Decolonizing Healing Praxis: Testimonios of Hope & Transformation among Community Educators and Practitioners and Young People of Color

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Fall 2021

Abstract

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It is well documented how the cumulative social toxins of systemic oppression and racism have detrimental consequences on the health and wellbeing of low-income Young People of Color (YPOC). There is a growing recognition among community educators and activists that healing constitutes a critical intervention to fostering Young People's individual and collective capacity to hope and believe that their living conditions can be transformed (Ginwright, 2015). Healing is understood as a process that is inclusive of mind, body, culture, and spirit and aims to restore and renew the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of Young People, educators, and the broader community. However, not much research has examined how community educators, practitioners and Young People are making meaning and building innovative practices inclusive of healing to facilitate a sense of positive identity and wellbeing among Young People of Color. By centering the testimonios of community educators, practitioners and YPOC, this dissertation examines how healing is a fundamental praxis to harnessing the power of critical consciousness, culture, and hope among Young People. Healing offers alternative models and strategies to building healthy and resilient communities in response to the ongoing physical, mental, and spiritual violence of systems of oppression.

Based on the testimonios of community educators and practitioners, Young People of Color, and participant observation in community spaces that center healing and social justice, this work explores the emergence of a decolonizing healing praxis that centers healing as a critical process by which to facilitate individual and collective agency *with* Young People of Color. As a methodological tool, testimonios provide great insights into the life experiences and reflexivity of participants in this project. For this work, healing is understood as a process inclusive of mind, body, culture, and spirit and aims to restore and renew the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of Young People, educators, and the broader community. Testimonios serve as a healing tool that aims to heal the fragmentation inflicted by historical and ongoing trauma while aiming to strengthen the desire to create community and movement. Participants' understanding and embodiment of healing is transformative. It seeks to address root causes of oppression and decolonizing in that it works to create a third space that goes beyond trauma informed and fosters the intrinsic value of going within to facilitate collective healing *with* YPOC in the larger project of decolonization.

I argue that what I am calling a *decolonizing healing praxis* facilitates healing spaces that provide a context for young people to reconceptualize individual challenges as a politicized

collective struggle, and through this process, create a platform for both Young People and educators of color to collectively engage in healing and transformative relations. I elaborate a robust analytic of healing to emphasize a focus on educators and YPOC's mind, body, and spirit as key to understanding the role healing practices play in supporting transformative and holistic modes of teaching and learning. The findings from these testimonios uplift the cultural healing wealth fostered in community spaces, which center healing practices that are culturally relevant and draw from a diverse range of healing modalities. Moreover, it highlights how a decolonizing healing praxis can support Young People in their individual and collective healing processes to nurture their resilience, hope, and capacity to see themselves as agents of change.

Dedication

Para mi abuelita Dolores Ontiveros Vargas
(September 23, 1932- March 19, 2015)
Gracias por ser siempre mi angelita que me inspira, cuida y guía
desde el más allá, ya que siempre está presente en mi corazón. Sus conocimientos y amor por las plantas son de mis tesoros más apreciados,

And

To my brother, Ramiro Chavez Rodriguez, Jr.
(May 16, 1975- July 22, 2019)
I miss your laughter and I know that you have been with me every step of the way in ensuring my prayer was completed. I love you bro!

And

To my dear mentor, Melinda Micco
(December 21, 1947 -December, 5, 2021)
You have been my role model and inspiration since I started my journey in higher education and only days before keeping your promise to file with me you transitioned with the ancestors. As an ancestor you have continued to shower me with your unconditional mother love energy and your spirit has been my strength as I finally birthed my offering.

Acknowledgements

Ometeotl, I give thanks to the Creator for my life and many blessings. I call in the energies of the four directions, the four elements, los abuelitos y las abuelitas, my ancestors, spirit guides, and all my animal and plant relatives and give thanks for their healing and guidance throughout my journey. With respect and permission, I give thanks to the ancestors of the Chochenyo Ohlone Indigenous Peoples who are the guardians of the land in which I stand. I acknowledge and give thanks to all my relations for helping me make this dissertation possible. From beginning to end, this labor of love has been a prayer and writing as ceremony made it possible for the healing stories of all those kind individuals who contributed to this project to serve as a portal between myself and all the spirits I encountered while on the journey in order to bring this ofrenda to completion.

