). The knowledge selection to be imparted, the methods, the practices, and how everything will be measured are acts characterized by engaging in the forfeiture of certain aspects and elements conducive to a more humanizing schooling experience. All in the name of perfect reproducibility, yielding scripted learning. Everyone has a role that must be played accordingly, "we make the school into a box in which they are to be kept and moved at the ringing of the bell" (Janson and Silva 2017, p.12). Decentering these perspectives is necessary to hamper epistemological purges already taking place in the schooling experience. "Schooling issues, such as assessment, subject matter, hours of textbooks, and the knowledge being transmitted, are wrongly accepted as dogma. Such a limited vision makes it almost impossible to have a vision of schooling without meeting such conditions" (Paraskeva 2016, p.212).

Myths, traditions, and taboos constrain the education field. They should be acknowledged, considering how these aspects entwine the education fabric and demarcate the experience, restraining educators in the name of accountability and trackable efficiency. Within these aspects is where the dominant Western Eurocentric perspectives reside, permeating education, including the domineering traditions and structures granting an advantage to some, and marginalizing others (9). It is part of the standardization movement; all aspects of schooling and learning become checkboxes to be tracked, measured, and monitored, losing meaning and value in the process (Janson and Silva 2017). Schools are the means and place that foster students' potential, creating the way for self-transformation (McLaren 2002). The pervasiveness within the system guided by linguicism is always present and palpable with a validated scientific production that privileges English above all languages. These representations embody an obdurate aura that preserves and disseminates how participants interpret all aspects housed in the symbolic systems participating in the learning experience extending the hegemony by cementing processes in education. "Teacher (and learner) images of languages and cultures are often 'schoolarised', instrumental, ethnocentric, monolithic, and stereotyped. These images reinforce hegemonic understandings of the value of languages and a limited view of their social, cultural, political, and identitary role" (Moreira 2017, p. 4).

Unchallenged and unrecognized myths in education are partly due to the surrender to the acceptance of the dogma of the language decided in curriculum and instruction. Fixed by meritocratic interpretations, low educator expectations, and a repressive curriculum (5) with "the formulation of educational "objectives, "the selection of" learning "experiences, the organization of those learning experiences, and their evaluation" (Huebner 1966, p. 104) directed at minority students with a different language and cultural background that are not aligned with what is considered mainstream ideologies.

Having the facility to visit different campuses in the capacity of a DLBE specialist, one can witness how ideologies, quick-win mentalities, or mitigating circumstances can alter efficacy. Each time I enter a classroom, I can see model variations. The first thing to notice is the classroom environment. Though, it serves multiple purposes facilitating social interactions, content learning, language development, and acquisition to name a few. A fallacy quickly relegates it to serve an aesthetic value for individuals visiting the classroom. It makes an excellent impression to have the classroom organized and decorated in a certain way with colorful representations of good practices. Usually, classroom visits are short, some more organized than others. Teachers can clearly distinguish themselves if all the program components are present, even though many objects on the walls and around the classroom are not used consistently for instruction. Many DLBE models have student-generated alphabets with multiple word walls in both target languages and classroom labels. I had always considered these components busy work, which provided little added value for the effort is to produce when not used for learning.

Every educator has a paradigm that differs in goals, objectives, and bilingualism. Each interpretation of what is to be bilingual and the program's objectives inform our practice and what is being implemented, monitored, tested, and reported to mark progress—witnessing the inconsistency in using the target languages, tending to ignore the language allocation guidelines because students would be testing in one language—dismissively justifying teaching only in Spanish. The perceived lack of time and the amount of educational material needed would not allow instruction in both languages. Educators' ideologies on language, race, and culture, in general, inform the way educators approach education. Ideologies, including those about language, are derived from specific evaluative frameworks. My experience with language oppression was in elementary school, where we could not speak Spanish in or outside the classroom. We were scolded and sent to the principal's office. Later as a first-grade bilingual teacher, I was forced to transition kids at the end of the first six weeks of school. Just as my students were learning to read in their native language, it was taken away from them, and they were forced to change from Spanish to English instruction with ESL Support. After two years of doing this and seeing the children struggle with reading, writing, and content knowledge, I decided that it had to stop. I approached my principal with research on second language learners. I told her I could no longer do the injustice of holding these children back from learning to read and shielding them from systematic language oppression. After some discussion, she agreed to let me move forward and keep the Spanish instruction for the whole school year. Ultimately, it was the best thing for my kids as they all were reading on level and writing in English. The following year we implemented

a dual language program at my school. This episode supports the notion that language is curricularized; it is no longer a social process; it is divided into curriculum abilities promoted through controlled experiences (Valdes 2015).

The manner in which decisions are taken within the learning experience and curriculum is derived from the value systems we subscribe to. Realizing the answer to these concepts will provide awareness of how decisions will influence and affect the schooling experience. (Huebner 1966). Carse (1986) explains that we often operate under certain mindsets following preconceived scripts; everybody assumes all are constrained within the boundaries and behave accordingly. The schooling experience becomes a series of learning activities that are selected depending on what values system is being used by the person guiding each level of the learning experience. Under our own volition, can we break the spell since it is a self-imposed parameter derived from our process and understanding being misguided by ideologies rooted in the English hegemony. Hidden within these cultural scripts are our predispositions, biases, preconceptions, and even our prejudices that can go on continually unchecked if we do not intentionally reflect and review our behaviors, including those related to teaching. Unchecked, these cultural scripts and majoritarian stories perpetuate inequality and create an unequal space for everyone (Viesca and Gray 2021). As educators, we learn strategies and skills but also need to know how to adjust our paradigms on the topic. We should speak up and advocate and incite change for what is suitable for our teaching demographics. We must help educate the administration on what research has proven and the importance of the role native language plays in second language acquisition.

The schooling experience is a system already in motion regardless of our own emotions and belief systems. We manage to produce and deliver promising outcomes for some students. As educators, we can influence student learning through our involvement and academic language models. We can take the first step to break the spell and adopt a different stand of our own volition. An awareness of what kind of decisions and choices are being made is essential to understand the impact of one's decisions. This appreciation and realization are what Huebner (1966) refers to as the power or influence educators have on intervening in the life of others.

Moreover, this power alters the learning experience by not making it conflict-free; making decisions must be made with somber trepidation. This perspective will decenter and erode the power of the current status quo and the Western English hegemony. We can consider diverse epistemological platforms scrutinizing methods, their validity, and scope with the forewarning of not sinking into a self-justifying position of predilection by denying frameworks based on provenance or renegade the systems of knowledge proven and confirmed by the sciences. It is possible adopting the position beyond the dealing of the ultimatums demanded by the contradictions within the experience tapping into the decentralized network of knowledge, borrowing what is needed, and expanding such network by adding the understanding gained. (Paraskeva 2016).

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AFFIRMATIONS OF BILINGUALISM, BILITERACY AND BINATIONALISM IN THE CALI-BAJA BORDERLANDS: TRANSFORMATIONAL POLITICS OF LIMINALITY, COUNTER-ERASURE AND BORDERIZING.

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ABSTRACT:

Our collective reflection communicates perspectives from four leaders of the Developing Effective Bilingual Educators with Resources (DEBER) Project. DEBER is an inter-institutional bilingual teacher preparation program in the Cali-Baja borderlands sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. DEBER goals include supporting the transfer processes for prospective bilingual teachers (scholars) from community colleges to undergraduate programs as well as the completion of a postbaccalaureate teacher credential program.

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Our collective reflection communicates perspectives from four leaders of the Developing Effective Bilingual Educators with Resources (DEBER) Project. DEBER is an inter-institutional bilingual teacher preparation program in the Cali-Baja borderlands sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. DEBER goals include supporting the transfer processes for prospective bilingual teachers (scholars) from community colleges to undergraduate programs as well as the completion of a postbaccalaureate teacher credential program. DEBER leaders design, implement and evaluate ongoing advisement as well as professional development learning opportunities for scholars. Leadership in DEBER is operationalized via ad-hoc working groups. We are four of the seven members that comprise the research and evaluation workgroup. We are bilingual, biliterate, and binational doctoral students, faculty members, researchers, and evaluators at Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) that are designated as Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs). In consideration of the geospatial context of the San Diego-Tijuana region where DEBER is implemented, we critically reflect how DEBER's ways of knowing, being, and valuing affirmed scholars' bilingual, biliterate and binational identities in Eurocentric, white-supremacist, monolingual IHEs. The following collective reflections draw from our individual reflections and memos, audio-recordings of group dialogue and excerpts from "I'm From" poems written with and for our DEBER Scholars.

Our reflection considers how Latinx students in IHEs experience cultural, racial-ethnic, and linguistic affirmation (Garcia 2019) through our intentional engagement with the transformational politics of liminality, counter-erasure and borderizing. Our reflection addresses the following question: What are the navigational practices that contribute to scholars' development of bilingual, biliterate, and binational identities and practices in the Cali-Baja borderlands? Informed by Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework and Garcia's (2019) typologies of Hispanic-Serving Institutions, we analyzed how IHE students affirmed their cultural, racial-ethnic, and linguistic assets as emerging bilingual, biliterate, and binational educators. Specifically, we welcomed the opportunity to critically reflect on how our experiences, beliefs, motivations, and politics cultivate a collective ideology that influences our leadership practices, and policymaking at IHEs as well as why we prioritize scholars' well-being, academic self-concept, and sense of belonging (Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019).

Politics of liminality (Hastings & Haller, 2002) are one navigational consideration for our community of scholars and leaders. Liminality honors our authentic selves as well as our common and unique communities. Liminality honors our natural demeanors, languages, interests, and instincts. Along the Cali-Baja borderlands, liminality naturally takes on many forms and communicates our dynamic situatedness in cultures, languages, and nation-states. Somos una comunidad que vive en un espacio liminal; ni de aquí, ni de allá (Anzaldúa 2012); we are the children of the corn, somos de mashed potatoes, enchiladas y burgers también; a limbo of constant adjustments depending on our audiences, on which side of la línea our bodies, our minds and hearts happen to know, be and value at any particular moment. Lines are drawn in the sand between our nation-states, neighborhoods, generations, worldviews, and often our liminality manifests like

door jambs between the students in hallways and teachers in classrooms. In these spaces somos los shapeshifters, coyotes, y magicians of IHEs- we are from the words of César Chávez, we are from mighty warriors in the face of adversity.

Sometimes our audiences are friendly, such as being with family and friends where laughter dances and tears flow with as much ease in Spanglish, ingleñol, inglés and Spanish. Other times our audiences are hostile, especially when we cross the borders of concrete riverbeds, bridges, and tunnels and uniformed officers employ every ounce of authority, both granted and perceived. A culture of surveillance cameras continuously records our crossings of a geopolitical line designed for division as we travel from campo santo and the promised land into nepantla and then back again. Our crossings are not our definition but our constant counter-narrative of how we know, who we are and our values.

Politics of liminality affirm scholars' bilingual, biliterate, and binational intersectional identities. DEBER scholars are an antidote to division, they push back against the unnecessary death and destruction de la mente, el cuerpo y el alma. They are the coyotes y cascabeles that roam the chaparral-filled ridges and ravines, moving as freely as possible between cities and through cañones where their souls come to rest and to be rejuvenated despite the constant beating of nativist rhetoric from both sides of la línea. In spaces of liminality, we find our natural selves that purists tend to scoff at because here we move beyond the dichotomy of Español de la Academia Real and the Queen's English. We move beyond punitive divisions from la Ciudad de Mexico and Washington DC. We speak the language of abrazos y sueños, de humildad, y de momaxtiani-temaxtiani más que maestr@-alumn@, or teacher-student because we all greet the same sun and travel together across la misma tierra de aprendizaje. Through the politics of liminality, we look to the past and the future, while rooted in the present, much like planting maíz in soil made fertile by the discarded pieces of life. We embrace our authentic selves and liminality, respectful of our knowing, being and valuing as a cooperative and engaging in academic mulmenyah, a collective work that honors our strengths, our traditions, and dreams beyond artificially constructed borders meant to keep us toiling in Plato's cave. Preferimos el sol y no tenemos miedo de las sombras proyectadas por la tierra.

Politics of counter-erasure are another navigational consideration for our community of scholars and leaders. Counter-erasure is an entry point for our scholars and leaders to address our intersectional identities and navigational practices in walled borders, militarized borderlands and Nepantla. Counter-erasure situates our intersections of racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, linguicism, and xenophobia. Counter-erasure supports scholars' interactive analyses of linguistic acquisition and loss, dynamic categories of migrant, immigrant, refugee and asylum-seekers, racial-ethnic inclusionary, and exclusionary formations of power and privilege, as well as dehumanizing and transformative pedagogical practices and ideological stances. Politics of counter-erasure are navigational practices that support scholars' critical reflection of the liminality of racialized bodies at IHEs, categorically segregated for support system access and simultaneously homogenized into pan-ethnic labels of Latinidad and Hispanicity. Counter-erasure directly holds space for alternative epistemologies that resist logics of white supremacy—

navigational practices that reject a constant sense of urgency, hierarchies, quantity over quality, individualism, and binary ways of thinking, being and mattering. Politics of counter-erasure supports our existence as our full selves, as we work towards unsettling practices and approaches that align with Eurocentric, white supremacist monolingualism.

The politics of counter-erasure are decolonial practices that affirm persons and the politicized nature of knowledge. Our IHEs erase Latinx languages and cultures. We unapologetically elevate Brown spaces and center Latinidad and transfronterice realities (e.g., comunidad, relationships with time, translanguaging). We center our borderlands in our programming and practices. We acknowledge our geo-political realities of our learning and living in a highly politicized and militarized border region. We normalize our border languages and cultures. Counter-erasure happens in spaces that are not only inhabited by Brown people. We normalize our Spanish use in our monolingual English-only IHEs. We also make explicit ideological stances of solidarity with other historically minoritized groups (e.g., programming on anti-Black racism, Asian hate) and supporting the students we serve to engage with intersectionality and intersectional frameworks (e.g., raciolinguistics). And there is so much more counter-erasure to be practiced for us to say we do decolonial work. We self-examine if we are doing enough to center Indigeneity and Blackness. We interrogate if we are unintentionally offering a singular narrative of Latinidad or "Brownness." For example, our letter of understanding with scholars (a Eurocentric practice of transactional contracts) asks scholars if they are Latinx, Hispanic, or Chicanx, but what about the erasure of scholar's cultural identities that are not affirmed by such categorical labels? We are naturally engaging in decolonial practices by showing up as ourselves in IHE spaces that have done harm to us and our families. With more conversations and reflections on our structures and practices, we believe we can continue to move in a decolonial direction. We can continue to elevate humanizing pedagogies and praxis, but how do we move from the critical to the decolonial as epistemologically they are not the same. We think we can start by reckoning with the contradictions of what we do by unpacking our positionalities in IHEs and explicitly naming our politics of counter-erasure.

Politics of borderizing are another navigational consideration for our community of scholars and leaders. The Cali-Baja borderlands are a geospatial and conceptual location explicitly influenced by the beliefs, values, traditions, customs, and social practices of those that are borderized. This concept that persons, and their perspectives and practices, are borderized is interesting to us as persons, as educators, and as community members. Specifically, we are interested in learning about the complementary process of how persons borderize. Borderizing is similar to translanguaging as both an action verb as well as conceptual construct. How is a pedagogy of borderizers both decolonial as well as liberatory in terms of ways of axiological feeling, epistemological thinking, and ontological being? Are DEBER's practices decolonial and liberatory? Is decolonial an appropriate framework for institutional analyses? Are liberatory practices appropriate measures or constructs for individual and interpersonal analyses? We do not know of any institution of higher education in any of the three Californias that explicitly prioritizes the teaching and learning of liberatory practices. As we reflect, we interrogate the limitations of

decolonial frameworks as appropriate for the analyses of DEBER Scholars' development. Is the decolonization of economically inaccessible IHE institutions an appropriate goal for DEBER? Are measures of borderized students' bilingualism, biliteracy, and binationalism indicators of best practice? Yes, there are social and economic salaries and benefits that are associated with being a bilingual teacher; however, the distinction between being a teacher and being a simultaneous student and teacher of a pedagogy of borderizers is a nuanced distinction. Just as praxis is the blend of theory and practice, our notion of colega-ness is the blend of learner and educator. Colegas that learn and teach a pedagogy of borderizers recognize and respect the multiplicity of languages, literacies, cultures, dispositions, worldviews, nation-states, and reconcile the contradictions of colonial markers of institutional difference such as gender, sexuality, race-ethnicity, linguistic competence, enrollment, persistence/participation, graduation. Colegas that learn and teach a pedagogy of borderizers continuously affirm languages, literacies, and cultures as liberatory practices to reflect on, situate and negotiate colonialism, classicism, racism (anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity), patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia. Theorizing from the Cali-Baja region we cannot ignore the sociopolitical reality of the pandemic. Though the militarized border has always functioned as a de facto fortress to keep brown bodies, brown minds, and brown ideas outside of the U.S, during COVID-19 we truly experienced the full closure and exclusionary nature of Empire. We are scholars, shapeshifters, coyotes, magicians, and nahuallis. We are from thorns, roses, Califas, y Aztlán. Somos de everywhere and nowhere and the in-between. As human beings that engage in decolonial practices, our minds and hearts are also impacted, shaped, nurtured by the temporality, and physicality of our geospatial realities. Our hearts remaining open as we confront multiple closed borders.

In our critical reflection we have written about liminality, counter-erasure and borderizing not merely as abstract ideas but as concrete realities that shape our innermost beings. Cultivar estos conceptos de liminality, counter-erasure and borderizing en este suelo del sistema educativo es nuestro DEBER. Findings from our critical reflection suggest that cultural, racial-ethnic, and linguistic identity affirmation are crucial for transformational learning experiences of scholars. It is with this in mind, that we enter this intellectual/academic critical reflection. Our bodies and minds are full of dreams, ideas, and reflections about how best to continue the work of ancestors by sharing our generational knowledge to rescue the sacred wisdom buried beneath our feet. This is our calling, this is our duty, this is our DEBER.

