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“An Awakening of Critical Consciousness: Unfurlings of (Re)Memory, Resistance and Resiliency”

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**“An Awakening of Critical Consciousness: Unfurlings of (Re)Memory,
Resistance and Resiliency”**

by
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Submitted to Scripps College in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of Bachelor of
Arts

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Professor Marina Perez de Mendiola
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Como siempre y con tanto orgullo, amor y felicidad mil gracias a mi comunidad específicamente mi familia. Mama, viendote organizando, siempre saludando a las personas mientras hacías tus compras. Tomando tiempo para conocer e interactuar con personas en relación de sujeto a sujeto. Eras la primera activista que conocí y continuas siendo uno de mis mejores apoyos. Para mi papa y sus conocimientos que desafortunadamente, con el mundo en que vivimos no has sido considerados valiosos. Preguntándote sobre tu niñez y los aprendizajes que ni tu ni mama aprendieron en la escuela pero fueron mis primeros guías. Para mi hermanita que me recuerda fácilmente cuando tengo que estar humble y acordándome que hay diferentes componentes de ser parte de la comunidad y revolución. Para mi hermanito, siempre me inspira a ser una persona mejor en mi entendimiento de mi ser as well as that of the community.

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Thesis Statement: Un Camino Continuo

This thesis is different in approach to what I had been writing during the fall semester of my senior year. Originally, I was ready and excited to write about the “coloniality of being” a theoretical framework furthered¹ by Latin American philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007). I was going to anchor my thesis on this conceptual framework in understanding how food is “decolonial love”² in the context of the Poblano population in New York City and how memory, resistance and resiliency were prevalent in the communities that I came from. Although, this aspect of my work will find its way in a chapter in this thesis in the fall semester I kept getting stuck and had to rethink the nature/object of my thesis. I was caught up in the language and ideas of what was considered “academic”. I was stuck because of the common narrative that is fed to people of color in the academy or the world more generally that we have no “knowledge” to contribute. Given that no one had written about Poblano food in relation to the Mexican diaspora in NYC it was an overwhelming task. I wanted to honor and write about the community that I came from. In asking questions that I will get to later on within the text, when I started writing from the heart and where I saw power I wanted to write about it in a way that felt authentic and amplified those voices that are not traditionally written about³.

Therefore, this thesis is “messy”. It deliberately moves against academic requirements of objectivity, modernity, and positivism. To some it might be considered “non-academic” because

¹ It is credited to Walter Mignolo to have coined that term.

² Chela Sandoval coined that term within her book although Junot Diaz has been the one that has written about it more recently to a broader audience.

<http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/paula-ml-moya-decolonial-love-interview-junot-d%C3%ADaz>

³ What made it hard to move forward was that the information was not there. I had to ask myself the question after I had finished my fall semester of my senior year what type of thesis I wanted to make. Given limited time and resources I would not have been able to give it the honor that it needed. I didn’t forget my roots but rather las fortalezi being at Scripps these past four year and enduring a surprising amount of pain and resistance.

in discussing topics such as love, community, hope and imagination that are contradictory in the academy. This thesis then, is work that comes through lived experiences. It is a representation about what intersectionality⁴ coined by black feminist and lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and developed further by sociologist and black feminist Patricia Hill Collins, means to me, particularly as a student of color at Scripps College in Claremont, CA in my last semester of college. This thesis does not adhere to “traditional” academic criteria which I feel tends to be rigid, constrained ways of regurgitating knowledge. It is not easily digestible, nor is it something that offers concrete answers. Rather it is a critical understanding of many of my experiences in the last four years of education, with a specific focus on the most recent events that have unfolded in my personal and academic life. This thesis is a journey. A journey that I have taken that has consisted of walking random roads but somehow finding my way back to what sparks a fire of hope in me. It is by witnessing communities in New York City, Bolivia, Tlaxcala, Mexico City, Chiapas and Southern California that continue to struggle and hope in the face of neoliberal, power-hungry nation-states, that propels me forward and brings me hope and renewed sense of consciousness as to where I want to go.

Introduction: Modernity and Discourse

When ideas of “modernity” and “objectivity” are of high value and at the forefront of Western thought, it is no wonder that the traditional systems of research receive accolades, are revered and seen as the ultimate truth and nothing but the truth. There is a great disservice done whether it is intentional, to the citizen-subjects that are caught in these paradoxes. In truth there

⁴ Video about what intersectionality is from Kimberly Crenshaw:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DW4HLgYPIA>

is no such thing as being impartial and objective because as we go through the world we are conditioned, guided, taught and raised to believe in certain world views depending on circumstances that are tied to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, immigration status, to name a few. As Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset stated, “yo soy yo y mi circunstancia”. Ortega y Gasset states the basis of life. To claim “objectivity” and to question people and their disciplines as “objective” is difficult because it has been instilled in us that *they* know better. But it is Western hegemony that needs to be addressed because it has implications and ramifications in the lives of many, but particularly in those of the marginalized voices and bodies in the world.

Starting with the concept of modernity, there are many ways to begin a discussion on the impact it has had on the colonality of being. As I enrolled in more courses relating to the concept and had a deeper understanding of the ramifications modernity had as a tool and discourse wielded in societies to further perpetuate the systems of power that we live under, separate worlds clicked in my head. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres states, *On The Coloniality of Being*, “modernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without colonality, and colonality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses” (244). Maldonado-Torres recognizes that modernity is a symptom of colonality. The discourse of “being modern” further reinforces colonialism and white supremacy. The agenda of modernity is pushed on communities as something to strive towards and the modernist discourse is used and wielded in such a way that people’s ways of living and understanding the world are questioned. Under the guise of progress and looking towards the future, a people's food, language, traditions, cultures and memories are systematically attacked. The discourse is in effect a violent form of being and thinking. It is violence inflicted on communities of color and particularly indigenous

and black people in the Americas via reinforced stereotypes that have been repeated through time such as being “backward” and thus “unintelligent”.

It seeped into science as well, as Maldonado-Torres writes, “scientific racism and the very idea of race were the most explicit expressions of a widespread and general attitude regarding the humanity of colonized and enslaved subjects in the Americas and Africa in the sixteenth century” (Maldonado-Torres 244). From the micro to the macro level, the bodies of colonial subjects have been fashioned in relation to the colonizer or the people in power. When the stereotype and discourse are naturalized in society it stands to reason why despite the end of colonization and slavery the ramifications are still felt and in fact have evolved so that the hierarchies are very clear and distinct, despite many people insisting that it ended years ago. These hegemonies need to change and be challenged because it has caused immense pain, trauma and sorrow in communities throughout the world. However, I do not wish to solely highlight the negative impact modernist discourse has had on communities of color. It is a disservice to people that continue to challenge the world by existing, surviving, thriving, passing down knowledge and wisdom in ways that do not fit under the guise of modernity. It makes me reflect on the significance then that modernity has had in my life and my understanding of the world in relation to being a child of the *diaspora Mexicana* in NYC. As a Chicana in NYC, deciding to go to college on the other side of the country was something no one in my community had done before.

Con el Nopal en La Frente: Migración y Familia

I acknowledge the sacrifices as well as the choices that my parents made, so that I was able to have immense privilege. It was something I knew from a very early age. I am the oldest

of three, my parents migrated from Mexico City and Izucar de Matamoros arriving in NYC. Being documented, having the ability, the freedom to travel is something that so many of us take for granted. Recognizing the people who do not have the ability to travel due to physical borders and the unimaginable grief that results from this inability; these borders are enforced on people and show how much power governments unjustly have over us and how hierarchies are reinforced with borders. Understanding that neoliberal policies had a huge effect that propelled migration from Mexico to the United States in whatever way possible is to recognize once again the violence that was inflicted on people. No one wants to leave their homeland, risking their lives, their bodies, going into debt unless there are forces beyond their control that pushes them to do what needs to be done in order to survive. The horrors of trying to cross the border given the hyper-militarization, extortions, narco-traffickers, coyotes as well as environmental obstacles is not something that is often talked about within the communities that I come from, but it looms over people. In recent years it has only gotten worse with the border budget being at an all-time high. In 2016 the budget was around 3.8 billion⁵. Many people do not make it to their destinations and they remain the faceless, the invisible, the forgotten, the dead⁶. To a certain degree it has become the norm to yearn going to the United States because it is one of the only chances that people have to affect not just their lives at the personal level but that of their

⁵https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/the_cost_of_immigration_enforcement_and_border_security.pdf

⁶ A good book that is written about the journey of Central Americans and their journey to the US/Mexico is *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* by Oscar Martinez. It is important to recognize the complicity that the Mexican state and people has with people migrating from other parts of Latin America. We need to do better.

community. The links that they have in Mexico do not go away and if anything, it is a constant presence in people's minds while in the United States.

Imagining, dreaming, hoping, loving, resistance, resiliency, memory, survivance, surviving, thriving. These are all words that swirl through/around my mind on a daily basis and words that roll off my tongue as I speak to people. These words have power as all words do. But these words wield power in such a way that to speak them or write them into existence is to be defiant and challenge hegemonies that have been set up in such a way that people oftentimes fall into pits of despair. Recognizing that living in the world that we are living in, our existence as people of color, as people with complex intersectional identities is in and of itself resistance. Knowing that our history is embedded into our DNA⁷ and that oftentimes our histories are not known to us in an attempt to erase, eradicate what marginalized people know to be true and it is that imagining, hoping and loving towards a world in which many worlds fit is possible. As a study in 2006 put it, "However, one of the more startling reports published in 2005 challenges this belief and suggests that epigenetic changes may endure in at least four subsequent generations of organisms"(Weinhold A163). To have evidence that is backed by science validates the existence of what people have known in their core. People of color are intimately vinculada to what was is and will be and they understand it in their DNA. To actively resist requires action every day and understanding that it goes beyond us as individuals and even us within our small communities of individuals. Being able to think about the collective, the community in such a way that encapsulates the essence of us as the collective is something that is hard to achieve because it requires us to be active in our understanding of our relationship to

⁷Weinhold, Bob. "Epigenetics: The Science of Change." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 114.3 (2006): A160–A167. Print.

the world. It is not to say that the individual is not important but to also understand that in the hyper-capitalistic world that we currently live in, especially in the United States, splintering people apart is a way in which we are not able to see the power, resources and love that we have and should be able to share among ourselves.

Recognizing that we have to do community care and that it does involve self-care and healing in such a way so that things like burn-out do not happen because we are taking care of ourselves not just in the physical sense but mentally, spiritually, emotionally and in relation to one another. Because community care is not the norm we see people being burned out, people leaving movement spaces completely because they are so depleted, mental illnesses arising because we have not been taught how to take care of ourselves in ways that bring us together; it is a constant learning process. For so long, generationally, the important and overarching force in life was surviving. Starting on the healing process takes time, patience and understanding that it is a painful process because it has to be done in a holistic manner. The mainstream narrative surrounding healing is that it involves only one person and it means being happy by any means necessary.

Acknowledging that healing is not linear and that it is cyclical means that people have to be patient with themselves and see that it is a process that looks different for everyone. It is especially difficult not to get discouraged when the usual narrative is around being able to do everything quickly and efficiently. To that degree, healing is inherently anti-capitalist. Because there is this idea in society that time is money it is easy to get caught up in others processes and journeys and not recognizing how much needs to be processed, untangled and confronted based on not just people living in today's society but that of their ancestors. There is so much to

remember, to excavate, to recognize, to accept, to define, to come into and it is terrifying. It is stepping into a deeper understanding of yourself in accordance to everything around you. It is in a certain way, depending on people's beliefs, a connection of the soul in accordance to the body, aligning in ways that are not visible and do not conform to “modernity” and “rationality”. Healing is not easy because it means that there is so much that people need to be gentle within the process of understanding of themselves. The traumas left behind, the scars, the imprints of living life is embedded into us in ways we are not cognizant of. It is amazing coming into deeper understandings of the self especially with colonization and other mechanisms that were used to fundamentally change the way the world was. Recognizing the power it had on people as well as the world that we live in is to witness intergenerational trauma. It is also recognizing the intergenerational wisdom that is kept alive despite non-stop attempts at quelling and erasing. It ties so neatly to our critical and ongoing understanding of what coloniality of being is and the ever-expanding understanding of it, especially given that those types of works are being made more accessible to people out of academia or social justice circles.