Indeed, it has taken a village for me to bring this healing project to completion and I especially want to give thanks and honor the unconditional love of my large extended family. While it was not always easy for my family to understand what took so long and why I spent so many hours away from family writing this project, my loved ones were always there when I needed some encouraging words, a warm meal to nourish my spirit, or just a shoulder to cry on when I wanted to give up. In particular, I give thanks to my parents Ramiro and Idolina Chavez, who are my everything and whom without the many sacrifices they made along their journey, I would not be here. To my siblings Ramiro Jr., Zenialisa, Jason, and Celeste who have witnessed the many sacrifices I have made and who have been there every step of the way. To my partner Manuel Salvador Diaz for always sharing unconditional love and encouragement even in my darkest moments. Gracias por tu amor siempre. To my daughter Itzel Xiandani Diaz who's loving, chill, compassionate, and healing presence has been the one constant in my life. Giving birth to you as a young mama, means that in more ways that you can imagine you have been my greatest teacher and medicina. I give thanks to my tia Teresa and my cousins Liz and Xiomara for your spiritual strength and prayers when I needed them most. To my mother-in-law Dolores Zepeda and my sister-in-laws Ines and Miriam for the unconditional support always. And I especially want to give thanks to all my nieces and nephews for the joy, laughter and overflow of love I always received from you all: Fernando, Izael, Zaretzi, Delilah, Malia, Paulette, Leo, Mateo, Mia, Inezita, Yamanik and Kali. And to my grandson, Lazaro, who's near birth we look forward too with open hearts.

In my graduate program at Berkeley, I would like to give my deepest appreciation to my dissertation chair, Patricia Baquedano-López, who has been a champion of my work throughout this entire process. Patricia Baquedano-López embodies a way of being and relating that not only invites every student she interacts with to explore our academic curiosities with intellectual rigor but to also do so from a place that honors our whole selves. Patricia- your warm spirit nourished and grounded me always especially when the imposition of the academy unsettled me. To my dissertation committee member and spiritual guerrera, Laura E. Pérez, my most sincere gracias for taking your course would serve as the impetus to embark on my healing journey of self-care and coming back home to me and this would forever change my trajectory as a graduate scholar. To my dissertation committee member and compañera, Cati V. de los Ríos, I feel indebted for your willingness to jump on my project during my last semester and for all your thoughtful and critical feedback during the last stages of my work. Your encouraging feedback supported me in more ways than I could ever describe. My sincerest gratitude to the mentoring of SCS faculty Lisa Bedolla-Garcia, Nailah- Nassir, and Leonardo Zeus who were also instrumental in my

scholarly growth and supporting my academic journey. Thank you also to all the Graduate School of Education personnel. I want to especially give thanks to Danica DuPaty, Ilka Williams, Karen Sullivan, and Rosandrea Garcia. Their guidance and support was invaluable to me.

There have been many kind individuals and academic spaces throughout my journey that have influenced my thinking, supported my intellectual growth, and who provided invaluable feedback in the many drafts of my writing. In particular, I want to give my deepest gratitude to my ISSI family and the unconditional support of Deborah Lustig, David Minkus, and Christine M. Trost during my early stages of data analysis and chapter drafts. To my ISSI cohort: Cole Hansen, Fithawee Tzeggai, Jocyl Sacramento, Leah Jacobs, and Olivia Chilcote for providing critical and thoughtful feedback always. To my SCS cohort compañeros: Arianna Morales and Tadashi Dozano. To the many amazing friends that I made along the way and whom I was blessed enough to share space to exchange ideas and who nourished my spirit when I needed it most: Alejandro Garcia, Bayley Marquez, Bianca Suarez, Cecilia Lucas, Dinorah Sanchez Loza, Frankie Ramos, Gabriela Borge Janetti, Irenka Dominguez-Pareto, Theresa Burruel Stone, Juan Herrera, Sara Chase, and Veronica Luna. I especially want to give my deepest appreciation to my solid team and compañeros who believed in me and supported me unconditionally with their generous feedback during the most critical time of bringing my prayer to completion: Ana Macleod, Derrika Hunt, Nate Gong, Rosalinda Godinez, and Vianney Gavilanes. It was such a beautiful experience to share my process and daily progress texts with colleagues who are committed to healing and decolonization. I especially want to uplift the support of Alejandro, Derrika, and Rosi, for their support during the most critical final moments helped me to push through when I thought I could not do it.

