

Chicana and Black Feminisms: *Testimonios* of Theory, Identity, and Multiculturalism

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In this article, we examine our own *testimonios* inspired by Chicana and Black feminisms that have not only informed our research and teaching but have also helped us to make sense of our lives. We offer our *testimonios* related to theory, identity negotiations, and pedagogical concerns with teaching multiculturalism as a way to recognize and acknowledge that as academics, researchers, and teachers, we must continue to learn language from, and create new language for, our theoretical spaces that help us to express and navigate the complexity and multiple locations of struggles and resistance. Collectively, *testimonios* facilitate crucial lessons for examining the interconnectedness between Chicana and Black feminisms through the lived experiences of those living in or on the margins. They also provide critical self-reflection that is needed to unlearn oppression that exists within each of us.

Coyolxauhqui personifies the wish to repair and heal, as well as rewrite the stories of loss and recovery, exile and homecoming . . . stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives. (Anzaldúa, 2002b, p. 563)

Black feminist thought can simulate a new consciousness that utilizes black women's every day, taken-for-granted knowledge . . . it affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists . . . [and] aims to empower African American women and stimulate resistance. (Collins, 2000, p. 32)

The quotes from Anzaldúa and Collins are great reminders of how awareness inspired by *Coyolxauhqui* and the everyday lived experiences of women of color can create spaces that foster both collective healing and critical pedagogy. We offer examples of these spaces through our personal *testimonios* of theory, identity, and multiculturalism that draw from and build upon the work of Chicana and Black feminisms. These theories speak to the struggles of a collective “we” and continue to speak to the individual “I,” as we demonstrate with our own *testimonios* the ways in which our individual lives are influenced, challenged, and transformed by collective scholarship.

Chicana and Black feminisms can inform research and teaching while helping those living on or in the margins make sense of and heal fragmented lives. For example, the *testimonios* we present here provide a window into the negotiations many have embarked on, while serving as a methodological tool that can piece together fragmented experiences, bringing one closer to being whole again. Although we share our personal stories that bear witness to injustices and violence in our own lives, we believe that our *testimonios* have the potential to connect our “I” to the collective “we” (Beverly, 2005). *Testimonios* have an overtly political intent and, therefore, often compel others to take some form of action. Furthermore, for women of color in the academy, *testimonios* can provide a space for self-reflection of the internalized ways that one can embody and live out the very oppressions we desire to challenge, change, and decolonize. Collectively, there is an urgency to heal fragmented lives and to illuminate complicity in dominant thinking (hooks, 2010). Elenes (2000) contends that the *testimonio* is a “map of consciousness” (p. 115) and, thus, can be used to look deeply within to change the inner, colonized self while bringing about collective change—transformations that Chicana and Black feminisms capture.

In this article, we take readers through a series of moments in our own lives that speak strongly about the ties between our experiences and what we call our theoretical homes—Chicana and Black feminisms. In sharing our *testimonios*, we (the authors) are in some ways building bridges of understanding that can lead to powerful, collective sisterhoods for subsequent work and support for navigating through internalized oppressive discourses. Theories do not exist solely for analyzing the experiences of others, they coexist within us and through us. Cutri, Delgado Bernal, Powell, and Wiederman (1998) assert:

The opportunity and support to personalize theory offers a key process that must be further studied. If scholars pursue critical, feminist, and social reconstructionist theories as vehicles to transform society, then they must seek to better understand how these theories can be more effectively taught and learned so that they transform individuals. (p. 113)

We agree with Curti et al. that to teach or facilitate discussions surrounding social change, we must understand how theory can not only transform others but also ourselves.

We provide such a possibility with our own *testimonios*. We first situate our work by revealing who we are, followed by our *metodología*—how we collected our *testimonios y otros pedacitos de memorias* (and other pieces of memories). Then, we offer through our *testimonios* three themes: (1) the ways in which we came to our theoretical homes, (2) our identity negotiations, and (3) our tensions with multicultural education. In our concluding thoughts, we critically reflect on implications for theory and practice.