I: Hegemonies and Discourse: Understanding First Steps towards Sustainable Communities

The goal of the people who are resisting and rebelling everyday is to regain the ability to have a sustainable community. One of the key understandings towards building that community or collective consciousness is the reconocimiento that forming new hegemonies⁸ through discourse is a necessary step. Having the opportunity to read scholars that transcend the

⁸ Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist that while sentenced and carrying out his sentence in prison wrote over thirty pieces of literature but whose understanding of cultural hegemony was critical. The writing and theoretical framework continues to be key moving ahead towards building new hegemonies. But with hegemonies, the connotation that it has had and continues to have as the word itself.

dominant narrative or hegemony that emerges out of the progressive political sphere has been one of the biggest “aha” moments in my life. It led to a bigger recurring question throughout my time in Oventik. Oventik was the caracol that we stayed in during the week. Oventik is the place in which the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* is based along with other necessities for the communities such as schools, clinics, restaurants and shops to buy Zapatista produced products. In Oventik, we were fortunate enough to be part of the only language school.. While in Chiapas, we would take classes with the *promotores de education* (education promoters) which were regular community people that guided us through classes. The reason it is organized in this fashion is because student teacher relations are seen as hierarchical and vertical in nature, as opposed to non-hierarchical and horizontal. During my studies there, a question came up for me while taking part in the classes, discussions and convivencia with the community: how can we get to a point in our collective consciousness in which we are willing to risk our lives for what we believe in? Where do people draw their strength to stay within movements of resistance? As extreme as it may seem these questions kept coming up for me. What does it mean to risk your life and personal safety for a movement? Social movements can not be something that people are semi-committed to when encountering paths of struggle and liberation. The feeling, the unwavering support and struggle has to consistently be bone-deep. When I look towards the Zapatistas and their twenty plus years of struggle I am in awe. They have been able to combine thought not only through words but action to build the world they want to live in. This stands in stark difference in relation to the United States and the movements or organizing that takes place here

Understanding that the United States is in a critical time and space with the shifting of movements that are happening/emerging, a lot of work still has to be done. Discourses have been bought up and written about and are continuing to materialize in a way that is able to look towards the sustainability and greater understanding of movements. Building on the questions that my time in Mexico elicited, my aim is to explore how people in the US are building new counter hegemonies. What the Zapatistas have been articulating and writing about is being seen as “common sense” and is raising collective consciousness in order to build a “world in which many worlds fit.” Being able to bridge the gap between my experiences in Oventik and the communities that I envision going back to in the United States is central to my inquiry here. The works of fundamental authors such as Paulo Freire and bell hooks will guide me in the path that I am exploring as I walk it and try to understand my own position in the struggle for dignity and liberation. There is so much learning to be done through the writings of many that it is hard to understand where to start.

Over the course of the last fifty years, there has been an emergence of post-colonial writers who are able to express themselves in such a way that it ties the idea of organic and traditional intellectual that Gramsci writes about, validating the writing as “academic” while also affirming the lived realities of people of color in the United States. With the emergence of writers like Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua in the 20th century, new hegemonies started to form. Through their writings they made visible and articulated what being a Chicana can mean, what being working poor is, and they unravelled the complexities of our identities in a country that hates these ideas and thoughts and attempts to systematically kill people of color. Their courageous efforts and accomplishments were a source

of realization, radicalization and rebellion for me within this institution. They were the creative and political impulses that open the doors in the 21st century to an abundance of writers and critical thinkers and doers. They empowered new generations to write about topics that, for example, I, like others, thought were only ideas we had as individual. Thanks to these writers various communities have been able to access resources that were previously only for a select audience. This is inciting a consciousness that is starting to manifest itself in this generation in a very different way from other periods in history. This initiates a movement that aims to bridge the gap between thought and action towards a praxis and towards an understanding of a radical and liberating ideology.

One thing that would be useful to ask in the process of bridging this gap would be; why is the canon that we tend to read and cite in understanding more of ourselves and the world always a white Eurocentric cannon? Recognizing that a person like Karl Marx was not not the only person to discuss concepts such as capitalism, seizing the means of production, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. However, the academy have elevated him and his work to a degree that could be considered alarming considering the fact that so many other people including indigenous people in the Americas have talked about the same concepts and theories without the same institutional recognition. In fact they are lumped together under the umbrella of Marxism and its branches. That is to a certain degree damaging in our critical understanding and reflection of the self and what that means under the coloniality of being. In being cognizant of the words that we use we should also be aware of who is saying it, when they are saying it and the intention behind it. We tend to get hypercritical, and I have been guilty about it but understanding the context of the written pieces helps us form a more cohesive and comprehensive understanding of

how we can appreciate what was written, critique it and move forward in a way that keeps unifying people rather than subjugating them to further disintegration within the community.

One of the people who has been influential in the context of radical and liberating ideology has been bell hooks. It is important to understand that no struggle works in a vacuum; the reconocimiento that all oppression is connected and that people are able to be influenced by other struggles and paths of life is why bell hooks is such a critical figure within the US context. There is so much brilliance and generosity within her writing that much of it has been a source of inspiration for. For the purpose of this work, the piece that I will be focusing on throughout this paper is *Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness*.

In the article *Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness* she opens with some important and critical questions that have a lot to do with understanding what resisting within the capitalistic system means. She writes, “Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of the colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? This choice is crucial. It shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practice and our capacity to envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts.” (hooks *Choosing the Margin* 203). This has been a question that we have seen posed time and time again within different social movements in the battle against capitalism. It is critical especially when thinking about doing things like attending graduate school with the knowledge that there are unquestionable privileges that come with being an academic. But as bell hooks writes, being able to still be in

the struggle despite the access that you potentially have to power and material wealth is what being in the margins means. Especially as people of color, it is important to remember that we cannot let ourselves be swayed from our ideals and lose our dignity. There are obviously people of color within the United States who enforce the capitalistic, patriarchal white supremacist agenda but it is imperative that the reminder that all oppression is connected and needs to be acted out on.

In talking about the importance of praxis, bell hooks presents how people from marginalized communities view the world. She writes, “I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me” (hooks *Choosing the Margin* 204). This is something that I was able to see within the Zapatista movement during my time in Oventic. Their understanding of the world through the languages and words that they speak and invoke is radically different from the languages that I speak. One example was the word *ch’ulel* which can be roughly translated to consciousness/dignity/spirit. As Nathalio said in class, “si no sabe quién eres, cómo vas a saber en qué dirección vas a ir” in regards to understanding the concept of *ch’ulel*. I think it interweaves seamlessly with what hooks wrote about the understanding of what having multiple voices within herself means. It is not just her writing but the understanding from the communities that she has been a part of and her ancestors and those that have passed on that are able to be shown within her writing. In the article she addresses how “language is also a place of struggle... our words are nothing without meaning, they are an action, a resistance” (hooks *Choosing the Margin* 203-204). This is what building new discourses and forms of hegemony means in the context of the US. Without a solid

foundation in the hegemonies that we are forming to fight against the oppressive ways of being what ends up happening is a movement without a specific aim or ways to make it sustainable.

The readings that have come from the Zapatistas are a perfect example of what forming new hegemonies looks like. The accessibility of the documents that we read are important to note in understanding how we can build long-term movements. Along with their day-to-day struggle, recognizing that new discourse needs to be put out so that collective consciousness can be achieved is one of the ways in which the Zapatistas are considered revolutionary and an example for other movements throughout the world.

Freire also talks about praxis in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when he writes, “Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus even greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality” (37). Both bell hooks and Paulo Freire have managed to write in such a way that people who were oftentimes excluded from these discourses could read them and take something tangible out of their writing. The understanding of what radicalization means is useful in thinking of how to form sustainable communities and collectives. With radicalization comes the actions that takes us back to the question of how to get to the point of risking your life for what you believe in.

The circumstances in the United States are forcing us to think of what collective experiences are in order to understand and accomplish next steps. We have different ways of being and understanding the world that are unique to the United States and so have processes that are different that of other movements like the Zapatistas. There is a greater grasp on the lived experiences being able to manifest themselves on paper. It is the understanding that as people who have been exploited since before being born, there has to be the ability to understand who

you are in relation to your community and why you are fighting for what you are fighting for. As hooks writes “Our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting... Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised” (Choosing the Margin 204). hooks is able to inscribe/mark/etch on paper the understanding that living in the United States means being able to recognize the need to build alternatives to the oppressive hegemonic state that we live in. It cannot mean participating in the revolution on your own, but rather being able to be in community and lifting collective consciousness. In a space that molds people to be individualistic and pushes them to climb to the top through the seductiveness of the “American Dream” while making sure most never make it to that top, doing what hooks does is resistance because their knowledge and understanding are not just staying with themselves but rather acknowledging that everyone needs these types of knowing. We need to understand who we, as the collective, are in order to build spaces within our living experiences that have the ability to manifest themselves in the praxis that we have been building and walking towards. We are only at the beginning of the long journey in freeing ourselves from our oppressors and taking active steps in changing this world into a place where many worlds are able to exist.

Through dialogue and language new hegemonies can be built and sustained in a way that will make a path towards true liberation in a dignified manner. Words have a very important place in the fight that we are engaging in every day. Within the words of bell hooks new hegemonies and forms of being are brought to light in a way that is not exclusionary. We are being the authors of our knowledge and understanding. Through the Zapatistas, there is also a lot of inspiration to draw from by being able to see how they are resisting every single day. It is important to remember, however, that there are different paths to achieve a new world and

people like bell hooks are writing about the collective's hopes and transcending the dominant narrative. Their work has allowed me to better approach the question that plagued me while in Mexico around this idea of people drawing their strength to risk their lives for what they believe in.

II: Imagining and Engaging in Words as Power

Words are important to be able to move forward and engage in practices of a world in which many worlds fit. To engage in that plural understanding of the world, one must examine a movement that has sparked extensive conversation on a global scale regarding how to go about constructing new realities-the Zapatistas/EZLN (Zapatista Army for National Liberation). Since their uprising in January 1, 1994 after NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) was enacted much has come out from the movement as well as from outsiders. After hundreds of years of marginalization by Mexican society, historically high child mortality rates, high illiteracy rates, various indigenous Mayan groups were not willing to be silenced any further. It is important to note that all of the EZLN's speeches were translated from Spanish to English and their comunicados are still being translated in various languages by volunteers. One of the striking aspects of the comunicados is the language that is used. As they've written and spoken, their understanding of the world and how people should go about the world is from "abajo y a la izquierda"- down and to the left and living with dignity. What this means is, for one thing, using language that is accessible or making sure that words and concepts that are oftentimes used in an academic setting are explained. Their way of communicating to the outside world is remarkable in that it engages the audiences and readers. Subcomandante Galeano (formally known as Subcomandante Marcos) is known to use characters such as Don Durito, a beetle or el Viejo

Antonio as well as storytelling to relay information and knowledge. Traditional intellectuals are ones trained solely in the academy or with their knowledge deriving from it. Organic intellectuals on the other hand do not have to be inside academia but have gained knowledge through everyday living. What the Zapatista movement does is interweave the functions of the organic and traditional intellectual, avoiding the binary opposition that frames it challenging our Western outlook of the world.

Another writer whose work is studied that continuously challenges and confront our understanding of the world is Gloria Anzaldúa. In her iconic text *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Anzaldúa was able to craft a world in which our understanding of it is ever-changing. Her use of poetry, her slipping into Spanish, Spanglish, theories and frameworks is a way to enter in and analyze how through her work the reader can have a more holistic understanding of life. The use of imagination in both the Zapatistas' and Anzaldúa's writing counteracts hegemonic states of knowing which include logic, reason and doubt. To introduce the imaginary, dreaming is an act of defiance to the hyper-capitalistic white supremacist world we're under. Language has power and being able to construct new hegemonies through a critical understanding of Anzaldúa's and the Zapatistas' words is a step towards living with dignity.