I also offer my deepest words of gratitude as an offering to all who have permitted me to share their healing stories. As I was writing, I challenged myself to hold space for the multiple truths and stories I was trusted to hold with love and the vigilance needed to protect the healing conocimientos shared with me. I am especially in deep gratitude with all the Young People who trusted and openly joined me in the vulnerability of sharing our testimonios for healing and medicina. I am deeply humbled by this journey and inspired by their healing stories. This work has solidified my commitment to Young People, it has deepened my commitment to healing, and it has expanded the breath of my work that yearns toward a more free and just world.

Last but not least, I give thanks to all the community members of the various organizations that taught me and shared so many teachings and healing conocimientos with me along the way. Their shared wisdom and knowledge not only kept me abreast of the completion of this dissertation but they also taught me about life, community, and also myself. I especially want to give thanks and honor my mentors: Deborah Santana, Brinda Mehta, Julia Oparah, Melinda Micco, and Vivian Chin who were influential in my intellectual growth as an Ethnic Studies scholar during my undergraduate years and Shawn Ginwright for the opportunity to work and learn from you. To my lifetime friends: Alma Flores, Enyonam Nanevie, Esmeralda Izarra, La'Cole Martin and Maria Dominguez for always listening to me when I needed it most and nourishing my spirit and our friendship. And finally, I am appreciative of the many people that played various significant roles in helping me think through various angles of my work. An acknowledgment page could not contain all their names, but they know who they are…. Thank you so much comunidad. To everyone, I will always lift you up in my prayers. Ometeotl. Tlazocamatli.

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INTRODUCTION

Healing Justice and Decolonization

> Activism is engaging in healing work. It means putting our hands in the dough and not merely thinking or talking about making tortillas. It means creating spaces and times for healing to happen, espacios y tiempos to nourish the soul . . . It's frustrating when healing doesn't happen immediately. Some of us choose to slow down the healing work or choose not to heal because we've become familiar and comfortable with our wounds. We may be afraid that our entire life will change if we heal. And it will . . . plunge your hands into the mess, plunge your hands en la masa, into embodied practical material spiritual political acts.
>
> Anzaldua, 2002, p. 572

> As a process, decolonization means engaging in the activities of creating, restoring, and birthing. It means creating and consciously using various strategies to liberate oneself, adapt to or survive oppressive conditions; it means restoring cultural practices, thinking, beliefs, and values that were taken away or abandoned but are still relevant and necessary to survival; and it means the birthing of new ideas, thinking, technologies, and lifestyles that contribute to the advancement and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples.
>
> Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005, p.3

My heart is racing with excitement and in rhythm with the sound of our drum, our sonajas, and ayoyotes as we march to form an inner circle among the many students, teachers, children, elders, and community leaders surrounding us. With the sacred fire and the sound of the conch and drum, we began by honoring the four directions, father sky, and mother, Tonanzin. As part of creating space for the sacred, our Mexica Danza Kalpulli Xochiquetzal[1] was invited to open and bless The Project of Peace[2] march and community gathering. As settlers[3] on Ohlone

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[1] As Mexica Danzante, I am part of the kalpulli (Nahuatl word for house) Xochiquetzal under the palabra of Genaro Martinez, our danza teacher and guardian de la tradicion conchera. Danza Mexica is a prehispanic traditional form of organization by family or clan that consists of a way of life that honors all our relations, human and non-human, and is grounded on a set of values and Indigenous concepts that guide our way of being and relating to all our relatives. I have been a danzante for about a decade and have several family members who are danzantes too. Every practice or ceremony is opened by honoring the four directions: (East) the direction of the deity Quetzalcoatl, (West) the direction of the deity is Xipetotec, Mictlampa (north), and Huitzilopochtli (south). For a close examination of the Danza Mexica tradition and its historical significance as a political/cultural/spiritual movement in both Mexico city and the U.S. Southwest, please see the brilliant dissertation of Luna, Jennie (2011) Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance.

[2] All places and names are pseudonyms.

