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# Seeking a *Mexicana/Mestiza*<sup>1</sup> Ethic of Care: Rosa's *Revolución* of carrying alongside

Mia Angélica Sosa-Provencio

Department of Teacher Education Educational Leadership and Policy, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, USA

## ABSTRACT

This Chicana Critical Feminist *Testimonio* reveals a Mexican/Mexican-American Ethic of Care particular to the needs and strengths of *Mexicana/o* students and *Testimonios* of struggle, survival informing one Mexican/Mexican-American female educator of predominantly Mexican/Mexican-American students. This work, theoretically framed within Chicana and Black Feminisms, is part of a larger ethnographic study conducted through multiple methods. Findings reveal Rosa's *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care, a (re)incarnated social justice revolution carrying education as ethical imperative toward uplift. Findings have implications for all educators to protect and sustain ongoing struggles for equity and dignity for *Mexicana/o* youth and all those on the margins of schooling.

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## Introduction

*Each morning I rise in search of those words, that image, the cuento [story/lesson] that might open a small footpath of knowing toward the abandoned villages of our forgotten.* – Moraga 2011, 87

For black and Southwest Spanish-speaking *Mexicana/o* communities, survival of mind/body/spirit has required the psychological work of educators of color circumscribing school spaces of healing resistance where love, dignity, historical consciousness, and rigorous academic preparation were cultivated to buffer the cruelty of the outside world (Foster 1998; hooks 1993; Maestas 2011). Historically, when communities and teachers of color held local ownership over schools, they prepared young people academically, culturally, and spiritually to challenge the racism, class exploitation, and linguisticism raining down on their communities (Donato 1999; Siddle Walker 1996, 2000). Within the Jim Crow South, black educators engaged a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care informed within Black Feminist frameworks wherein collective survival and uplift formed the foundation of academic preparation of African-American students (Cross 1998; hooks 1994; Ladson-Billings 1994; Stewart 2013). A Critical Feminist Ethic of Care among Spanish-speaking *Mexicana/o* educators of the Southwest have been documented as well, though to a lesser extent due to policies and practices largely excluding bilingual and *Mexicana/o* educators (Donato 1997; González 1999; Milk 1980). These black and *Mexicana/o*, Spanish-speaking educators taught, loved, and academically prepared children as kin within an historicized Critical Feminist Ethic of Care framework strong enough to heal the wounds of subjugation

and to resist the shame and oppression long thrust upon their communities. Today, young people of color still struggle for educational equity, evidenced in low achievement and completion rates and disproportionate suspensions and expulsions (National Center Education Statistics 2011; NMPED, 2011) and cry out for educators who embody this Critical Feminist Ethic of Care of collective responsibility for uplift (Cammarota and Fine 2008; Valenzuela 1999).

The legacies of these educators and their nourishing, buffering, and challenging Critical Feminist Ethic of Care may today offer insight into building schooling spaces of hopeful academic futures for young people of color and specific to this work, *Mexicana/o* young people. This article seeks to reveal and more deeply understand tenets of a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care, fed within Chicana and Black Feminisms, specific to the needs of *Mexicana/o* young people. I term this a *Mexicana/Mestiza Ethic of Care*, which centers the intellectual potential and needs of *Mexicana/o* students toward dismantling the workings of oppression within their lives and communities. This work may serve to inform educators of all backgrounds to academically prepare and culturally affirm *Mexicana/o* students who comprise over 64% of the US Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau 2014) and experience the longest ongoing European occupation of any Latina/o group, subjugated and sanctioned within our own ancestral homeland (Chávez 2011; Kennedy and Simplicio 2009; Ortiz 2009).

In understanding the role that *Mexicana/o* educators may play to inform the preparation of *Mexicana/o* students, however, we unfold the deeply colonizing and oppressive histories of public education within Spanish-speaking communities. Southwest *Mexicana/os* and *Mestiza/os* have collectively experienced subordination in all arenas beginning in 1539 with the arrival of the Spanish (Acuña 1988; Anzaldúa 1987; Baca 1990; Córdova 1994; Gaspar de Alba 1998; E. Martínez 1998). Circumscribed as, 'rebellious, mongrel Indian race' (Nieto-Phillips 2004, 52), the system of interlocking racialized and class oppressions for *Mexicana/os* was perfected (Collins 2009; Gomez 2008). This marking and the social subjugation it justified was perhaps most visibly operationalized through public schooling (G. González 2003; Milk 1980; San Miguel 2003; Valencia 2011b), constructed to clear away 'backward cultural beliefs' precluding 'social betterment' for Mexican children (G. González 2003, 106). This *clearing away* was accomplished through cultural and linguistic erasure, denigration, corporal punishment, low teacher expectations, unenforced compulsory school attendance laws, segregated and underfunded schools, and firing of Spanish-speaking educators (Donato 1997, 1999).

Within this Chicana Critical Feminist qualitative study, I utilize *Testimonio* methodology eliciting the wisdom of *Mexicana* female educators through multimodal narratives, *Testimonios*, of enduring and overcoming oppression (Latina Feminist Group 2001). The larger body of this work is informed through *Testimonios* of four *Mexicana/Mestiza* female educators conveyed across multiple methods of individual and focus group interviews, field observations, (co)researcher reflective journals, and photo elicitation to reveal tenets of a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care to better serve *Mexicana/o* students who continue to struggle for educational parity (Baca 1990; Cammarota and Romero 2006; J. González 2011; San Miguel 2003; Valencia 2011a). This work focuses specifically on Rosa Maldonado, a bilingual Mathematics teacher born in El Paso, Texas and raised along both sides of the US–Mexico Border. I focus on Rosa alone to convey her *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care in depth and complexity. This article discusses the particular *Testimonios* that nourish Rosa's curriculum and pedagogy and which give form to her *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care.