WHO WE ARE

We are two *amigas* and *colegas* who have maintained a friendship and sisterhood through the years as a tool to foster resistance and strength in our academic and life journeys (Burciagas & Tavares, 2006; Cutri et al., 1998; hooks, 2010). Cinthya is a bilingual *Tejana Nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Texan) midway through the tenure process. Michelle identifies as Mexican American (although embodies Caucasian and African American heritages) and is a native *Tejana* English speaker who is at the beginning of her career in academia. Our academic journeys initially brought

us together through a shared mentor—a critical white feminist professor who introduced us to the field of Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE)¹. Our work in RECE has purposely and politically infused knowledge, experience, and theories from the margins, which has brought us closer as friends and colleagues. After speaking on panels at conferences over the years about Chicana feminism (Cintha) and Black feminist thought (Michelle), we have decided to document our *experiencias* through *testimonios* in order to connect our *vidas* (lives) to the theoretical homes that we use in our everyday work. We also contend that our respective theoretical homes have many points of affinity worth examining to build bridges of sisterhood and critical self-reflection. Thus, we turn now to our *metodología*.

METHODOLOGY: TESTIMONIOS, WRITING Y OTROS PEDACITOS DE MEMORIAS (AND OTHER PIECES OF MEMORIES)

We shared our first *testimonios* through online communication about our thoughts and stories framed by our use of Chicana and Black feminisms. The process of writing prompted us to include *otros pedacitos de memoria*. Thus, the *testimonios* shared in this article were pieced together by our original communications and further expanded upon through conversations that generated new *testimonios* (as memories re/surfaced while engaging in the writing process, finding points of affinities with our *testimonios*, and editing). Even our literature review of our theoretical spaces has become a *testimonio*, as it is deeply connected to our individual experiences with Chicana and Black feminisms—the I—while connected to our larger collective experience—the we (Beverly, 2005).

Through a multidimensional process of conversations (in person, on the phone, and through online communication), writing, and (re)membering², we constructed points of affinity as a method of grouping our *testimonios*. Through this methodological process, we determined that our affinities encompassed (1) connections to our theoretical homes, (2) recognition of our multiple and shifting identities, and (3) tensions with multicultural education. We struggled initially when attempting to (re)present our *testimonios*, as we wanted to maintain their authenticity while providing the structure necessary to explain the ways in which they connect to Chicana/Black feminisms and to each other. To reconcile these issues, we (re)membered, (re)worked, and (re)visited ideas, lived experiences, and connections. This process might be described as a *rompe cabeza* (puzzle), that is, finding pieces and trying to fit them together in the hope of creating an image that stems from our strong connections to our theoretical homes. In the end, we hope our *testimonios* are about the individual and collective healing, interconnectivity, and the critical pedagogies (or social transformations) that can come from such processes.

The following *testimonios* embody three themes. First, we speak about our theoretical homes, in which we connect our *vidas* to the theories that have given us direction in our lives and in our work in academia. Next, we reveal our multiple and shifting identities and how we have negotiated and become aware of how our identities are fluid and in constant flux. Finally, in our *tesitimonios* about (un)learning multiculturalism, we examine the tensions surrounding multicultural education. After each theme, we provide a brief analysis that shows the connections between Chicana and Black feminisms and their implications for collective healing and agency. The last section examines the lessons provided by our *testimonios* and implications for pedagogy.

OUR THEORETICAL HOMES

Cinthya: Chicana Feminism

As I have shared my *testimonios* with Michelle, I have come to understand how central Chicana feminist theorizing is both in my personal and *profe* (professor) life. Chicana feminism, in many ways, saved me. I found a healing space, a home that is welcoming to an immigrant child, second language learner, and border crosser (Saavedra, 2011). I came to this home via Gloria Anzaldúa's writings in 1995. When I first read her work *Borderlands* (Anzaldúa, 1987), I felt that I finally understood the ambivalence I felt growing up in Texas. Her words and her historical account of Chicana/os helped me to not only confront my prejudices but also accept my own ambiguities, uncertainties, and how to negotiate dis/comforts of embodying multiple identities, *arrebatos* (violent ruptures), and transformations (Anzaldúa, 2002b). When we can experience this space, or what Anzaldúa (2002a) calls *nepantla*, transformation can occur. *Nepantla* is a "place where different perspectives come into conflict . . . the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium" (Anzaldúa, 2002a, pp. 548–549). I see the concept of *nepantla* helping me to undo and challenge the false binaries that I have inherited in my Western upbringing.