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EL CORRIDO DE LA REDADA DE LOS "41 MARICONES": DECOLONIZING EL PORFIRIATO AND ITS QUEER SIGNIFIER

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to critically examine the story of the number 41 as a queer signifier in Mexican culture from a decolonial perspective, taking into account archival records in the development of hegemonic masculinity in the 20th century. An examination of hegemonic masculinity and homophobia of early 20th century Mexico is provided by reviewing colonial accounts of indigenous sexuality, as well as uncovering the hidden stories of the corrido/ballad of El Baile de los 41 Maricones. The corrido was used as satire to ridicule the homosexual practices by the bourgeoisie, creating a rift between social classes, and allowing the poor to take a higher ground by claiming real masculinity.

KEYWORDS: violence; resistance, criminal; homosexuality; raid; corrido

RECOMMENDED CITATION

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When the Spanish landed in the 'New World' in 1519, they encountered an indigenous population dressed in accordance with the environment and their needs, without shame and guilt about their nudity, sex, gender expression, and sexuality. Following the arrival of the Europeans, indigenous people were exterminated, raped, enslaved/trafficked, and forcefully indoctrinated by Christian missionaries, transforming and restricting their views about sex, sexuality, and homosexuality, to immoral, wrong, transgressive, and/or sinful (Lavrin 2012; Sigal 2003).

It is the purpose of this study to use decolonial methods to examine the discourse surrounding the number 41 as a queer signifier in 20th century Mexico, by using archival records of news media coverage (newspaper reports, popular media broadsides, texts, and the compiled diary of Amada Díaz [daughter of Dictator/President José de la Cruz Porfirio (Porfirio) Díaz] to decolonize the rise of homophobia in Mexico (Franco 2019; Smith 1990; Smith [1974] 1993). These aforementioned archival records are used to investigate the history of homosexuality through the negotiation and integration of values; this methodological approach allows for the engagement of culture to generate new "oppositional knowledge…to resist injustice" (Collins 1998, xiii). This perspective as a framework allows us to explore the connections and pathways of a story by connecting ideas to a phenomenon. In other words, sociocultural history is linked to homosexuality.

The number 41 has its origins in the criminalization of homosexuality under the rule of Dictator/President Porfirio Díaz. During a police raid in Mexico City in 1901, according to media reports 42 men were arrested in an elite private party, but only 41 were arrested and charged for offenses to morals and good manners. The 42nd man went missing from the records and was rumored to have been the son-in-law of Porfirio Díaz (Orozco 2003). The news of this event became a national scandal and made international news in the print media and popular culture, inspiring the *corrido*/ballad of *El Baile de los 41 Maricones* (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003). To understand the development of 41 as a queer signifier, we must critically examine the intersections of hegemonic masculinity and homophobia of early 20th century Mexico by delving into the hidden story of the *corrido* of the 41.

Homosexuality was an open and acknowledged part of indigenous American culture prior to European colonization (Cannon 1999; Jacobi 2006; Sigal 2005). As part of Díaz's repressive regime, homosexuality was driven underground, and hegemonic masculinity became solidified. After this underground community was exposed in the media, the topic of debate shifted to one in which homosexual men were condemned and traditional hegemonic masculinity was defined as a set of macho heterosexist cultural ideals. The *corrido* was further used as satire to ridicule the homosexual practices by the bourgeoisie, creating a rift between classes, and allowing the poor to take a higher ground by claiming "real masculinity" (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003).

There are several instances of colonizers having first-hand experience with homosexuality through interactions with indigenous people. Jacobi (2006) stated many Europeans encountered natives whose behaviors went against their norms. One of the first Spaniards to walk across the Americas was Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. He joined an expedition to Florida which resulted in

being marooned in the Gulf Coast area from 1528 to 1536. Cabeza de Vaca was held captive by the Karankawa people from the Galveston area and was eventually able to escape. After he managed to break free, he became a trader and then a shaman, allowing him to travel through and interact with many different semi-nomadic tribes known as Coahuiltecans and other southwestern tribes who lived in villages before eventually reaching Mexico City (Chipman and Joseph [1992] 2010). In his travel accounts, Cabeza de Vaca notes with Christian disgust that men married other men:

> These are womanish, impotent men who cover their bodies like women and do women's tasks. They shoot bows and carry heavy loads. Among these people, we saw many of these womanish men, who are more robust and taller than other men and who carry heavy loads. (Núñez Cabeza de Vaca 1993, 90)

Other encounters by missionaries Jean Bernard Bossu, Pedro Font, and Joseph Francois Lafitau who encountered North American natives highlight the case of "perverse addictions" in that "they were dedicated to nefarious practices," and "...addicted to sodomy. They corrupt men..." (Cannon 1999, 3). However, we must remember that the sexual practices and beliefs of a people must be understood "within the situation of the gender-meaning system of the culture" (3).
Homosexuality practices were first noted in the colonial archives in the work of *Historia de la Nacion Chichimeca of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochit* and the *Monarquia Indiana of Juan de Torquemada* which outlines the active case of homosexuality. Fernando de Alva Cortés Ixtlilxóchitl was of indigenous noble descent and colonizer Cortes Ixtlilxochitl. He was university educated and through his research, chronicled pre-historic and colonial history, religion, and literature (Brokaw and Lee 2016). Fray Juan de Torquemada was a missionary in colonial Mexico who also chronicled the history and culture of New Spain by collecting documents and oral histories of the people, their history, their conquest, and the forced Christian conversion (Brading 1991).

Meanwhile, the *Florentine Codex* organized by Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, a Franciscan friar, in 1529 brought to light an oral discourse analysis used to attach metaphors, and concepts so that Christian meanings could be attached to the items which the Spaniards viewed as immoral. From here their alphabet set about knowledge to learn the indigenous language/speech and norms of the natives. This further situated a way to decode the indigenous language and behavior of the people to refute preconceived aspects or notions (de la Carrera 2010). The process of creating the *Florentine Codex* was done via Sahagún's writings of speeches and images/pictorial records collected from Nahua elders, known as *Huehuehtin*. Specifically, these records were collected through oral interviews and research documents to educate Spain of the people it conquered/ruled. The *Florentine Codex* consisted of more than 1,000 folios; these indigenous speeches and records were translated as part of a wider cultural translation endeavor to understand indigenous language, ideas, and practice (Kimball 1993). All original documents are still in the Royal Palace and Library of the Academy of History (Kimball 1993). Consequently, Christian priests were able to use the

codex as a heuristic tool to decipher the language and customs, to identify and record the indigenous traditions they found to be "evil" (de la Carrera 2010).

The homosexuality of today was not in existence as a self-identity of the past (Larvin 2012). Hence, the interplay between desire and power is illustrated by efforts to control the perception of sex and sexuality as dual natures. *Ometeotl* was the name of the primordial dual-sexed creator deity in Aztec civilization, who was a single entity that possessed both male and female characteristics (Joyce 2000). Accordingly, all forms of creative work demanded the participation of both men and women, due to this complementary dualism. Sigal (2005) notes that though the sexual identity of the past was not as it is today, the Mexica had Nahuatl terms which encompass homosexuality as existing and being part of society. The terms used to identify homosexuals were *xochihuah (sochioa), cuiloni, chimouhqui, cuiloyotl, patlache, and patlachuia. Xochihua* was used to refer to a person whose gender is unclear, or gender-bending and translated to "possessor of flowers" (Sigal 2005, 586). *Cuiloni* is a male homosexual who is penetrated (de la Carrera 2010; Kimball 1993). *Chimouhqui* is the crossdressing homosexual, c*uiloyotl* is the act of homosexual act of sodomy, and *patlachue* is a hermaphrodite. Finally, *pathlachuia* is the act of one woman engaging in sexual acts with another woman (Segal 2005). The deviancy of the terms Sahagún identified went against Christian ideals (Wawzonek 2017).

Homosexuality was placed in an Indigenous matrix with religion, sacrifice, and the gods by the natives in contrast to that of purely sinful by the Spaniards (Sigal 2005). Subsequently, the sexual behaviors of the indigenous people were placed as part of a confessional manual. Gutiérrez (1991) mentions shame, and modesty as not occurring among these people before the encounter with the Spaniards. Their relationship towards their body and sex was to fertility, virility, as well as attributed/performed to religious/holy/spiritual practices (Sigal 2005). They viewed sexual intercourse as a symbol for cosmic exchange/harmony between the masculine and feminine forces of sky and earth. From this sex/erotic act, the various sexual forms (heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality) held no limit or form, nor boundary. Upon the Spanish encountering the natives, they situated their gender hierarchies and roles which are still evident today. León Portilla (1959) highlights the case of homosexuality in *Visión de los Vencidos.* This text was developed by Mexican historian Miguel Leon Portilla of the Aztec account of the conquest of Mexico from the perspective of the Nahuatl people. He noted the existence of a cross-dressing woman (womanish sodomite) who needed to be punished and controlled by the colonizer for the engagement outside of the binary.

Patriarchy is the subjugation of women as men possess primary power/dominance, assume roles of authority and social privilege, and exercise control over the distribution of wealth which was introduced by the Spanish (Kaufman 1987). This sentiment was held as the conquerors used women as property and objects to be raped, pillaged, and trafficked. All with the intent to create a system of breeding mestizaje that brought them under control by the Spanish under a caste system of patriarchal White supremacy. Thus, these practices situate and explain the domination of women by men and the subordination of homosexual practices.

COLONIAL BINARIES

The Spanish Crown, according to Szasz (1998), allowed for the admonishing of all sexual acts outside of marriage between a man and woman. As part of their effort to convert the conquered to the new Spanish beliefs, they [the Spanish Crown] introduced sexuality regulations to penalize behaviors such as sodomy. This was all done to control and limit the social power of the indigenous people by removing them from their sexuality. For example, men who had sex with men were charged with sin that necessitated punishment in society such that the forced moral obedience through measures of domination like death set about sexually acceptable conduct among the natives (Tortorici 2012). Spaniards used punishment as a form of fear and suppression to keep homosexuality at bay while focusing on sex purely for procreation, survival, and a means of expansion.

Moreover, Sigal (2011) noted that the Aztec (*Meshica*) view of sexuality was attributed to a deity associated with fertility, sexuality, and sexual love known as *Xochiquetzal*. She was the protector of mothers and pregnant women in childbirth. The Aztec's focus on their children was a product of raw material with their birthing process as mothers being the warrior princesses (*cihuapipiltin*) setting forth the next generation. For the Spaniards, their efforts to civilize the savage native brought about the superimposing of Catholicism upon their indigenous rituals, beliefs, and values which attempted to remove the agency of women and placed them in a subjective role. However, among the Aztecs, the women worked together in complementary and symbiotic roles in their division of labor and in combat. Nonetheless, women were deterred from combat as even these people placed women in supportive roles (*mociuaquetzque),* no longer allowed to be warrior chiefs, but pleasure girls (*auianimes*) only worthy of providing sex (Resendiz 2001).

Sigal (2002) noted that in gendered warfare, sodomy as an act was used to discredit enemies as they were charged with the allegation of "sodomotic passivity," which was feminine as a form to discredit and remove agency from the natives. Examining same-sex behaviors was done to assert control and superiority of the elite through heteronormative hegemonic ideology. Furthermore, Gutiérrez (1991) extends this conversation to female sexuality in that through women's sexual exchange with men who were the outsiders, men from other clans/groups, became part of the community. Through a woman's sexuality, expectations towards reproduction were set forth as the outsider became part of the group. The sexual transformation of the Mexica people occurred to create cultural dominance by the Spanish (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006). Sexuality was a tool and instrument to enact power differentials and set about a historical construction upon one ruling power to another dominated people. Hence, the knowledge, expectations, and socially acceptable behaviors privileging heterosexual relations are a result of the imperial/colonial legacy set up by the Spanish Empire.

Homosexuality was relegated to the underground where it persisted privately and escaped civil legal order. However, two versions of sexual practices by males took precedence which was of the effeminate sodomite and lusty native who was known to be the two-spirit which we know today as berdache (*berdaje)* (Lavrin 2012). These berdaches represent the gender variance of these

indigenous cultures given their transdisciplinary gendered role in society. They engaged in the third gender role that played a significant role in the community for cultural, spiritual, and religious aspects in the family and community. As a result of their existence, it is possible they held honored roles as spiritual leaders, mediators, and diplomats (Wawzonek 2017). Such with homosexuality and being two-spirit was part of their religious life, but the Spaniards placed these practices within the bounds of sin and gave them a lowly and despised treatment which resulted in deviance and death (Sigal 2005).

HOMOSEXUAL PERSECUTION IN THE 20TH CENTURY: LOS 41 MARICONES

Upon Mexico's independence from Spain, colonial persecution of homosexuality subsided, but did not disappear completely. Although the death penalty for homosexuality could no longer be enforced, public decency standards still had to be followed, and the conduct of homosexuality was still stigmatized and confined to private realms (Lavrin 2012). Laws against soliciting and aberrant public conduct were severe and draconian. The social and political upheavals brought about by the new Spanish reforms triggered economic issues for Spain (Deagan 2003). Mexico's moral code resulted in a paradigm change in sexuality and attitudes about gay partnerships as the region's sexual platform was altered. Homosexuality had to be practiced privately given that it was still seen as a moral failing or lapse in judgment (Franco 2019).

Buffington (2003) notes in both the 19th and 20th century Mexico, deviance of any kind was often linked to the unnatural, antisocial, and criminal which included individuals who engaged in homosexuality. Sexual deviance was a sign of criminality which in turn threatened the social, political, and economic development of the times, especially when men took passive roles with men. This does not mean that men engaging in active roles with men was not a problem, but it had fewer ramifications and criticisms. However, the topics of gender, masculinity, and sexuality were not actively addressed under the rule of Porfirio Díaz (Navarro 2017).

Díaz's dictatorship/presidency was regarded in Mexico as a time of socioeconomic disintegration and oppression of the civil liberties of its people (Evens 2012). His rule wreaked havoc on the lower classes and established an inequitable system of wealth and class distribution. In other words, under Díaz's rule, the poor stayed poor, and the wealthy got richer while sexuality remained hidden. Opponents of Díaz's rule feminized the cultural European identity of the elite while bringing to light their vulnerability as they championed brute masculine standards of masculinity (Buffington 2003; Navarro 2017). This call for hypermasculinity against Porfirio Díaz's rule lay the framework for homophobia creating an anti-elite narrative that influenced Mexico's ideals of hegemonic masculinity, framed against the fear of the homosexualization of Mexico brought to the forefront by the national scandal of the dance of the 41. The police raid of *El Baile de los 41 Maricones* occurred on November 17, 1901, at approximately 3 a.m. Additional reports refer to November 18th and 19th, but the broadside pamphlet for the *corrido* references November 20th (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003). The *corrido* appears in the first column with an English translation in the second column:

Aqui estan los maricones	Here are the fairies/faggots
Muy chulos y coquetones	Very cute and coquettish.
Hace aun muy pocos dias	It was a very few days
Que en la calle de La Paz,	That in the street of La Paz,
Los gendarmes atisbaron	The armed police peeped
Un gran baile singular	One great singular dance.
Cuarenta y un lagartijos	Forty-one lizards
Disfrazados la mitad	Half in costume
De simpaticas muchachas	Of charming girls
Bailaban como el que mas	Danced like the most
La otra mitad con su traje,	The other half with their suit,
Es decire de masculinos	Is to say in masculine,
Gozaban al estrechar	Enjoying as they moved
A los famosos jotitos…	the famous *jotitos* (feminine little gays)...
	(Espinoza and Resendiz 2018, 24)

The police raided the dance on the grounds on the pretense that they [the event organizers] had failed to obtain the appropriate permits to hold such an event when the event offended public morality (Irwin, McCaughan and Nasser 2003). The 42 men in attendance were believed to be from the upper class; the name *lagartijo* (lizard) in the *corrido* refers to the opulent clothing worn by the elite (i.e., large hats and coattails). Half of the participants were dressed in ball gowns, attire, and full make-up, while the other half were dressed in suits. However, just one was permitted to leave discreetly without persecution (Irwin and Nasser 2003; Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003; Naja 2017; Orozco 2003). The men in attendance at the event were divided into two groups: half in feminine dress and the other half in suits. Of the total of 41 people that were arrested and processed, only 19 were prosecuted by the law (Buffington 2003; Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003).

Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser (2003) note that Jose Guadalupe Posada's broadside pamphlet print of the *corrido* gained national attention as *El Baile de los 41 Maricones* made the number 41 synonymous with homosexuality. To this day, the identity of the *corridista* (author) remains a mystery. Irwin and Nasser (2003) state there remain discrepancies and inconsistencies over the number of men detained in the raid as reported by *El Universal, El Popular, El Pais, El Imparacial, El Diario del Hogar, La Patria,* and *El Popular*. As a result, the first publication of the number was 42, but was later amended to 41. In the print media, it was reported that the police raided the dance on the grounds the organizers lacked a license, and the event offended public morality given this watershed moment (Franco 2019; Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003). The news media (i.e., newspapers) of the time reported a sizable proportion of those arrested were from privileged backgrounds (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003). The publication *El Hijo del Ahuizote* condemned the situation, citing unequal penalties (Barrón Gavito 2010); those (twenty-two) jailed in masculine garb (tuxedos) claimed they were unaware their dancing partners were

males in feminine attire, thereby buying their release from the Twenty-Fourth Batalion's Barracks (Franco 2019).

To restore some order to the heteronormative standards of Mexican society the men dressed in female attire were prosecuted by the governor of Mexico City, Ramón Corral (Castrejón 2003; Franco 2019; Sifuentes-Jáuregui 2002). Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser (2003) found that the governor ordered the 19 male crossdressers, who were in violation of male effeminacy, to clean the streets while clad in their dresses in order to publicly humiliate them. As an additional punishment, they [the 19 crossdressers] were mandated to serve in the federal army in the form of labor conscription as cooks and support workers doing manual labor on Mexico's southern border as part of their sentence (Franco 2019).