[3] Our indigeneity in relation to the original Native American peoples, the Ohlone territory of Huchiun, makes us settlers on occupied Indigenous stolen lands. It is important to acknowledge the multiple strands of our Indigenous and mixed-ancestries. Particularly, for many Latinx peoples residing in the U.S., it is important to acknowledge the ways in which the historical and political contexts of neocolonialism have forced many Latinx individuals to become detribalized peoples. An anti-Indigenous and anti-Black state agenda in the U.S. and in many of our countries of origin, means that many Latinx people have been conditioned to assimilate to becoming "white" under U.S. Census government racial categories. However, for many Latinx individuals, our Indigeneity is felt and lived through our Indigenous genealogies, Indigenous conocimientos, and healing practices that we continue to embody and maintain alive. For many of Latinx individuals who reclaim our Indigeneity, the reality is that we may not have

occupied land, with respect and permission from the ancestors who walked these lands before us, we proceeded to offer our danzas, Maiz,[4] and Mayahuel[5] as a collective prayer asking our ancestors for strength and healing for our Young People and community. With the sound of the drum and sonajas, we offer our prayers and healing to the land and the ancestors who came before us. The land remembers and cries for the sound of the drum and for our feet to caress its soil when dancing in rhythm with the drum. On this day, Young People of Color (YPOC) break a 74-day relay-fast to foster a message of peace and healing justice. Their collective message of peace and hope is in response to the urban violence and systemic oppression that impacts their daily lives. In the closing of the ceremony, our elder invites twelve youth to form an inner circle to represent the twelve months of the year and to join us in prayer as we close with the sound of the conch and the drum. Through the embodiment of our collective spiritual prayer, my identities as mama, danzante, healer, educator, scholar, and member of this community merged and interweaved the multidimensional aspects of who I am. I was deeply touched and honored to have witnessed and been part of the collective healing spaces that are made possible when Young People of Color and the community organize and come together to nurture a message of peace, love, and hope.

The birthing of The Project of Peace came into existence as a youth-led initiative with the desire of promoting nonviolence and peace for young people's schools, neighborhoods, and the larger community. The vision behind this project was birthed by high school students of color participating in a young men's and women's healing circle at Love Academy. These circles were facilitated after school in partnership with a community-based organization at a small urban public high school composed of majority low-income Latino and Black young people. From its inception, these circles and calls for action were a loud cry that poured from YPOC's hearts and the pain of losing loved ones. At their school, in the span of seven months, four of their peers were killed as a result of community gun violence. Upon entering the school's main entrance hall, the loss of life was felt via the many candles, pictures, sacred objects, and student notes gathered in each of the four altars built to honor the students' lives. These altars symbolized a physical and spiritual display of students' pain and served as a sacred space for collective healing for students and staff. Most importantly, these altars were a necessary and critical reminder of the humanity of the precious young lives cut short. This is especially significant given the ways mainstream media normalizes and reduces the death of Black and Brown youth to terms of crime statistics and a discourse of pathology.

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a direct generational link to a specific tribal identity or land base, while some may have a more direct link to Indigenous communities in their land of origin. Particularly, urban cities across the U.S. are experiencing growing immigration by Indigenous communities from southern Mexico and Central America. For many of these Indigenous migrants, maintaining their native language and cultures is an ongoing challenge in what can be a very hostile environment and U.S. culture. Fortunately, in the Bay Area there is a growing movement to (re)claim our Indigeneity and revitalize our danzas and native languages. This is manifested in what can been seen as a growing effort to bring traditional teachers and healers from our homelands to share ancestral knowledges through workshops and private sessions that aim to decolonize knowledge and share Indigenous teachings and worldviews despite the political borders put in place to uproot us from our ancestral lands and cultures.

[4] Translation: corn. The dance of corn is a prayer to honor our relation to the corn and give thanks to the land for its abundance. Maiz danza is also about honoring the importance of planting new seeds, in this case supporting the young people planting seeds of hope, resistance, and peace.

[5] In Nahuatl, Mayahuel is the deity of the maguey (agave plant), which is related to the earth, fertility, and food. translation: 'Metl' which surrounds the maguey, 'yahuali' round. This danza is offered to support the healing of the community for the maguey is deeply respected for its many healing properties, both physically and spiritually.