Moreover, the work of Chicana feminist educators (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Elenes, 2000; Trinidad Galvan, 2001) have been instrumental in helping me see the counter-discourses, the *testimonios*, and the many (her)stories that exist *y las mujeres y estudiantes que sobreviven* (and the women and students who survive) in our society. For example, Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) exemplify such endeavors as they examine the everyday pedagogies of *mujeres* (women) inside and outside of academia. Elenes, González, Delgado Bernal, and Villenas (2001) urge us to "place cultural knowledge at the forefront of educational research to better understand the lessons from the homespace, our communities and schools" (p. 595). Working under a Chicana feminist framework necessitates that we release in our minds the sanctity of academia and that we embrace and ensure a *respeto* (respect) for the theorizing that happens and exists, in complex ways, in the everyday pedagogies and lives of *la gente* (of people). Trinidad Galvan calls these practices and lessons "the pedagogies of the everyday, the mundane and the ordinary" (2001, p. 605). She compels us to excavate the ordinary and mundane in communities because often these everyday pedagogies are ignored or marginalized for not illustrating traditional androcentric models of critical pedagogies (Elenes, 1997). These critical lessons happen in nontraditional spaces and, unfortunately, are not deemed or recognized as theoretical locations. In these ways, Chicana feminist epistemology speaks to my soul—and my soul has no boundaries, no labels—and it moves with much greater ease than I do. Thus in trying to suture my mind-body-spirit split, I allow myself to learn from the spiritual me—*movimiento*—to be borderless, flexible, and fluid.

Michelle: Black Feminisms

When, as a doctoral student, my advisor first introduced me to Collins (2000), I had never encountered an academic reading that I felt so close and connected to. As an undergraduate and master's degree student, I was often exposed to mainly Euro-white, male, philosophical perspectives, so when given the chance to read and engage in conversations about Black feminisms, I

felt like I had found a home in academia—something that I was not sure existed until then. Even though I identify as Chicana (while embodying a multiplicity of ethnicities), once I read Collins' (2000) work, I immediately felt close to the struggles and empowerment she expressed. hooks and Mesa-Bains (2006) suggest that feminists and women of color “do have differences but our commonalities are just as strong, and they represent hope for resistance and freedom” (p. 3). I agree with hooks that while differences exist, I have felt strong parallels to Black feminisms.

Prior to being exposed to Black feminisms, I was mainly encouraged to use deficit approaches to examine the circumstances surrounding and impacting on marginalized communities, which as a Chicana, made me feel as if my everyday lived experiences were irrelevant in academic spaces and that my involvement in academia meant embodying dominant and oppressive discourses. Black feminisms have provided ways in which to theorize (and therefore legitimize) the knowledges of women of color, transforming “both theory and practice in higher education across the disciplinary divide, [and] offering a wide range of methodological approaches to the study of multiple, complex social relations” (Dil, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007, p. 629). Even with countless acknowledgments of the theoretical contributions of Black feminisms to academia, when attempting to use Collins to inform my coursework during my doctoral studies, it was met with resistance when one of my professors suggested that I choose a more “serious” scholar with whom to become familiar. I ignored his suggestion and continued where I felt most connected. Embracing Black feminisms has been a refusal to use “the master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984, p. 112) as my sole source of support. And as such, it has been a powerful form of resistance to the academic apartheid of knowledge (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

Black feminisms attempt to specifically reclaim the knowledge of Black women thinkers (Crenshaw, 1991; Lorde, 1982; Walker, 1983) and to locate and re-center subjugated knowledges (Hull, 1984; Richardson, 1987; Washington, 1975). Brewer (1993) contends that “what is most important conceptually and analytically in this work is the articulation of multiple oppressions . . . historically missing from analyses of oppression and exploitation in traditional feminism, Black Studies and mainstream academic disciplines” (p. 13). By bringing the everyday lived experiences of women of color from the margins to the center of thought, the complexities of identity, power, oppression, resistance, and empowerment are revealed as they intersect and relate to the social contexts that we function in, create, and are marginalized from (hooks, 2000a). These complexities have been conceptualized as a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000, p. 299) that is always present in the form of structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal power and oppression that are produced and function both systemically and in our everyday lives through our *experiencias*. Feeling a connection with the writings of scholars like hooks and Mesa-Bains (2006) who proclaimed, “When I realized that I was going to have to resist this domination in every form, my feminist resistance began” (p. 14), I, too, have been inspired by Black feminisms as they have allowed me to gain a clearer understanding of complex systems of oppression while encouraging me to look within myself to transform the dominant perspectives I have taken on throughout my life.