There was a great deal of public outcry since the public did not accept such disgusting individuals serving in what they thought to be a dignified army of heteronormative males. That being the case, these men who were caught in drag, the cross-dressing transvestites, were assigned to assist the federal troops by serving as maids to the soldiers and working in the meal halls while the 'masculine' soldiers battled against indigenous Mayan uprisings (Mayan Caste War) in the Yucatán Peninsula (Franco 2019). Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser (2003) state that it is extremely likely that these '19 criminals' were subjected to emotional, physical, or sexual violence or even worse atrocities such as death, during their time serving in the federal army. The male crossdressers' punishment exemplified the institutionalization of hegemonic masculinity using shame and punishment to regulate gender norms, expression, and heterosexuality. Espinoza and Resendiz noted,

> to be gay and masculine could be forgiven with the right payment, but to be gay and feminine was to be publicly denounced, ridiculed, and punished. In turn-of-the-century Mexico, homosexuality itself was not a crime, but a violation of heteronormative gender roles... (2018, 25)

The arrests and police reporting were impacted and modified by the privileges afforded to certain social classes under the law. This becomes abundantly evident when we examine the missing 42nd male, who was not processed by police and released from custody. A question raised is "Who was this 42nd person and why was he spared from prosecution?" Allegedly the person was Ignacio 'Nacho' de la Torre y Mier, a rich landowner who was married to Porfirio Díaz's daughter, Amada (Orozco 2003). Nacho was freed to avoid a societal-political scandal at the behest of the president. Amada Díaz had previously expressed concern about her husband's sexual inclination, which had been widely publicized in the circles of Mexican high society. She had consigned herself to a life of luxury with no intimacy at her husband being gay.

> Nadie me habla del vicio de Nacho, pero todos lo saben y me compadecen. Que terrible castigo envió Dios a mi vida; muchas deben haber sido mis culpas! La sodomía de Nacho causa asco y burla en la gente, dejando en mi necesidades físicas insatisfechas (lo que ninguna mujer decente debiera mencionar), que solo la practica intensa de la religión me permite soportar. (Orozco 2003, 17)

Porfirio Díaz protected his son-in-law to keep his daughter from experiencing any shame or embarrassment (Orozco 2003). Amada wrote in her journal about the day her father summoned her to the presidential palace to notify her that her husband had been apprehended while participating in a private event for crossdressers. Because of the political and moral climate of the period, the news of the incident became an (inter)national scandal. The image of Ignacio was pasted on Posada's broadside, bringing this to the attention of the whole public. He was depicted wearing a gown as a means of undermining his masculinity. However, when he was apprehended, he was dressed in a man's suit as reported by Amada.

Upon Porfirio Díaz's intervention, the raid's police records, including the witness testimonies, court transcripts, and even diary entries, were tampered with and destroyed (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003; Monsivais 2003; Najar 2017). Historian Juan Carlos Harris managed to unearth the names of some of the persecuted despite the raid's intention of erasing all traces of it. Seven of the detainees, Pascual Barrón; Felipe Martnez; Joaquin Moreno; Alejandro Pérez; Ral Sevilla; Juan B. Sandoval; and Jess Solórzano, sought a writ of *amparo*/constitutional protections against military service because homosexuality was in fact not illegal. Even though their charges were reclassified as crimes against decency, there was no change in the severity of their sentencing (Franco, 2019; Monsivais 2003; Morales 2018).

However, one participant was known to be in attendance at the ball and was prosecuted but was released at the behest of his family influence. The story of Antonio Adalid, also known as Toña, told in Salvador Novo's novel *La Estatua de Sal*, is an example of class privilege in action (Monsivais 2003). Novo's book tells the story of Adalid, the son of Don Jose Adalid, a *caballerango*, and godson to Emperor Maximillian I of Habsburg, I, who ruled Mexico from July 11, 1863, to June 19, 1867. Monsivais (2003) also reported that Antonio Adalid was known to be a transvestite. In *La Estatua de Sal*, Adalid goes on to provide further details of the night he was sold to the highest bidder at the ball at the reported age of 14 according to the account in the corrido *El Baile...* Antonio was really 20 years old at the time he was sold (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003; Monsivias 2003). Nevertheless, Antonio's prostitution could be deemed trafficking given that his body was sold as a commodity to the highest bidder; but the act itself was not viewed as a criminal act. Instead, Antonio was prosecuted following this experience as one of the 19 crossdressers who attended the private event referred to in the *El Baile de Los 41 Maricones*.

Novo further reported that Adalid's family did pay for his release to prevent him from being accused or penalized for any wrongdoing (Monsivais 2003). The second factor in his release was his attire at the time, which was a suit rather than a dress shirt and dress pants for women. In this case, his transgression was not a violation of heteronormative gender role performance. However, once his identity was revealed to the world, he was disowned and disinherited by his family. He got shipped off to California with no way to support himself. Upon his arrival in California, he went to the church that heard of his troubles and the local priest was instrumental in helping him secure a position as a Spanish instructor at a nearby college (Monsivias 2003). Accordingly, the press reports influenced the lives and mainstream aspects of masculinity for these people who were publicly ridiculed for their engagement in the private party.

BROADSIDE PUBLICATION FOLLOWING THE *GRAN REDADA*

The *Gran Redada* resulted in the publication of the *corrido El Baile* which mocked homosexuality and gender violations against hegemonic masculinity (Sifuentes-Jáuregui 2002). The broadside sheets drawn by Posada were the principal source that kept the narrative of the 41 alive (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003). Posada was a renowned printmaker best known for his broadsides, etchings, and engravings that called attention to the absurd and obscene (Sifuentes-Jáuregui 2002). He recreated the event through a series of engravings.

Amada Díaz, Ignacio's wife of over 13 years, said the drawing by Posada featured her husband disguised as a woman right in the center main scene (Orozco 2003). So, as Amada stated, "La noticia trascendió al público merced a una hoja ilustrada donde aparecía mi marido, en caricatura se entiende, vestido de damisela" (Orzoco 2003, 45). Hence, this picture of homosexuality served as a source of amusement for the audience. Posada's photos and portrayals of the events of that night and the following weeks were published in El Mundo in 1901, which criticized the *baile* (Sifuentes-Jáuregui 2002).

Orozco (2003) further makes mention of homosexuality being a trend for Ignacio after this occurrence. Amada Díaz mentions in her diary entry on September 13, 1912, that her husband had a "close, but stretched friendship" with future revolutionary, Emiliano Zapata. Amada notes how Zapata was one of the best horse trainers and that he had previously worked at multiple ranches in the area, and that they [Ignacio and herself] met him when he worked at the *hacienda de Atlihuayan* at the De la Torre family ranch. Zapata was well known for his horse training work. She explains that at the behest of saving Emiliano from forced punishment in working in the stables of the 9th regiment for supposedly not supporting Pablo Escandón when he ran for governor and won, Ignacio asked his father-in-law, Porfirio to get Emilio's location commuted to their family *hacienda* de Santiago Tenextepango. Díaz agreed and Zapata was sent there to serve at their hacienda for a time (Monsivais 2003; Orozco 2003).

Eventually, Ignacio would end up as a prisoner at Lecumberri as a result of his involvement with several government schemes that occurred over the course of several years. General Zapata, having taken control of Mexico City, gained Ignacio's custody on January 26, 1915. Ignacio was forced as a prisoner to "…preparar alimentos y cumplir con las tareas que le imponen." (Orozco 2003, 122). On the account of his forced custody, she [Amada] would later find that he had been released due to health issues. She was informed through telegram on March 19, 1918, that her husband had been released and sent to New York for extensive medical care. When she was finally able to reach him weeks later, she discovered him in the hospital, unrecognizable and dying. Amada said, "Cuando vi a Nacho casi no pude reconocerlo; esta convertido en un viejo de rostro cadavérico" (Orozco 2003, 185). The doctor further explained to her,

> Nacho tiene destrozadas las paredes rectales y despedazado el esfinter del ano. Que el paciente paso mucho tiempo sin recibir atencion medica y el daño estaba tan avanzado que afectaba hasta el colon transverso (habre entendido bien esos terminos medicos?). (Orozco 2003, 185)

On April 1, 1918, Ignacio passed away as a result of complications following an unsuccessful effort to remove a portion of his colon through surgery. Based on Amada's diary entries, we can see that Ignacio had a role in *El Baile...* and died possibly because of his homosexuality, having been raped repeatedly while under the custody of Zapatista revolutionary forces.

HOMOSEXUALITY DURING *EL PORFIRIATO*

Before 1901, José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz (Porfirio's) regime (*El Porfiriato*) kept homosexual life concealed, and out of sight. Porfirio Díaz, of indigenous ancestry, rose to become dictator of Mexico from 1877 to 1911. He continued to be re-elected via the use of violence to silence any resistance. When Francisco Madero defeated Díaz in the 1910 presidential election, Díaz went as far as to re-establish himself as the president-elect again and thus taking the reins of the government as a dictator-presidency. The capitalist class and politicians committed abuses and injustices against *campesinos/*peasants under *El Porfiriato* presidency. Political dissatisfaction continued to grow in intensity until it culminated in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Ibáñez 1920; Monsivais 2003).

Mexican citizens who had been repressed under *El Porfiriato* considered the president's modernization, affiliation with capitalist outsiders, and extravagant life as decadent as the class war in Mexico grew. Because of the controversy in 1901, many members of the working class began to identify homosexuality with the excesses, and decadence of the upper-class and the advancement of modernity. Broadsides distributed by the press helped to perpetuate homophobia as well as the media's coverage of the issue. Due to their heightened awareness of high society's corrupt nature, the c*ampesinos* came to view their role as the ideal for what it means to be a definition of a man (Barrón Gavito 2010; Irwin, McCaughan and Nasser 2003). *El Porfiriato* attempted to keep the reigns of control by keeping control and authority of the people and government (Navarro 2017).

This attempt at control resulted in the number 41 acquiring a connotation of being lesser than a man. Irwin (2003) posits that the number 41 is derivative, disparaging, and disrespectful to heteronormative males since it implies that a man is passive and/or effeminate, degenerate and so a lesser human. When a person reached the age of 41, they began to refer to themselves as "30-11 years old" (Irwin 2003, 178). The government and military of Mexico removed the number 41 from public buildings, license plates, and police badge numbers because it had come to denote homosexuality. This reinforced hegemonic masculinity and demonstrated institutionalized homophobia, which treats anything feminine as submissive, passive, and degenerate (Sifuentes-Jáuregui 2002).

Considering the exposure to and interest in Posada's works, gender transgressive homosexuality became widely associated with the number 41. This sentiment is expressed clearly by Roumagnac, "Criminals constituted an identifiable class with distinct traits that included atavistic homosexual tendencies" (1904, 80). Homosexuality was acceptable exclusively for criminals; however, it was not okay for them to be passive or effeminate (Buffington 1997;

Roumagnac 1904). Díaz incorporated depraved language to feminize indigenous men in his memoirs. For example, whenever he described the *juchitecos*, the indigenous men from the Juchitán, Oaxaca village, who served under the *Porfiriato* battalion he described them as degenerate or backward (Navarro 2017). Díaz assigned grades of masculinity where his generals were the alpha males, and the subordinate soldiers were not seen as male and identified as effeminate to keep a sense of order and power. He further placed the indigenous people as ignorant and superstitious; however, many of his soldiers were native. The *juchitecos* were described as bloodthirsty and fierce, but because they did not meet the European view of masculinity; under the *Profiriato* the *juchitecos* were viewed as feminine/inferior (Roumagnac 1904). Essentially, the natives were good enough to be soldiers but were not good enough to be treated as 'men' and were sexually denigrated (Navarro 2017).

Sifuentes-Jáuregui (2002) noted that given this master narrative by the Porfiriato people could be called gay-effeminate/sissy after *El Baile...*, based on the number 41, and be equated to homosexuals. The mainstream discourse explains the events of the raid became associated with homophobia and hate crimes as a symbol of corruption, depravity, and is inherent to the elite of this raid (Monsivais 2003). Buffington (2003) highlighted that the working class also defined a suitable working-class concept of the masculine as people could be called gay effeminate/sissy based on the number 41 and how they carried themselves. The relationship between the working class, along with the press, brought to light evidence that the elite had become "too soft to govern their women... [to] assert their masculine prerogatives and obligations" (Buffington 2003, 218).

Homosexuality posed a threat to the elite upper-class men and the effeminate behavior of the Mexican government (Barrón Gavito 2010). These political issues would be highlighted in the mediums of film, literature, and the news on homophobia and *machismo* in Mexico. Masculine values were privileged as Mexican identity was distanced from queer culture and history (Navarro 2017). Mexico tried to expel the effeminacy from national attention, yet it still gains notice today. Thus, we can see:

> The modern notion of homosexuality in Mexico is born not because of a new transvestitism or a new mechanism of sexual desire between men, but because there was a scandal that provoked a new discourse formulating the possibility of a certain eroticism existing between men. (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser 2003, 3)

Since bringing to light this movement of oppression noted in the news media, we must remember the battle that has been waged across time and in the current time against homosexuals. Therefore, *El Baile de los 41* serves to set up a discourse to identify an understanding, awareness, and culture for queer people. Moreover, these images, words, and narratives have become embedded in the culture, language, and history, positioning a conversation that social justice advocates must confront in the pursuit of agency, freedom, and social recognition.

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SPIRITUALITY AMONG MEXICAN TRANSNATIONAL TEACHING YOUTH: TOWARDS DECOLONIALIZATION AND HUMANIZATION OF RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate purpose of this study is to illustrate the transnational journey of Mexican populations in terms of their spirituality. With this goal, I designed this study based on decolonial and humanizing principles of testimonios epistemologies (Calderón-Berumen et al. 2022) to describe the spiritual trajectories of Mexican transnational returnees pursuing a teaching degree in Tlaxcala, Mexico. Based on interviews, written questionnaires, and the teaching journal of the author, I suggest that transnationals understand that spiritual and religious development is different for Mexican communities on both sides of the border. Mexican transnationals used online interactions to promote spiritual healing among those "left" in the north side of the border. Because spirituality has been traditionally ignored by most U.S. academia, this article supports the importance of humanizing scholarly research to understand the complexity of Mexican transnational populations.

KEYWORDS:

Mexican transnationals, spirituality, religiosity, pre-service language teachers, returnees, decoloniality

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"…pláticas and testimonio can be crucial epistemological and methodological tools when doing critical educational research working with and for—rather than on—communities of colour"
(Calderón-Berumen, Espinosa-Dulanto, and O'Donald, 2022, p.4)

I am a male scholar of color. I am an immigrant, a Mexican transnational. I come from a Mexican middle-class family who struggled to make a living during the several economic crises that Mexican experienced during the 20th century. I am part of the last generation of Mexicans who attended non-neoliberal schooling. While I have always rebelled against the status quo and social disparities, my epistemologies are limited to, mostly, western knowledge. That is, I have almost always been exposed to western and positivist perspectives which, in many cases, dehumanize research.

I did not want to leave home Mexico. But I had to. I have had privileges that most of Mexican transnationals don't have. But I have experienced structural, academic, linguistic, and personal discrimination on both sides of the border. I have dealt with loneliness, helplessness, and sorrow because we, migrants, have many homes and yet, no home at all. Because of my grandma's consejo, I turned to spirituality to cope with loneliness, sickness, and difficulties during my transnational journey. My own spiritual trajectory as an immigrant, along with decolonizing principles of testimonios and pláticas, motivated me to examine how spirituality is an important factor in the development of Mexican transnationals.

The present article embraces some epistemologies embedded in testimonios-pláticas: I attempted to create humanized research with and for communities of color (Calderón-Berumen, Espinosa-Dulanto, and O'Donald, 2022, 4). Particularly, this article aims to illustrate the religious and spiritual development of Mexicana transnationals by bridging spiritual ontologies we, transnationals, have in "el norte" and "el sur" as distinct yet united communities. In this way, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of transnational Mexicanas who returned to Mexico as part of a voluntary or forced migration. By emphasizing the importance of spirituality and religiosity, I highlight the relevance of healing and solidarity in transnational communities.

SITUATING THE STUDY

In the last decade, Mexican transnationals, or Mexican origin communities who move across nations, have returned to Mexico due to the lack of jobs, the increase of anti-Mexican policies, and xenophobia in the United States (Martinez-Prieto 2021, 126). Thus, many Mexican transnationals of first and second generation voluntarily or forcedly migrated (back) to central Mexico after the 2008 economic crisis.

Tlaxcala is the smallest state in Mexico and is located only 120 kilometers away from Mexico City. Tlaxcalans, or people from the state of Tlaxcala, played an important role during the colonization of the New Spain after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in 1521 (Calderón Morillón

2004, 58). However, because Tlaxcalans' alliance with the Spanish conquerors, their importance in the history of Mexico has been relegated or even ignored by many scholars in Mexico and the United States. On both sides of the border, some Mexican communities refer to Tlaxcalans as los traidores (the traitors) and this stigma has permeated scholarly work across the Mexican-U.S. border (Martinez-Prieto 2022, 67).

Along with the rest of Mexico, Tlaxcala has also received large numbers of Mexican transnationals who have decided to go (back) to Mexico with their families in recent times (Flores-Hernández, Cuatpotzo-Flores and Espejel-Rodríguez 2014, 261). Because many transnationals are already bilingual, many of them decide to take advantage of their English proficiency and enroll in Mexican public universities to pursue English Teaching degrees (Christiansen, et al. 2018, 80). Higher education is a way to achieve social mobility for transnationals in Tlaxcala, as it is in other states of northern Mexico (Martínez Prieto, 2020, 158). Because of the ancestral Spanish-Tlaxcalan alliance, Catholicism is rooted in Tlaxcalan communities. Spirituality has been extensively examined among scholars based at Mexican institutions, especially as it played an essential role in the (de)colonization and creation of the current Mexican identity (Lafaye 2015, 30). Different from researchers based in Mexican institutions, some scholars (i.e. Figueroa 2014, 33; Pérez 2014, 24) have highlighted that the spirituality of Mexican-origin individuals living in the United States has been traditionally ignored by academia, for which they called for a decolonial approach (meaning less positivistic and patriarchal) to understanding individuals' identities and journeys. For this reason, the present work contributes to two main areas of current academic discussion: 1) it examines the relevance of spirituality and religiosity of Mexican transnationals after they go (back) to Mexico to continue with their professional development which, to this day, is an area of opportunity for scholarly work, and 2) it emphasizes the need of decolonizing research perspectives to analyze transnational populations.