With the Zapatistas, it is fascinating to delve into their use of certain words and their radically different understanding of the world via their Mayan languages. English often comes across to some of us as a very two-dimensional language which through conversing feels like a single straight road without many bifurcations. Languages like Tsotsil engage according to a "subject to subject" understanding of the world and not following the customary "subject to object" that keeps framing many Western non-indigenous languages. Tsotsil is more

three-dimensional and engages us in a cyclical and prolonged way of understanding the world and our role within it. Subcomandante Marcos powerfully grasped this idea in *Nuestra Palabra es Nuestra Arma*: “Una persona sin historia sin pasado no existe y no tiene futuro/A person without history without a past doesn’t exist and doesn’t have a future” (94). It invokes and puts into question how much of our history including personal is passed on. There are certain types of knowing that are prioritized and seen as important. Being able to have memory that is handed down is crucial in the process of creating the path towards new worlds. Understanding the past and recognizing it is vital towards remembering the millennia in which the earth has existed and will continue to exist. We are existing in this moment as a tiny blip of history. However, by being able to reconcile that form of knowing we are able to move with purpose in the present and towards the future. Living in Western societies has conditioned us to think of time as linear and limited. Being open and receptive to not thinking of humans as the *end all be all*, that is that everything starts and ends with humans we can start to critically examine the way we are living. It shows us how we can reconcile our failures with intention as we embark into the journey created through being able to live in harmony while engaging in dismantling oppressive systems of domination.

Throughout a class I took my fall semester of my fourth year Translation and Right to Language one of the aspects that we have discussed at length was why words are important. The Zapatistas inspire, move and bring hope through words and language structure that create new epistemologies and ways of knowing. One important principle that they abide by out of the seven that constitutes their attitude towards life is *mandar obedeciendo* which means to command by obeying. The language that they engage in is not grandiose but engages communities that are the

most marginalized, indigenous people of Mexico. The Zapatistas in public all wear some type of mask that leave only their eyes for the world to see. By creating this basis of anonymity, it forces outsiders to look deep into the texts—oral or written-- that have been crafted by many in the community even when it is delivered by a few. One of the famous spokesperson was Subcomandante Marcos but he has been adamant as well as the EZLN has that their writing represents the voices of many undermining the cult of the individual that so dominates Western codes of life. They are constructing new realities as they walk the path of dignity. It is not a movement that claims to have answers, it involves people in a participatory way inviting all to share the journey to dare to imagine and to have hope. It is resisting the systemic process of forgetting that is central in our current societies to prevent people from engaging and creating outside of the mainstream. *Mandar obedeciendo* invokes alternative forms of knowing that don't frame hegemonic imperialist states as the center of control but rather operates under an understanding that in order to lead one must obey. When thinking about leading it does not follow the customary hierarchy of leadership; it brings up horizontal leadership that acknowledges and puts into questions what traditional colonial modes of leading are and engages in changing the narrative to one of the people's.

Looking into different texts and speeches the word dignity is, for example, used time and time again and indicating a non-linear way to interact with others. As Subcomandante Marcos writes, “el concepto de dignidad que no es algo que se entienda con la cabeza si no es algo que se vive o que se muere es algo que se siente dentro del pecho dentro del sentimiento de ser humano/ the concept of dignity as something that can't be understood with the mind but rather is something that is lived or that you die for, it is something that is felt in the soul inside of the

understanding of human beings” (Nuestra Palabra 93). Having to translate from Tsotsil into Spanish and into English is a good example as to why translation is not an exact science and how true translation is about being able to understand the essence of the words rather than a literal translation of the word. The concept of dignity through this explanation is able to push against our narrow understanding of the word. In this example the reader can see that dignity is not just a word but that it instead forces us to see it as a path in which there is something that cannot be described in words but rather felt. It can not be rationalized and that is something that traditionally strikes fear into “modern society”. The idea of modernity is a way to further subjugate marginalized communities into ways of thinking that disempowers and makes people lose hope.

Modernity is a way to manipulate people under the guise of progress and tangible outcomes. What the Zapatistas then do is reframe our ideas of progress and outcomes. The idea of the journey rather than the destination is critical when understanding how the Zapatista movement is still fighting and changing in its attempt to engage the world in dialogue, a world in which many worlds fit. It breaks away from notions such as “seeing is believing” and asks us to engage in imagining and dreaming- something that not a lot of us do because it is not seen as a valuable process the older people get. Our society also keeps us “busy” in many detrimental ways in order to ensure that our ability to imagine and dream is dwarfed particularly afraid that it may challenge the power structures that rule us. The single word dignity in such a context is engaging in a deeper more rooted way of being and aiming towards “decoloniality.”

Decoloniality is the process in which people are resisting and rebelling against cycles of violence that they face on a day to day basis and that have been passed on generation after generation-

hurt and trauma has been central to understanding identities but what Zapatistas offer is hope and intergenerational wisdom⁹. Engaging and re-engaging in these types of understandings can only help in being able to build towards futures beyond our wildest imagination.

Hope is precisely another critical word used within the Zapatista's language. As Subcomandante Marcos writes with the understanding that it is written collectively, "children in the mountains of the Mexican Southeast grow up learning that 'hope' is a word that must be pronounced collectively, and they learn to live with dignity and respect for difference. Perhaps one of the differences between these children and those from other areas is that these children learn, at a young age to see tomorrow" (The Speed of Dreams 69). This is a beautiful piece of writing because it works in conversation with other rebellious actions and thoughts. It evokes dreams of a better future and towards deeper community and commitment for one another in the fight towards dignity and liberation. The ability to see tomorrow is something that is hard to cultivate. As colonial subjects, surviving is oftentimes the only recourse for marginalized people because they were not meant to survive. To not only survive but hope conveys a deeper understanding of not just themselves as individuals but as a collective. It also helps extend and be able to move forward in ways that heal and challenge the systems put into place that constantly seek to enact violence on communities that dare to fight back. With the word hope, it is clear that people are knowingly going against the cruel systems that operate by exploiting the marginalized. Hope combats the subject-object relation that can only see the other as object in order to build subjectivity. To build subjectivity is to recognize that someone is a subject thus

⁹ For a good introduction of what indigneous people in Chiapas face an accessible document in English is available here: <http://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/library/southeast-winds-storm-prophecy/>

human. It is not the type of thinking that has unfortunately as we have witnessed been stressed in the current dominant society.

With Anzaldúa and her use of metaphors throughout her writing challenges hegemonic writing and attempts to understand the world in a way that changes the narrative. Gloria Anzaldúa was a writer, poet and theorist who was born in Texas and pushed the boundaries of what being Chicana meant. Through her writing Anzaldúa is able to go to different realms and takes the reader along with her through her journey of understanding. As Anzaldúa writes, “the odds were heavily against her. She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but she kept stoking the inner flame. She remained faceless and voiceless, but a light shone through her veil of silence” (Borderlands 45). Her different selves have served to protect her in a world that deemed her unworthy and disposable. Because of the inner rebel that is always present as a reaction to the world that people face, it is easy to get stuck in the mindset of the world as a cruel place. But in those three sentences so much is conveyed as to the incredible resiliency of marginalized subjects. Building and biding time with an understanding that it is not linear but rather a social construct is to engage in true change that is critical in remembering our spatial timeframe and recognizing all history and understanding of how to work towards a vision of hoping, dreaming and imagining that works to undue colonial mindsets that work to undermine true communities in their complexities. Engaging in this work is a constant struggle that is being undone at all times. To remain vigilant and critical is to take conscious steps towards liberation and dignity. Healing is no easy work. It is a painful process that forces people to reconcile their various selves. What Anzaldúa attempts is to guide us through ways of knowing with a critical

understanding as to how we can move forward in conversation with one another. She also introduces a concept namely “*la facultad*.” Anzaldúa writes,

“*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface...It’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate...This shift in perception, deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul)” (Borderlands 60-61).

The way that Anzaldúa sets up *la facultad* transitions to writing what people can feel but proves harder to express. She engages in shifting the paradigm of what academic writing is supposed to be. Rather Anzaldúa enters in conversation with her lived experiences as well as her surroundings. Acknowledging the importance of lived experiences is critical in engaging in the conversation of traditional and organic intellectual. By writing about *la facultad* it is also putting into question ideas of modernity and all its attributions. *La facultad* is not tangible and can not be researched in ways that would be considered “academic” but rather engaging in the other, that is what is not “reality.” By using both soul and the underworld, Anzaldúa challenges her readers in all of their complexities to look beyond our understanding of real vs unreal and engage in what could be considered the supernatural, the imaginary or the inexplicable. This is one of the ways in which Anzaldúa excels, expands Chicana epistemologies and encourages us to be critical of what society has deemed to be rational and true. What Anzaldúa invites her readers to do is also to hope and imagine. There are ways in which people feel and view their reality that challenges and puts into question these systems of oppression that operate insidiously and very quietly.

While Anzaldúa uses her experience as a mestiza navigating the US and her experiences, being able to put her work in conversation with the Zapatistas’ allows the use of imagining the potential of knowledge production. Throughout Zapatista writing, one of the ways that they fight

and rebel is through language. As previously mentioned, the language that people speak, have a lot to do with the way they go about life. As delivered by Subcomandante Marcos in Oaxaca, “there are words in it (indigenous languages) that speak of the history we are, yes, but that also speak of tomorrow. One must know how to listen to these words, and one must know how to brandish those words so that others might be born who will speak of a time yet to come... if we learn to listen, we would find in our language that for us, the indigenous, tomorrow means being as we are and being with everyone” (Speed of Dreams 76). It invites people towards thinking of the future in non-linear ways and thinking about the collective and what the potential of community can look like. Time is not conceived in a constrained manner rather it ebbs and flows. They acknowledge the importance of words but rather than using jargon the Zapatistas ground it into the experiences of everyday people. It transcends Western thought and cuts through cycles of indoctrination in which progress and modernity are the only things that matter. In languages that counteract hegemonic, imperialistic and colonial languages what is shown is different pathways of resistance that lead towards new realities being imagined and created.

In a similar vein, Anzaldúa is able to encapsulate the colonial subject and the resistance and fight towards remembrance within a US context. She writes, “debajo de mi humillada mirada está una cara insolente lista para explotar. Me costó muy caro mi rebeldía- acalambada con desvelos y dudas, sintiéndome inútil, estúpida, e impotente/ beneath my humiliated stare is a insolent face ready to explode. The cost was very steep for my rebellion- cramping with doubts and sleepless nights, feeling useless, stupid and powerless” (Borderlands 37). It is important to point out that it was written in Spanish because it shows how languages that were forced upon people and inherently colonial like Spanish can, when seen in the backdrop of the United States

and its hegemonic practices of English, become a tool of resistance. As she writes about the ways in which she continuously rebels and challenges the systems of power it is inspiring. Those feelings that she expresses: feeling useless, stupid and powerless are ways in which populations and communities are subdued. This awareness of the self is one that people do not engage in as often as they should. To invoke words such as “rebellion” and “explode” is defying norms that were set up to contain. In conversation with one another, Anzaldúa and the Zapatistas invite readers to be critical and defy “logic” with hope and imagination. With these new veins of understanding, usurping models of power and dominance grows closer and closer.