FINDING HEALING AND AGENCY IN OUR THEORETICAL HOMES

Even though neither of us come from the particular communities that produce Chicana and Black feminisms, we have found a healing space within them (hooks, 2000b). For us and many who find

themselves marginalized within dominant spaces, connecting with the work of feminist scholars of color like Collins and Anzaldúa can help to legitimize the knowledges of lives on the edge. Profoundly resembling every day lived *experiencias* and spaces of dis/comfort, using Chicana and Black feminisms as theoretical homes can open spaces to reconceptualize subaltern lives and identities.

Testimonios inspired by Chicana and Black feminisms can create possibilities for inner and collective healing as well as agency that resists dominant, Western, patriarchal, epistemological frameworks that have historically ignored or made invisible counter-discourses, her-stories, and non-dominant cultural knowledges. Theoretically inspired *testimonios* also provide validation and recognition of community strengths, while encouraging acknowledgment and rethinking of the complicity that can occur when attempting to function within dominant discourses (Collins, 2000; Cutri et al., 1998). Further, Chicana and Black feminisms recognize intersectionalities that we all embody and perform (Anzaldúa, 1987; Crenshaw, 1991; Dill et al., 2007; Latina Feminist Group, 2001), and therefore, in our next *testimonios*, we illuminate how our (the authors) multiple and shifting identities play out in complex ways.

REVEALING MULTIPLE AND SHIFTING IDENTITIES

Cintha

I was the master at memorizing and that served me well in Nicaragua and in the U.S. I was considered bright there and here. I cannot deny that I had a privileged position in Nicaragua. My dad was a diplomat who did come from a humble and poor background, but he was one of the extreme few who got out of poverty and had an established career with the Central American Bank. Perhaps it was because of this cultural and class capital privilege that I adopted the language and discourse of us/them that is rampant in the U.S. Thus, upon arriving to the U.S., I immediately saw myself different from Mexicans. Overtly disparaging comments were common about *los mexicanos* by my grandparents and later by my parents. Anytime I remember this, I shudder, but now know how easy it is to adopt these dominant discourses that perpetuate the us/them dichotomy. That is, these discourses are readily available in school curriculum, my family, and the media.

We encountered tremendous poverty in the U.S. as my dad struggled to find a job and the discrimination he faced because of his “foreignness” and limited English. My formal schooling exposure and even perhaps the style of teaching in Nicaragua—direct instruction and banking method—were similar to what I encountered in the U.S. I “fit” perfectly in the school system. This fitting in came at a price of hiding my Nicaraguan culture and my Spanish language and assimilating into the dominant Anglo culture. If we had old money privilege in Nicaragua, my dad would have known English and had connections in the U.S.; then perhaps we would have avoided really hard economic times when we immigrated. It is all so complex, attempting to situate cultural and class “privileges” and their varying degrees and show that a first-generation breaking out of poverty is not the same as having inherited privilege. Privileged identities can shift and change depending on contexts, situations, and spaces. I often think about this in my life, that as a woman of color who is light-skinned, I have many privileges. In many ways, this recognition challenges the us/them dichotomy. Maybe I have more in common with my “others”

than I think. I am reminded of the concept of “*yo soy tu otro yo*—I am your other I” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. x). With this in mind, I am more open and flexible about whom I embody and that my identity can change depending on contexts. Because of my fluid identities, I should be more vigilant of the intersectionalities present, not only in my investigations of my work but inside me as well (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Michelle

Why do I have to put myself into so many boxes to define my ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and so forth? But, I realize that others are constructing me and who I am according to the boxes they want to put me in, and therefore, in some ways, I embody and am positioned by what they construct me as. So, I would have to say that my boxes are multi-faceted and indistinct. As an example of this complexity, to identify as one race or ethnicity is difficult, although I can say that I feel most connected to my Mexican American heritage. My mother identifies as Mexican American but also feels connected to her African American heritage because her father (my grandfather) was both Mexican and Black. I also wonder about my *abuela* (my mom’s mom) and what indigenous identities she embodies? Then, my biological father is Caucasian. As an abusive partner to my mother and *mi familia* for much of my childhood, it has been a painful reminder of my *both/and* (Collins, 2000) positioning. If someone forced me into other boxes of identity (for which I would argue can never be as static as the language used to label them), I would be constructed as a “woman,” “heterosexual,” “able-bodied,” and “mono-lingual.” I have experienced both comfort and unease being placed in these boxes—probably comfort/unease associated with intersecting privilege and oppression, a sense of both/and always happening to me and that I am producing. Collins (2011) reminds me: “Oppression is full of such contradictions” (p. 760).