With the support of community organizers, students decided to launch The Project of Peace Initiative with a 74 day-relay fast that began with a school-wide celebration to beautify their school on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It ended on Cesar Chavez Day with a community march and gathering in which local politicians, community leaders, students and families, and the community at large participated to promote unity, healing, and a positive message of peace. By the end of The Project of Peace, close to 200 individuals, including youth, teachers, and community members, had joined forces in solidarity to take on the challenge. Each day, a new student took on the fast for 24 hours and committed to a peace pledge of meditation and reflection during his or her fast. Two other small urban high schools joined the fast in solidarity. Students also held daily healing circles at school during lunchtime to support fast participants and create a space to share their experiences and speak out on the impacts of violence in their lives. These collective healing spaces were open to any student, teacher, and staff interested in participating.

At one of the small schools, Young People led the healing circles. In partnership with community educator and healer, Juan, students helped to facilitate and foster collective healing at their school. Juan drew upon Indigenous traditional knowledge and spiritual healing in his praxis with the intention of helping to alleviate some of the pain YPOC hold and carry. Inspired by Juan, Luis and DaShawn then approached him about their interest in learning and continuing to support these circles as a sacred space for healing. For Luis and DaShawn, this entailed a commitment to (re)claiming traditional knowledges of their Afro-Indigenous and Mexica-Indigenous ancestors. To varying degrees, both Luis and DaShawn had prior exposure to healing modalities rooted in Indigenous Knowledges[6] from their family elders. With respect and honor, both young people took on the responsibility of co-facilitating a healing circle each day by building an altar to honor the Four Directions and Ancestors. Luis and DaShawn also smudged[7] all who wished to participate in cleansing and ritual.

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As I describe in my opening vignette, during my experience as an ethnographer and community educator in the Project of Peace march, I *felt*[8] (Million, 2013) and was part of co-creating a different narrative with Young People of Color (YPOC):[9] one based on a story of

[6] My understanding of Indigenous Knowledges draws from Ritskes (2011) who asserts "Indigenous Knowledges are not a desperate reach into a static, romanticized past but a realization that, through history and embodied experience the past and the future can be informed and transformed; Indigenous Knowledges are dynamic and fluid" (p.413).

[7] Both Luis and Dashawn were taught by their mentor Juan how to smudge themselves and the place for the purposes of clearing the energy and cleansing themselves of anything bothering their spirit. Both Luis and Dashawn used sage to smudge themselves.

[8] Million (2013) speaks to the ways in which academia produces gatekeepers that deny Indigenous scholars entry into mainstream social discourses because "we seek to present our histories as affective, *felt*, intuited as well as thought" (p. 57). Million highlights how Indian and Metis women in Canada created a new language for communities to address their histories by insisting on including their lived experience and emotional knowledges of past pain and grief and what hope means for their future. Thus, *felt* scholarship understands "felt experience as community knowledge, knowledge that interactively informs our position as Indigenous scholars, particularly as Indigenous women scholars"(Ibid).

[9] Young People of Color refers to the collective identity of any self-identifying Black, Latin@, Asian American, Pacific Islander or Native American student. It is important to highlight that although these categories can be helpful in creating solidarity within oppressed groups that share similar characteristics and histories, there is also great diversity and variation within each ethnic group. I will use the term "Young People of Color" and "Students of Color" interchangeably. For the purposes of this article, when I refer to Students of Color I am speaking about high school age youth (14-23).

healing and love and of youth resilience and power. A story that was signaling a different kind of narrative that was not being written into the pages of the many scholarly books and research I was asked to read in my graduate courses as a critical scholar in education. I became deeply moved and inspired, bearing witness to how YPOC and community educators in this story were co-creating a language of healing, a language of hope, and a language of transformative change. YPOC were transforming their collective pain into positive action in their community in these healing spaces. Yet, research knows very little about how YPOC engage in community healing spaces and practices and how these represent ways of thinking and lived experiences that are rich in understanding what pain, grief, and hope meant for them in the past and for their future aspirations.