In regard to words and how Anzaldúa and the Zapatistas as a collective view words and language, their ways of understanding raise awareness with how to live. The Zapatistas state, “because our most ancient say that words are sounds that are lived, not the noise that fills... in our memory we guard all colors, all routes, all words, and all silences” (Speed of Dreams 91). It encapsulates a vivid and intimate knowledge and wisdom that comes from generations past whose memory is honored by the path the Zapatistas made, on that brings about hope and light. It isn’t an abstract understanding of the world but rather a nuanced and deeper awareness of the world around us and what inhabits it whether or not it is human. There is something special about not just being interested in words and language but also the silence that inhabits them and what it means in the process of walking a path towards liberation. As Anzaldúa writes in regard to language, “for a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish the first language; for a people who live in a county in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo... what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable to communicating the realities and values

true to themselves--- a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both” (Borderlands 77). Creating a new language because of the repression stemming from many places, a way of protection as well as a critical way of being is seen here. While for the Zapatistas, it means fighting for their indigenous languages because it is their way of life, Anzaldúa on the other hand is fighting for the ability to create new languages and be able to be free and seek to build sustainable communities. What is key to remember is that the Zapatistas do not claim to have the answers to everything. On the contrary, they are building the path by walking on it. There is not one way to go about producing change and action that will dismantle systems of dominance and power. Through our different wisdoms and knowledge, working together, bridging gaps and being in the collective through tiny steps is a move in the right direction.

Bringing Anzaldúa and the Zapatistas in conversation with one another gleans new knowledge and ways of being. Words have power and the way that they wield them shows people that there are ways to go about fighting in various capacities but working towards a world in which many worlds fit. The ability to imagine and hope is one that people are constantly working towards not just as individuals but as communities that seek to build a path in which through conversations with one another, systems of oppression are brought down. Having the privilege to read and understand the importance of words that are not just words but rather action, something that is viscerally felt is key in moving forward. Working together for realities that seem far away and a figment of the imagination is to create new understandings on how to truly live and thrive, not just survive. Being in cycles of survivance makes it difficult to live. However, it is through the work of others, guiding and learning that slow and small steps are

made¹⁰. Since time is a social construct, people can not be limited to thinking that we do not have a lot of time on earth. Rather this invites us to think as to how the world is moving and how it can continue to move for the future generations. Hoping for better times in which people won't have to think about just surviving but rather have the space and understanding to hope and look at tomorrow as an opportunity to be in community. The building blocks are slowly being formed towards new ways of being.

The word is important but the praxis is a way of resistance that was cultura situated knowingly or unknowingly. Community through food is also a way in which bonds grow stronger. Food is not just something to do but traditionally has meant being in a mutually beneficial relationship with the earth. From chinampas to milpas to a rancho both of my parents grew up with a more intimate relationship to the earth. Cutting caña after skipping school to go to the river with his buddies, my dad's existence in Izucar de Matamoros is one that stands in stark contrast to mine. Even my mom's journey being raised in la ciudad de México. Idealizing it, is also not something i want to engage in but these differences have provided significant backdrops for my life. Both of them coming from Central and South of Mexico with similar enough customs but still very different from each other in views of the world. I grew up in NYC the "melting pot" where Mexicanes was enforced through everything except for public school.

III: Del Mercado a la Mesa: Poblano Food as a Vehicle Towards Resistance, Resiliency and Memory- From Mexico to NYC

Writing, theorizing and researching on the Mexican diaspora to NYC as it relates to food and the coloniality of being is such a privilege and something that I am doing out of love for the

¹⁰ <https://restforresistance.com/> Resources that are accessible and made specifically for QTPOC regarding mental health. Nothing works in isolation, rather it words in tandem with one another.

communities that I come from. I have been struggling with questions regarding food and Mexican diasporas for some time now. I have been attempting to make sense of the various layers such as neoliberalism and socioeconomic background that resulted in a huge Mexican population, with a high percentage from Puebla and Oaxaca, in NYC when it is worlds apart from each other. The fact that so many Mexican people in NYC are also undocumented¹¹ is another factor when thinking about, not just Mexican immigrants but their children who were raised in New York City, an entirely different environment than their parents had grown up in. Being bilingual, navigating a school system that their parents never went through, and attempting to fit in as much as possible, understandings of assimilation and memory is critical. I'm hoping that with this writing as a journey in which there are no specific outcomes, I can rather more of a critical awareness as to how Poblano food is able to show resistance, resiliency and memory in ways that challenge the current imposition of modernity and Westernization.

According to my point of view, one of the most important aspects that matches my thesis objective would be non-linear understandings of the world rooted in centuries of anti-colonial resistance, and with intimate bonds to the land on which people have lived for tens of thousands of years. Often this entails knowledge that has been silenced and rendered invisible. Mesoamerican histories in all their complexity are part of the foundation of the thesis. My work bridges the gap between academic and organic intellectuals and is seeking to understand and take into account timeframes that show resistance to the colonial era. Food seems an almost “organic” site through which to embark in that process of understanding.

¹¹ <https://mx.usembassy.gov/visas/> More information around how to get “lawful” entry into the US and the different requirements. It is clearly not accessible and meant as a way to keep class relations in place.

I am writing and theorizing about these issues because it is only when I was able to go to college and take classes that I was able to explore my passions. Through theories that go into different fields I have been able to consider Poblano food as a place of resistance, resiliency and memory. It allows me to address culture and how/if people are interlocutors. Having access to land and how the state of being grounded-both literally and metaphorically is lost when thinking about spatial understanding of the world. Since the conquest of the Americas, two of the most valuable assets has been land and labor. Land has been a constant struggle in Mexico¹² that I think transmits a lot when thinking about accessibility to ingredients. There is also this disconnect that I have noticed with second generation Mexican Americans/Chicanxs meaning that (and I speak through my personal experience) so few of us know how to cook Mexican food. My parents grew up with more intimate knowledge of the earth and the whole *mercado a la mesa* experience, while the way that I grew up was in a first-floor apartment with plants in buckets around the apartment. The *mercado a la mesa* experience as I define it is through the various social aspects such as buying, preparing, serving, and eating the food. Through a deeper understanding of the way that Mexico was formed and the homogenized culture it implemented whether successfully or not has significant importance when thinking about how to build a world in which many worlds live.

What propels me to think about food is knowing that there is something critical within the diet of Mexicans from the center and south of Mexico that is still there through our ancestors' ways being left behind, discarded to fit the monolithic understanding of what a Mexican is. The diet is very similar to the Mesoamerican one in which vegetables and plants

¹² Going back to colonization but most recently seen post Mexican Revolution as well as post-NAFTA

native to Mexico were consumed on a daily basis. This includes food such as maíz, beans, nopales, epazote, verdolagas, quelites and chiles. The fact that the diet has persisted is testament to the resiliency of people and how their socioeconomic status as well as other factors have not changed since the colonization of the Americas in 1492. Despite all of that, diabetes and other diseases that have to do with food have skyrocketed in Mexico since 1975 due to neo-liberal policies as well as an increase in urbanization that were put into effect and that is showing its negative results with repercussions on working class people and campesinos. It is the leading cause of death in Mexico and has followed Mexicans to the United States.¹³

The coloniality of being offers an attempt at reimagining ways of living that have survived despite the five hundred and more years of colonization and coloniality. Maldonado-Torres explains that the coloniality of being is a cycle of violence with colonial subjects’¹⁴ proximity to death, both literal and figuratively based on the non-ethics of war that has been normalized in “la vida cotidiana”. As marginalized people, this has become part of the daily lived reality because the non-ethics of war include putting into question the idea of people being human¹⁵. This cycle of violence is part of the being for generations¹⁶. With the conquest and subsequent colonization of the Americas, coloniality is what transcended the event of the colonization and inscribed itself into the societies that we currently live in. Having foods with

¹³ There have been some studies but for the most part, there have not been studies around people of indigenous/native descendant and as people shift? dies and introduce other food it has ramifications that have not been thought about, let alone acted upon due to who is seen as valuable. One of the biggest ramifications is the high levels of diabetes in indigenous communities and people with majority indigenous blood.

¹⁴ What this means in lived experiences is the hyper-militarization of the border and police, gentrification, food deserts as well as other symptoms of coloniality and thus white supremacy.

¹⁵ Thinking back to slavery and the massive genocide as well as seizing of land in the name of religion, the questions of who is to be considered human allowed for many atrocities to be committed by people in power.

¹⁶ In a tangible effort to acknowledge ways of subverting knowledge production some podcasts that address cycles of violence while given POC a range of emotions and humanization are in no particular order (and free): *The Friend Zone*, *Locatora Radio*, *Another Round*, *Bitter Brown Femmes* and *Healing Justice*. There are good resources within podcasts to explore.

animal based products such as cheese and sour cream be part of what is considered to be “authentic” Mexican food is one clear example of coloniality.

Food is one of the ways in which people ground themselves in their culture consciously around events and celebration and unconsciously in everyday life cultivating a sense of belonging. In thinking about culture, it is important to always remember that culture is never static. It is always changing and being (re)constructed. It brings up questions around how people are replicating culture being far away from Mexico in both distance and time. Many people I know have not been back since the 90s, more than twenty years ago. Food is very much a gender based understanding of culture as well. Mexico is a society that is driven by patriarchy and specifically machismo. Women are the people that execute the whole *mercado a la mesa* in their homes. However, when it comes to making a living out of it like chefs, we see that it is more male-dominated.

There is a lot to unpack and unravel when engaging critically around the understanding of Mexican food culture and how it is *intimamente vinculado* in the idea of intergenerational wisdom as well as resiliency. One of the biggest reasons why food is the link towards abstract understandings of the world is because it is accessible to everyone. Food is an integral part of everyday life. To reach a deeper awareness of not just themselves as individuals but as a collective requires working towards small everyday acts of rebellion.

Coloniality is the aftermath of colonization. The colonization of the Americas was during a specific period in time that happened over 500 years ago. However, just because colonization ended did not mean that everything else that the colonizers had brought over with them including food, ways of living, language and customs were abruptly switched off. Instead it entered

seamlessly into coloniality, something that is embedded into everything within the Americas. Colonization came with the idea of Europeans sacking the land of anything that they considered valuable along with the annihilation of indigenous people and further punishment of enslaved African people that were bought over. The complete erasure of everything that there was in order to move forward with ideas of modernity and a new kind of existence was colonization and continues to be coloniality. With this in mind, there are still indigenous people fighting and resisting as well as other communities that although might not know everything about their past, *campesinos*, working poor people, rural and urban people, *siguen en la lucha*. People sometimes forget to recognize or reconcile what coloniality actually entails and how insidious it has been operating for more than five centuries and how submerged we are into societies that deems colonial beings as disposable¹⁷. The coloniality of being is a critical understanding and engaging of not just people as objects as has been historically seen and used but rather engaging in and attempting to understand subject to subject relations in a way that oftentimes is a long and painful process.

Coloniality of being is this cycle of violence that is a part of the being for generations. It is a theory that goes beyond the theory and into the lived experiences of the colonized. As Maldonado-Torres writes, “Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday.” (Coloniality of Being 243). One way that I have seen people resisting is through the culture of

¹⁷ To use this language in such a way that removes the personal is a disservice to the potential of the language and thus the way community shows up.

food- *del mercado a la mesa* because it is such a social aspect of people's daily lives. Through buying and preparing food the way that it is passed on generation to generation is fascinating how it all changes when Mexican bodies migrate to NYC. It then transitions into interesting territory thinking about how food is used to perpetuate culture, traditions and language when we talk about intergenerational understanding. With children growing up in NYC there is a significantly different spatial territory in relation to that of their parents. There is a huge difference between just surviving and the idea of living.

The conscious act of replicating culture and tradition despite not being in their *tierra natal* is to me resistance. When thinking about food, the use of ingredients that are native to Mexico is another way of seeing how people have not forgotten. Coloniality is very theoretical but it is grounded in a variety of different lived examples. In particular, the idea of intersubjective relations is important in relation to my thesis. Interpersonal relationships are critical, but under the system of coloniality, relationships are not meant to survive and thrive due to oppressive systems that seek to reduce self-Other relations. If people are not allowed to build and foster community because of their lived reality, then engaging in those types of relationships is an act of rebellion. Food is life-giving and provides knowledge, memory, resistance, and resiliency. With food culture, in particular in NYC, one of the important things to remember and realize is how community has been able to be enacted despite people being cut off from their place of origin.