The findings of this study help contextualize the particular situation of the participants and should not be understood as generalizable. However, the present work can serve as a point of departure to comprehend the influence of spirituality among transnational pre-service teaching youth and, more importantly, to humanize research with/for transnational (returnee) migrants.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DECOLONIZING EPISTEMOLOGIES IN RESEARCH

"Testimonios" originated in the Global South with the purpose of emancipating those who are marginalized and oppressed. Reyes and Rodriguez (2012, 526) stated that testimonios aim to resist imperialism in the Global South, mainly in Latin America, where local elites, along with U.S. interventions, caused death and desolation among many (Martinez-Prieto 2023, 14). Huante-Tzintzun (2016, 44) pointed out that, when the epistemologies of testimonios were adopted by U.S. scholars, they extended to include a call for action in educational contexts. Pláticas, in a similar vein, aim to bridge the individualistic conceptions of testimonios to community actions. For Espino, Muñoz, and Marquez, pláticas are a "collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities in an effort to enforce strong bonds among the members of that social network" (2010, 805).

The foundations of this research are based on the emancipatory epistemologies of testimonios and pláticas. In this regard, the ideological principles that support this investigation are based on Espinosa-Dulanto and Calderón-Berumen's statements about testimonios epistemologies (2020, 1-3). I subscribe to the idea that testimonios and pláticas should:
1) foster the humanization of research, emphasizing healing practices,
2) bridge "north" and "south" knowledges and experiences, and
3) move from a western "I" to a collective "we."
As a reaction to most western research, the decolonizing principles of testimonios and pláticas allow me to find epistemological spaces to investigate the impact that spirituality has among us, Mexican transnationals.

SPIRITUALITY, RELIGIOSITY, AND DECOLONIZATION

This research is guided by the concepts of spirituality and religiosity. Although both concepts are relegated to secondary discussions in U.S. academia due to neocolonial and western perspectives, scholars have pointed out their importance for human development. In this regard, Lopez et al. (2011, 1299) emphasized the difference between spirituality and religiosity in the development of humans. Religiosity, on the one hand, relates the commitment of an individual to institutional religious practices. Spirituality, on the other hand, relates to the individual interpretation of the relationship of a person with a higher power. In a similar vein, other scholars (i.e. Saucier and Skrzypinska 2006, 1255) have stated that traditional concepts of religion do not equal subjective conceptions of spirituality or vice versa: Individuals can be religious but not develop notions of spirituality, or they can be spiritual without having any religious affiliation.
Recently, academia has also concentrated on the development of spirituality among transnational populations. For example, Gómez Carrillo (2012, 61) defined spirituality as a process in which transnationals find dignity and socialization. Because transnational communities usually experience processes of dispossession (of dignity, land, and people) in their new home countries, Gómez Carrillo (2012, 62) explained that spirituality provides spaces in which transnational populations can make meaning of their own existence.

This article is highly influenced by Anzalduan notions of spirituality. Anzaldúa's ideas have guided scholarly work about the spirituality of Mexican-origin transnational communities in the United States (i.e. Delgadillo 2011, 111; Schaeffer 2018, 1006). For Anzaldúa, spirituality, as an indivisible part of human nature, is essential to understanding human identity from a decolonial perspective of perpetual oppression (2010, 94). In addition, Anzaldúa considers that spirituality regulates different conceptions of reality by providing meaning to material and immaterial experiences of people (95).

As explained by Tirres (2019, 128), a pertinent claim about Anzaldúa's decolonial notions of spirituality relates to the fact it creates a positive impact in people's existence. This claim is common among the scholars who have examined spirituality from Anzalduan or other lenses (i.e. Lamb et al. 2021, 5; Lopez et al. 2011, 1299; Vázquez Palacios 2001 615; Twenge et al. 2016, 1720; Yañez-Castillo et al. 2018, 5).

SPIRITUALITY AS PART MEXICAN (TRANS)NATIONAL IDENTITIES

The concept of spirituality is essential to understand Mexicanidad or being Mexican. Lafaye (2015, 30) explained spirituality as one of tenets of Mexican identity. After the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in 1521, the Spanish conquerors used the spirituality of indigenous communities to impose the Catholic religion among the subjugated populations. The imposition of Catholic beliefs along with the spiritual resistance of Mesoamerican communities created syncretic deities, such as the veneration of Guadalupe-Tonantzin.

Ironically, as mentioned by León-Portilla (2014, 21), the symbol of Guadalupe-Tonantzin was used and adopted by criollos, or Spanish-origin individuals who were born in America (the continent), to keep their privileges in the new continent after Mexico's independence war (1810-1821). The current number of Catholics/Christians in Mexico can be explained by the syncretism of Spanish oppression and indigenous resistance during more than 300 years of Spanish colonization. Despite the gradual acceptance of Catholicism in Mexico, post-revolutionary administrations promoted the secular orientation of Mexican State during the 20th century, which caused tensions between the Catholic church and Mexican administrations. Such tensions caused the Guerra Cristera (1926-1930) in which some campesinos (farmers), supported by the Catholic church, fought against the Mexican army to counter the impositions of a secular State in western and central Mexico (Parada 2015, 67). According to Levinson (2001, 94), some Mexican institutions are still strongly influenced by the secularity of the Mexican State.

Some rural and indigenous communities in Mexico have rejected the imposition of Catholic and secular perspectives on their spiritual practices for centuries. For this reason, some Mexican scholars (i.e. Toledo 2003) have examined the spirituality of indigenous nations in Mexico as sustainable alternatives to western notions of wellbeing. In the Mexican state of Tlaxcala, where this research took place, investigations about spirituality have mainly concentrated on the relationships between gender, agriculture, syncretism, and the spiritual development of rural communities. For example, Manzanares (2004, 15) analyzed the rituals that Tlaxcalan women carry out in agricultural activities in the town of San Miguel del Milagro, where Catholicism and indigenous practices become mutually involved.

Research about spirituality has also analyzed individuals pursuing degrees in Mexican universities. For example, Yañez-Castillo et al. (2018, 5) analyzed the association between spirituality and the use of drugs and alcohol among Mexican university students. Different from youth in other countries, college populations in Mexico reported to be highly spiritual despite their religious affiliations, which was not associated with the use of drugs or alcohol.

WHEN IN EL NORTE: SPIRITUALITY AS REACTION TOWARDS COLONIALISM

The impact of spiritual practices in Mexican populations living in the United States has been addressed by Chicana feminist scholars, who are scholars of—mainly—Mexican origin living in the United States. Usually based on the decolonial work of Gloria Anzaldúa (2010), Chicana feminist scholars have highlighted the importance of spiritual development in Mexican-origin

populations during their transnational journeys in the U.S. In general terms, Chicana feminist scholars propose a more indigenous-oriented spirituality in which white male institutions and symbols are replaced with indigenous deities (Cantú 2014, 205; Encino 2014, 138; Lara and Facio 2014, 4; Hernández 2014; Tellez 2014). For instance, Lara and Facio (2014, 4) proposed that spiritual development can be a way of decolonizing identities of transnationals. Similarly, Elenes (2014, 57) and Espín (2014, 103) created new interpretations of Catholic symbols, such as the Vírgen de Guadalupe and Saints, in a way that challenged spiritual male-centered practices. Also from a Chicana feminist point of view, Pérez (2014, 25) and Figueroa (2014, 33) claimed that spirituality is an important part of humans that has been ignored in academic practices in the United States. This lack of importance of spirituality in scholarly work, according to Elenes (2014, 57), represents a way of subjugating female transnational narratives. While Chicana feminists' holistic ideas about identity and spirituality can be applied to different social groups in both sides of the Mexican-U.S. order, their statements have concentrated on Mexican transnational populations who live in the United States and not in Mexico.

In short, the spirituality of Mexican populations in Mexico and the United States has received different degrees of scholarly attention. Because spirituality is essential to understanding the current and historical situation of Mexico, especially regarding the relationship between spirituality and various social movements in this country, its relevance has been extensively addressed by scholars based in Mexican institutions. In contrast, the spirituality of Mexicans in the United States has not been as widely examined. In this way, most scholars who have focused on the spirituality of Mexican-origin populations in the U.S. have stated its importance towards achieving more indigenous oriented and less patriarchal perspectives. At this point, I did not find studies that analyzed the impact of spirituality among Mexican transnationals when they go (back) to Mexico to continue with their professional growth. To fill this gap in literature, the present works aims to examine the influence of spirituality in the well-being and identities of transnational Mexicanas once they are in Mexico.

METHODOLOGY

I acknowledge that spirituality and religiosity should not be confined under a specific methodology—in fact, selecting a methodology seems to resemble western and colonial patterns of research. However, I subscribe to Fierros and Delgado Bernal's (2016, 101) conceptions regarding the meaningfulness of developing decolonizing research practices by navigating already-existing methodological constructs. This article follows a qualitative approach to understand the spirituality of Mexican transnational pre-service language teacher Mexicanas and was guided by two overarching questions:

1) How do notions of spirituality and religiosity impact the development of identity of Tlaxcalan transnational pre-service language teachers?

2) What factors influence the spiritual development of Tlaxcalan transnational pre-service language teachers?

CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

Although the number of Tlaxcalan transnationals coming (back) to Mexico has not been exactly calculated and it might not seem as large as it is in other Mexican states—for example, Tlaxcala's return migrations rank 29th out 32 Mexican states—it has called the attention of local and federal governments as it has grown dramatically in the last years. For this reason, in 2016, the Tlaxcalan government received federal funds to support the incorporation of transnational returnees to local economic activities, especially in the municipalities of San Lucas Tecopilco, Lázaro Cárdenas, Hueyotlipan, Zacaulpan, Ayometla, Tenancigo y Terrenate (Gobierno del Estado de Tlaxcala 2016). This governmental support for transnational returnee communities in Tlaxcala is only fair, as migrants contribute to the local economy with remittances that ranged from 187-225 million dollars (BANXICO 2018).

Regardless of the remittances of Tlaxcalan migrants and an apparent economic prosperity, Tlaxcala is a state in which gender violence is latent, especially in terms of human trafficking and prostitution. The municipality of Tenancingo, in this context, is known for la trata (or human trafficking) of women for illegal sexual exploitation to the states of New York and New Jersey (Ordoñez León 2015, 84). Human trafficking in this zone of Tlaxcala is such that in 2015, Mexican and U.S. authorities carried out an operation to capture some of the leaders of this criminal organization (Ponce de León 2015).

PARTICIPANTS

The three participants of this study were pre-service teachers at an English-Teaching degree in a university in Tlaxcala, México. They were studying the last semesters of their degree. At the time of the research, they were 21-23 years old. I decided to ask Valentina, Laura, and Jessica (pseudonyms) to take part in this research because, as I will explain later, we developed mutual confianza, or confidence, during our concurrence in the program. Valentina, Laura, and Jessica have similar transnational trajectories, as all of them returned to Mexico after living in New York.

Valentina lived in New York for 8 years and returned to Tlaxcala to finish high school, where she was required to repeat one year of schooling before graduating. During her off time, Valentina was working as a language teacher and English tutor. Laura was enrolled at the Language-Teaching program, but she decided to take a year off to work and live with her father in Mexico City. Laura lived in New York for 12 years, and then moved to Tlaxcala to continue her education. Jessica is the only participant who is a US citizen, for which she had traveled to New York at different times. Her family, however, moved permanently to Tlaxcala when she was only 10 years old.

I was the participants' instructor during the first semesters of their teacher training program (2014-15), when we developed a connection during my time there. Even after I left their program to pursue my doctoral degree in the United States, we kept communication via social media.

INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

This qualitative research took place at three different momentums. First, during 2014-15, when as an instructor, I collected data using my teaching journal. Later, in 2017-18, I applied questionnaires and interviewed participants. In 2020, amidst the pandemic of COVID-19, participants read and approved the interpretations I'm sharing in this article.

When I taught in Tlaxcala (2014-15), I did not plan on focusing on researching the spiritual identity of pre-service teachers; however, my teaching journal was meaningful for the goals of this study. This is because the academic interaction in Mexican universities is different to the ones in the United States or other western countries, so my participants and I became friends when I was teaching there. For this reason, not only did we share classes, but also social and recreational events. My teaching journal, therefore, was useful as it provided insights not only to the academic trajectory of my participants in my classes, but also, to social and cultural aspects of this region and its strong devotion to Catholicism.

In 2017-18, based on the research of Christiansen (2015, 440), I decided to approach the spirituality/religiosity of participants by analyzing off-line and on-line interactions, as the combination of these two can provide a more comprehensive idea of the way individuals conceive their spiritual identities in physical and digital environments. In terms of face-to-face interactions, I conducted 3 in-depth interviews, which lasted from 50-90 minutes, in which I asked pre-service teachers about the importance of spirituality in their academic and non-academic development. As my participants and I had developed a close relationship, one-to-one interactions (such as interviews) were useful because, as suggested by Brown (2001, 16), participants felt more confident and open to answer. For the online interactions, participants were asked to answer a written questionnaire. As part of the questionnaire, I asked Valentina, Jessica, and Laura to find and copy-paste the digital interactions in their social media which they believed were meaningful in terms of their own spiritual perspectives. In April 2020, I contacted participants so they could verify that my own interpretation of data reflected their own perspectives. Participants approved my findings and suggested some modifications to the present manuscript.

DATA ANALYSIS

To get familiar with the data, I initially open coded, as suggested by Saldaña (2009, 88). Later, I coded according to the thematic themes and sub-themes I found in my initial coding. This process is called "axial coding" (Seidman 2006, 122).

To avoid that my own interpretations and positionality took over my participants' perceptions, once my axial coding was finished, I asked Valentina, Jessica and Laura to member-check if my findings aligned with their personal views after I finished with the coding process. When I asked participants to member-check my data analysis (2020), none of them were enrolled in the English-Teaching degree, which probably helped in terms of the transparency in the interpretation of data—meaning we did not have an unequal power relationship anymore, at least in academic terms.

FINDINGS.

MEXICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND THE APPARENT LACK OF SPIRITUALITY

According to my teaching journal, transnational pre-service teachers barely showed any spiritual inclination during my classes. However, transnationals follow traditional celebrations in their communities which are highly related to Catholic tradition. As Tlaxcala's population density is high, there are several communities that are geographically close. Each community, as part of the Tlaxcalan culture, celebrates a Catholic saint on a determined date of the year. Families, according to tradition, get together to prepare el mole, a traditional Mesoamerican dish. During that day, most members of the community go to mass.

It is accustomed that people invite guests from different Tlaxcalan communities to celebrate and eat mole with their families. Many Tlaxcalans take pride on invitations, and sometimes get offended when people do not attend their celebrations. While Laura was enrolled in one of my classes, she invited me to eat mole with her community, and to attended the religious celebration. In two years of constant interaction, that was the only kind of religious interaction I had with any of the participants. This almost null demonstration of spirituality or religiosity in academic spaces is explained by some of the answers of participants in the questionnaires and interviews, in which they stated that spirituality is not useful to interact with their national pre-service teacher fellows:

> Well, my friends don't really care about spirituality, they don't really care about it. When you are a teenager, you don't want to hear about those things, so here…with my classmates… I don't think it affects my identity that much. (Laura)

Laura, in alignment with my personal observations, claimed that spirituality is not important during the development of transnationals, or any pre-service teacher, during their training in Mexico. The fact that transnational pre-service teachers did not show any major spiritual behavior can be explained by many factors. The first one is that transnationals want to fit in into the university environment, so they modify their behaviors to be socially accepted (Sueda 2014, 146). The lack of a spiritual orientation can also be explained by the influence of the secular role of public education in Mexico, where religion and spirituality have been clearly separated from instruction since the nineteenth century (Levison 2004, 201).

In spite of the secular orientation of Mexican higher education, the three participants mentioned that spirituality is relevant for them, and that their spiritual identities have been influenced by the rejection or acceptance of their transnational families' religious values. For example,

> Spirituality is something that makes you feel good with yourself. I was not spiritual before, it was my auntie who introduced me to this group…The first sessions, it was so weird, I was like 'these people are just crazy.' But then I realized how important the Bible is in your life, and how you can do everything with the help of God…People sometimes asked me to be the 'Valentina' they knew [before attending this religious meetings], we want 'Valentina' back, so it was a little difficult to socialize with others.…Oh, I forgot to tell, I was in the United States when I joint this Catholic group. (Valentina)

Valentina was introduced to a Catholic religious group when she was in the United States, which guided her spiritual development in Mexico as well. In Valentina's perspective, the catholic conception of God has been important for her. Her spirituality, however, has made it hard to socialize with others. Valentina's experience does not align with other studies (i.e. Yañez-Castillo et al. 2018, 5) about Mexican university students, who claimed to have moved away from institutional affiliations of religiosity. Valentina's experience suggests her spirituality is intertwined with her religiosity. That is, she has adapted Catholic traditions to understand her spiritual identity.

Different from Valentina, Jessica has opted to create her own spiritual identity, which is different from the one her family inculcated on her while they lived in the United States:

> Well, it has definitely changed. In the United States, I was more young [sic] so I was influenced by family. They told me what to believe in and what not to believe. Whereas in Mexico I am older, and I choose what I want to do and what to believe in. (Jessica)

Jessica moved away from the spiritual conceptions her family promoted while she was younger and in the United States. Because Jessica is older now, she decides on her own spirituality. Interestingly, when I asked how people see spirituality on both sides of the border, participants equated religiosity to spirituality. In this way, participants mentioned people in the United States are more open to other religions:

> Well, I think people in the United States are more open minded in terms of respect to different religions. There are different religions and people respect them. People in the States are more liberal. In Mexico, in my town, people are not as open-minded about religion, and they are more strict (sic) in terms of traditions and values. (Laura)

Laura believes that Mexicans in the United States are more tolerant of other religious practices compared to her community in Mexico. In addition, as in former studies (i.e. Yañez-Castillo et al. (2018, 5), Laura's answer emphasizes that transnational communities become tolerant of other religious conceptions when they are in a new national context. In Tlaxcala, however, probably due to the lack of religious diversity, Mexican communities are stricter in terms of following Catholic traditions and values.

THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING AMONG MEXICANS IN THE US

When I inquired why people were more open in the United States than in Tlaxcala regarding religious orientations, participants stated that probably their friends and family living in the United States needed more spiritual comfort. For the participants of this study, the development of spirituality is related to having different lifestyles in both countries. In this vein, participants pointed out that, differently from the situation in Mexico, in which families have constant socialization and immediate family support, Mexican migrants in the United States work intensely, which limits them from having human interactions outside their workplaces:

> Yes, you know, in the [United] States people work 24/7. They do not have time to hang out as we do in Mexico. Mexicans [in Mexico] just go out every Friday and have fun, but people in the States take their job more seriously. In Mexico, people are like 'I can have a 4-hour job' and whatever, that's ok. So, I think spirituality gives them hope and helps them have a good life…So, spirituality helps them people to have more hope in that country [the United States]. (Valentina)

For Valentina, spirituality is more necessary in the United States because people are far from their families, so they cannot socialize and receive community support. For Valentina, Mexican migrants experience an overwhelming workload which impedes them from socializing. Because of their lack of socialization, Mexican communities in the United States turn to spirituality to maintain emotional balance and hope. Jessica, in a similar way, added that spirituality is more necessary in the U.S. because it connects Mexican transnationals with their families and friends in the south side of the border:

> …they [people in the United States] care about feeling good, feeling connected with their families and the ones they love back here [in Mexico] …I guess it [life] is more difficult for them and they need it more… (Jessica).

For Jessica, Mexican communities in the United States turn to spirituality to connect with their home communities in Mexico. The perspectives of Jessica and Valentina extend on previous literature about spirituality among Mexican-origin communities and self-healing (Perez 2007, 102). In this way, the participants' answers suggest that spirituality not only serves for emotional healing, but spirituality is also used as a way to emotionally connect with their home communities and as a strategy to cope with adversity in the United States.

TRANSNATIONAL SPIRITUAL SUPPORT THROUGH ONLINE INTERACTIONS

In terms of online interactions and the spiritual identity of transnationals, participants expressed heterogenous perspectives on their questionnaires' answers. While Jessica mentioned that she did not like to express her spiritual beliefs via social media as she perceived this kind of posts could be controversial, Valentina and Laura did use Facebook to share their spiritual beliefs. Laura stated that she shares her spiritual beliefs but not so frequently and she tries that her posts did not relate with any religion:

> …I sometimes share something that has to do with part of my beliefs or spirituality, but I know that most of the things I share have to do with the universe and it doesn't get into any religion. (Laura)

Laura shares posts that relate to the "universe" but tries not to attach her spirituality to religiosity. That is, Laura's answer suggests that she distinguishes spirituality and religiosity. For her, spirituality should not be attached to religion, so she uses social media to express her individual notions of spirituality without religious labels. Different from Laura, Valentina was explicit about the objective of her spiritual posts on Facebook:

> …Most people who like my social media live in the U.S…people suffer more in U.S. in many ways; they work more than 8 hours per day, some of them are away from their family and country, they don't have many relatives in the U.S., they have to deal with racism and different styles of living. Therefore, these people find hope in spiritual life, so when they see these types of messages in social media, they feel relief. In Mexico, in the other hand [sic], they don't deal with these problems every day…They have a more regular life. (Valentina)

Valentina, because of her transnational experience, is aware of the difficulties Mexican suffer in the United States. These difficulties relate to disadvantaged labor, racism, isolation, and nostalgia for their home country. By posting on Facebook, Valentina tries to provide spiritual healing to those living in the United States. That is, Valentina is aware that spirituality is more necessary in the United States for people who, like her family before returning to Mexico, migrated looking for better economic opportunities.

As part of the questionnaire, I asked participants to copy-paste any social media post they would like to share with me. Laura and Jessica did not copy-paste any interaction. In contrast, Valentina copy-pasted online interactions in which she used religious passages to provide comfort, support, and encouragement to their compatriots in the north side of the border. Valentina shared a message in Spanish. She took the original post from a Catholic webpage. The message, which translates into "It's being hard, but don't worry, God is working in your favor, and you will be victorious at the end!" supports Valentina's purposes of trying to support her friends and family in the United States. She shared the post with a couple of emoticons: a "heart" and two "clapping hands." I did not ask permission to share the comments to her post, but most of the people who commented bilingually to her post and said things like "thank you," "regards from NY," and "We miss you."

In a second sharing, Valentina wrote a phrase in Spanish which translates as "Don't tell God how big a problem is; tell the problem how big God is." She used the hashtag "another day," in English. Valentina explained that she wrote this post herself and, as in the previous post, people from the United States interacted with her in English and Spanish. When I asked about the purpose of this post, Valentina, explained that she tried to provide emotional support for those in the north side of the border. Valentina's posts show that transnational communities take advantage of technology to maintain their emotional bonds with communities on both sides of the border. However, different from other studies, (i.e. Christiansen, 2015, 12) the south-to-north online interactions of Valentina suggest that transnationals aim to contribute to the emotional healing and wellbeing of those "left" in the United States.

DISCUSSION:

DECOLONIZATION, SPIRITUAL HEALING, AND HUMANIZING RESEARCH

The findings of this study contribute to the analysis of Mexican transnationals at different levels. To recall, the raison d'etre of this article was, based on testimonios and pláticas' epistemologies (Espinosa-Dulanto and Calderón-Berumen 2020, 1-3), to create scholarly work

"for" and "with" the transnational communities towards disrupting dehumanizing academic perspectives. That is, this research was guided on the decolonial premise that spirituality is essential in the development of transnational populations, and that it should bridge communities who have been dislocated from their (new) home communities.

In an attempt to decolonize and humanize my research, I operated from notions of spirituality that clearly separated "spirituality" and "religiosity" (Lopez et al. 2011, 1299), and the subjective interpretation of these two concepts (Saucier and Skrzypinska 2006, 1255). Spirituality, besides commitment to a superior power, was also defined as a source of dignification and comfort for transnational populations (Gómez Carrillo 2012, 62) and an essential notion to understand reality and achieve a more egalitarian conception of traditionally excluded populations (Anzaldúa 2010). Regardless of different approaches to spirituality, most authors supported the idea that spirituality can positively impact people's existence (Lamb et al. 2021, 5; Lopez et al. 2011, 1299; Vázquez Palacios 2001, 615; Twenge et al. 1721, 2016; Yañez-Castillo et al. 2015, 5).

The findings of this research exemplify that most transnationals sometimes differentiate between spirituality from religiosity, but sometimes they associate them as one single construct. For example, when they described the different religious practices in the United States to the Catholic traditions of the state of Tlaxcala, sometimes participants equated religiosity to spirituality. However, Laura's and Jessica's answers explicitly distinguished spirituality from religiosity. Research about spirituality has suggested that spiritual development tends to disappear during youth in the US (Twenge et al. 2016, 1721; Lamb et al. 2021, 5). Recent research also claims that spirituality is salient among Mexican university students who, nonetheless, reject religiosity (Yañez-Castillo et al. 2018, 5). The perspectives of the participants of this research partially align with (or reject) former studies: while all of them declared that spirituality is relevant in their journeys, the distinction between religiosity and spirituality was not always clearly defined.

The relevance of the spirituality for Mexican populations in the United States and Mexico relates to the historical relevance of spirituality in the creation and development of Mexicanidad, or being Mexican. In other words, spirituality appears to be an essential part of Mexican identity regardless of age. Despite the importance of spirituality for the transnational participants of this study, the secular orientation of Mexican institutions limited any sort of spiritual or religious interactions among them.

Particularly for Valentina and Laura, who are not able to return to the United States, spirituality becomes important when interacting with their loved ones in New York. The participants of this study have experienced first-hand the difficulties that Mexican communities in the United States face, so they are aware of the importance of spirituality as a healing tool to cope with isolation, sorrow, and discrimination that migrants encounter in a new country. For the participants of this study, spiritual support is more needed for Mexican communities in the United States because of the lack of social support and overwhelming working conditions.

Findings of this study suggest that spirituality is pivotal for transnational communities to function. Because Mexican transnationals located in Mexico understand the difficulties that Mexican communities experience in the United States, social media has become a south-to-north

vehicle for spiritual support among transnationals. In this vein, while current research has emphasized the importance of spirituality as a healing practice for Mexicans in the United States (i.e. Cantú 2014, 206), the present research illustrates the spiritual solidaric exchange Mexican transnational communities have on both sides of the border—from Mexico, in this case.

This article empirically supports the need to consider spirituality and religiosity as essential in the development of transnational (returnee) communities not only at the individual level, but in terms of social functioning. Former research about transnationals going (back) to Mexico to pursue language teaching degrees has mainly focused on other factors— such rejection of their home culture (Mora et al. 2014, 182), governmental policies (Martinez-Prieto and Lindahl 2020, 10; 2022,126), and curricular ideologies (Martinez-Prieto 2020, 22; 2023, 1). In this way, the present study contributes to the current discussion by examining of the impact of spirituality among Mexican transnationals returning to Mexico, and the spiritual acknowledgment and behaviors of Mexicanas towards their US-based beloved ones.

Testimonios and pláticas epistemologies were meaningful as they allowed scholarly spaces to research spiritual practices that Mexican communities have del sur al norte (from south to north). Findings of this research contribute to the notion that Testimonio-pláticas epistemologies help scholarly work move away from a western "I" to a collective "we" (Espinosa-Dulanto and Calderón-Berumen 2020, 1-3), where populations in the Global South act as agents of healing among their U.S.-located counterparts.

Finally, I would like to point out that the present study relates to the intersections of decolonization, spirituality, and humanization of research. That is, it would not have been achieved if analyzed from colonial, western, and positivist approaches, where spirituality has little space in academic discussions. In general terms, this work supports the imperious need for decolonial and humanized perspectives in US academia to understand the complexity and multilayered journey of transnational youth.

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THINK OF THE WORLD WE CARRY WITH US: LATINA WOMEN CHANGING THE CONVERSATION OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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ABSTRACT:

My genuine interest in the role of parents in schools, especially of those parents who face more difficult challenges when making their voices heard is sustained through the memory of my parents' participation throughout my schooling. My parent's participation in my education went further than the formal parent involvement model offered by my school. A parent's conception of their child's education is largely based on their relationship with the school and the educational intent for the child. Parent involvement is claimed to be a multidimensional construct, and we now know that generally there are two places where a parent becomes involved in their child's education—the school and the home. My parents were part of communal participation where parents communicated about school and organized as a community to be involved when needed. They communicated with other parents (our neighbors) who attended meetings or events to keep abreast of important information.

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My genuine interest in the role of parents in schools, especially of those parents who face more difficult challenges when making their voices heard is sustained through the memory of my parents' participation throughout my schooling. My parent's participation in my education went further than the formal parent involvement model offered by my school. A parent's conception of their child's education is largely based on their relationship with the school and the educational intent for the child. Parent involvement is claimed to be a multidimensional construct, and we now know that generally there are two places where a parent becomes involved in their child's education—the school and the home. My parents were part of communal participation where parents communicated about school and organized as a community to be involved when needed. They communicated with other parents (our neighbors) who attended meetings or events to keep abreast of important information.

My parents were involved in my schooling. Although I am sure they knew very little about the formal definition of "parental involvement" in schools, they did as much as they could in their way. My experience has made me reflect that schools should not be isolated in their search for solutions but instead work for and accept the collaboration of the parents in their schools. The views toward my education that my parents expressed represented one form of parental involvement, or what I call parent participation: one that encouraged me to work hard at school so that I could move further in my studies and my future endeavors. Ideally, the school should not be a place where teachers come to teach and students come to learn, and that's it. In the best of both worlds, schools should be an extension of the community. They should be places where parents, grandparents, and community volunteers are seen every day. They should be places where students feel a sense of belonging and contribution. It stands to reason that the more "community-like" a school is, the more interesting and successful parent participation will be. I became involved in the school participation of a group of Latina women at West Lake Junior High (**WLJH**) in West Valley City (WVC), Utah, a predominantly Latinx community. It was through an invitation from a colleague to help with the newly built community garden that I began to volunteer and was later employed by the school to assist with the Family Center. During the first couple of months of volunteering in the garden, I noticed how the participation of the Latina women entailed making connections and having conversations in the garden about their children and plans for the upcoming school year. The principal's vision for the garden was to create a place where parents, teachers, and students could potentially form a partnership centered on improving and strengthening parent and school relations. The garden was built on the school's north side field, making it visible and open to the neighboring community. Over time, the garden became a unique place outside the concrete walls of the school for what I saw as parent participation.

Why a Garden

Part of the reasoning for the principal having the garden built on school grounds was two-fold-one was to have a different way for teachers to teach a science lesson or a mathematical equation and also to teach about the environmental impact of a garden in a suburban space, the

second was to have parents involved in teaching students about gardens from the knowledge that some parents might already have to complement the teacher's curriculum. The women that form part of this group were in a familiar context since many of them grew up with home gardens where their parents and grandparents had taught them how to tend them. The principal felt that they could share this knowledge to be able to give a different perspective to the teaching and learning process.

The fact that since he had given the keys to the garden to Yesenia who was also the parent liaison for the school meant that the garden would be available to the community at times and days when parents had time to come with their families, so this allowed for parents to develop trusting relationships with one another. And since there was a group of women who had been at the school for several years helping out at the family center they had already developed a relationship with the school's principal, they did not have to follow the school's agenda when it came to bringing up issues at the school. The parents who could not come in during school hours began to feel like they could come to the garden and voice their concerns with the knowledge that they would be heard by the school. The garden provided a place and the opportunity for parents to help each other and figure out what the school is doing to address their concerns. They were able to build a collective sense of authority, which countered the power imbalance that the school system has in place.

The purpose of this research was to explore Latina women's perception of their engagement in said education. Based on the literature, parent and community involvement is a process that encourages support and provides opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to work together to improve student learning. It demonstrates that everyone involved can benefit from parent/school relationships in some shape or form. Parents are well informed about school activities and can maintain an ongoing discussion with their children's teachers, ultimately improving student learning. For this group of Latina women, the garden became a place for a much more meaningful engagement with the school. The actions the Latina women took at the community garden challenge the scripted ways parent involvement had been established by Eurocentric schooling. As mentioned, the mothers acknowledge that parent involvement meant being present inside the school walls, but that not everyone was able to be present during the designated times.

When I first started going to the garden my thoughts were not of establishing a site to work on an ethnography. I enjoyed going with my partner and watching our daughter play in the garden. The planting, weeding, watering, and picking the crops along with the conviviality with the parents seemed familiar to me. It reminded me of the summers I spent at my grandparent's ranch. Waking up at sunrise with my grandfather and headed out to the Huerta (orchard) to water the orange tree orchards from the canals that he and his sons-my uncles-had built. Then I went back to the ranch and helped my grandmother tend to her home garden. I remember weeding and picking the different vegetables she had planted, all the different smells from the flowers and plants that she used to decorate the house or that she used for home remedies. Spending time in the garden brought back those memories. There was something about the way the moms talked with each other about their days. The way they joked about their husbands, kids, and neighbors. Laughing at the little

things that they warned them not to do or say. How they listened to each other when they had a concern or an issue that they needed some advice with. And these conversations were not limited to only school issues but they also expressed concerns about their family or finances. Listening to them reminded me of my grandmother, mother, and aunts talking to each other or their neighbors and sharing their insight and knowledge of how to deal with or resolve their issues. Any approach to involve parents in ways that will transform the culture of schools must require a radical rearrangement of power relations between schools and parents. A transformative parental participation strategy must be rooted in the needs and experiences of families, communities, and schools. Many studies of parent involvement problematically focus on what happens within the confines of the school walls and fail to understand that many of the decisions about a child's education happen outside those walls. As a researcher, I began to understand how school administrators, teachers, and staff have certain assumptions concerning parental involvement. It was the world of the parents that interested me most.

At the garden at West Lake, the parents spoke about how they felt unwelcome at the school because the staff made them feel a nuisance when they came to the school to resolve an issue regarding their child. As time passed parents began to realize that when they brought up any given issues affecting their children it became known that certain parents had a direct connection with the school principal. They felt heard and their issues were approached and respected. I became interested in the interconnectedness that the parents demonstrated within and outside of the garden when it came to decision-making and prioritizing. I began to see how their everyday participation could change the perception of marginalized parents within this specific school.

A Decolonial Feminist Approach to Participation

Drawing from modernity and coloniality scholars, I engage Argentinian feminist philosopher, Maria Lugones' (2010) "Towards a Decolonial Feminism" to help me approach, learn, and understand the participation of the women I talked to at West Lake Junior High (WLJH. My engagement with Decolonial Feminist thought helps me with three concerns in this research. First, to unveil the deficit portraits of the women in this ethnography however they were defined in the school context. Second, help me understand how racialized and gendered binaries have put these particular women under a classification that limits their authority to domestic matters and does not authorize them to be an independent base of leadership in the school. Third and final, to help me understand how the unique character of the garden exposed a de-linking of decision making and advocacy from colonial impositions to a degree.

On several occasions, while at the garden I overheard some of the women talk about how they had difficulties in trying to communicate with their child's teacher. Every time they attempted to see the teacher they were told they needed to come in during the teacher's office hours, which were usually in conflict with their work hours. They spoke about how the "immigrant parent" felt like they were invisible and that only when they volunteered for something, did they get noticed but even then, they were still not listened to. But they continued to find ways to change the conversation to make sure that their children's education was never disrupted.

Decolonial thought is about making the invisible visible and about analyzing the mechanisms that were set up that made invisibility possible and part of this change is to recognize the intellectual production of what was once invisible by no longer reducing it to only culture or ideology. Mignolo (2007) has repeatedly insisted that what is sought out in decolonial thought is not only a change in the contents of conversation but also a change of the limits and conditions of conversation. In other words, we do not just need new ideas but we need a completely new way of thinking. Decolonial thought aims to recognize situatedness as involved in the production of knowledge. This was demonstrated by the women in the garden when they became part of the teaching team. They brought a more holistic model that was centered on their knowledge about gardening that was meant to be complementary to formal education and the teaching of the educational standards.