Young people's community manifestations, such as The Project of Peace, is one of the many ways Young People of Color are engaging in the process of decolonization[10]; a process that aims for YPOC and their families to not only survive but also thrive by working towards the healing of past, present, and future generations. It is well documented how colonial and racialized histories have created historical and generational trauma, displacement, and *soul wounding* (Duran, 2016) for many Indigenous, Black, and marginalized Communities Of Color (Cote-Meek, 2014; Deloria, 1991; Graveline, 1998; Kozol, 1992; Spring, 1994). For Indigenous scholar, Michael Yellow Bird (2005) from the Arikara (Sahnish) and Hidatsa Nations, the process of decolonization means "engaging in the activities of creating, restoring, and birthing" by "restoring cultural practices, thinking, beliefs, and values that were taken away or abandoned but are still relevant and necessary to survival" (p.3). For the Young People who participated in these healing circles, engaging in collective healing-centered practices helped inform more than just their individual identity. Their engagement in community healing spaces highlights how non-traditional forms of youth activism represent an untapped source of strength and help to facilitate collective healing. These community spaces make it possible for Young People to foster a culture of non-violence, activism, and renewed hope.

Drawing on the testimonios[11] of thirty community educators and more than three years of engagement and participant observation with various community-based healing efforts working towards centering healing when working with Young People of Color in northern California, this *knowledge documentation*[12] (Gonzales, 2012) examines how community educators and practitioners interweave social justice and healing as a critical process by which to facilitate individual and collective healing spaces with urban Young People of Color from marginalized communities. By centering the testimonios of community educators and practitioners, this work

[10] The project of decolonization must entail the work of healing, returning to balance and wholeness the split between body, mind, and spirit imposed by colonial settlers. The process of decolonization materializes in decolonizing pathways that YPOC and community educators are creating through healing centered practices that mobilize the voices of young people towards transformative change from within and from that place of decolonizing self to also challenge the logics of settler colonialism through their activism.

[11] Latina Feminist Group (2001) proposes *testimonios* as a method for feminist research praxis. The authors in this anthology speak to the power of story, personal narratives, and how *testimonios* can be legitimate sources of data and evidence. Framed by common political views, a *testimonio* is a way to collectively create knowledge and theory based on experiences.

[12] In *Red Medicine,* Patricia Gonzales (2012) uses the term *knowledge documentation* to refer to the idea of research in order to center Indigenous Knowledges, which she understands as "knowledge that emerges, coalesces, and coheres to a variety of stimuli based on the subjective experience of people who descend from the original inhabitants of a land base, such as the Americas" (p.3). Throughout the rest of this healing project, I will use *knowledge documentation* interchangeably with research in my attempt to decolonize language in ways that are more aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing.

explores how what I call a *decolonizing healing praxis* works to harness the power of critical healing consciousness, spirituality, and agency among Young People by drawing on a diverse range of healing modalities to offer alternative strategies in creating new visions of collective engagement that contribute to the individual and collective healing of YPOC and the adults that work with them in deeply intimate and political ways. In this way, healing becomes more than just a radical response to our individual and collective fragmentation at the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual levels and the dominant cultural imposition that splits the mind, body, and spirit.

As a whole, this healing project aims to explore and uplift how community educators and YPOC draw upon the concepts of healing, spirituality, and agency to engage and create a *decolonizing healing praxis.* This will potentially open possibilities for research and teaching as healing praxis, a praxis that honors the *healing conocimientos* that are being birthed, (re)centered, and transplanted in collective healing spaces with YPOC. In chapter one, I articulate a *decolonizing healing paradigm* to argue that healing is not only a critical aspect of decolonizing Eurocentric modes of thinking and being that privilege linear, secular, and scientific ways of knowing in education but, most importantly, of building the kind of educational projects that can nourish both educators and our future generations in *bodymindspirit* (Lara, 2002).[13] In chapter two, I explore the epistemological and methodological implications of employing what I call a *decolonizing healing methodology*, which seeks to embrace a research space that is both healing and transformative and de-centers colonizing relations of domination in the process of co-creating collective knowledge. Chapters three and four draw on the testimonios of community activists, educators, and healers of color, or whom I call *SocialJusticeHealing(r)Evolutionaires*, to explore how these practitioners generate collective knowledge and catalyze a *decolonizing healing praxis* with YPOC. In chapter five, I unpack how a *decolonizing healing praxis* allows *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* to address some of the challenges that they encounter in their praxis. I conclude this healing project by sharing some of the key lessons guiding the praxis of *SJH(r)Evolutionarie*s and a prayer that honors the power and resonance of a *decolonizing healing praxis.*

I now invite you to bear witness as I interweave and share how this project came to be in the following pages, how the concept of healing is understood in this work, and some context to why this work matters. Finally, I present a more detailed roadmap to the presentation of this knowledge documentation.