In NYC, the substitution of ingredients because of lack of money or ability to plant herbs and other vegetables in creative ways like on a fire escape¹⁸ shows me that there is a clear

¹⁸ Theoretically since it is against the law....

yearning for memory to be passed on. The ability to connect food with remembering and honoring the history of how dishes were prepared, how they have evolved or how people keep traditions alive despite different living situations is critical. However, what complicates all of these issues which are many but some of the biggest ones include, lack of documentation, children born of the diaspora, either born and or raised in NYC and the huge cultural differences that people need to navigate. One clear memory that I have is of my dad picking up some green stuff that I later on learned were *verdolagas* from a baseball field to have *verdolagas en salsa verde*.¹⁹ It took me around ten years to actually recognize them because I never paid attention when I was younger because it was part of my normal. Memories of me going to the store for cilantro and ending up with perejil because I could not distinguish what it looked like or even what it smelled like because I was not paying attention to anything regarding food. I just knew that my mom cooked and I would eat it without a lot of the crucial ingredients because of my wanting to assimilate into the idea of Americanness that included Lunchables instead of tortas. This idea of not noticing culture because it is your lived reality until something threatens it or you are forced to confront it and make a choice, to continue in it or go through the process of assimilation is a constant struggle. Since it is a collection of practices that unless challenged dictate life, being able to understand the nuances and the intricacies in which Poblano food has a legacy of adaptation and resistance is important in being able to identify and take steps to be in dialogue around the idea of food.

Culture is constructed, replicating what we know- what people were exposed to, what is real which brings up questions around how people are replicating culture when they are far away

¹⁹ I remember it being really spicy because of the salsa verde but the pork ribs in it were amazing.

from the Mexico. When we think about food it is crucial to talk about gender roles because in a patriarchal driven society women have historically been doing the labor of food. From administering the money needed to buy food and ingredients to going to stores and budgeting the money in order to really stretch it out. One example is of my mom walking an extra five blocks to go to a specific grocery store because *chiles serranos* were fifty cents less per pound than in a store closer to our house. From buying the ingredients to then preparing the food and then serving it to the family, oftentimes women are the ones eating last, making sure that everyone has enough food, getting up to refill plates and then cleaning up the kitchen.

It brought up a lot of questions that I am currently grappling with. One of the biggest questions is what does the process of decoloniality look like and what does it potentially look like? With thinking about this another thing to mention was access to land in Mexico versus New York City and access to certain produce. Because food is such a critical component of the *vida cotidiana* people with thinking about food some of the thoughts that came up was time, being anti-capitalist, gender, socioeconomic class, knowledge production, oral history, memory both hidden and apparent, assimilation, modernity, the physical body and the whole aspect of your being; mental, physical, socially, and through the soul. With colonialism one quote that made me think about the context of food, Nelson Maldonado Torres wrote, “Coloniality is not simply the aftermath or the residual form of any given form of colonial relation” (243). Our food choices dictate so much of our life and relationships to others- however its external forces that are also witnessed. It would be interesting to look at the timelines for food and different types of diets and looking at how with the colonization there was a lot of effort to eviscerate all remanence of Mesoamerican societies.

Moving forward, one of the apparent and looming issues is citizenship. Alyshia Galvez has written about Mexicans in NYC so it was interesting to read an article about immigration. Immigration is crucial to my thesis because it is immigration from Mexico to NYC that it is possible to undergo this research. However, it is also the fact that a lot of immigrants are undocumented and can not travel back to Mexico that creates a certain type of imaginary and understanding of how they live. As Galvez writes in *Immigrant Citizenship: Neoliberalism, Immobility and the Vernacular Meanings of Citizenship*, “erroneously constructed by both restrictionist and expansionist camps of immigration analysts as being a historically stable concept that has only recently been challenged by the globalization of contemporary social life, citizenship has always been a contentious and contested concept, subject to shifts in meaning with prevailing tides of opinion and analysis” (722). This is important when doing my research because citizenship is crucial in understanding how the concept of culture and nationalism arises with immigrants and children of immigrants. With the United States’ current stance of immigration it is imperative that we try to humanize people to the fullest extent.

One of the concepts that Gálvez puts into context is the Mexican population in NYC. She quotes Sergio Cortes who writes, “scholars call the growth in the last two decades of the Mexican population in New York City ‘accelerated’, meaning that it has taken less than a generation for the community to grow from the original ‘pioneer’ migrants to a circumstance in which nearly every family in some rural Mexican towns can name a member living in New York City” (Gálvez 726). It is because of this that there have not been as much studies on Mexicans in NYC as one would hope. There is a lot of knowledge that still has to come about in regard to Mexicans and their children that grow up in New York City because there is a lot lost in

translation and experiences. From getting a bagel with cream cheese and jelly at the local bodega instead of a tamale de mole with *champurrado* there are very clear differences generationally. Growing up in NYC to Mexican parents, it has been interesting navigating college life in California, especially in terms of accessibility to food and the regions from Mexico that people tend to go to New York City as their final destination for the moment. One of the key things that Gálvez writes was that “the willingness of undocumented immigrants to assume on their own backs the weight of deportability is the quintessence of neoliberal citizenship” (Immigrant Citizenship 733). This idea of citizenship makes it so that undocumented immigrants are not able to travel freely and therein lies the paradox. They migrated to NYC and then are unable to leave or move around freely for fear of the repercussions that would not only affect them but the whole community in which they live in. People build whole lives in the US, many having been in the US longer than their tierra natal. From personal knowledge, it is evident that people tend to send their kids to Mexico for long periods of time to get to know the culture, traditions and language even while the parents are unable to return.

Reading *Rethinking Chicana/o Literature Through Food: Postnational Appetites* edited by Nieves Pascual Soler and Meredith E. Abarca gave another perspective in thinking about how food is placed in different contexts and examined. Throughout the whole book, food is the central component with a Chicana literature lens. What was critical here was the way in which the interdisciplinary aspects of this field came out. There is an acknowledgment on how food has shaped the Chicana identity. In the chapter *Families Who Eat Together, Stay Together* one of the key aspects that Abarca brings up is the idea of forgetting. She writes as well as cites,

“furthermore, food as a concept of personal identity underscores the relational aspect of self-subjectivity (Symons, “Epicurus”). The preparation and consumption of food—who cooks, who eats first, what happens at mealtimes—needs a critical examination to make judgements of when the cultural and social values embedded in family’s foodways should be embraced and remembered, and when culinary traditions must be broken and forgotten (Blend; Goldman). Family traditions can be recreated through the recipes passed down from one generation to the next—shared orally, in written form, or sometimes embedded in a persona’s sensory memory...when intentional modifications to old family recipes are performed, or when a person refuses to re-create familial recipes, this action entails a process of rejecting traditional, familial, and cultural values through an active course of forgetting.” (Rethinking Chicana/o 120-121).

While I do not completely agree with the analysis of modifying recipes that the author had in this piece a lot can be extracted from this piece. Culture is fluid. This understanding of food through literature is more about the theoretical concept of food. Rethinking and reimagining this idea of *del mercado a la mesa* in terms of what cultural and social values come out of it is evident.

When thinking about what goes on in food, we have to remember consistently that it is oftentimes memory. Even if the produce or ingredients are not available in New York City, the rituals are still there. As they mention, it either reinforces certain values or rejects them.

In terms of second generation Mexican-Americans/Chicanx’s and what they navigate growing up in a metropolitan city that is known as the place of immigrants. Food is very much a place of resistance. When it is framed in a way that shows the long history of food, Mexican food culture is thus reinforced in such a way that we can start thinking about how resistance and

memory is central to move forward into a world in which many worlds fit and being able to honor the idea of intergenerational wisdom as well as recognize the trauma that happened through colonization and coloniality. Writing about specific dishes that are not applicable to all of Mexico is also a way to ground the lived experience of people that I have been in community with and also people that I want to further relationships with in a reciprocal manner, new understandings of the world and putting into words a lot that we have known. The writers also add another dimension when they ask these critical questions, “How do children attempt to (re)negotiate the meaning of family mealtime, food, eating, and cooking within the family environment to create cultural and social spaces where new models of family can prevail?” (Rethinking Chicana/o 121). This idea of transitioning I think is very relevant in this work because the circumstances in which children of immigrants live through is very different than what their parents went through. Many shifts occur between those two generations. One of the most apparent being that the children are proficient or dominate in the English language²⁰. The ways in which people navigate the world is then very different with how people are treated based on accents and their English levels compared to their parents. With this in mind, the floodgates will be opening to the experience of interlocutors, not just in food but in being in this third space, that cultural shift in which many Chicax writers and thinkers went through. Being able to have the answers from the people and trying to bridge it with what their parents think about Mexican food culture in NYC brings about a lot of further exploration in regard to being able to cook, oral traditions being passed on or this change in which modernity is used as a way to assimilate and leave behind any semblance of the past.

²⁰ It doesn't change the segregation, high ESL students and low graduation rates that still occur across the five boroughs

I have a personal investment to further this kind of research because my parents migrated here from Mexico in the early 90's and my siblings and I were born in NYC. Growing up, I was not aware that being Mexican, especially in NYC was so different. Going to Spanish speaking mass and once finished seeing a lady selling pan de fiesta, along with the ice cream truck next to it is a typical Sunday morning. The community that I am a part of is majority Mexican. Two years ago, two school buses filled with people for the church we attend went to the celebration of sixty years of priesthood who had been part of the parish for around twenty-five years before being switched. Most of the people who went were Mexican although this was a Spanish born priest. He had baptized my siblings and I, and countless other Chicano/Mexican-American children. Community is forged through religion and food in New York City.

Being a Chicana in NYC means knowing what neighborhoods and stores have good and cheap aguacates, what stores have epazote for quesadillas de flor de calabaza. It also means having kermeses at church to raise money for la Virgen de Guadalupe. Seeing Mexican people with their Home Depot carts outside selling fresh tamales, elotes, chicharrones, with some arroz con leche is now a big and increasingly normal but also risky if you do not have proper documentation part of NYC. The type of community forged here is one unique to NYC, especially because there is a huge influx of immigrants and is known as the "melting pot;" of the US. Being Mexican and Mexican American/Chicanx in NYC also means that a large part of the community is undocumented which leads to exploitation of workers and a huge percent of those people working as dishwashers, housekeepers, construction workers, and other positions of manual labor ready for the exploitation of people that have limited English under their belts and sometimes minimum education. I see Mexicans in so many different capacities and perspectives.

The ability to thrive here though, is part of the Mexican way of life, despite the odds, being here and making their own communities, when they left everything they ever knew back in Mexico. The sense of community is really strong here because for some people, this is the only family that they have. They are resilient and resourceful oftentimes because it has been forced on them.

Realizing that the imagination is not something reaffirmed in today's society in order to build a world in which many worlds fit. Rather we are taught that the regurgitation of what was spewed at us is the way to make it in life. A clear example that I can give is that this spring semester I have been privileged in being able to take a class with Professor Gilda Ochoa. In one of the classes that we had, one of the activities that we did was theater of the oppressed. As we all did our skits from examples about Latinx's in the educational system we were able to stop the skit and change what was happening in the scene. The original scenes has examples of discrimination, racism, and the blatant inequities that exist when talking about working class/working poor students of color. What we realized was that when we stopped the skit and came in to change the scene, we were very limited in our understanding of what we could change. When seeing a scene about a military recruiter in a remedial English class everyone came in talking about going into college, going into business, going into trade school, going to community college. However, we were limited in our colonial understandings of the world and we did not ask ourselves the questions of, what would educational systems look like if at an early age students were taught histories that were representative of themselves. If they were encouraged to think and imagine and create a world in which many worlds fit. Thinking about the pipelines that schools have put into place to sort students out and further segregate them what would the world look like if that was not in place? If the position of educator and student were

not hierarchical but rather horizontal and having a mutual understanding that there is much to teach each other in ways that recognize people's place in the world and building towards sustainable communities.