In elementary and middle school, being around my Chicana friends and family was the norm. However, when I began high school, I learned that to be “successful” in academic spaces I was expected to embrace and emulate White culture and deny any part of me that would exhibit otherwise. As an example, in high school, I was placed in the honors program where all of my classes had a majority of white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle- to upper-class students. There were only a few students in the program who did not fit or perform this strict identity. In one of my non-honors classes, I was required to sit across the room from one of my best friends from middle school, and since she was not admitted into the honors program, we did not have as many classes together in high school (a stark contrast from middle school where we were practically inseparable). One day, our class was assigned a kite project. The girl sitting next to me said, “Hey, do you want to work together?” and I said, “Sure.” Then, later, after class in the hallway, my Chicana friend from middle school said, “What? Do you think you are better than us now?” I felt an emotional and horribly sinking feeling that one of my very best friends was so angry at me, and rightfully so. Why did I jump to say, “Yes,” to work with this other person I didn’t even know when my friend for so many years was just across the room?

With countless moments like these, and similar to many young women of color, entering the honors program in high school launched me into a different space—one that was shifting, like cement breaking and moving underneath and all around me in unpredictable ways. I would have to learn how to navigate both who I was and the complexities of institutional structural and disciplinary power (Collins, 2000) that I was forced to encounter every day. Hegemony was

all around me; it was happening to me, and I was producing it, but it sometimes revealed itself blatantly, like in the instance of hurting my friend. I was pushed and pulled from and within my intertwined identities. On one hand, I was moving into new spaces of privilege (or what dominant society thinks of as privilege and success) by having access to honors courses that would prepare me for college. On the other hand, I was being sent a message by the system and my white peers that I had to choose, and that the right choice was this hegemonic idea of “success” (e.g., honors classes and making those who had access to them my peers), stripping away my Mexican American identity and alienating me from everyone I knew, loved, and grew up with. Being an honors student in high school literally separated me from my Chicana identity and attempted to teach me that “success” meant emulating a white, middle-class culture.

IDENTITY LESSONS FROM CHICANA AND BLACK FEMINISMS

For both of us, our identities have been shaped not only by our families but also by what is expected of us in society and by the complex negotiations we have engaged in throughout our lives. Both Chicana and Black feminist scholarship have helped us to interrogate the source of our own oppression and our complicity in it as well as to help us negotiate and perhaps even transcend how discourses and structures of power intersect in our lives and bodies (Ayala, Herrera, Jimenez, & Lara, 2006; Collins, 2005).

Collectively, theoretically-inspired *testimonios* facilitate a deeper examination of identity, one that disrupts the oversimplified notion of life as neat and marginal. Instead, *testimonios* encourage the understanding of identities as lying somewhere on the *fronteras* of cultural privilege and cultural oppression in complex ways, thereby facilitating the recognition of interconnectedness (Anzaldúa, 1987; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). Furthermore, identities of “success” for women of color can come at a high price that leads to some rewards, while causing more devastating isolation (James, 1993). Collective efforts to resist identity as being able to be categorized is a way to speak back to and resist this isolation. Multiple and shifting identities, and the experiences tied to them, embody what Collins (2000) describes as “both/and”—we are all many things that overlap. This recognition comes from being able to (re)member through *testimonios* how many can feel dismembered through lived experiences.

Success is a structure of power, a hegemonic circumstance that is “enjoyed” while it can strip away the strengths of community, language, and culture. This is because, too often, to be successful means that community and a sense of connectedness must be replaced with individualism. In sharing our *testimonios*, it led us to think deeply about how mainstream education obscures our understanding of ourselves and others in profound ways. We contemplate further the content and pedagogy of multicultural education as another contested area in our lives.