Tenets of a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care, developed fully within research findings, include: (1) curriculum and pedagogy rooted within intergenerational *Testimonios*, narratives, of struggle and resistance; (2) education framed as an ethical calling toward recovering dignity and equity; and (3) reframing dominant constructions of social justice revolution as *Revolución*, a concealed battle waged beneath a blended, ambiguous, and protective cover. Research questions include:

What is a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care?

What are *Testimonios* of struggle, resistance, and survival that inform Mexican/Mexican-American educators?

What pedagogies, practices do *Mexicana* female teachers of *Mexicana/o* students infuse into their roles as educators?

### **Theoretical framework**

This work is theoretically framed within Chicana and Black Critical Feminisms constructing intellectual, instinctive, imagined, embodied, spiritual, historical, and cultural ways of knowing as inextricable epistemologies foundational to dismantling workings and perpetuation of racism, sexism, classicism, linguisticism, colorism, nationalism, and heterosexism (Anzaldúa 2000; Collins 2009; hooks 1994; Moraga 1983; Trinidad Galván 2006). Chicana and Black Critical Feminisms recognize the power language holds to (re)construct a larger social reality (Blackmer Reyes and Curry Rodriguez 2012; Knight 2004; hooks 1994; Lorde 1978, 1984; Saavedra and Salazar Pérez 2012; Smith 2002) and are grounded in constructing healing, resistant tools (Anzaldúa 1987; Lorde 1984) where Mexican/Mexican-American students are academically and intellectually nourished to lead lives of dignity.

### **Background literature**

*Caring* has long been a fixture of dominant narratives of education with regard to school climate, teacher roles, relationships between teachers and students, and underlying motivations of educators. Depictions of caring, situated within White Feminist frameworks, are salient in our collective psyche, in mainstream scholarship, and in national school campaigns (charactercounts.org; stopbullying.gov). Absent from a White Feminist Ethic of Care, however, is a framework for caring which addresses the specific needs of young people at the intersection of race, class, gender, residency status, and language. To address this, Feminist Scholars of Color have drawn upon the Critical Feminist Ethic of Care of community educators of color who have constructed education as the practice of freedom and who built schooling spaces infused with legacies of struggle and resilience (Foster 1993; Gonzalez and Ayala-Alcantar 2008; hooks 1994; Knight 2004; Thompson 1998; Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Jackson 2014). Some work has been done to reveal a framework for caring centering Mexican/Mexican-American young people: Most notable perhaps is Valenzuela's (1999) work which challenges White Feminist *esthetic caring* which hinges caring on academic achievement; she offers *authentic caring* situated within Mexican/Mexican-American students' identities and lived realities to address their academic and social needs. Built upon these legacies of scholarship, I seek to understand and reveal a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care framework specific to the needs and strengths of *Mexicana/os* young people struggling on the margins of school and beyond. This work centers the wisdom and knowledge of *Mexicana* female educators and the *Testimonios* that undergird their *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care in order to design school spaces for *Mexicana/o* students that offer a healing resistance against continued marginalization.

### **Moving beyond dominant-culture ethics of care**

For the past 30 years, *care* has existed predominantly within a humanistic, moral, interpersonal, maternal, apolitical, nurturing, and feminized framework (Gilligan 1982; Larrabee 1993; Noddings 2003, 1992). And while care scholarship has seen added dimension as scholars have differentiated between *authentic* care and *esthetic* (Noddings 2003; Oakes and Lipton 2003), only Valenzuela (1999) touches on the ostensibly colorblind, apolitical constructions of care that silence the multiple identities and *native knowledge* ways of knowing that students of color embody (Darder 1991; Godinez 2006; Smith 1993, 2002). According to Knight (2004) an ethic of care framework must *sense the urgency* of cultivating critical communities of perseverance to challenge inequities and untruths that continue to disenfranchise students of color, especially at the intersection of class (Anzaldúa 1987; Gonzalez and Ayala-Alcantar 2008; Henry 2006; Rolón-Dow 2005; Villenas and Moreno 2001), and a White Feminist Ethic of Care framework does not go far enough to this end.

Challenging this White Feminist Ethic of Care stands a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care framework rooted within Chicana and Black Feminisms wherein care is *necessarily* political, positing that within a racialized society, colorblindness is a privilege that children of color cannot afford (Gonzalez and

Ayala-Alcantar 2008; Thompson 1998). These White Feminist frameworks of care are not constructed to combat assimilationist pedagogies and *knowledge apartheid* resulting from gross social inequities (Pérez Huber 2009) and the continued ‘perception[s] of Mexicans as “other”’ (Menchaca 2003, 25). Students of color themselves have long challenged educators toward ethics of care with the teeth to transform these realities. Through their words and their actions, young people of color battling inequitable schooling institutions are calling for a critical, humanizing ethic of care that resists *historical amnesia* (Darder 1995) of assimilationist pedagogies distorting and invalidating their lived realities, language(s), and historicized struggles (G. González 2003; Lorde 1978; Nieto 2002).