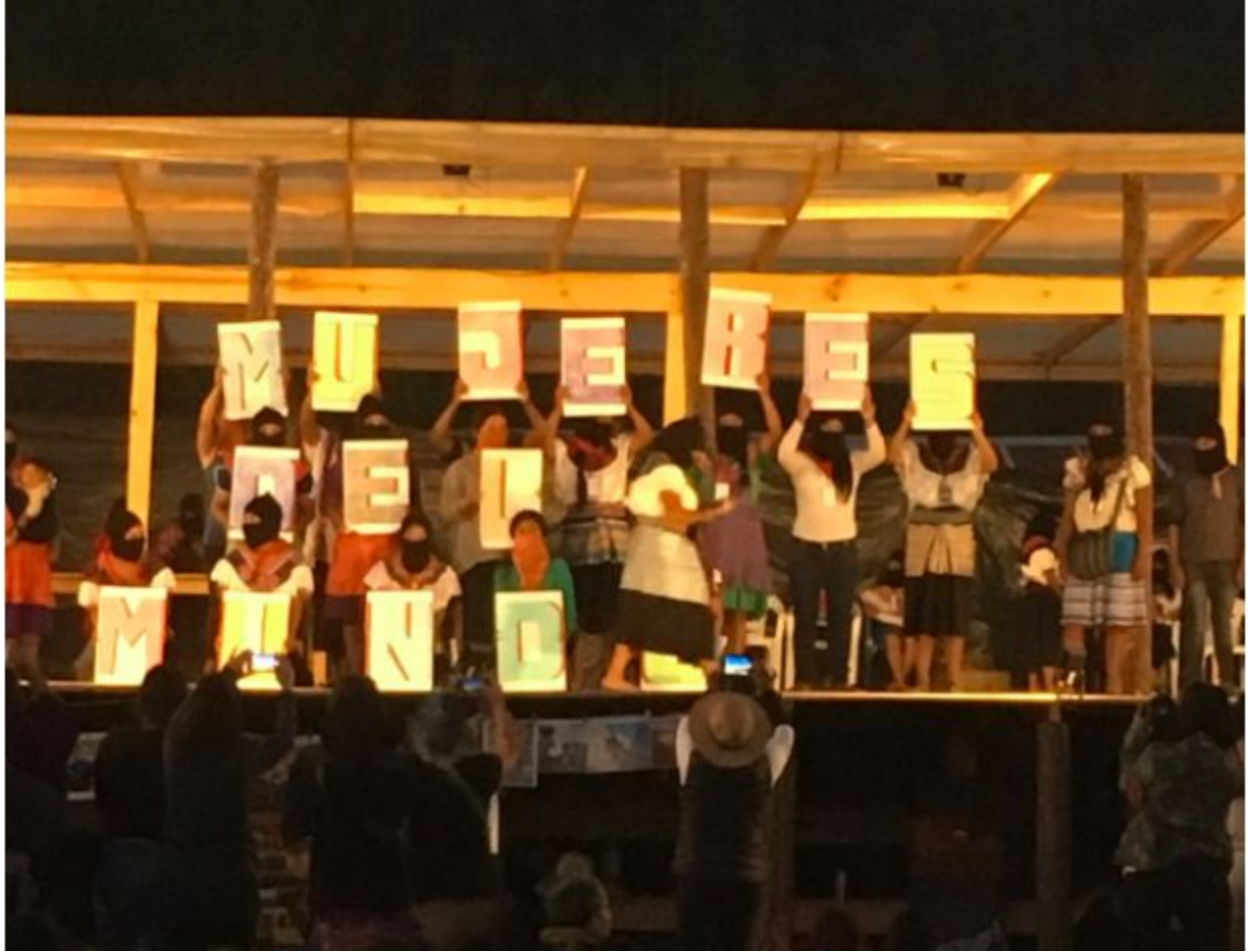
Claudia Velandia-Onofre / INTI - International Native Tradition Interchange (Indigenous Peoples Organization based in NYC since 1992 - in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council - ECOSOC)

Angelica Lara

María de Jesús Patricio Martínez (Marichuy) was the independent candidate running for president as the vocera for the CNI (Congreso Nacional Indígena). A healer, activist, coming from the Nahuatl community in Tuxpan, Jalisco.



(Left) Claudia Velandia-Onofre, Zapatista Women, Angelica Lara, Cheyenne Jones and Florcy Romero of Women of Color in Solidarity.









IV: “Otro mundo es posible si nos organizamos para luchar porque nadie más lo va hacer”- Convocación de mujeres (Morelia, Chiapas)



Reflecting on a specific instance during the convocación

“Inter(generations)”

Oceans of despair and grief

Welling up, attempting to overtake

who I am

where I am

reconociendo that this grief

it's bigger than me.

with wails that threaten to burst out

mis ancestros anunciando su presencia. . .y²¹ intento escuchar.

²¹ I chose to use y instead of e because I realized that the Spanish that I speak although borrows from English is also the “broken” Spanish that my dad’s side of the family uses and that we spend the most time with.

On December 31st 2017, the Zapatistas, sent out a statement about the first ever convocation for women in the struggle (in the website www.elacezapatista.com); it was to take place in March 8-10th of 2018, in what is known as the “caracol” de Morelia. Womxn of the world were invited to come, dance, play, and be in community with Zapatista women as they welcomed us to their land. Having been in Zapatista territory before, as well as taking classes and reading about their struggle there is much to admire. When the uprising happened in January 1, 1994, the same day that NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) took place, the world was in awe of indigenous peoples taking back their land, autonomy and freedom. Having organized themselves way before the uprising they are often seen as a source of inspiration for many people around the world. From their 2001 Marcha del Color de la Tierra²² to the Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres from 1993 were some of the points included having rights to education, amount of children that they had and protection from physical abuse²³.

Being able to go into caracoles in the first place is not something that one just does. When people are invited to the caracoles there is usually a process they must go through. There are protocols in place that have channels of accountability and security measures. That people could register online without having to have for example an organization or collective writing on behalf of that person meant that there were some people from what I would overhear that did not really understand the struggle of the compañeros and thought of the convocation as a women’s conference. While in Mexico the spring of my junior year, I was taking classes in the caracol known as Oventik. It was an hour away from San Cristobal de las Casas. Every week we would

²² <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/03/12/oja167-marcha.html>

²³ <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1993/12/31/ley-revolucionaria-de-mujeres/>

go through the same thirty-minute process where the Zapatistas would check our passports and speak to our instructors. This time the convocacion was so open and limitless it meant inherent risk that the Zapatistas were taking on. Because they self-proclaimed autonomous territory free from Mexican rule (put in the 6th dec or the southeast wind) paramilitaries as well as military bases are stationed across Chiapas that specifically target Zapatistas. Through the *Primer Encuentro Internacional*, my outlook on organizing and solidarity work has shifted and expanded.

Getting There/Estoy Llegando

Reflecting back on the immense privilegio I had being able to go to Chiapas, Mexico for the *Primer Encuentro Internacional Político, Artístico, Deportivo y Cultural de Mujeres Que Luchan* that took place March 8-10, 2018 I am filled with so much gratitude and a renewed sense of hope and love. There was a lot that I thought about while I was in Mexico in autonomous land with people who were making reality the world they want to live in. I recognize that it took a lot of effort, physical labor, etc to welcome around 5000 women from around the world to partake in the struggle. The week was one full of so many different emotions that even now, reflecting on when I left the caracol de Morelia at 7 in the morning I have not been able to fully process them. I met amazing people that taught me so much and that made me realize, recognize and acknowledge how much I need to keep learning about. I met so many remarkable women with intersecting identities and the ones who really took me under their wing, validated my feelings and uplifted me were the women of color at the conference and more specifically my black and indigenous sisters. Having the immense privilege to have been there, listening and participating I

am still reeling about the fact that my life was forever changed in ways I could not have imagined when I was getting ready to arrive to Chiapas.

It was decided that I would be going to the Convocación de Mujeres que Luchan in Zapatista territory after shifting my thesis during winter break. I remember thinking that it would be amazing to go to this momentous event, but with thesis and the end of my fourth year looming ahead I thought I would go to the next one. However, working with my thesis advisors as well as people that I met while in Mexico I managed to cobble together an itinerary for attending the convocación. I would rely on that experience as a way to dig deeper into what I was writing about for this thesis. With a few minor bumps in the road including buying a wrong plane ticket and figuring it out the day I left, I was flying out to Mexico.

With some funds from Scripps I was told I could use them for the conference. I was elated but with a lot of questions and anxiety that included how to get to the destination given that it was on autonomous land within the country of Mexico. Through copious emails sent out to thesis advisors, directors of study abroad programs and people on the ground I managed to know where I would be staying once I landed, my transportation to the caracol de Morelia and when I would be leaving back to the United States. The day of, however, with a lot of anxiety in the pit of my stomach I checked and rechecked all of my flight information because of its critical component of having to switch airports to save money. As I was checking for the last time I saw that one of my flights had its time as 9:00. Normally I would not have given it much thought because I knew that I had gotten a flight for 9 pm. However, I was confused because in Mexico they use the 24-hour system. I realized that I had not booked a flight to leave at nine at night but rather nine in the morning. As I scrambled to secure another flight before starting the journey to

Morelia, I was nervous about what would happen traveling alone as a visibly brown young woman through Chiapas.

El Encuentro

Arriving at the caracol and being there as a witness, a listener, learned and avid watcher, it was remarkable that I had made it there. So much happened externally and internally as I took part of the *convocación*. No men were allowed to be at the *Encuentro* which meant that the Zapatista women were in charge of everything. From cooking and selling food to ten times the amount of people that they were expecting, they kept everything running smoothly. The discipline that they had while also managing to have fun at night with parties that would go until one in the morning. I managed to meet such amazing and inspiring women from all over the world that shook me out of the slumber that I had gone under while back at Scripps and made me remember what it was like to imagine and hope and be in community with women that understood what liberation, resistance and resiliency looked like and actively carried it out within their daily lives. Being there alone prompted me to interact with others and be the person to strike up a conversation. The conversations went through so much that by the end of it I had learned many new things. Through those conversations I managed to learn more about indigenous peoples within the United States than in my entire educational career. I met people whose descendants and roots were from various indigenous nations across the world²⁴. I met them at different times in different places but we always managed to come back to each other. In my work of hoping to understand how the melding of the traditional and organic intellectual happens, for me, this writing is the outcome. Even within the gathering itself and understanding

²⁴ Some of the groups represented were the Tohono O'odham nation, Mapuche community, Purepecha community, Taino community, Mohawk nation and Palestinian nation

the Zapatista women and their lucha however, racism, appropriation and transphobia still occurred to us and others around us.

However, seeing the women of color stand up for themselves, questioning and educating others around us will forever be etched in my heart, mind and soul. It was incredible witnessing womxn of color stand up for themselves and call out people that were not respecting what it meant to be on Zapatista territory and what they fought and continue to fight for²⁵. Seeing indigenous women resist against assimilation and forced niceness and meekness throughout the conference only made it that much more clearer to me the importance and criticalness of being in international solidarity with one another and looking for active ways to be in community with one another. From learning about the annual canoe trip that various indigenous peoples take throughout the northwest to the Mapuche struggle in Chile and Argentina to the Zapatista women struggle and seeing their commitment to do the event justice as Zapatista and therefore indigenous women. There were many rumors about how many people were supposed to attend and how many actually ended up coming. As I stood in a four-hour line to get into the caracol I heard that the reason why the line was so slow was because there were supposed to only have been 500 women attending according to the number that had signed up while 3,000 had already shown up by the time I got there. To be there as a witness and participating was a way in which I healed my soul and understanding of myself. – put in for maldonado torres ideas of reciprocity and what decolonial love looks like-YES!! I was witnessing and partaking in it because I was in the unique and fortunate position of having women guiding me within the caracol and whose traditions and customs were inherently part of decolonial love. In that I mean that decolonial love

²⁵<https://medium.com/communityworksjournal/dismantling-neoliberal-education-a-lesson-from-the-zapatistas-2fa8f44961c9>

or our concept of decolonial love has always been an aspect of community within the communities of women that I talked and listened to.

I learned so much about indigenous struggles and peoples in the United States and it made me realize how complicit and violent I have been in not recognizing the indigenous people of the land that my family traveled to after being displaced from their ancestral lands due to neo-liberal policies. I was born and raised in the stolen land of the Lenape people and am currently as a Scripps student, on stolen Tongva territory. I was one of the youngest participants from the United States and traveling alone to the caracol forced me to talk and meet with people that I would not have normally spoken to. People took me under their wing, they were patient with me and shared their histories and that of their people.