The theoretical considerations produced by feminists of color such as Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldua seek to destabilize hegemonic conceptualizations of humanity defined in opposition to "third world" subjects. From this perspective, their voices have served as a bridge through which the main concerns of women from the Global South can be heard in the Global North. For this research, I engage decolonial feminism specifically through Argentinian anthropologist María Lugones' "Towards a Decolonial Feminism" (2010). I sought to apply a decolonial feminist perspective to parental involvement to reinterpret the "scripted" model of assessing what constitutes an involved parent and how this model serves as an imposition on the women represented in this study. Decolonial feminism as articulated by Lugones engages Anibal Quijano's (2001) concept of the "coloniality of power" which can be understood as the confluence of the production of race and gender/categories, labor, capitalist economy, and Eurocentric epistemology. Colonial scripts de-authorize the women I studied both by defining them racially, as knowing less and coming from more primitive groups, and by limiting their authority to the private realm of their homes. The garden offered an extension of the women's voices: it is a "public" space, where the women talked both about their aims for their children and how these aims might be translated into school policy. It allowed them the space and community needed to counter the racial denigration of the colonial script and the gender delimitation of their authority.

Decolonial feminist theory engages with debates about coloniality/modernity and indigenous identity and gender in Latin America providing space for the silenced voices of women to speak of their identities, who they are, and the relationship between their personal and organizational lives (Lugones 2010). Lugones (2007; 2008) argued that modernity/coloniality needed to be understood through specific articulations of race, gender, and sexuality, which requires scholars to engage in dialogue with women in the Global South who have different values, ideas, and experiences and to challenge the liberal, White feminist paradigm that continues to dominate the discipline (Metcalfe and Woodhams 2012).

In her essay "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," Lugones (2007) introduced a systemic understanding of gender constituted by colonial/modernity in terms of multiple relations of power. This gender system has a light and a dark side that depict relations,

and beings in relation as deeply different and thus as calling for very different patterns of violent abuse. Lugones argues that gender itself is a colonial introduction, a violent introduction consistently and contemporarily used to destroy peoples, cosmologies, and communities as the building ground of the "civilized" West.

Traditional academic structures and cultures typically include practices, patterns, rules, values, knowledge, and interpersonal styles that reflect and ensure the well-being and cultural capital of those at the center of society who most benefit from the colonial agenda. The way most US academic institutions do business has been passed down within their Eurocentric origins and history, privileging coloniality. The traditional view of parent involvement assumes a European-based nuclear family where the father and the mother play a role/script. For the woman, the emphasis is more of a service role of a stay-at-home mom.

Lugones' writings are an analysis of the colonial system for controlling women and through women, the families. Lugones uses the modern/colonial gender system or the coloniality of gender as a lens that permits her to search for social organizations from which people have resisted capitalist modernity due to their tension with its logic (2007, 742). She proposed to work towards decolonial feminism by learning about each other as resisters to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference without necessarily being an insider (I am situated as a male researcher) to the worlds of meaning from which resistance to coloniality arises. A closely related idea here is not simply to see a single alternative but many within the understanding that with oppression there is always resistance at many levels. It is from this perspective that I approach and move towards what I consider to be a decolonial feminist starting point in the conversation of parent involvement. I refer to it as decolonial because part of the goal is to denounce and transform colonial relations of power and colonial ways of relating that continue to persist within the educational system when it comes to parent participation.

I choose Decolonial Feminist Theory to fully examine the complexity of power within the discourse around parent engagement and to recognize the empowerment of those who have traditionally been marginalized through the historical practice of silencing and segregation. The epistemological foundation of this paradigm is that meaning and knowledge are constructed through a historical and social context in which race and complex structures of power interplay within society. "This means that not only is the relationship between the knower and the would-be known (i.e., the researcher and participants) interactive, it also involves a consciousness of cultural complexities in that relationship" (Mertens 2010, 32). Decolonial feminist epistemological framework challenges the use of dominant paradigms and methodological approaches in research. Specifically, it objects to how these approaches have been used to examine and inappropriately characterize the experiences of Latinas/os. It calls on critical researchers to center the lived experiences of communities within research in a deliberate attempt to create social change (Hurtado 2003). Additionally, it recognizes the fundamental value of the lived experiences of communities not just within the content of knowledge produced but in the very process of creating that knowledge. Utilizing this framework is particularly important for this study because it provides the tools to help capture the experiences of the Latina mothers, and because of my

positionality as a male researcher that powerfully informs my subjectivity as I entered into this study.

I argue that cultural intuition (Delgado-Bernal 1998) mediated my broader methodological approach to this study helping me tap into the lives of the women. Specifically, my experience as a witness to my own parents' struggles in the schools I attended informed my perspective, albeit as a son not as a parent, or even as an immigrant, experiencing these forms of abuse and marginalization. But even from this stance, my personal experiences continued to serve as a source of cultural intuition that allowed me to identify those cultural practices and norms instilled by my parents that fundamentally regulated how I developed relationships with the moms. It focused on a collective memory I shared with the women, not so much in terms of the content of our experiences but the shared cultural ways we learned about relating to one another and the world around us. A decolonial feminist approach to ethnography encourages dialogue between the researcher and the participant, where power is shared and knowledge is produced together. This raises issues of representation and positionality: the researcher's power concerning knowledge production and the representations of participants and their knowledge. It highlights the position of researchers in enabling collaborative dialogue and equal power relations with participants. In addressing the complexities of representation and positionality, a decolonial feminist theory, therefore, enables me to "respect the perspective of 'the Other' and invite 'the Other' to speak." (Kincheloe et al. 2015, 171).

A decolonial feminist approach to research offers a means to decolonize ethnography; it is a collaborative approach to building new knowledge that is socially, culturally, and historically located. Implementing this approach in my research I found that the women organizing is orientated by the women's respect for each other and to reclaim the value of community, where they are at one with the community of the home and the community of the school under the conditions of equality and cooperation. In this study, I was particularly interested in examining how the community garden and by extension the family center, shaped and informed the participants of the women to collectively organize to reshape the conversation of parent involvement. The community garden brought together six women who shared the difficult task of building a place for themselves and their children far away from the communities where they grew up. The community garden provided the context for this personal transformation, enabling new forms of action at the school. The importance of a place "where I can be myself" should not be underestimated. Too often, their children's school was a place where the mothers could not be themselves, where they felt stifled, silenced, manipulated, or voiceless. In the garden, they felt like they could recover their wholeness and exercise and develop those parts of themselves that were not given expression at the school. As I write this, I have an image of the mothers, laughing at the garden while they tended to the crops. They are talking about issues and questions that they had about the school and how their concerns could be brought up to administrators, but at the same time laughing at each other's jokes and family happenings, their faces radiant with confidence.

As I have mentioned before, the garden belonged to the parents and in this space, they began to expand their conversations from what were they going to be planting to one of how can we bring

the issues that parents were discussing into the school. One of the things that Yesi had started doing at the garden was having informal parent meetings. She realized that not all parents could come during school hours to a meeting at the family center so she started having a monthly gathering at the garden on Sunday afternoon or evening hours during the week when she was tending to the garden. She would make sure to call parents and send notes home inviting them to come and work on the garden and have conversations about concerns and events that were coming up at the school. She tried to have the notes be translated to the different languages parents spoke within the community. She wanted to make sure that as many parents as possible could be reached. She had also made sure to let the administration, teachers, and counselors know that they were invited to come. During the winter months, she still had the informal meetings, but they were moved to the family center and tried to keep them on Sundays or if during the week, in the evenings when parents would be able to attend. Yesi informed me that the principal and one of the assistant principals showed up twice to the garden. From the times I was able to attend I never saw a teacher and Yesi mentioned that none had shown up.

CHANGING THE CONVERSATIONS (THE MOMS)

Through this research, I examined Latina mothers' experiences and perceptions of being involved in their children's education. The mother's responses to interview questions, my observations at the garden, family center, and school events were synthesized to tell the narrative of Latina mother's participation. The examples the mother's provided about how they help their children illustrated how they view their engagement. In the context of this study, this premise suggests that there were a myriad of ways to be engaged in a child's education and that the traditional Eurocentric notions of how a parent should be involved present a limited view of family participation. The Latina mothers' narratives will illustrate the scope of parent participation by the moms and their community. This analysis centers on the voice of Latina mothers and allows for a focus on the centrality of experience and knowledge of the moms. The data and analysis provide a counternarrative and disruption of the master-narrative, which traditionally presents a deficit account of immigrant parents of color.

Several of the moms described situations where they came into the school or tried to contact school personnel, but none of the participants shared a story about an educator reaching out to initiate contact unless it was for disciplinary problems. This engagement, as they described it, was a one-sided relationship where they were expected to come in, make contact, and resolve an issue for their child. This form of engagement represents a traditional framework (the script) of parental involvement. When the moms did attempt to involve themselves and help their children or access the school, they struggled to understand communication due to language barriers or because of a scheduling conflict. As **Z** described, the only communication about her sons' progress came at report card time: "I know my son does good in school but sometimes I would like to get a note from his teachers letting me know how he is doing before I get the report." Parents were expected to support their children at home with homework and keep up with their progress, but communication between the school and parents was limited even if letters sent home were in both English and Spanish. A report card mailed home was **Z's** only report on the progress of her child's

studies. She knows the value of parent support when it comes to children's education, but acknowledged the challenges she and other parents face to get access to information. **V** spoke about knowing, as did **Z**, that parents should be involved, but that an unfamiliar system in a predominantly English-speaking environment created an uncomfortableness to communicate well with educators:

> **V**: In Mexico, parents are involved in their children's education but to a certain point. Why? Because there we knew that teachers are educating our children. We want them [teachers at WLJHS] to do the same. But the system here really is very different. Schools here want us to be involved, but we don't know or simply we don't feel comfortable. Because when you get there, they only want us to be their assistant—you know, pass out papers or take children to the restroom. And I don't feel comfortable because I want to know what my child is learning.

These responses speak to how dominant ideologies maintain barriers of access that are not seen or recognized by many at the school but are highly visible to those who are marginalized. This environment perpetuates a system that privileges those in the majority and reifies the marginalization of the minority community. **V** and **Z** are both pointing out that being in the minority and seeing no one of your community in the school can make it an intimidating place to access, and she is explicit that she is not comfortable accessing the school in this environment. Some of the parents indicated that communication is only initiated when there is a serious problem with their child. **A.** described how the school did not contact her until a situation, which started as a small problem, turned into a bigger issue even after she made several attempts to engage with the school about the issue:

> Because a girl was bothering my daughter, I went to the school several times to talk about that. And when she decided to protect herself, they called me. Because she said, "These girls are always making fun of me and pushing me and I am fed up." "The assistant principal told me your daughter pushed this girl," and we had a problem . . . And I said, "I feel bad that this happened, but it was supposed to be over from the last time I came to the school. How does this work? You only phoned me when she is the one that starts the trouble but when she is the one that is being bullied you don't?"

A. went to the school twice to deal with an issue around bullying for her daughter, but was unsuccessful. It was not until her daughter decided to protect herself and pushed the girl back that the school contacted her. The response by the school was so delayed, even with **A**'s attempts to intervene, that it escalated to a physical altercation between her daughter and another student.

Y spoke directly to another participant about the importance of communication, and how if she had known about her son's troubles, she could have done something to intervene and help the situation, "It is very important communication because if I knew about [my son] from the beginning we could have done something. But we have to keep on communicating because it is the only way we can help our children." **Y** recognized that communication between the school and parents is critical to supporting students and intervening. She also indicated that if the

communication comes too late, the effectiveness of an intervention is diminished. **M** also shared that she wished she had known of avenues for effective communication:

> [My daughter] is a very good girl but as you say there is a lack of communication. I would have liked to know there was a place I could talk with people in my situation. The marks are good, but I wanted to know about you earlier.

M referred to her daughter as a good, well-behaved student but also recognizes a lack of communication on the part of the school and wishes she had known about the family center and community garden earlier so she could have gone in to "talk with people who understand my situation." **M** is not concerned about her daughter's marks or grades because as she described they are "good," but she does feel the need to have a place to discuss educational issues.

In this way, communication becomes a privilege to those who know the system and can intervene on behalf of their children. Access is maintained for English-speaking parents and educators in the system and assumes this one-sided communication is enough to support all communities of students and parents. The system's failure to address or recognize the current communication (or lack of) only further exacerbates the inequities in access and opportunity for these students and families. The mothers' primary motivation for parental participation was their desire for their children to have a future that is better than their own. For all six of the moms, the *future* meant that their kids would continue their education and/or they would have a fulfilling career. The moms saw a correlation between their present-day struggles with language and money and their educational experiences. Consequently, they wanted their children to see the relationship between working hard in school and having an easier life in the future. Many of the mothers equated the type of job their children will have with their commitment to education. They wanted their children's future jobs to fulfill and provide higher monetary opportunities so that their children are not limited like they are. **A** and her husband use their experience with work to motivate their son and daughter to focus on their education. She told me about having the following conversation with both of them:

> "Do your school work, that way you don't have to work too hard when you are big. You don't want to be like your father and me. We are there, every day, we are there working, it does not matter if it's raining, too sunny, too cold, too hot. You don't want to work like that." I tell them, "That's why you have to study." His father tells him the same, "You have to study so you don't have to work like me."

By being engaged in their education, she hoped that her children will succeed in school and be able to work in a professional field. Similarly, **V** felt that if she would have had the opportunity to complete high school she would be better able to assist her sons. She expressed frustration that because she did not finish school, she is not equipped to help her sons without others' help. She wanted her son to be well educated so that they did not struggle as she has. This goal for their future has motivated her to be engaged in their education. **Z** worried about the future for her son because he struggled to focus in school. She started asking herself frequently, "What will happen in the future for my kids?" She worried that if she was not involved in his education now, there

would be negative consequences for him in the future. She wanted her son to be motivated by his future as well, so she reminded him to listen to his teacher and hoped that he would see the connection between doing well in school and being successful in life. All of the moms discussed college as part of their children's future. **Y** already had one daughter in college and felt that a college degree was crucial for her children to have a solid future. She told me:

> All the time I talk to them about that because if you are studying, you can make something of yourself, something good in life. I did not get the opportunity to go to college, look at me. I cannot work in a better paying job, but if they go to college they might be better off. If you don't study, life, it's harder than if you have a profession or you are a professional.

V, like **Y,** talked about always talking to her sons about going to college. She mentioned that she had not been successful in convincing her oldest son to go to college; he had decided to work in construction like his father. But as her second son was getting ready to graduate high school she sat him down and told him:

> My son thinks of the world we carry with us. It is not only what you pick up in that specific moment but it's also what your parents, grandparents, and many generations back have taught you and how those lessons are part of the road you still have to walk. That is why going to college is something you should do so that you can get much further than we did.

All of the moms mentioned that their struggles motivated them to help their children pursue a college degree. Although the mothers recognized their limitations in their ability to educate their children, they were not deterred. They felt inadequate and yet capable. The mothers used their present-day struggles to motivate themselves to positively impact their children's future. Access to the system is difficult due to the barriers reinforced by the system. These barriers maintain a status quo environment that privileges English as a language of access which frees up time and resources to access the school, and citizenship which gives parents more knowledge and safety to access the system and question outcomes for their students. A common theme throughout these statements is that they are interested, invested, and desire to be involved in their children's education, but how can they participate when there are no spaces or opportunities made available to do so? Instead, they encounter a system that prevents access, is limited in communication, and sets up rules for communication that exclude an entire population of parents who have to provide for their family.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore Latina women's perceptions of their participation in their children's education because of the community garden and to understand their experiences. This dissertation contributes to a deepening of the discourse in research and practice at the intersection of parent participation, school-family partnerships, and shared leadership. Gordon and Louis (2009) reported a recent convergence of calls for shared leadership, participatory reforms, and schools as communities. Likewise, the literature on school—family

partnerships need to acknowledge goals beyond those of raising student achievement as legitimate aims for engaging families and so incorporate lessons on shared leadership and leadership for social justice. The study seeks to understand how parents, as stakeholders of their children's education, had developed a partnership with the principal that gives parents a meaningful voice and a presence in the educational setting and how they wanted to create structural change in the school culture.

This demands a major shift in mindset, from one of devaluing and doing to and for families to one of valuing and co-creating with them: asking questions, listening, empowering, sharing perspectives and information, partnering, codesigning, implementing, and assessing new approaches and solutions, and supporting parent leadership and advocacy for educational equity and change. It means building on family strengths and working with families to co-create and dive deeper into their beliefs, norms, and practices. It means setting policies for schools and other organizations that combat racial and economic inequalities and creating opportunities for teachers to hone their understanding of how inequality manifests itself in children's and families' lives. When relationships with educators are characterized by mutual respect, trust, open communication, and inclusion in decision-making, families are more likely to feel confident about their roles as advocates and become more engaged in their children's learning. Yet these relationships do not happen overnight, nor do they exist in a vacuum. They are fundamentally shaped by and built upon a community's culture-its beliefs, goals, social norms, practices, everyday routines, languages, and economic resources. Considering the findings presented in this research, schools should promote and support parental involvement programs in ways that are meaningful and important to the families of minority school children. Schools should consider how they can devise and invest in activities and strategies that foster parent and school collaboration and enhance collaboration and partnership between the parent, home, child, and school. Additionally, in opposition to deficit-based theory and research, I hope that the results of this research will challenge current orthodoxies, the status quo and the acceptance of what "others" deem to be considered true parental involvement or to view that white experiences should be considered the normative standard. Current models and paradigms of parent involvement require a shift to be looser, broader, and less general, to encompass and include minority parent involvement. Their less visible, unscripted, and unconventional contributions of involvement must be recognized and acknowledged. And those who create paradigms for parent involvement programs need to be more culturally aware, open-minded, and educated about the many ways minority parents are supporting their children, "beyond bake sales."

With regards to implications, I offer this caveat; minority parents (including myself) are deeply concerned about their children's schooling, best interest, and well-being. As the women in this study shared, the various ways in which they are involved demonstrate an obvious need to rethink, reconceptualize, and redefine parent involvement in schooling. And while many White teachers, administrators, and district staff may have "good intentions," it takes more than just good intentions or even an "openness" to seriously consider and tackle issues surrounding race with regards to the education and schooling of children of color. Schools should start working towards

building trust with stakeholders inside of a child's home. Teachers should challenge their thinking and their own biases. And the school administration should insist and provide coaching so that staff begins to mitigate cultural incompetence and close communication gaps and hold them accountable for deliberate attempts to sabotage the future of even one student or the break-down of communication with even one family. Schools should consider the social and personal experiences as well as literacy and educational levels and preferred communication methods of all families.