### **Legacies of critical care toward healing wholeness**

Students of color are struggling to ‘survive the crossroads’ (Anzaldúa 1987, 81) of disjointed, Positivistic, and so-called objective schooling spaces in which survival necessitates learning to silence and separate themselves from their racial and linguistic selves and those intellectual legacies and home pedagogies that sustain them (Cruz 2006; Darder 1995; Knight, et al. 2006; Oesterreich 2007; Taliaferro-Baszile 2010). Within a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care framework of *endarkened* Chicana and Black Feminist epistemologies lies the power to reclaim wholeness, ‘mending and suturing a body complete’ (Cruz 2006, 64) by challenging oppressive structures that perpetrate it. Young people are crying out for these healing, resistant school spaces enabled by a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care offering a ‘new consciousness’ of wholeness ‘so that we are on both shores at once’ (Anzaldúa 1987, 78). One black female principal gives breath to this healing wholeness cultivated within protected spaces beyond the white gaze of schooling,

I be me in that space.../Whole – /made of all that is me.../Sustaining this entity.../Folding into itself.../facing struggle/Being me/ Being Whole/ Being me again.../So that this Third Space/ between paved and gravel becomes.../...whole (philosopher)/ integrated...(transgressive)/ critical...(-ly important)/ VOICED (heard) – (Dillard 2000, 665–666)

As these cultural *máscaras* [masks] of resistance are braided into the beings of young people (Godinez 2006), body/mind/spirit is ‘nourished, supported, protected, encouraged, and held accountable’ (Gay 2000, 47). Within a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care stands a connectedness to intellectual and resistance legacies of dominated people wherein the accumulation and application of knowledge exists for uplift and survival (Córdova 1994; Saavedra and Salazar Pérez 2012; Villenas 2006), it signifies a charge for critical educators to carry the weight of historical consciousness toward uplift wherein one becomes educated *for your ancestors who came to this soil with salt water in their veins, and for your descendants* (Delpit 2003, 19). Within a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care, educators are *L@s Encargada/os*, those entrusted to carry the weight of struggle toward transformation. In a general sense, a person *encargada(o)* is one charged with a task, though the root of this word, *cargar*, to carry, bears particular significance within the context of a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care where *caring* means *carrying* education as a ‘validation vision’ to ‘see ... through the fictions of [w]hite supremacy’ by uncovering ‘true faces, our dignity’ (Anzaldúa 1987, 87). Chicana and Black Critical Feminisms challenge educators to decentralize depoliticized, interpersonal notions of care toward a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care academically integrating students’ cultural, intellectual, and resistance legacies as a wealth source – the means through which inequitable systems may be dismantled and transformed (Antrop-González and De Jesús 2006; Godinez 2006; Knight 2004; Rolón-Dow 2005; Valenzuela 1999; Villenas and Moreno 2001).

### **Methodology: Chicana Critical Feminist Testimonio**

Chicana/os and *Mexicana/os* have long ‘told stories aloud: as weapons ... as historical accounts and prophetic warnings, as preachers and teachers against wrongdoing ... as prayer ... through this storytelling one’s awareness of the world and its meaning grows and changes’ (Moraga 2011, xvi). This work is methodologically framed within this weapon of *Testimonio*, a decolonizing research epistemology

which defies inequitable distributions of power characteristic of Western social science methodologies wherein the researcher is positioned as central knower while participants are unconscious actors in the researcher gaze, deemed incapable of theory (Dillard 2000; Delgado Bernal 1998; Smith 2002). This work is nourished within an *endarkened* feminist epistemology centering Chicana and Black Feminisms rooted in lived realities, self-definition, and agency at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and spirituality, a methodology which stands as the 'collective refusal to be reduced to someone else's terms', wherein voice itself is 'an act of resistance' (Dillard 2000, 673).

This Critical Feminist *Testimonio* centers participants as co-researchers and theorists making meaning out of individual and collective *Testimonios* of resistance and survival elicited through multiple methods to more deeply understand and name the *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care that they as *Mexicana* teachers embody and infuse into curriculum and pedagogy (Alarcón et al. 2011; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga and Flores Carmona 2012; Fine and Weis 2010; Latina Feminist Group 2001). Participants' politicized *Testimonios*, communicated across multiple data sources, may offer a critical text to challenge institutional structures that perpetuate inequity and the means to heal the pain of subjugation for *Mexicana/o* young people (Baca 1990, 2002; Gaspar de Alba 1998; Nieto-Phillips 2004; San Miguel 2003).

### **Participants**

I utilize Criteria Sampling calling for female, Mexican/Mexican-American educators within a comprehensive public high school and charter middle school who teach predominantly Mexican/Mexican-American students; I subsequently relied upon Chain Sampling to complete my goal of four participants (Marshall and Rossman 2010). While participants' *Testimonios* were at the heart of this work methodologically and theoretically, at no time were they established as criteria for sampling. The reasoning behind this is multifaceted: A Chicana Critical Feminist framework recognizes the ubiquitousness of oppression, which presupposes that a *mestiza* consciousness is never far removed from the inheritors of slavery, colonization, and oppression (Moraga 2011, 38). Further, working within a Chicana research epistemology and my own intuition as a Chicana researcher positions this bloodline-knowing as a sacred site for which entry is slowly earned. Finally, the complexity of *Testimonios* as both firsthand lived experience and simultaneously intergenerational inheritance (Henry 2006) inhibits their reduction to sampling criteria.

I have chosen to work with four participants to gain the intimacy and trust necessary to share sacred and guarded *Testimonios* (Pérez Huber 2009). I worked with four participants who interchangeably self-identify as *Mexicana*, Mexican, Mexican-American, and Hispanic and range from fully bilingual to English-dominant Heritage Speakers. While the curriculum and pedagogy of all four participants collectively embody tenets of a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care, for the purpose of communicating these tenets in nuanced detail, I focus on the *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care emerging through Rosa, a 6th, 7th, and 8th grade Mathematics teacher in a Dual Language Charter School. Rosa was born in El Paso to a single mother from Juárez, México. Rosa is a native speaker of Spanish and fully bilingual. Rosa is raising a 15-year-old son and is full-time caregiver to her mother within the home the three share.