One of the saddest things I think for me was how uncomfortable my sisters felt at the convocation when in the presence of a large white Latinx/European population. There was a lot of behavior by white women that caused rage, sadness, fury, grief and hopelessness in the women of color who traveled to the lands of the Zapatistas. However, the healing that was initiated within those communities kept reminding me that in our understanding of community and a “world in which many worlds fits”- having the backs of our fellow sisters of colors is what has always been done and what grounds me in the fight for justice and liberation. Each time I talked to a woman of color we instantly clicked. What was said throughout the events was how we were all meant to be in that space together in order to move forward in the realities that we live in within the United States. The violence inflicted by white women upon all women but with higher statistics when it comes to indigenous, black and trans women even within the convocation showed how the microcosm of the conference was a reflection of society and what

we constantly have to navigate. From being shushed for laughing loudly by a white Argentinian woman, being called rude and taking it too far when we stood up for ourselves and talked back to not being able to physically be in spaces because of the amount of white women that were there with their non-critical stance of themselves, these instances were quite telling. White people where there in ways that showed they did not realize their spatial understanding of the world and the way they dominated, took up space, energy resources. I definitely felt that as a women born and raised in the United States, the idea of double consciousness was one that was felt by the whole group of women I interacted and made community with because we were witnessing and oftentimes a part of something that we could see was blatantly racism and showed micro and macro aggressions but because we were having these conversations or we were at least hyper aware of the isms we felt it, we fought back, and we talked about it and processed it. There are different ways to be violent and, unfortunately, we experienced different forms of violence while at the convocation.

An example was when a group of us women of color were sitting down, watching the plays that the Zapatistas were putting on that really made me think about how theater has been a constant while I have been on Zapatista territory. Watching the skits/plays while they talked about indigeneity, autonomy, resistance, collectivism other themes emerged from observed and understanding the unity and discipline that they have as well as the imagination to have something like a space for five thousand women and children to arrive on Zapatista land and be in each other's presence. However, what was interesting was that while we were there three white women in within an hour decided that it would be okay to smoke next to us, in the middle of the crowd, next to elders and children. This lack of awareness of spatial entitlement is

something that I witness on a daily basis but is oftentimes hard to articulate or even formulate what is happening. Being in the land of my ancestors gave me the courage to tell them that they couldn't smoke next to people. The audacity that they had to be smoking cigarettes, with the smoke going onto our space and not giving the people around them courtesy or respect of not smoking in the same space shows the extent of the entitlement. That it happened three times was unbelievable to watch but even more so to realize and remember that having someone call them out is not the norm. When I would call people out, the look of shock and offendedness that would show on their face was an indication of the power dynamics that even within autonomous territory, white supremacy still reared up in spaces, times and places that I was sad to witness happening.

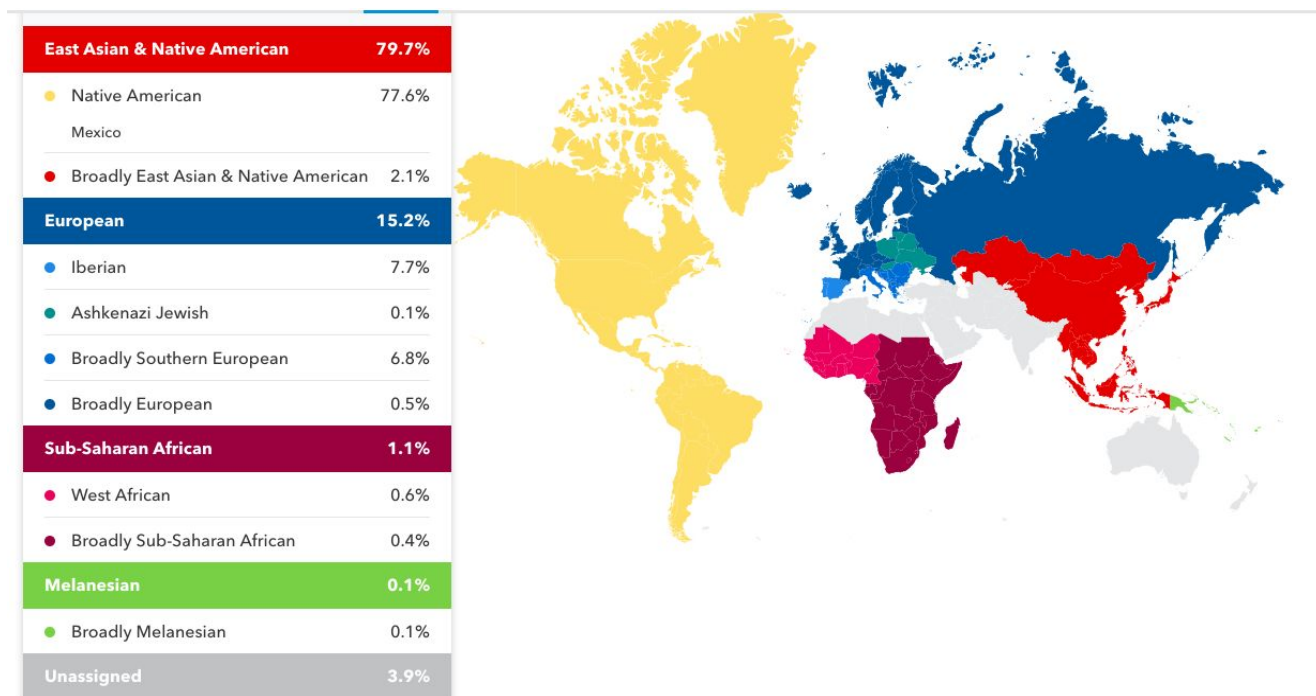
Reflecting:

It reminded me of what Anzaldua coined *la facultad* and being in that in-between space where with all my lived experiences as well as my learned experiences, I was able to analyze and register why what the women were doing was repeating and enforcing hierarchies that exist outside of Zapatista land. To stand up for oneself in the face of authority or positions of power is to sneer at what they represent and be witness to not just surviving but living and taking action. Through the text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldua the reader is able to understand a little deeper the notion of coloniality and how it manifests itself. One of the ways that marginalized communities are able to survive is through a concept Anzaldua calls "La Facultad". She writes, "its (La Facultad) a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us... it is anything that breaks into ones everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one's defense and resistance" (Anzaldua

61). Through this quote, a wealth of information is presented the reader. La Facultad is something that marginalized communities must develop in order to survive in the capitalist, patriarchal, heteronormative society that many people live in. It is the knowledge that they were not meant to survive and thrive in society. La Facultad is a way to deal with the physiological trauma lived everyday and also ingrained into the DNA of marginalized communities. It is a way of being in order to live. La Facultad is not something positive although it is necessary. Having to develop a kind of 6th sense for being a person means being in a constant state of anxiety. Anzaldua writes, “we lose something in this mode of initiation, something is stolen from us: our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance” (Anzaldua 61). As marginalized people times of innocence were much shorter. We were not in a privileged position where we did not have to know that the world was out to get us and that we would have to fight everyday in order to thrive. The constant violence seeped into life makes it so that everyone grows up at such a rapid pace that people do not know another way of living. Anzaldua is able to perfectly encapsulate how communities are conditioned to survive through the way that their body is able to help them out and not get killed just by being alive.

My dad’s part of the family is from the south central part of Mexico and being able to be in the southwest part of Mexico was recognizing the indigenous roots that I have from the Mixteca region of Mexico with my great-grandfather leaving his home of Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca at three years old after the Mexican Revolution and ending up in Izucar de Matamoros. Both regions are where the Mixteca people live and even though with the assimilation following the Mexican Revolution my family does not speak the language or is involved in a specific community, the rituals, traditions and customs as well as the traditional foods show that a variant

of indigeneity is apparent within those communities. Apart from this, it is with a western mindset that I was also intent on finding a way to prove my ancestry. Feeling insecure in the unknown of who I was, knowing my ethnicity but not knowing my race. Knowing that everyone in my family was brown but no one speaking anything other than Spanish. Through a friend, I was able to take a genetic test for free from 23andMe. It arrived during winter break and I sent it out nervous for the results.



(My DNA results with the update that 23andMe did April 2018)

The way race is constructed in Mexico is one that is distinct from the United States in which *mestizaje* is seen as the norm. It was a tactic used to assimilate indigenous peoples after the Mexican Revolution where it was the melding of indigenous, European/white and to a much smaller degree African blood because of anti-blackness embedded in Mexican society that made the “cosmic race”. With *mestizaje* having ties to eugenics the article *Mestizofilia, Biotipología y Eugenesia en el México post-revolucionario: Hacia una historia de la ciencia y el Estado*,

1920-1960* by Alexandra Stern gave more insight into how and why people think that the only indigenous people seen as a homogenous group, are long gone. Eugenics is not something new as people witnessed what happened in Germany during the 20th century. It is constructed, reinvented and reinscribed in the recent history of humanity. Specifically in Mexico, with the notion of “the cosmic race”(José Vasconcelos’s concept) as Stern writes, “que una “raza” híbrida perfecta que combinara los rasgos superiores de los indios, los asiáticos, los blancos y los negros podría producirse al seguir una “eugenesia misteriosa de gusto estético” en vez de la “eugenesia científica/that a hybrid “race” could be combined perfectly the superior features of the Indians, the Asians, the whites and the blacks might produce a type of “mysterious eugenics of aesthetic taste” instead of “scientific one””(277). This instituted the erasure of a large population of indigenous people in Mexico and served to whiten Mexican people in an attempt to be “modern”. During that time, the goal was to push forward with a nationalist agenda to form the new nation of Mexico. As she writes, “es también cierto que si el mestizaje sigue indefinidamente, desaparecerá con el tiempo pues la raza blanca, siendo superior, prevalecerá sobre las [razas] inferiores negra e india” (280). Como está escrito en el artículo, estaban dispuestos a mezclarse con personas indias con el propósito de todavía ser superiores a las personas negras e indias que estaban en México. En cierta modo, estaban usando esa noción de tener hijos con poder subir en la jerarquía socio-económica porque si no eran blanco y no eran indios, eran mestizos, y eso era mejor que ser negro o indio.

México que eran indios pero ya no son, ya se han movido con el tiempo.

Y las personas que pudieran ser consideradas siendo parte de la raza cósmica era muy limitadas. Otra vez estaba esa noción de que solo podrían ser europeos e indios, como se

menciona en el artículo, “esta ausencia expresaba su deseo (jamás articulado) de que el resultado eventual de la mezcla racial fuese la desaparición paulatina del proceso de mestizaje del panorama nacional y la ascendencia concomitante de los blancos o criollos” (279). Con el mestizaje iba ser más fácil para personas del uno por ciento para asumir posiciones de poder sin que fueran cuestionados sí acerca de su mexicanidad. Así la gente mexicana no se pudiera enojarse porque dirían las personas en poder que eran mestizas. Y eso ha ocurrido en varias formas en México a través de los años en la historia. Es fascinante ver cómo personas en poder pueden pensar en el futuro sobre qué manera pudieran seguir beneficiando a las personas blancas o los criollos.

There has been a lot in this writing that I sometimes think I made up because it sounds unbelievable. I am asking readers to not always rely on tangible evidence but to accept that one can talk about a knowledge that is felt and is a sign from something bigger than us, or at least stemming from what I have experienced as a multifaceted person writing this thesis. It is to recognize that everything is intimately tied together and that when we hurt the planet, for example, the earth, pachamama, madre tierra we are hurting ourselves and those who come after us. It is about knowing, noticing and paying attention to the culture that you come from, recognizing that even within your culture there were things that were different, from skin tone to the foods eaten. The ancestry test showed up showing that I am almost eighty percent native american. While from my dad’s side of the family, they do not speak a language other than Spanish and are not part of any indigenous communities, at weddings they do *el baile del guajolote*; my father’s godmother was a curandera; my grandmother never learned how to read and my great grandfather arrived to Izucar de Matamoros as a three year old with his four year

old brother, refugees of the Mexican revolution from Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca speaking Mixteco but given how small they were in a place where only Spanish was spoken it was forgotten and never taught to my grandmother or my father.