(UN)LEARNING MULTICULTURALISM

Michelle

When I was a teenager, I made a new Caucasian friend who had just moved to South Texas and joined our sports team. Prior to her move, she had little experience with communities outside her privileged, white, upper-class family and friends. During the school year, she was required to do a

project for class where she had to ask someone from an “other” culture to teach her how to make an *ethnic* cuisine. She picked me and my family to “study.” When I approached my mom about it, she seemed reluctant, but then said, “Okay, we can teach her about guacamole since there is no cooking involved.” I remember feeling nervous when we all went to the grocery store together because it felt awkward to do anything with this person outside of the predominantly middle- to upper-class and white spaces of our athletic team.

After we finished shopping, we returned to my house, which looked nothing like my friend’s house. She lived in a wealthy, gated community on the “new” side of town (a community that was built to keep out our brown bodies—except for “the help”). In stark contrast, I lived in a house with mold on the floors, holes in the walls, and boards on the windows. It was not in a gated community but on a block nestled between several low-income housing communities.

As we made the dish, my friend said, “Oh wow, this is going to be *so great* to take to class!” I truly felt this person had no clue how this made us feel. She had found the ultimate exotic other dish to take to class, with no questions about how the avocados, tomatoes, onions, limes, and garlic got to the store, the answer to which was on the backs of brown bodies working in the fields. Why couldn’t my friend’s teacher have assigned a lesson to find out about the struggles and empowerment of our family, friends, and communities? Why did they just want to know how to make guacamole?

This story from my childhood came to mind as I was sitting as a first-year assistant professor with two colleagues in a undergraduate student presentation of her teaching internship cumulative project—which happened to be a thematic unit about Mexico. At this time, I lived in a place with a seasonal head start program and service center for migrant workers and their families just 20 minutes away from the university (a place where students had never been given an option to be able to do their internships); this student decided to talk about Mexican food! As she presented, she said, “I had to think of something to do for mathematics, and I remembered my classes at the university when a particular professor told us that we could make mathematics curriculum culturally relevant by making quesadilla fractions.” As she continued to present, I politely interrupted and asked if she and her students talked about any political struggles faced by Mexican children, families, and communities, such as with the recent immigration policy enacted in the state of Arizona. She responded with a simple, “No.”

As I sat there and watched the presentation continue, I felt sad, angry, and hurt and remembered my experience with the girl who had to study another culture by learning how to make an ethnic cuisine. My colleagues in the room could feel my body clenching, and after the presentation was over and the student left the room, one of them said, “Are you okay, Michelle?” and I said, “Can we say tourist curriculum?” And then one colleague responded, “I know, honey.” And that was that. Absolutely nothing had changed in 15 years.

I had hoped that in the years between my childhood and now as an assistant professor, educators might have changed the way in which they approach multiculturalism. I am reminded of hooks’ (2010) revelation in that “many of the abuses of power that I had experienced during my education were still commonplace” (p. 3). Therefore, when considering the continued misuse of multicultural education to reify institutional and social oppressions (Collins, 2000), I have realized more than ever that I must engage in conversations with students and colleagues about recognizing, resisting, and reconceptualizing dominant notions of culturally relevant curriculum.

Cinthya

As I began my first tenure track position in northern Utah, fears of teaching multicultural education to all white students resurfaced. The multicultural classes I had taught before, as a visiting assistant *profe* in North Carolina and as a graduate teaching assistant, were full of resistance both on my end and from my students—the us/them mentality, in particular, the teacher/student, Chicana/white, knowing/not knowing binaries were embodied as much by them as they were by me. I, therefore, began to ask different questions about what to do with my class, my readings, and my pedagogy. One approach that I had to problematize was the belief that I was going to change my students. That implicitly denotes that my students are in one space (the wrong one) and need to be in another space (the right one), as if spaces are not ambiguous sometimes and even contradictory at other times. Who am I to think I know the right way to think? I can think about myself and how I can believe wholeheartedly about one thing but, in the next minute, embrace an opposite belief. I also know that I have not completely rid myself of Western epistemology. It is buried deep. I am complex. And all I can hope for is more spaces where I challenge an old belief or an old me, but perhaps getting completely rid of the old me is an illusion at best. What I have learned from Chicana feminists is that we are ambiguous and even contradictory. And besides, is that not what Western research and pedagogy proposes—to intervene and change those who are not like us? There has to be another way—a different way—to approach the teaching of multicultural education that does not necessitate an us/them mentality but instead promotes a connectionist approach (Elenes, 2006; Keating, 2007).