### **Research site**

I conducted this study in a mid-sized city along the US–Mexico border in which per capita income is reportedly below \$20,000 and according to the 2011 US Census, 20.4% of residents live below poverty. I chose this location because of its proximity to the US–Mexico border and its large Mexican immigrant and native-born Mexican-American population, nearly 56.8%, with over 40% speaking a home language other than English (US Census Bureau 2014) while Hispanic children constitute 73.9% of total district enrollment (Office of Accountability, Assessment & Research 2011).

### Data collection

The theoretical rootedness of this Chicana Critical Feminist *Testimonio* positions participants equitably at multiple levels of data collection and analysis (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Participant *Testimonios* emerged across multiple data collection methods: (1) two 60–90 minute individual semi-structured interviews; (2) five 90–120 minute focus group interviews providing reflective and discursive methodological spaces for emerging *Testimonios* (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012); (3) ongoing field observations within and beyond participants' classrooms; (4) my reflective researcher journal; (5) photographic elicitation conveying participants' ethic of care and a larger *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care (Altheide and Johnson 1998; Eisner 1993; Oliver 2003); and (6) participants' reflections surrounding their evolving consciousness/*conocimiento* (Anzaldúa 1987) across collected data. Participants provided ongoing layers of data and analysis through reflection with partners, lovers, children, parents, friends, siblings, and students regarding this work.

### Data analysis

There are numerous oral stories which tell of ... history ... erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people. The negation of indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology ... (Smith 2002, 29)

Alongside other 'alter-Native culture[s]' marginalized and colonized within their own lands (Gaspar de Alba 1998, xvi), Chicano and *Mexicana/o* peoples have been disfigured in history and separated from self-authorship (Latina Feminist Group 2001; Pérez Huber 2009). This research is situated within *endarkened* epistemologies of reclamation and redefinition of voices that have been silenced and submerged (Delgado Bernal 1998; Dillard 2000). According to Córdova (1994), the 'passion and depth of Chicana writings originate from the need to survive, first, by deconstructing others' definitions of us. ... [T]he Chicana is in the best position to describe and define her own reality' (182). Employing this critical lens as part of a decolonizing research epistemology validates participants as centralized subjects capable of self-definition and theory within their own experiences and within the research (Collins 2009; Trinidad Galván 2006).

Five focus groups provided a source for data collection and also the space wherein we as co-researchers collectively analyzed data across all other sources including individual and focus group interview transcripts, field observation notes, co-researcher reflections, and shared photographs. All individual and collective interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by me. Interview transcripts and observation notes were made available to participants for individual and focus group analysis. Themes emerging across all data sources provided the basis to sort, color code, and draw connections between initial and subsequent data. Preliminary data analyses were further contextualized within collective cultural knowledge, academic literature treating *endarkened* epistemologies, and within our own families and circle of *Mexicana/o* friends and colleagues (Dillard 2000; Latina Feminist Group 2001). Within focus groups, participants and I crystallized emerging analyses and salient themes across all data sources (Luttrell 2010), continuously (re)contextualizing understandings of a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care and its underlying *Testimonios* within individual interview transcripts, initial focus group data, my observation data, collected and shared photographs, and our own experiential, intuitive, and cultural knowledge (Latina Feminist Group 2001). Reflexive crystallization (Altheide and Johnson 1998; Luttrell 2010) and principled fidelity to analysis within the research phenomena (Atkinson and Delamont 2008) were utilized among participants in all aspects of data collection not as a strategy approximating validity but an alternative to it (Villenas 2010).

### Researcher positionality

Also shaping this work is the intersectionality of my positionality as an institutionally sanctioned researcher and US-born *Mexicana*, identities simultaneously positioning me as insider/outsider within

the research phenomenon (Villenas 2010). I self-identify as Chicana and *Mexicana* raised in middle to lower class means with intergenerational ties to both sides of the US–Mexico Border within close proximity to this research. I am a Heritage Spanish Speaker though English-dominant. An additional layer of positionality comes in my appearance: I am a *güera* – light-skinned, light-eyed, often mistaken as white non-Hispanic by those who do not understand nor recognize the nearly 500 years of complex multi-hued *mestizaje* visibly manifesting in my body. Like my participants, my *mestiza* consciousness is shaped through firsthand and intergenerational *Testimonios* at the intersection of my racialized, classed, linguistic, and nationalistic situatedness. My theoretical framework, research epistemology, and positionality live and dwell at the intersection of my European phenotype, US citizenship, native English, and education level and offer the lens through which I recognize and analyze emerging themes.

My positionality within predominantly privilege, even as intergenerational oppression courses through my veins, gives shape and form to a lived reality within which I, too, cannot lay claim to being spat upon, shat upon, for being Brown (Moraga 1983); however, a *mestiza* consciousness cannot be encapsulated nor essentialized within firsthand *Testimonios* of racialized, linguistic oppression. It is not born in the space of one body nor in one lifetime – it is a historicized layering of collective experiences of subjugation and oppression and the bloodline wisdom inherited across time from *antepasados*, ancestors, who have sustained it (Anzaldúa 1987; Moraga 2011). This *mestiza* consciousness of accumulated painful histories and complexity of unearned light-skinned *güera* privilege both shroud and enable me to see and understand where my identity merges and diverges from my participants'. Continued reflection upon these shades of sameness and difference shaping my capacity to analyze and understand nuance emerging within and across unfolding data are essential to maintaining trustworthiness and ethical principles within my Chicana Critical Feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal 1998; Smith 1993, 2002; Villenas 2006). What follows is a discussion of research findings detailing the *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care and its underlying *Testimonios* emerging within Rosa's curriculum and pedagogy.