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EntreMundos/Criss-Crossing Early Childhood Ecological Pedagogy(ies) with Nagualismo as Embodied Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

The author identifies as a mixed-race early childhood teacher educator, bridging ecology, culture, and learning situated within a university early learning center located on the unceded territories of Multnomah, Clackamas, Willamette, Chinook, Klickitat, Klamath, Cowlitz and other native bands of the Columbia River. Her pedagogical documentation of critical emergent curriculum is inspired by the United Nation's call for early childhood educators to re-orientate pedagogical approaches with an image of the child as a global ecological citizen. This interdisciplinary inquiry crisscrosses between UN Global Goals, Remida philosophy, and post humanist pedagogies while centering Gloria Anzaldúa's (2015) Naguala or shapeshifter metaphor for embodied inquiry. In this investigation, neoliberal interpretations of emergent curriculum are interrupted by drawing on experiences of "pedagogically cultivating conditions of emergence" (Nxumalo et al. 2018, 435) with the creation of an "otherwise" curriculum in an inclusive preschool classroom. Nagualismo as more-than-human theory engages Mexica cosmology in reversing environmental degradation with sustainable consumption and production patterns and becomes deeply embodied by an emergent bilingual child who creatively reimagines the language of his body as shapeshifting into a metal recycler.

KEYWORDS

critical mixed-race studies, Chicana/o/x studies, Remida, early childhood sustainable development, embodied inquiry, common worlds pedagogies, Anzaldúa feminist materialism, UN Global Goals, Nagualismo

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INITIATIONS

We begin by offering the reader a metaphorical sun compass, for orientation as you traverse this interdisciplinary crisscrossing. In facing East, I introduce and problematize how few educators are familiar with UN Article 29, a global call for childrens' right to ecoliteracy. This global call foregrounds an epistemological tension between my commitment to ecoliteracy while maintaining an inclusive classroom under an authoritarian director whose neoliberal approach understaffed our lab school to save the university money and gain upper management approval. This tension was resolved by cultivating ecoliteracies during an 'otherwise' (Nxumalo et al. 2018) rest/time. I think *with* Anzaldúa's (2015) autohistoria-teoría; weaving in personal life stories of ecoliteracy formation as a mixed-race White assumed Chicana teacher/educator. I narrate lived experience in an ancient observatory in Xochicalco, Mexico as an organic metaphor for drawing upon life experiences to understand and critique larger social structures. Then, in Facing South, in the literature review and methods sections, UN Global Goals and Remida philosophy are crisscrossed with post human frameworks for "awakening and quickening ecological minds" (Parnell, Cullens, and Domingues 2022). This is followed by personal narratives of spiritual awakening juxtaposed against "pedagogically cultivating conditions of emergence" (Nxumalo et al., 2018 435) with the invention of a rest/time Green Team (a name borrowed from small groups of university employees whose combined goal is to educate and empower colleagues to establish environmental practices). Finally, in Facing North—First, I interpret data from a post-qualitative way of "doing inquiry" (Kuby 2019) as "emergence in practice, including decisions about what belongs in young children's curriculum-making…that explicitly situates young children's learning within current conditions of late capitalism and its entanglements with the settler colonial, racist structuring and rampant extractive consumerism of everyday life" (Nxumalo et al. 2018, 436). Then, I conclude by reflecting on "multi-metaphorical meta-frameworks" (Sfard 1998) and wonder alongside post human feminisms "how emergence, in resistance to these and other obfuscations of neoliberalism, might be taken up as openings to situate early childhood curriculum within the actual, messy, highly uneven and extractive places and spaces of early childhood education?" (Nxumalo et al. 2018, 435). Lastly, I come full circle by invoking educators' ancestral metaphors for embodying environmentalisms as resistance to eco-illiteracy in future generations.

FACING EAST

1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently there has been a lack of scholarship at the intersection of Chicanx studies and infant/toddler and preschool education. There is, however, a rich history of integration of Chicana/o/x Studies applied to elementary, high school, and higher education. This paper is a unique contribution to a growing body of early childhood education (ECE) research foregrounding global south perspectives such as Black and Chicana feminisms (Salazar Perez and Saavedra 2017) and reconceptualizing global north onto-epistemologies in childhood studies (Salazar Perez, Saavedra, and Habashi 2017). This inquiry elaborates on what Anzaldua's (2015) Naguala

metaphor entails for ECE embodied inquiry and environmental education. In my experience as an ECE educator, the ability to shapeshift is indigenous to children.

One aspect of colonization is a severing of our earth-connected selves (Marya and Patel 2021). Agro-ecologist Devon Peña has long stated that a lack of connection between culture, ecology, and learning exists in Chicana/o/x studies as a field. He warns that, "lacking an epistemology of local knowledge, students of Chicana/o studies will be left few options for critically approaching and perhaps reversing the politic-economic processes that destroy places" (1998, 11). Not only are Chicana/o/x culture, ecology and politics deeply connected, Peña proposes they are "subversive kin" (11) and calls for inventing "critical, reflective inquiries by relating politics to culture, culture to economics, history to philosophy, and all of these to ecological perspectives" (13). Latinx environmentalisms are emerging built on insights of environmental justice scholarship as well as critical race and ethnic studies (Wald, Vazquez, Ybarra, Solis, and Jaquette Ray 2019). I integrate Chicanx environmentalisms into my research with preschool children by crisscrossing theoretical frameworks to blur disciplinary borders. Anzaldúa's feminist materialism is interlaced with posthuman pedagogies, Remida philosophy, and United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals to construct ECE *with* 'just' sustainability(ies). 'Just Sustainability' refers to a wider perspective of environmental education that combines ecological principles with social justice principles (Domingues 2021).

I was introduced to Freire in Chicano/Latino Studies, and his ideas about ongoing liberation education being connected to the eminently pedagogical character of a revolution. Revolutionaries cannot afford to wait for the powers that be to change the oppressive nature of the educational system because it is not in their best interest to encourage masses of children destined for oppressive working conditions to think critically (Freire 2000). Freire died in 1997 while working on his last book, *Pedagogy of Indignation,* and towards ecological literacy as weaving a broad-based pedagogy of liberation for animals, nature and oppressed peoples of the earth (Khan 2008). Eco-illiteracy guarantees that humans and more-than-humans will continue to experience ongoing climate emergencies, and displacement.

Many ECE folks are advocates for the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and treat this declaration as central to their work (Samuelsson, Li, and Hu 2019). Few educators are familiar with Article 29 which identifies children's right to ecoliteracy. Increasingly, ECE for sustainability is looking to global citizenship as an identity framework. Carla Rinaldi wrote, "To form a sense of self, a sense of belonging that is both local and global, to be clearly bound to the place where we live but, at the same time, to dialogue with the world is an essential value for the future" (1998, 114). In Australia, the national professional association for ECE has updated its Code of Ethics to include "the obligation for early childhood educators to 'work with children to help them understand that they are global citizens with shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity' (Code 1.4)" (Davis 2009, 230). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a national body that supports North American high standards of educational ethics and works to protect the rights of all children. In the face of increasing climate crises, NAEYC has yet to release a position statement Advancing Environmental Sustainability.

1.1. METAPHORS

Socially constructing knowledge in ECE lends itself to the methodological flexibility of *multi-metaphorical meta-frameworks* (Sfard 1998) in communicating unconventional data and theories (Domingues, 2019). Anzaldúa (2015) teaches, "Metaphors *are* gods. According to archetypal psychology, we have internalized the old deities, animals, and forces of nature that our ancestors considered gods. We could say that metaphors are allies, spirits (transformative aspects of the unconscious seeking to enter consciousness)" (55). Sfard (1998) engages metaphor to reach the core levels of our thinking and to make transparent tacit assumptions and beliefs that guide us. Her use of multiple metaphors for learning was inspired by the concept that "new knowledge germinates in old knowledge" (4) an idea that has been embraced by theoreticians of knowledge construction, from Piaget to Vygotsky. In keeping with a Chicana/o/x approach to social science research, I think *with* Anzaldúa's (2015) autohistoria-teoría. Autohistoria focuses on the personal life story but, as the auto-historian tells her own life story, she simultaneously tells others' stories (Keating 2009).

> ***Autohistoria-teoría: Xochicalco, Mexico***. We arrive at the ruins of an agricultural village with ropes and signs closing off the area. My Chilango father, never being one to blindly obey authority, passes under the rope and signals for me to do the same. He is heading directly for the decaying entrance of a cave. A guard exchanges whistles and joins us, offering his flashlight as he guides us into the cavern.
>
> It is cool inside, and a dark, moist, narrow entrance opens into a spacious room of ancient stone that feels holy. The guard instructs us to form a circle around a puddle of water that has collected in a small cavity on the stone floor in the middle of the room. He turns off his flashlight. As my eyes adjust to dark, I begin to see a bluish light emanating from a human made hole in the cave ceiling. Light shines down creating a microcosm of the sky above as it reflects in the puddle of rainwater. My ancestors, ancient astronomers who designed this living observatory, studied the cosmos by looking down at the reflection they created in water. This experience leaves a lasting impression of indigenous genius on me. I engage the paradox of Xochicalco observatory as an organic metaphor for drawing upon life experiences to understand and critique larger social structures and our place in the world. Freire conceptualized this as "Read the word, read the world" (Freire and Macavedo 1987).

Understanding how women of color theorize forms of self-knowledge and self-ignorance is underexplored within contemporary mainstream epistemological literature (Pitts 2016). It is important to recognize differences among BIPOC practices of knowing, and I am contributing to autohistoria-teoría method as a mixed-race and White presenting scholar. More vignettes of my spiritual awakening are woven into the narrative section and juxtaposed against a monoracial 4-year-old co-protagonist's embodied inquiry. My co-protagonist chose the pseudonym JW, which

are initials of his Chinese first name, also used as his English middle name. The first Chinese character means “eyes bright and piercing,” and the second character means “prestige”. JW is familiar with crisscrossing cultural worldviews and possesses, “the capacity for shape-changing and shape-shifting of identity” (Anzaldúa 2015, xv). His father is employed at a university as a professor. JW was born in Oregon, and his grandparents immerse him in Chinese lifeways. He learned to speak English at 3 years old during his first year at the lab school and identifies as both Chinese and American. JW is competent at negotiating complex social identities, and familiar with crisscrossing cultures.

FACING SOUTH

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review and methodology sections that follow, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) and Remida philosophy are crisscrossed with post-human frameworks for ‘awakening and quickening ecological minds’ (Parnell, Cullens, and Domingues, 2022).

2.1. UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

There is a sturdy bridge between the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UNDRC), and Reggio Children which is an international center for the defense and promotion of children’s rights and potentials located in Italy. Many ECE educators are aware that in 1989 the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Since then, 195 countries have signed and ratified the UNCRC. The United States (US) is the only country not to ratify the UNCRC. Rinaldi expounds on the child as a global citizen,

> The child is not a citizen of the future; he is a citizen from the very first moment of life and also the most important citizen because he represents and brings the ‘possible’ A bearer, here and now of rights, of values, of culture.. It is our historical responsibility not only to affirm this but to create cultural, social, political and educational contexts which are able to receive children and dialogue with their potential for constructing human rights. (2006, 32)

These UN initiatives reinforce an image of the child as a global citizen,

- UNDRC and its corresponding Article 29
- Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 generated from the Rio De Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development
- Decade of Sustainable Development
- UN Global Goals

In 1959, the UN General Assembly set forth its UNDRC, followed in 1989 by the UNCRC. Article 2 of this Convention makes clear that children’s rights are universal. However, many are unaware of Article 29 of the Rights of the Child, which declares children’s right to eco-literacy and that “education… should encourage children to respect others’ human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment, and

respect other people" (https://www.unicef.org/). In 2015, SDGs were adopted by all UN Members, as a call to action to increase global ecoliteracy by 2030.

2.2. Remida Creative Reuse Cultural Education

Since late 1940s, Italian Municipal Preprimary Schools and Infant/Toddler Centers of Reggio Emilia's system have grown from a vision of inclusion and social justice in the politics of the town for which they were named. Centers like Remida—a cultural project that emerged in Italy—socially construct global citizenship through giving value to waste materials and are aligned with the 12th UN Global Goal to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. International Remida centers represent a sensitive, relevant approach that respects a child's understanding of sustainable consumption and production patterns and allows them to have a voice (Reggio Children 2005).

The Remida creative recycling center opened in 1996 and is run by the Municipality and IREN, an energy company in Reggio. This Center,

> Represents a new, optimistic and proactive way of approaching environmentalism and building change through giving value to reject materials, imperfect products, and otherwise worthless objects, to foster new opportunities for communication and creativity in a perspective of respect for objects, the environment, and human beings (Reggio Children 2019).

Reggio Emilia philosophy was born when female factory workers of Villa Cella built the first preprimary school to foster democracy out of material rubble of post-fascist war (Barazzoni 2005) producing a cultural value of building in a sustainable way. Since then, Remida-inspired educators are redesigning spaces for ecological awareness out of the material rubble of hyper-consumerism (Domingues 2019). Whereas co-founders of the educational experiences of Reggio Emilia were building physical space to transmit democratic principles during the decline of fascist Italy, contemporary educators are designing physical and conceptual spaces out of reuse materials to generate intercultural experiences, and global ecological citizenship through "fostering intelligent moderation in the next generation" (Parnell et al. 2017).

3. Methods

The "doing of inquiry" is an alternative to conventional processes of developing a research question, followed by designing a methodology and then collecting data for analysis (Kuby 2019). The body of scholarship—thinking with theory—is situated in a growing body of "post qualitative inquiry," which complicates normative ways of doing qualitative research (Kuby 2019; St. Pierre 2011). The "post" refers to both a usage of post-foundational theories (ie., post structural, post humanist) and this movement focuses not only on epistemology, but on ontologies and ways of being. Kuby (2019) describes how Jackson and Mazzei (2012) conceptualize the assumption that theory *is* method (Lenz Taguchi and St. Pierre 2017) as *thinking with theory*, and advocate for research to be a process of assembling data and theory together.

3.1. Pedagogical Cultivation of Emergent Curriculum

Reconceptualist scholars from Common Worlds Research Collective (CWRC) assert that emergent curriculum, "stands in contrast to, and is an important site of resistance to standardized and theme-based curriculum in ECE" (Nxumalo et al. 2018, 434). Critical emergent curriculum is marked by "questions and speculations that complicate and destabilize prevailing "evolutionary" understandings of emergent curriculum and some of its taken-for-granted characteristics" (Nxumalo et al. 2018, 434). In troubling emergent curriculum, they consider how it "might be more ethically and politically situated" (434) and are "interested in creating epistemological shifts away from neoliberal, child centered, and romanticized ways of understanding emergent curriculum" (434). Emergent curriculum is reconceptualized as 'Living' or 'Otherwise' pedagogies,

> I am interested in the relation between what emerges and the material possibility for *something else* to form as that which charges curriculum with life. Underlying this interest is an attempt at experiencing curriculum as a site for something more than following the lead of the child. It is here that the possibility to think curriculum as a site for the search of alternative subjective and relational processes lives. (Numalo et al. 2018, 434)

ECE is encouraged to 'trouble' (Haraway 2008) emergence. Nxumalo et al. (2018) argue that educators can misinterpret what Reggio Emilia approach signifies by 'conditions of emergence' and run the risk of having liberatory curriculum become a pre-packaged commodity. F. Nxumalo et al. (2018) resonate with Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. who argue that "work accomplished in early childhood by people in Reggio Emilia has been (mis)interpreted by many in North American context[s] as an evolutionary project-one that builds on existing positivist ideas. [When] they are *revolutionary*, reconceptualist, and post-foundational in nature" (2014, 122).

3.2. Autohistoria-Teoría

Anzaldúa (1987) invented the term *autohistoria-teoría* as an alternative to Western autobiographical forms and informed by reflective self-awareness in service of social justice. She imagines it in multiple ways including "as a personal essay that theorizes" (2009, 578). Pitts extracts that "from this brief articulation, Anzaldúa appears to point to the manner in which the act of giving meaning to oneself provides a platform for collaborative forms of meaning-making" (2016, 2). Keating (2009) has noted that although Anzaldúa never offered a systematic definition of the concept, she did exercise the theory throughout her writings, interviews, lectures, and teaching (as cited in Pitts 2016).

3.3. Posthuman Pedagogies

CWRC is an interdisciplinary network of researchers concerned with our relations with the more-than-human world. Members work across the fields of childhood studies, ECE, children's and more-than-human geographies, environmental education, feminist new materialisms,

Indigenous and environmental humanities. 'EntreMundos' is multi-metaphorical and is a Spanish interpretation of the conceptualization of 'common worlds' between human and more-than-human.

Thinking *with.* Nagualismo has various identities as a "Mesoamerican magic supernaturalism," a Toltec worldview, shamanism, global traveling, an alternative folk epistemology, and (especially) shapeshifting. Here, Nagualismo, inspires us to think *with* theories—an innovative approach in ECE. Thinking *with* theories is a post- foundational assumption that theory *is* method, and of concept *as* method (Kuby 2019; Lengs Taguchi and St. Pierre 2017). Post humanism is an overarching term for more-than-human ontologies informed by postcolonial, anti-racist and feminist ways of thinking about the nature of reality (Common World Collective 2020). This philosophy refuses to take the distinction between human and more-than-human for granted. Thinking *with* is a way to (re)think human *in relationships with* more-than-human (including this paper itself) and to build upon interdependent relationships with the world and theories (Kuby 2019). Images conjured up during experiences with naguala are similarly reconceptualized by Anzaldúa as relationships *with* more-than-human, "They are not images; they are not images *of* animals but images *as* animals. They show us that images are daimonic forces, equivalent to 'spirits.' Images are animals, helping beings who assist us on our underworld journey each night. All inner images, says Hillman, are 'power animals,' and the power is imagination" (2015, 28). I acknowledge that Indigenous ways of being and worldviews, have always decentered the human (Nxumalo et al. 2020).

NAGUALISMO

'EntreMundos' is multi-metaphorical and is a Spanish synonym for the Nahuatl concept of 'nepantla' or in-between space. Being multilingual can lend itself to identification with what Anzaldúa terms a "naguala," for whom "Living between cultures results in 'seeing' double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent" (2015, 127). "According to nagualismo, perceiving something from two different angles creates a split in awareness. This split engenders the ability to control perception" (127). Multiple perspectives of the Nagual engenders a critical consciousness.