For Keating (2007), “connectionist thinking is visionary, relational and holistic” (p. 2). I love it when she says that this connectionist approach is about “collective healing.” If we move beyond Western epistemological ideas of existing in such hierarchical, dichotomous understandings of the world that produce rigid labels such as me, Chicana, and my students, White, what possibilities lay ahead? What deeper connection can we make? Will it be smooth? Probably not. What I learned from reading Keating is that I had to go back and reread Anzaldúa! I also needed to reengage with spiritualism as Keating asserts, “When we talk about spirits, transformation, interconnectedness, or the sacred, we risk the accusations of essentialism, escapism, or other forms of apolitical, irrational, naïve thinking” (p. 2).

Could it be a coincidence that during this time, I was also coming out of an atheist coma? At the same time, I had just moved to Utah, and I was experiencing a different consciousness in spiritualism. My *Papi* had died two months prior. What and who I thought was my rock and foundation were taken from me, creating what Anzaldúa (2002b) calls *arrebato*—rupture and fragmentation that can force us to rethink, re-interpret who we are. Anzaldúa explained that “*Cada arrebato* is an awakening that causes you to question who you are, what the world is about” (p. 547). The person who had my back was gone! For the first time, I needed to find inner strength, needed to know that I was going to be okay. Finding inner strength was a new experience for me, one that my culture nor my family had taught me. This inner search led to a series of spiritual awakenings in my life. For example, seeing myself as interconnected to other human beings, animals, nature, and cosmos. I began to see life in a different way, not a better way, just another way. This change was inner. As I was rereading Anzaldúa in *Entrevistas/Interviews*, *This Bridge We Call Home* and even *Borderlands*, I saw the message differently this time. For the first time, I began to see her connectionist perspective. The new questions I was asking about

teaching were intimately tied to my new perspective in life. My own borderlands necessitate bridges for crossing back and forth or for standing in the middle. Maybe I finally understand what the path of the *nepantleras* are, “‘in betweeners’ those who facilitate passages between worlds (p. 1)” (Anzaldúa, cited in Keating, 2006, p. 9).

Multicultural Education Through Our Eyes (I's)

Our *testimonios* reveal tensions with multiculturalism. Furthermore, they expose the need to radicalize not only multicultural education but also pedagogical approaches with students in teacher education programs (hooks, 2010). Understandings of dominant content and pedagogy, as framed by Chicana and Black feminisms, helps us to uncover their ties to Western epistemological orientations of the world (Collins, 2006). For example, multiculturalism continues to be reified as a notion that can be concretely explained and performed—a check list. However, we teacher educators argue that we are not pushing our students to grasp (with epistemological and ontological questions) what it means to live or be in multicultural spaces. Pedagogy needs to shift to de-center traditional multicultural content, blurring and zigzagging identities on various levels, not just by destabilizing student/teacher binaries but also, for example, right/wrong views (Keating, 2007). This can lead to engaging with broader issues of connectionist/*nepantla* states as a way to release the us/them dichotomies inherent in Western epistemology. Instead, bridges can be built with many and multiple sisterhoods (hooks, 2000b).

CHICANA AND BLACK FEMINIST-INSPIRED *TESTIMONIOS*: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY/PEDAGOGY

Our *testimonios* first came about through our conversations surrounding concepts from our theoretical homes in Chicana and Black feminisms that we believe to be central to our work and our lives. By revealing and writing our *testimonios*, we have found affinities that connect our lives and our theoretical spaces with each other—a *puente* between the two of us. Even though our individual experiences are different, they are parallel, yet are intersecting. For example, both of our *testimonios* point to structures of power that are instrumental in reifying oppressions, while embodying strength, empowerment, and healing (Collins, 2000). Both Chicana and Black feminisms, as our theoretical homes, remind us that experiences and everyday pedagogies are complex navigations that entail constant reflections and negotiations (Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 2000a). Our *testimonios* about our closeness to Chicana and Black feminisms, shifting and multiple identities, and tensions with multicultural education, create a space for this to occur. Unpacking our stories and connecting them to our theoretical homes, we contend, bring theories alive and give life to theories through our bodies and stories. Curti et al. (1998) assert that we can engage with theories intellectually but in “failing to engage with them on the personal levels of culture and affect, [we] . . . bankrupt the transformative powers of critical self and social examination” (p. 101). *Testimonios* can provide these transformative lessons for individual and collective social justice work in classrooms and local or global communities (Dill et al., 2007).