### **Findings: *La Encargada's* revolution: carrying the weight of history, academic achievement, dignity, and well-being**

Rosa enters into battle daily for her *Mexicana/o* students' right to language, dignity, and educational rigor; her war, however, is waged not by steel weaponry but through the enduring woman warrior spirit of *La Revolucionista Encargada*, or simply *La Encargada*, She<sup>2</sup> who will carry, She who will endure. This notion of *carrying* bears significance within a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care and in particular within the context of the multiple responsibilities Rosa shoulders within her *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care. Rosa wages an ambiguous, undetectable war as *La Encargada*, woman warrior who carries upon Her spirit heavy histories of subjugation for *Mexicana/o* People and students' rigorous academic preparation alongside their dignity and well-being.

At times, Rosa readily offers the rootedness of her *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care. She describes a photograph from three decades ago she has brought to our third focus group, 'This is my aunt and my mom ... we were always encouraged to do better than they did. They both worked [the] farms, *eran en la friega* [they were in the struggle] from six in the morning until 11 at night.' The two women stand arm in arm on a sunny day, smiling and looking into the camera. Rosa's reason behind bringing the photograph seems connected to her sense of urgency for uplift conveyed in our first individual interview:

I tell [students] get an education, go on in life ... *con educación pueden llegar muy lejos*, you can accomplish so many thing with that. *La educación es importante y que no se los traten como Mexicanos, que no se vayan al field a trabajar*. [Education is important so they won't treat them like Mexicans, so they won't go the fields to work]

Rosa reveals her spirit of *La Encargada* who likewise toils *en la friega*, fighting for students' dignity and equitable economic options. For *La Encargada*, education is not the neutral acquisition of concepts but a weapon to resist the economic and racialized oppression that *Mexicana/os* face. Rosa reveals

here the *Testimonios* that drives her to prepare students to survive and thrive in a world where *being treated like Mexicans still means being treated as less*. While Rosa's consciousness of the workings of power and racialized oppression is clearly communicated here and echoed in our third focus group months later, it is what she speaks in between that brings to light the ambiguity and duality that is at the heart of her *Revolución*.

When I ask Rosa directly in our first focus group interview about her role as a *Mexicana* educator with regard to advocacy, Rosa responds emphatically:

In college, they tell you, like, 'you have to go out there and advocate for yourself and you have to go out there and protest and you have to go out there ... you have to stand up for yourself ...' and it's like, *Why?! I'm not oppressed*. Ooh, I hate that word. '*You are the oppressed*' and I feel like a roach being pressed.

Rosa's assertions regarding racialized subordination of *Mexicana/os* and her role as a *Mexicana* educator may seem changeable; however, when crystallized within an *endarkened* epistemology (Dillard 2000; Luttrell 2010), a deeper meaning emerges: For Rosa, *Revolución* is not waged by words nor by theory but by struggle (Menchú 1984, 223).

Rosa shares similar *Testimonios* with her students as a *Mexicana* female *en la friega* as language learner, and daughter of a single mother who carried the weight of family by working the onion fields her entire life. Rosa wages war on the subjugation *Mexicana/o* students face by carrying its weight on her spirit. Rosa and *La Encargada* are one in the same, warring tirelessly against second class citizenry by bearing the heavy histories of her People and likewise the academic preparation, dignity, and well-being of her *Mexicana/o* students and their families. *La Encargada* wages an undetectable war beneath the cover of a fluid, mutable, ambiguous *mestizaje*, the historical means of survival for a *Mexicana/o* and *Mestiza/o* People never conquered (Anzaldúa 1987; Rodriguez 1996; Pendleton Jiménez 2006). *La Encargada* living and breathing within Rosa's *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care conceals, reveals, and reconfigures dominant frameworks of social justice revolution we have been taught to recognize.

### ***She who carries the weight of history***

Within Rosa's *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care lies the ethical urgency to carry the weight of subordination her students face as US *Mexicana/os*. This capacity to carry alongside comes predominantly from her mother's *Testimonios* who bore the weight of family, the economic stability of her household, and her daughter's dignity and well-being on her spirit and on her back. The *Testimonios* underlying Rosa's *Revolución* likewise are nourished within her own experiences as a Spanish-dominant, US-born *Mexicana*. Within the following *Testimonios* are seeds of *La Encargada*, visible in Rosa's classroom today.

#### ***Testimonio of mother***

When Rosa speaks of education, of her role as a teacher, and the importance of education for *Mexicana/o* students, she does so in the context of her mother. The spirit of *La Encargada* warring within Rosa's *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care comes into sharp focus within intergenerational *Testimonio* of Rosa's mother who worked many years in the *cebollas*/onion crops. Rosa speaks of her mother solemnly in individual and focus group interviews,

My mom was single. ... [She] would work go in at 6:00, 7:00 in the morning get out at 11:00, 12:00 at night in November/December, *cuando está la cosecha* [during the harvest] ... they used to work for Thanksgiving and Christmas. ... She struggled with everything, so there's times when I don't feel sorry for some students who come and say, 'Oh, my parents are getting divorced' ... *So what ...?! I mean, not so what*, but ... it upsets me ... *me enojo que they use these excuses* ...

For Rosa, her mother's struggle is never removed from fierce expectations she holds for her *Mexicana/o* students and for herself as their teacher,

All these students who are struggling, that's what we're there for ... to push them to move far, not to let these barriers knock them down ... *¿No tienen de comer? Si, todos tienen* [you don't have anything to eat? We do]. Let's

go on. ... This student that we have ... she just went down. She was an 'A' student. ... Like, *no hija, you're capable of doing so much more*. But she just stopped right there, just completely, her life stopped ...