My experience and knowledge is about recognizing that in Mexico, mestizaje also meant and continues to also mean when an indigenous person is not part of a community or speaks the language. It is about starting to ask the questions that led to knowing where my great-grandfather was along with the actual ancestry results because as very westernized in thought it made me ask my grandmother recently if we were indigenous and her reply was, “por supuesto!” It is also about knowing that assimilation played a big role in taking language and the community from my family. It made me think of *Mexico Profundo* by Bonfil-Batalla and his argument about how mestizaje is only the government attempting to hide the indigenous or “indians” that are living and surviving in Mexico today. As Bonfil Batalla writes, “we accept and utilize the pre-colonial past as the history of the national territory, but not as our own past. *They* are simply the Indians, the Indian part of México” (Bonfil 3). This is one of the common themes throughout his book, how Mexico pretends that all indigenous peoples are dead.

I have been reflecting on it for quite some time now because it is something that has weighed heavily on me and my understanding of myself and of others around me. The more I found out about what the coloniality of being meant and what decolonial love was everything clicked and made sense. However, through displacement and being born and raised in another country a lot of my history and knowledge of people was through school or what my family talked about. It was not until I was older and was fortunate enough to travel to Mexico that I started to think about the history or my family. Going to school in California though only

cemented that. The homogenization of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans/Chicanx leads to a one dimensional conversations around Mexico and it looks over racial disparities that exist at exorbitant rates.

There are a lot of seemingly random questions that come up but in seeing how “all over the place”²⁶ they are is to recognize our intersectionalities and that everything is tied to each other. One of the questions that I am currently grappling with has to do with being my gender and physical appearance. How does being a darker skinned brown women from/having roots in Latin America show how we move through the world, the validity that we get from both external and internal sources and what that it does to our the very core of the our being? This is so close to who I am and to a certain extent it embodies who I am and yet feelings of insecurity rise to the surface to resonate and make people remember what was inscribed in us as people of color: that as people of color, there is nothing useful that we have to offer “modern” society.

Conclusion- There Will be a Time...

This is a journey that I have embarked on in order to offer in a small way, like a seed something that offer hope, love and imagination. It sparks or keeps ignited our dignity and rage. Words matter. There is never a straight line and and this in particular has been about weaving in and out of paradoxes and contradictions. There is a lot I do not know but there is also so much wisdom and knowledge that I have been blessed with. Being in community is a constant struggle and always an active act, much like hope, love and imagination it requires fortalezerlo at all times each and every day. It is a never-ending process that is beautiful to witness the evolution that takes place in people. Our dignity can never be compromised. To write about this is to

²⁶ And yes I use this term strategically to debunk this notion that coherence makes anything valid when we know that how to cohere is also part of a ploy to be normalized.

remember and honor those that have passed that have affected me in ways I am constantly learning about.

Poder imaginar otro mundo ha sido algo que viene y va en mi vida. A veces es difícil poder pensar en otro mundo cuando hay tanto que pasa todos los días y la accesibilidad que tenemos a las noticias. Viendo como destruimos el planeta con la hydra capitalista es más importante que nunca como muchos antes de mí, ahora y después de mí de entender que ligados estamos los unos a los otros. Acordándonos que en la relación de sujeto a sujeto es reconocerlo en relación en todo el mundo. Con esa relación vinculada firmemente en nuestra conciencia, los próximos pasos están llenos de certidumbre y esperanza pero también con cansancio y trauma que se tardará diferentes entendimientos del tiempo para entender, confrontar y con mucha esperanza sanar. Esta tesis ha sido algo que me a costado mucho emocionalmente y me a forçado reflexionar en mucho. Ha sido en cierta manera una bendición poder escribir esto. Soy una de las pocas que siento que pude escribir algo que me ayudo y me continuará ayudando no solo en mi vida como intelectual orgánica e tradicional. Veering from el camino y encontrándome aquí escribiendo esta tesis es testimonio de cómo he crecido en mi entendimiento de comunidad y lo que amor y esperanza se pueden y deben de verse. Entrando en conversación con muchxs escritxres dentro de mi tesis me ayudo en entender con más profundidad lo continuo que es esta tradición de resistencia, amor, fortaleza y felicidad. La conversación no puede fluir en lo personal si no es algo constante en lo cotidiano. Esto empezó para mí desde una temprana edad creciendo en una comunidad que mientras estaba creciendo me enseñó amor y cariño. Escuchando lo que hacían mis papas llegando a Nueva York, cuando se conocieron dentro de la Iglesia Católica, llendo a México para casarse en Puebla con las tradiciones de mi papá que si

incluyo el baile del guajolote y mole Poblano. Me tuvieron poco más de un año después y mis hermanos y yo crecimos en Nueva York.

There is still so much that I need to learn, acknowledge, work through and heal from. It is a constant work in progress that forces you to do and be better for the community that you are a part of. For now, I am excited to graduate and be part of places and realities that want to be in community. Being at Scripps was hard in ways I am still trying to figure out because of so much happening in the past four years. Nevertheless, I have managed to meet such incredible people that have entered and left my life at different stages. I am forever grateful for the communities that let me into their spaces in ways that feel surreal and from a different reality. I just sit here reflecting back I think about my time in Bolivia which I did not really spend much time talking about or writing about but that impacted me in ways that I syncretized with what I learned in Mexico as well as what I learned here in California.

People were welcoming and eager to share certain aspects of their life because for so long it was cast aside and snubbed. What helped as well was that I was not entering spaces as a formal researcher but rather a student and oftentimes being the only visibly brown student with direct ties to Latin America. That formed a type of kinship that was seen in the way that I was able to interact with them and the hospitality that we inherently had. Thinking back to my time in Bolivia and being able to stay for a few days with the Aymara community in La Isla del Sol en el Lago Titicaca that is shared by both Peru and Bolivia. We were required to bring a bag of coca leaves to gift to our community. I ended up bringing an extra one and it helped me transcend barriers that I was not even aware of. My family inculcated in me to always share what I had if I was eating in front of other or else to not eat it at all. So, chewing on the coca leaves to avoid the

altitude headache that had started to form I shared the coca leaves during the boat ride to the island. I ended up having a great conversation in the bottom of the boat with some Bolivians that were also traveling to the island.

Being able to hear more about the history of Copacabana, the nearest town to the island was fascinating. While the white students were upstairs getting roasted by the sun, turning red as lobsters I was watching the water and journaling. We sat around at our destination for an hour waiting for people from the community that were going to host us to trickle in from what they were doing. As I waited I grabbed my coca leaf bag noticing that in the different communities that I had visited coca was used as a way to build community. I sat with the women of the communities that were spinning wool in a way that reminded me of a top. Transforming it from a ball of cotton into string as they casually spun it making sure that it was going in the right direction, talking to each other and making sure that the children were not getting into too much trouble. As I sat there, after having said hello, I just stayed there for a bit listening and taking in what was happening. Mientras mascaba coca le pregunté a la persona a mi lado si quería, dijo que si y tomo unas, comparti asi la coca entre las personas que estaban en el círculo. Sabía que en comunidades indígenas y en la cultura general de personas de américa latina si alguien ofrece algo, tomas por lo menos un poco. Así empezaron a hablar a veces en Aymara y aveces en espanol si nos querían incluir en sus conversaciones. Pero así empecé a hablar con la gente y pude preguntar un poco sobre el proceso de hacer hilo, como era vivir en la isla y otras cosas.

Al final de cuentas con la familia que me ospedo fueron personas tan generosas. Me hicieron una bolsa hermosa en la forma tradicional que involucraban hueso de borrego y el hilo que hacen de la lana de los borregos. Compartiendo comida y un poco de conversación con el

español que ellos sabían y con el español que yo sabía. Nos pudimos entender en formas que también trascendían el idioma. E tenido la inmensa fortuna de siempre en cualquier lugar que esté de conocer por lo menos una persona que me recuerda de la belleza que tiene el mundo y con la comunidad que personas están construyendo poco a poco en formas que quizás se vean sutiles pero la acción desde abajo y a la izquierda como lo ha demostrado lxs Zapatistas es la forma de seguir adelante.

We are in the belly of the beast and as we learn more and more about the world it can cause apathy, desperation, hopeless, anger, anxiety and stress but it is my hope that this writing can help a bit in grounding us, reminding us, finding joy and bringing to the forefront voices that are not heard often enough. This is a way to show vulnerability and bringing together different experiences that are valid and that do have something important to bring to the table. Being in community with people abroad, back at home and at Scripps, navigating these spaces resulted in a sense of loss, a sense of misdirection, feeling alone, lonely, trying to find my path. Being able to be in the presence of revolutionaries- 5 year olds running around the caracol of Oventik and being full of joy and awareness was amazing and soothing for the soul. In these times when ideas of rationality and modernity that make various ways of knowing valid having and honoring and making space for everything is beautiful and a way to move forward in ways people before us could not.

Ancestral knowledge has been passed down and kept in large part because of socioeconomic status and access. People from the land and their descendants knew that institutionally they would not survive if knowledge around healing and living was not passed down. Way of being that have been passed down generation through generation look like my dad

knowing every single plant I asked him about walking around the grocery store and outside, looking at the “weeds” and other vegetation that was considered not useful. This is the type of knowledge that requires years of schooling but it is something that within families is passed down. I remember being in Mexico for the first time and on our way to Izucar de Matamoros from Mexico City (CDMX) my stomach had been cramping up and it hurt a lot. The medicine they gave me while we got to our destination did not help. My aunt though patted my stomach and gave me from what I can remember mint and salt to chew on because I had empacho. I do not recall much details but I do remember feeling better and thinking again about growing up in NYC, my ties to the land were non-existent. Having people be in the natural health movement is hilarious because it is an over exaggeration of sorts how ancestral knowledge from the Americas gets commodified and capitalized. People finding out about nopales as the new “superfood” or avocados having sales of 2.6 million dollars in fresh avocado²⁷, they are one of the best investments for drug cartels because of their popularity. Thus, blood avocados are sold and distributed throughout the United States at exorbitant amounts (in NYC, one medium sized avocado costs on average 2-3 dollars), are not affordable to the communities in which it is part of their ancestral diet, and generate income into the emerging quasi nation-states of the drug cartels²⁸. The imposition of modernity has begun to show results in my generation and the saberes that have been passed down to me living and following western ideals and understandings of the world. However, through access to the internet I have also been able to see people reclaiming,

²⁷ <https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/fruits/avocados/>

²⁸

<https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/powerful-mexico-crime-groups-got-their-start-extorting-avocado-trade-report/>

remembering and piecing together histories of our ancestors and inherently a more critical and holistic view of the world.

Everything happens in layers or at least for me it does. Knowing what herbs can do, not just for cooking but having many medicinal uses has created a new way of being. I have gotten increasingly interested as the years have developed but oftentimes due to my lack of autonomy as a minor I did not have the funds nor time to develop my curiosity. Now, this summer I am hoping to start a foundation, the groundwork for what keeps me grounded, especially during these times of pain, uncertainty and change. Thank you.



Mi Familia Anfitriona- Natividad y Pedro



Natividad me permitió tomar estas fotos del proceso que tienen para hacer en este caso una bolsa.



Maíz cosechado en Guanajuato de donde proviene la familia de mi mama.



Con mi abuelito de parte de mi papá, Ernesto Herrera Flores que falleció Enero de 2018-
Descansa en paz.



Mi abuelita Teresa Palafox Miranda de parte de mi papa.



Con la familia de mi papá haciendo huaraches de frijoles negros.



Mi bisabuelito de parte de mi abuelito Ernest-, Cresencio Herrera Leonardo.



Mi bisabuelita de parte de mi abuelito Ernesto- Antonia Flores Tepepa



Enchiladas Verdes, una de mis comidas favoritas.

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