Thus, we offer the following theoretical and pedagogical implications for critical transformation of the self and social examinations.

Chicana and Black feminisms, when explored more deeply through *testimonios*, create *nuevas posibilidades* (new possibilities) for pedagogy and the way that we, women of color in academia, engage with our colleagues, students, and the world. First, we must recognize and acknowledge that as academics, researchers, and teachers, we must continue to learn language from, and create new language for, our theoretical homes that help us to express and navigate the complexity and multiple locations of struggles and resistance in our lives. Further, what we (the authors), have learned is that our stories are unique and yet are shared experiences even though we have come from different theoretical spaces and cultural, racial, and ethnic communities. Connecting our lived experiences provides lessons and pedagogies of sisterhood and solidarity—reminding us that *testimonios* are the “I” connected to the “we” and vice versa (Beverly, 2005). The “we” can be seen in Anzaldúa’s concept of *nos/otras* in that the “we” is cross-cultural, cross-ethnic, cross-racial, cross-gender or any division we have inherited from dominant world views (Keating, 2000). *Nos/otras* with the slash literally translates to we/them (or us/other). Anzaldúa has urged us to take notice of how we exist in each other—finding ourselves “in the position of being simultaneously insider/outsider” (Keating, 2000, p. 254). This is similar to Collins’ (2000) idea of both/and—that we embody both the oppressor and the oppressed. These ideas of connectivity stemming from Chicana and Black feminisms provoke building bridges of understanding and knowledge for teaching and research in academic spaces. Connectivity is one way that the us/them dichotomy can be challenged and bring about collective healing.

Finally, the most important pedagogical lesson inspired by our Chicana and Black feminist *testimonios* has been the reminder that we all must begin with ourselves (Dillard, 2006). The currents we ride (our agency, resistance, and complicity) are not in direct opposition to oppression and structures of power but are interwoven, messy, and web-like (Collins, 2000). This provides an important lesson, as it urges us all to learn and engage with the language of critique so that oppression can be recognized and resisted. Anzaldúa (1987) posits that “I change myself, I change the world” (p. 92). Similarly, Lorde (1984) suggests that “we must move against not only those forces which dehumanize us from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves” (p. 135). We agree with Anzaldúa and Lorde that one cannot facilitate, teach, and engage others unless one changes and shifts consciousness within.

Many times, when working toward and demanding that society change, some can forget that perhaps society is in many ways a reflection of each of us. Anzaldúa (1987) suggests that “the struggle has always been inner and played out in the outer terrains” (p. 87). Self-work must be done, then, in conjunction with the work performed in academia. As academics, we are not outside of colonization but very much a part and product of it. With these personal transformations we can offer different kinds of critical pedagogies for healing the self—a very different kind of critical pedagogy from the androcentric models we have been taught. Because *testimonios* are a call for political action from the vantage point of subaltern marginalized bodies and voices (Elenes, 2000), our Chicana and Black feminists’ *testimonios* serve as a call for one of the most revolutionary acts—the revolution within the self. In this way, we can collectively heal our fragmented selves.

Healing our fragmented “we” and “I” is the type of praxis that theoretically inspired *testimonios* have to potentially reveal about *nos/otras* (we/they and or us/them). *Testimonios* can become “a quest story of ordeal and distress, cyclic life-stages, and identity transformations” (Anzaldúa, 2002b, pp. 562–563). *Testimonios* inspired by Chicana and Black feminisms, then, can serve as

an ongoing reflexive activity that allows women of color in academia to connect with each other, in hopes of transforming the “I” in order to impact the “we,” the *nos/otras*, and the world around us.

NOTES

1. RECE has brought challenges, concerns, and counter-stories to the field it was birthed from—early childhood education. RECE can be situated within the uncertainties and ambiguities introduced mainly by postmodern and poststructural research as well as other critical perspective scholarship. Because most of the participants are of European descent, we find it imperative to also bring in voices from the margins.
2. We use parentheses to play with language and to point to languages’ multiple meanings. For example, to remember can be to recall but to (re)member offers a new way to visualize this act. That is, we are saying that in the process of recalling we also are putting back together what has been dismembered throughout our lives. Furthermore, by segmenting with parentheses, we also mean that the (re) is deeper and more reflexive. It’s not just to rework and revisit an issue but to (re)work and (re)visit it with political and critical awareness.

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