Rosa lived, learned and now educationally enacts her mother's capacity to carry on despite the *friega*, of physical work and the family responsibility she singlehandedly shouldered. Underlying *Testimonios* informing Rosa as an educator today is her mother, who Rosa describes as, 'always strong ... *la trabajadora, la fuerte, la que tenía* [the strong, hardworking one who kept things together] ... 'the backbone of the house. She made me who I am.'

Even amid the weight she carried physically and economically, Rosa's mother rose before the sun every day to make sure her daughter was armed with dignity and pride, 'That's a Mexican thing,' Rosa informs me, to be 'dressed decent ... *bien vestida* [well-dressed] *bien limpia* [clean] ... She'd wake me up *para hacerme mis chongos* [to do my ponytails] before the sun came up ... *y me hace parte dura aquí mis chongos* [she would part my hair *hard* for my ponytails]: Rosa laughs, placing her hands on either side of her face and pulling her skin back to illustrate the tightness of those ponytails. Within the multiplicity of Rosa's mother's roles: shouldering responsibility of her household by working days and nights in the fields while always rising early to send Rosa to school *bien vestida* [well-kept], *La Encargada* is nourished. Rosa's *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care 'prevails through the living memory of [her] ancestors' (Menchú 1984, 188), through interconnected, intergenerational *Testimonios* of her mother who instilled in Rosa the ethical commitment that today constitutes her *Revolución*: Rosa's students must become educated *so they will not be treated like Mexicans in the field*.

Woven into Rosa's *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care is her mother's ongoing war for the dignity and self-worth that was not always offered Rosa as a first-generation, Spanish-dominant, *Mexicana* student of struggling economic means; however, Rosa does not spend much time giving words to this war. What emerges across the data is a *Revolución* that resists form, that challenges the dominant narrative surrounding social justice work. *La Encargada's* war, Her *Revolución*, is instead waged through the lived experience of a girl whose mother would not, in Rosa's words, 'let these barriers knock them down.' Rosa, like her mother before her, *rises early en la friega* to carry great weight, to shoulder the battle for academic rigor, dignity, and well-being on behalf of *Mexicana/o* students and their families.

### **Testimonio of rainbows**

Though intergenerational *Testimonios* of her mother are deeply embedded within Rosa's *Revolución*, her own experiences in schooling likewise inform the enduring spirit of *La Encargada*. I ask Rosa, 'did you ever feel like teachers underestimated you or dismissed you?' She replies, 'Yeah, *he* did. 5th grade.'

When I ask, 'So what was that like?', Rosa responds quickly:

Horrible! [laughing] *No, no te creas* [just kidding]. *No sabes lo que me ponía hacer el maestro* [you wouldn't believe what he had me doing] – *unos rainbows* with ... tissue paper, you would cut ... and then you would wrap them in a pencil with glue? That's what he had me do all year.

I wanted to know more: What did this task mean for her then and now as a bilingual, Spanish-dominant *Mexicana* in the context of who *he* was as a white male teacher? I inquired further into how Rosa thought this teacher may have perceived her academic abilities as Rosa responds in a way which seemingly dismisses her previous assertion, 'I don't think he underestimated me so much ... maybe he liked me because I was a good girl but he had me doing the fun stuff instead of doing the work.' I was curious why Rosa shared this story in response to my inquiry into a teacher who underestimated her and then seemed to take it back. I returned to my original question: 'If you were aware of it then, or are aware of it now, why do you think he underestimated you?' Rosa replies matter-of-factly 'I just think ... I was the good girl, *que* he would rather have me do something fun.' Following the light tone of this response, Rosa's tone swiftly shifts to a solemn depth as she continues, '*pero pienso en él, que aprendí desde esos rainbows* [but I think of him, what I learned from those rainbows] ... *Si, me afecta como yo enseño a mis niños* [Yes, it affects me in how I teach my kids].' In Rosa's shift from her *Testimonio of rainbows* to its role in shaping classroom curriculum and pedagogy for her 6th, 7th and 8th grade mathematics classes is the spirit of *La Encargada*.

Rosa's *Revolución* on behalf of *Mexicana/o* students will not allow her to stay in her 5th grade classroom or her memory of it. She adds: 'I don't know what he thought. I don't know what he was thinking.' Encapsulated in the finality of this statement is Rosa's *Revolución*: She will not speculate as to this teacher's thoughts or opinions of her as a student in his 5th grade classroom. She carries the memory of her year of rainbows only as it informs *La Encargada* warring within her *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care. Today, she plans only rigorous curriculum in which students '*se ponen y estan en la friega* [they put themselves to it, they struggle] ... I could justify that ... it's not ... here, let's color this paper.' The seriousness in her tone with regard to academic rigor is unshakable – Rosa's students will not make rainbows.

### ***La Encargada in the classroom: carrying the weight of dignity and academic rigor***

During the same focus group in which Rosa shares the photo of her mother and aunt arm in arm, she has selected another depicting the earliest manifestations of who she is as a *Mexicana* teacher for *Mexicana/o* students. The photo was taken eight years prior and she is standing on a large dirt mound, joined by a large group of smiling children waving excitedly at the camera. She is surrounded by a rural village of narrow dirt roads and small, brightly-painted homes. She describes the photo:

This is me with some of the students ... in San Juanito in Chihuahua [Mexico]. ... You could see back here, they didn't have heaters ... the parents would donate wood ... everything was written on a blackboard still, and this was 2006 ... It was wonderful just to see how they live, how they have different *costumbres* [customs], las seöras, the parents, they would invite me to eat at their house, *muy humildes muchas pero bien bonito. Te daban a todo.* [very humble but beautiful. They gave everything].