At a Healing Crossroads: Danzante en el Camino

As a first-year doctoral student, I crossed paths with Luis and DaShawn at a critical juncture in my own healing journey. As a first-generation Xicana[14] student, I was grappling with the tensions of engaging Eurocentric modes of knowledge-production and academic spaces that treat research as solely an intellectual exercise divorced from our hearts. I struggled to find my

[13] In, "Healing Suenos for Academia" Lara (2002) speaks of the need to unlearn the western mind/body split and how this "perpetual process" entails "learning to listen to the wisdom of my whole body," our *bodymindspirit* connection (p.435).

[14] The spelling of "X" in Xicana is to recognize and connect with my Indigenous identity and spirituality. The "X" in Xicana instead of a "ch" challenges Spanish constructions of language and represents efforts to return to the Nahuatl usage and pronunciation of the "X" (Luna, 2012). I concur with Luna (2012) when she states, "Xicana does not identify a mere geographical location, nor is it limited to the imposed political, mental, and psychological borders. It reflects a political belief and strategy, an ideology, and way of life. It is "mujer/woman"-centered and honors, accepts, and respects all people who identify with being Indigenous to this continent and Earth" (p. 12).

voice. There were many moments when fear and insecurities made me doubt my own intellectual worth, and I wanted to give up. In my desire to seek and foster meaningful connections in the spaces of higher education that I was navigating, I began to co-create healing connections with kind peers and a few professors[15] who helped nourish my spirit as I felt unsettled by the epistemic violence of academia. As I elaborate in my testimonio, the intentionality to (re)claim decolonizing spaces both inside and outside the walls of the ivory tower meant that I began to experience transformative breakthroughs in my own process of healing that inspired and informed my scholarly interests. These breakthroughs of deep spiritual healing armed me with the courage to create meaning on my own terms with my new scholar identity and the sacred task of co-creating and sharing *conocimientos* (Anzaldua, 2002) through my dissertation project.

My encounter as a Mexican danzante and ethnographer with Young People of Color like Luis and DaShawn helped me crystallize my commitment to exploring the intersections of healing, social justice, and community in education. Listening to Luis and DaShawn speak a language of healing brought about insightful connections that aligned my research to gain a greater understanding of how YPOC and community educators draw upon healing-centered practices to foster and sustain their well-being and support the larger project of decolonization. Witnessing how Luis and DaShawn held space and leadership in a healing way intrigued me and posed some initial questions. I was curious about how engaging in collective healing spaces informs YPOC's identity and self-concept. In particular, I wanted to know how community educators and practitioners are co-creating meaning and a sense of empowerment with YPOC through their engagement in these healing spaces? How are community educators and practitioners understanding healing and spirituality within a context of social justice change? What are the healing stories that we are uplifting about our Young People, and what are the stories that are silenced? Inspired by the healing stories of YPOC, like Luis and Dashawn, I was able to make connections between their healing process and my own transformative breakthroughs and commitment to decolonizing self through ancestral healing practices and how these deeply healing and spiritual experiences informed my role as researcher and the research process.

The Sacred as Healing

Witnessing how unapologetic both Luis and Dashawn were about drawing upon their spirituality when co-creating healing spaces at their school offered an opening to explore the relationship between healing and spirituality in education. I began to reflect on how healing and spirituality are concepts that were not introduced nor critically engaged throughout most of my