Anzaldúa teaches, "To talk about the work of embodying consciousness, you appropriate the word 'naguala' from your ancestors, the indigenous Mexicans, who believed that certain humans could turn into animals" (2015, 105). The cultural concept of naguala is used in multiple ways and Anzaldúa has extended the metaphor to include "an aspect of the self that is unknown to the conscious self. Nagualismo is a mexican spiritual knowledge system" (237). She associates it with the creative process, and magical thinking (Keating 2015). From a feminist materialist standpoint, it is an "alternative epistemology, a folk theory of knowledge conditioned by a long-standing ideology and belief system. Nagualismo's basic assumptions (worldview) are shapeshifting (the ability to become an animal or thing) and traveling to other realities" (32).

Shapeshifting and transformation become a metaphysical strategy for crisscrossing worlds for B/border crossing adults and children alike.

Answering the global call to foster eco-literacy was challenging during a grueling teaching year. This investigation draws on doing of inquiry as "pedagogically cultivating conditions of emergence" (Nxumalo et al. 2018, 435) with the invention of a rest/time “Green Team" in our classroom. This co-research allowed for the ethical navigation of the epistemological tension in “the spaces between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived” (Nxumalo et al. 2018, 435). I engage post-human pedagogies to disturb interpretations of emergent curriculum as simply following children’s leads.

Facing West

4. Narratives of Spiritual Awakening and Green Team Pedagogies

Autohistoria-teoría: Takayama, Japan. I arrive at the Buddhist Yoko farm to begin training. Members from Asia, Australia, and North America participate alongside me. We learn many things regarding spiritual relationships between human beings and nature and are encouraged to go out and experience this relationship ourselves.

One night, I join a group of women and sleep outside with cucumbers. Next morning, I feel refreshed when I wake up. A mentor tells us how energized people feel when they sleep close to earth and plants. After offering my morning prayers, I greet the cucumbers on either side of me. I thank them for allowing me to share their home. Then I notice others quietly talking to the cucumber plants, coaxing the tendrils to wrap around their fingers. I sit there, too, with my index finger eagerly outstretched, waiting for a tendril “hug”. After some time, I feel frustrated as I hear others gasping with joy. I think the cucumbers must not like me very much and am filled with self-pity. Another woman sees the look on my face and encourages me to persevere. I continue to sit, enjoying cucumbers’ company, observing their characteristics. Moments later, a tendril begins to wrap around my finger slowly, and my heart expands with deep gratitude and love. I feel indescribable humility and kinship.

Autohistoria-teoría: Phoenix, Arizona. I knock on the door of a Chicano Centro, drawn to the building by public murals. Having recently reconnected with my estranged Mexica/n father, I want to learn more about my heritage. Salvador—a veteran of the Chicano movement—answers the door, re-cognizes me as a “White woman of color” and introduces me to Chicanismo. In reciprocation for teaching ESL to im/migrants, I participate in Mexica danza, temescal, and Nahuatl lessons. Salvador invites me to partake in a traditional form of physical and spiritual purification. Lodge is handmade with wood branches, covered with blankets and sits in a community member’s backyard in South Phoenix. A pile of large stones sit cooking on embers of a fire pit outside the lodge. I am given instructions on how to enter respectfully. Inside, I sit anxiously and eagerly in damp darkness, knee to knee with other folks and elders. The leader of ceremony instructs us to do our best to remain for the entirety of the ceremony. If we get uncomfortable, we can lean back, roll out of the tent, and lay in cool grass looking at stars.

Ceremony begins with four rounds of prayers. Each round involves a new set of burning red grandfather stones over which water is poured creating a powerful steam heat. Steam makes me aware and grateful; all I care about becomes sips of rosemary water in between rounds, the merciful breeze when blankets covering lodge are lifted in between rounds and the dirt to which I suddenly feel firmly grounded to. I become elemental—fire, water, air, and earth energies.

This narrative data integrates critical mixed-race studies (CMRS) with autohistoria-teoría. CMRS is an emerging discipline and emphasizes fluidity of race and other intersecting identities to critique processes of racialization and social stratification (Daniel 2014). This method is meant to be self-reflexive, allowing me, someone who identifies both as BIPOC and White *and* neither, to theorize embodied experience as well as to be in conversation with New Mestizaje frameworks. As someone who describes myself as a White person of color (wPOC), I trespass racial borders.

GREEN TEAM NARRATIVE DOCUMENTATION

As an educator, I favor negotiated curriculum, and pedagogically cultivate ecoliteracy with creative reuse cultural education. We make space in the Fall for a Remida-inspired creative reuse studio in our classroom as planned curriculum, but quickly realize that our "epistemology of display" (Domingues 2019) is neglected in our struggle to create inclusion in an understaffed classroom for multiple children with neurodevelopmental dis/abilities, emerging bilingualism, and post-traumatic anxiety disorders. JW asks throughout our harried day if we can deposit classroom recycling materials (see Figure 2) in the city bin located in the front office.

Figure 1. Classroom recycling center

In October 2019, JW is one of the first two children on Green Team and is increasingly intrigued with recycling, composting and creative reuse (see Figure 1). One day during rest/time when more than half of the children are asleep, I check in with children who are restless in the back room, eager to research and trying to stay quiet. JW asks if he can empty classroom recycling into the city bin. To maintain rest/time student-teacher ratio, I ask, "Does *everyone* want to go recycle?" and receive a unanimous "Yes!" What follows is cultivation of a rest/time Green Team, and JW's embodiment of sustainable development principles.

Figure 2. JW's reuse self-portrait

THE RECYCLING GAME. During rest/time in Remida studio, children who are awake quietly play the "Recycling Game" (see Figure 3) by categorizing materials into mixed and glass recycling, compost, garbage, reuse, and eventually, toxic waste. Questions grow about how different materials are recycled, eventually leading to a child asking how humans are recycled? When JW asks how cars are recycled—we watch a video of a scrapping yard. Reggio-inspired ECE is not a media-free philosophy. Watching YouTube videos of smelting, pulping and scrapping helps explain complex processes of recycling and the group is fascinated by the transformation of materials. Car scrapping captures JW's imagination, and later inspires his shape shifting. Scrapping, however, is seen as gruesome by some of the group and initial reactions include, "Poor cars!" and "No! Don't destroy them!"

Figure 3. Rest time recycling game

During Winter conversations with Green Team about life cycles of materials, and materials management, the topic of toxic waste emerges after reading a rest/time nonfiction book about an otter who survives a California oil spill. The following dialogue ensues,

> **Mixchel:** We've been talking about materials and where they go when we're done with them. We've been talking about compost, recycling and garbage and...
>
> **JW, 4 yrs.:** and reuse!
>
> **Mixchel:** And there's a new material that we've been talking about called toxic waste. What is toxic waste?
>
> **JW, 4 yrs.:** Toxic waste is not good for your body. I saw toxic waste get turned into garbage!

Helena, 4 yrs.: Me too!
Mike 5 yrs.: I saw a show where reuse was turned into trash! You pushed a button and it transformed into trash!
Aila 5 yrs.: I brought reuse to school.
Mixchel: Thank you for bringing reuse treasures from home to share at school. I have a book about toxic waste I want to read to you. What sorts of materials might be called toxic waste?
JW 4 yrs.: Computers! Phones!
Mixchel: The materials inside of computers if you break them open to recycle them can be very toxic and not good for your body or the earth.
Erica 5 yrs.: Flashlights!
Mike 5 yrs.: The batteries inside of flashlights are not good for the earth!
JW 4 yrs.: Paint!
Mixchel: Some discarded paints are toxic waste, that's right. You can't put it in the recycling or compost or even regular garbage.

The idea of toxic waste is captivating, and they decide to design a red recycling bin for toxic disposal (see Figure 4).

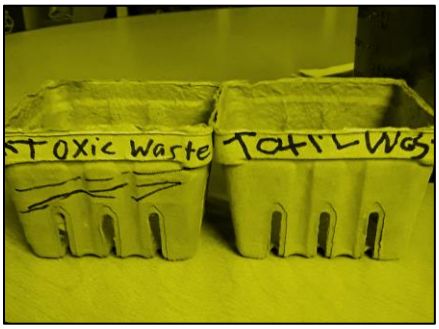

Figure 4. The Green Team creates toxic waste bins for the recycling game.

As children become proficient in identifying life cycles of a material, they volunteer to lead the recycling game and teach other children and adults how to play (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. JW teaches a student staff how to lead the recycling game.

BECOMING ACTIVISTS. Green Team grows as more non-sleeping children desire to join in recycling classroom materials in the city bin. This creates a need for more recyclables, and children

decide to go around to other classrooms during rest/time to collect their blue bin materials which contain plastic, paper and metal. Eventually, we also take our classroom food scraps to the kitchen's large city compost bin. When a neighboring teacher asks what 'Green Team' means to them, a 4-year-old activist explains, "It's where we give things sometimes, and take them away, and put them in our bin." Eventually, we add glass and garbage collection to our recycling route by collecting these materials from other classrooms (see Figure 6) and deposit them in city containers. Oftentimes, Green Team moves through the building at rest/time quietly imagining themselves and collectively shapeshifting into a recycling truck.

Figure. 6 Cultural exchanges between classrooms and Green Team.

Green team activists bravely approach front doors of classrooms and offices, stand at their borders, and wait for teachers and children who are awake to greet them. With some prompting, children ask, "Do you have any mixed recycling for us to take for you?" or "Do you have any used-up markers for us to collect today?" and "Do you want some compost tea for your plants?" Teachers, student staff, and children from other infant/toddler and preschool classrooms ask the group to explain what compost tea is, or what they are going to do with recycled materials. Over time, I'm surprised by how eloquently Green Team articulate their ecoliteracies. Pretty soon children from other classrooms ask to join Green Team, give donations of banana peels for our compost bin, and gift us books about recycling. Community activism affords connections otherwise rarely made during the day between isolated learning communities (see Figure 7).

Figure. 7 Collecting materials from a neighboring classroom.

SHAPE SHIFTING. During rest/time we go outside, and JW transforms a playground bicycle into a recycling truck which collects leaves. JW transforms into an active Green Team leader and takes responsibility for our vermicompost bin on a regular basis (see Figure 8).

Figure. 8 JW vermicomposts during rest time.

JW's bicycle transforms into a recycling truck, and routinely drops off leaves into our

vermicompost. These transformations culminate in his mother sending me a Marco Polo (platform) video of him re-imagining his body into a metal scrapper during COVID-19 lockdown in March

Figure 9. Video of JW releasing toy cars between his vigorously shaking legs.

In response to questions while watching the video together (during COVID-19 remote kindergarten February 2021) about his motion of dropping toy cars between his vibrating legs, JW 5 yrs. 7 mos. identifies,

> I'm a machine that crashes cars
> The machine is my body
> My body is the machine that
> Crashes them flat
> Instead of throwing materials away
> We reuse them
> They turn into cans.

This inquiry documents a method of thinking *with* post-qualitative concepts of pedagogically cultivating emergence, which is then overlaid onto reflections on community activism that took place during rest/time and becomes doing of inquiry as thinking *with* experience.

FACING NORTH

5. INTERPRETATIONS

'EntreMundos' is multi-metaphorical and symbolizes ecological crisscrossing between disciplinary worlds. My 4-year-old co-protagonist's nagualismo is interlaced with my own. My

image of the child is indigenous; children are present-time oriented, an oral culture, believe in the supernatural and are collectivistic. In Green Team pedagogical documentation, and with the "Becoming activists" narrative in particular, their collective ability to shapeshift is documented when the group moves through the building at rest/time quietly imagining themselves and collectively shapeshifting into a community recycling truck. This psychic transformation resonates with Anzaldúa's cultural teachings of nagualismo as "A hyperempathic perception fuses you with your surroundings; you become what you observe" (2015, 105). The group transforms themselves into that which transforms. Tesar et al. (2021) share this idea that the capacity for shapeshifting is indigenous to children, and cite documentation of this fascinating capacity in children who easily become other-than-human, other-than-themselves, and any other being or thing they desire to become (Rautio and Jokinen 2015). Through the "force of imagination" (Sallis 2000), children are able to bring together what cannot be brought together, transform any object into anything else, and animate a non-animate thing. With next to nothing at hand, they can create worlds where beings and things connect in unlikely ways. This capacity could be a fertile soil for social imagination, that, according to Maxine Greene, refers to "the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society" (1995, 5).

In "Shape shifting" narrative, Nagualismo as more-than-human theory engages Mexica cosmology in reversing environmental degradation with sustainable consumption and production patterns and becomes deeply embodied by JW who creatively reimagines the language of his body as shapeshifting into a metal scrapper. When JW's mother sent the video of him becoming a car scrapper, I realized his literacy of material, cultural and identity transformation now goes beyond understanding--toward "instanding" or internalized knowledge. Anzaldúa summons a conception of nagual, to articulate the work of encapsulating consciousness or theory(ies), "Once fed blood, once fleshed, the bones of inert and abstract ideas become embodied, become mental and emotional realities living inside your skin" (2015, 105). Nagual is fur and flesh on the bones of this paper. It's hide, pelt, warmth, and protection. It's the spirit. JW manifests conservation (metal scrapping) with his whole body and vibration—which I interpret as a spiritual experience/awakening as he becomes that which transforms. In *Autohistoria-teoría: Phoenix, Arizona* I juxtapose my own spiritual awakenings during my first temescal ceremony and JW's nagualismo. In *Autohistoria-teoría: Takayama, Japan* I reflect on reconnection with a more-than-human cucumber tendril and (CWRC) positing that "the notion of common worlds is an inclusive, more than human notion. It helps us to avoid the divisive distinction that is often drawn between human societies and natural environments" (1). This is research as ceremony—a paper offering of gratitude for finding my way back to my ancestors—to medicine. In the absence of an ancient observatory, a temescal, or an organic farm to illuminate our ancestors, elemental energies, and intimacy with more-than-human, it is possible to transmit deeply embodied ecological consciousness as ECE *with* just sustainability(ies). In our understaffed, highly inclusive classroom community, pedagogical cultivation of emergence took place largely during 'otherwise' rest/time.

6. Conclusions

Eco illiteracy is global oppression actively maintained by late-stage capitalism. SDGs cannot be achieved without realization of child rights. Children around the globe are rising to secure their right to climate justice (https://www.unicef.org/sdgs). Climate crisis is a child rights crisis. It robs children of their ability to grow healthy and happy, and causes illness, dis/ease, and death. Our intention as educators to sustain a livable climate must not only account for unique needs and vulnerabilities of young people; we must also include them in solutions. Children have critical skills, experiences, and unorthodox theories for healthier, more sustainable societies. They are not simply inheritors of our inaction, they are living the consequences today https://www.unicef.org/**).** It is also important to recognize that if we listen, young people are beginning to teach adults about eco-literacies. Now is the time to align *with* young activists and to learn from each other. Children are wired for ecological consciousness. We as educators cannot afford to wait for the powers that be to change the oppressive nature of the educational system in late-stage capitalism because it is not in their best interest to encourage masses of children destined for climate instability to consume critically. Edwards, Forman, and Gandini place Remida Centers within a global ecological context, "The proposals, with differences and specificities, dedicated to bringing discarded and recycled materials into schools are present throughout the world. A bastion of working with discarded industrial materials in schools is Remida Reggio Center, part of the Reggio Emilia Approach, deeply interested in the connection between children and their environment" (1998, 170.) As a mixed-race Chicana and Remida-inspired teacher/educator, I embody multiple sustainability's and cultural ways of knowing and am inspired by UN Global Goals. How might Naguala as a more-than-human way of knowing inspire educators' mixed/ancestral metaphors for embodying environmentalisms as resistance to eco-illiteracy in future generations? Aho!

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ENDNOTES

[i] Arce and Fernández (2009) define danza as ceremonial Aztec-Mexica dancing, which carries Indigenous ways of being and knowing.
[ii] Micaela describes Palenque as Colombia's Harriet. Benkos Biohó is a well-known leader who escaped from a slave port in Cartagena and, together with others escapees found San Basilio de Palenque, a maroon community. https://africanamericanheritagemuseumandculturalcenter.org/2021/03/03/benkos-biohos-life-mattered-and-heres-the-proof/.
[iii] Anzaldúa's offering of Nepantla recognizes living between worlds and beliefs (Calderón et al. 2012). Nepantla is a common theme in work that uses Chicana feminist epistemology. It locates alternative knowledges that sprout between worlds, within the contradictions, and offers insight that makes us "more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and to 'see through' them with a mindful holistic awareness" (Calderón et al., 2012, 518).
[iv] On February 21, 2022, Lyla June made a Facebook post, which started with this line, encouraging people to create ceremony if they have had their connections to their ancestors severed.
[v] A Spanish term used by Indigenous, Mestizx, Xicanx and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities to affectionally describe themselves; it is a reclaimed pejorative with a similar meaning to the word queer/cuir.
[vi] Inside their 2001 book Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios, Latina Feminist Group explains that "papelitos guardados" are secret and guarded personal stories held from public view. Stories that are deeply hidden within our memories and haunt our thoughts and feelings, until we share them as an empowerment process.
[vii] For reasons of privacy I have chosen not to share the details of my child's birth story here. Suffice to say he has biological and legal ties to his mama, and none to me. We did not plan his birth separately or together, but are endlessly grateful for the unexpected opportunity to become his family.
[viii] For reasons of privacy I have chosen not to share the details of my child's birth story here. Suffice to say he has biological and legal ties to his mama, and none to me. We did not plan his birth separately or together, but are endlessly grateful for the unexpected opportunity to become his family.
[ix] Run! Go! Go!
[x] Is he your only child?
[xi] Basically yes, but no. He's not mine.
[xii] Ah, so do you take care of any other children?
[xiii] Given my work around gender as a colonial legacy, I deliberately employ atravesade, a singular gender neutral version of Anzaldúa's default masculine inclusive modification of atravesados.
[xiv] Reform activists and abolitionists advocate for discontinued use of the state's language in referring to the Child Welfare System, arguing that it creates a misleading image of the policies and practices of this system which ultimately harm children, families and entire communities (Williams 2020). Instead, many opt to use Family Regulation system, which was initially offered by Emma Williams and popularized by the Movement for Family Power as a way to center families who this system impacts (Williams 2020).