Even when speaking of students who struggle tremendously with no heaters and little access to technology, Rosa remains deeply rooted within a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care framework – she honors students' supportive community, the beauty of their homes, their resilience, the generosity of their families, and their rich cultural wealth. Whether speaking of these students or her students today, Rosa is steadfast and unwavering as to her aims and likewise as to her students' capacity:

Everything affects the way I teach, just pushing them to do the best they can. *Yo siempre los empujo* [I always push them] and I'm just telling them, 'you could do it, you could do it' ... I tell them, 'You guys are smart. You can do anything.' ... They know they can do it, [I say], 'I taught you this, you guys know everything that's on there, don't worry about it' ... just making them again feel proud of who they are.

Throughout this study, Rosa's depictions of the *Testimonios* that give form to *La Encargada's* *Revolución* may sometimes be halting and even at times wavering; however, when discussing her students, the spirit of *La Encargada* is never quiet. She lives and breathes in the urgency with which Rosa plans appropriate curriculum to assess and meet her students' academic needs. In my observation notes, I recorded an interaction with an 8th grade math student where this becomes clear:

The kids are taking a test and Rosa has asked them to do only the even numbers in the book. A male student tells Rosa, 'Thanks, miss. You've made it a little easier on us', to which Rosa responds, 'Well, *mi hijo* [son], I just want to make sure you understand. I'm not trying to work you out.'

Upon hearing these words, the student smiles, nods, and goes back to taking his test. In this brief interaction, Rosa communicates she is intent upon purposeful curriculum that assesses the progress students are making towards understanding mathematical concepts she has taught. She communicates she has not assigned this test for the sake of being busy: to *work them out* for no academic gain but as a meaningful measure of what students know and understand.

What Rosa learned from her mother's resilience '*en las friegas*' and also from '*esos rainbows*' is a lot: Rosa is an educator who values her *Mexicana/o* students' time, understands their strengths and resilience, and demands a great deal academically from them. Because Rosa values the intellectual and cultural richness her students bring, she bears the weight of rigorous curriculum that prepares them to overcome the structural oppression that impacts their lives and positions them to seek more hopeful futures for themselves and their families.

Rosa charges herself not only with high academic expectations for her students but also with building a classroom community which protects and fosters dignity when they feel nervous, exposed, confused, or academically frustrated. During two separate classroom observations, I record students working out problems on the board. I note:

Eduardo ... is struggling to come up with the answer in front of his peers and is taking a long time. Rosa asks him, 'Are you nervous, *mi hijo* [my son]? To which he answers, 'yes, miss'. Rosa then asks Eduardo, '¿Pues, porque estas trabajando solo [well, why are you working alone?]'

In the next recorded observation, similar themes are salient,

Rosa is explaining isolating the variables in an equation. ... Rosa looks right at a student who was making a nervous face as he worked on the board and says to him, 'Julio, you're going to be OK' After communicating to Julio that he has written the wrong answer, Rosa states, '¿Quieres hacerlo de nuevo?' [Do you want to do it again?]. Julio is now shaking his head ... [Rosa says], 'Julio, do you want to pick Alicia to help you?'

In asking these students if they are nervous or need help solving the equations, Rosa normalizes their feelings of angst. Rosa questions not why they cannot operationalize the prescribed math formula but why no one has helped them. These moments could have seemed like a teacher highlighting student struggle in front of others, but they instead were opportunities to connect students to one another and to normalize the stress of not knowing. *La Encargada's* battle is not simply for academic rigor but likewise to preserve and foster students' dignity in the process. In these two examples, Rosa addresses students' frustration and nerves, then supports them through a community of peers. She demonstrates that her role is not to save students: Eduardo and Julio are part of a supportive community and must be self-reliant in either deciding to try the problem again (Eduardo) or in seeking help for themselves (Julio).

During our fourth focus group wherein participants shared self-reflections, Rosa contemplates the interdependence she values for her students. She speaks of the rootedness of her collective approach and reflects further on fostering collectivism alongside self-reliance.

I grew up with my cousins and so family was, *is*, very important ... we all lived together in the same property. ... So, I guess that was my community – my family. And that made us and still makes us strong. ... And maybe that ties into the community we have in our classroom, we all see something and we work together. ... But right now you've got me thinking and reflecting. ... I'm contradicting myself ... because we have Adam [pseudonym]. He's autistic, and the kids stand up for him, and they help him ... you're making me reflect, maybe we shouldn't let these students. ... He needs to stand up for himself ...

Within Rosa's growing consciousness of her *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care, she finds herself navigating the duality of a collectivism which must coexist with students' ability to stand on their own two feet. While she values the collectivism of her upbringing which manifests in her classroom, she works to negotiate the seeming contradiction of fostering individual resilience and independence within collectivism. Within these complex multilayers of academic rigor, dignity, and community lies *La Encargada's* obscured and reconstituted *Revolución*: No matter their strengths or struggles, Rosa bears the weight of honoring both while challenging her *Mexicana/o* students tirelessly toward an improved quality of life.

### ***La Encargada: shouldering responsibility beyond the classroom***

In the middle of fall semester, Rosa informs me she has begun tutoring during Saturday school, a voluntary resource for students who may need extra help outside of the school day, and she will be doing so until the end of the year. While this is a tremendous sacrifice for any teacher, it is especially striking due to the fact that Rosa is the single head of her household raising a 15-year-old son and caring for her mother as her declining health presents continuous challenges. Throughout each week, I have seen Rosa give up her lunch hour, time before school, and afternoons when school lets out to tutor students. I have seen Rosa's lunch grow cold and dry on her desk weekly as she moves about the school and her classroom tending to students' academic and social needs. In my observation notes, I write:

Rosa just offered a student her prep time or time after school to help her with division. When I asked her about it she paused, ‘well, what else do I do? ... I don’t want to embarrass her in front of the class. She just freezes when it comes to division.’

When I asked Rosa, ‘how much time would you say you spend with *this* particular student in a given week?’ she seems surprised that I would see it as out of the ordinary and replies with some confusion, ‘well, she can’t divide.’ In Rosa’s matter-of-fact tone is the answer to my question – this young *Mexicana* student struggles with division, and her academic struggle overrides Rosa’s lunch hour or time before or after school. For Rosa, student success or failure is a weight she carries on her spirit even after she leaves school. In my observation notes and later in my researcher journal, I write:

Rosa is telling me about a unit test her students ‘bombed’, she says, ‘it made me so sad. We went over and over it. *Me da pena. Como me agarra* [It hurts and it grabs me] – *me pega fuerte* [it hits me hard] and I got depressed. We went over it ... but I was talking to my boyfriend about it. *Que pena* [it hurts]’

The failure of Rosa’s students brings pain that she carries home with her after the last bell rings, and counting the hours or her effort is fruitless. Rosa will continue to give of herself and her time so long as there is academic struggle. Rosa’s enduring spirit, *La Encargada*, fights for her *Mexicana/o* students by carrying the responsibility of honoring their time and academic potential, and this duty Rosa charges herself with does not begin nor end with math.

Within a school that serves a *Mexicana/o* population at the perilous intersection of race, class, language, and residency status, Rosa carries the weight of students’ and their families’ struggles with untimely death, incarceration, and deportation. Within my reflective researcher journal, I write:

Rosa is telling me about some of the things her students are facing and how she is working with them to financially sustain their struggle. One student, Jaime, is not here today because his father was killed on Saturday. She has sent me a text [message] about an enchilada dinner she was helping sell tickets for ... ‘to help a family of seven whose two parents are facing deportation’ ... another large fundraising event Rosa co-headed up two years ago [paid] for a family to bring their grandfather’s body back from Mexico.

Within Rosa’s *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care lies the spirit of *La Encargada*, She who will carry social justice revolution on behalf of *Mexicana/o* students and their families through the undetectable weaponry of Rosa’s curriculum and pedagogy.

## Conclusion

Within the ambiguous battle that is her *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care, Rosa fights to heal intergenerational woundedness thrust upon *Mexicana/os* and in doing so, she (re)frames and (re)incarnates dominant paradigms of social justice revolution that our collective eyes and ears today recognize. As Rosa endeavors toward a more solid educational, social, and political *place to stand* (Baca 2002) for *Mexicana/o* students and families, she embodies Chicana and Black Feminist frameworks at the heart of a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care which constructs teaching as the responsibility to carry education as a reclamation site of dignity, as the academic preparation to dismantle oppression in its many forms (Córdova 1994; Cruz 2006; Knight 2004; Moraga 2011). Daily, Rosa bears the weight of constructing curriculum and pedagogy rooted in the complexity of collective self-reliance that enables her students to reach their academic potential and to build a strong sense of their inherent worth. No matter the weight of *Revolución*, Rosa’s spirit will carry on, *must carry on*. Rosa as *La Encargada* carries the collective history and continued struggles of her students, their families, and likewise the weight of generations long gone. By her enduring spirit, Rosa is the healing fulfillment of ‘those who came before us, those whose black-and-white dreams have allowed us to dream in color, whose misery and grief, longing and hopes ... ancestral yearnings ... have fueled our tomorrows (Chávez 2001, 8). Through Rosa’s *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care and the spirit of *La Encargada* lies a subversive path toward survival (R. Martínez 1996) and the power to carry her *Mexicana/o* students – to carry *all* of us – back to a place where we are challenged and cherished into loving ourselves again.

## Scholarly significance

Naming a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Ethic of Care and the ways in which it manifests within the curriculum and pedagogy of Rosa, warring in the spirit of *La Encargada*, provides educators with a conceptual framework to equip *Mexicana/o* students to reach their full capacity and take their rightful place in the world. Within *La Encargada's Revolución* and the particular ways in which it manifests within Rosa's curriculum and pedagogy are the means by which warrior educators of all cultural, linguistic, and gendered backgrounds may likewise construct curriculum and pedagogy as an ethical imperative toward equity. Lastly, these findings may inform all *Revolucionista* educators to reframe and conceal social justice revolution and thereby sustain this war over time on behalf of young people who find themselves at the perilous intersection(s) of race, class, gender, language, and residency status.

## Notes

1. *Mestiza/o* and the colloquial *Mexicana/o* gives name to a racialized, hyphenated ethnic identity, born on both sides of the US–Mexico border (Villenas, 2006), the mixture of indigenous, Spanish, and African ancestry resulting from Spain's sixteenth-century conquest of Mexico and the Southwest (Acuña 1988; Anzaldúa 1987; Córdova, 1994; Gomez 2008; Menchaca 1999). I privilege these terms as they transcend ethnic lines, nationality, geography, and political borders (Delgado Bernal 2006; Valenzuela 1999).
2. I capitalize *Her* and *She* when referring to the spirit of *La Revolucionista Encargada*, or *La Encargada* to highlight a unified warrior spirit across participants. I in no way aim to distance *La Encargada* from participants who embody Her:

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