[15] Professor Patricia Baquedano-López disrupts colonial binary thinking in education and embodies a way of being and relating that not only invites every student she interacts with to explore our academic curiosities with intellectual rigor but to also do so from a place that honors our whole selves. My first unforgettable interaction with Professor Baquedano-López was accepting an invitation to participate in a Dia de los Muertos intimate gathering at her home. The cultural significance of Day of the Dead for many Latinx families throughout Latin America is one that resonates given that it connects us to an ancestral practice of honoring our ancestors and loved ones who have transitioned in what is a set of spiritual practices that for many communities includes altar making and visiting our loved ones in the cemetery. Until that moment, I had only encountered Professor Baquedano-López during brief but warm interactions in passing in the halls of GSE. While I was not her advisee at the time, I remember feeling excited by her invitation to connect in a more intimate manner. Her invitation to what was a very healing and sacred space in which we took turns to honor our past loved ones was a turning point in my graduate school experience. For the first time, I felt I had found my community in what can feel like a very isolating space. The warmth and community I felt on that evening was precisely the affirmation I needed in order to gain the confidence I was lacking given the privilege that is given to secular modes of intellectual exchange in academia.

K-12 public education nor my doctoral graduate program. Despite the growing discussion of the need to critically engage spirituality, distinct from religion, and as part of our processes of decolonizing teaching and learning for both teachers and students (see e.g., Lara, 2002; hooks 2003; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006), the prevailing Eurocentric western lens to knowledge production privileges linear and secular approaches to education. When healing and spirituality are addressed in education, only certain approaches to healing and spirituality are recognized and not others. Moreover, spirituality as a concept in schooling is taboo given that spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably and how spirituality is presented mainly through a religious frame. For example, while the constitutional concept of separation of church and state means that religious ceremonies and symbols have been banned in U.S. public schools, it is evident how the academic, public-school year revolves around Judeo-Christian values, such as celebrating Christmas. Furthermore, as a daily ritual, students are required to say the pledge of allegiance, which clearly states, "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." These two examples highlight the contractions in public schooling, which imposes secular modes of teaching and learning. Yet, we can see how Christianity is privileged as a religion via holidays and references tolerated in public education.

Still, the spirituality that both Luis and Dashawn were invoking was not religious in nature but rather about helping to connect to each other and the sacred for collective healing. The integration of holding healing circles and smudging provided a space to honor each other during painful and difficult moments of loss. Sadly, the spirituality embodied by Young People like Luis and Dashawn is not acknowledged nor recognized in most formalized public school settings. The conceptualization of how we understand healing and spirituality in education is too often focused on healing; the individual and collective understandings of healing are dismissed. My dissertation aims to address this gap in education scholarship by deepening our understanding of how community educators and YPOC engage in healing and spiritual ways to help bring about individual and collective hope and aspirations in their communities. It highlights the importance of creating meaningful and spiritual connections to self and others that are not always about indoctrinated religiosity. By centering the testimonios of community educators and practitioners who engage and embody a healing approach with YPOC, we can begin to better understand the importance of the community context to our understanding of the relevance of healing in education.

Healing the Colonial Narrative

My healing encounter at the Project of Peace march with Young People and the community disrupts negative stereotypes that often portray and label YPOC as violent and apathetic in public discourses of education. Instead, this healing project highlights how Young People, like Luis and DaShawn, are supported and part of a larger healing justice movement, which is rooted in a long history of resistance and radical love by Communities of Color.[16] Healing Justice brings to the forefront how YPOC bear the brunt of toxic environments associated with increasing rates of violence, lack of access to mental health, the school-to-prison pipeline, and systemic economic and racial inequalities (Anyon, 1997; Brooks-Gun, 1997; Carter, 2007; Evans, 2004; Rios, 2011). The gun violence experienced by YPOC is a symptom

[16] It is important to acknowledge that while people of color share some commonalities in our histories of oppression, the experience by these communities is not identical. The history that accounts for the basis of this collective oppression came in a variety of direct and indirect forms of domination by the dominant culture.

of another stark reality. YPOC face an array of systemic violence that includes but is not limited to: growing income disparities, concentrated poverty, gentrification, poor access to quality education and healthcare, and punitive policies that criminalize poor urban YPOC. In terms of mental health and wellbeing, YPOC face a myriad of challenges that manifest in toxic symptoms that take a toll on their body, mind, and spirit (Flores, 2013; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Hill et al., 2010; Hyatt et al., 2017). In response, YPOC and community educators across our state are engaging in healing-centered approaches and are working towards building healthier communities so YPOC can begin to heal from this recurring trauma (Chavez-Diaz & Lee, 2014; Desai, 2020; Ginwright, 2010a, 2016). Thus, healing justice within the context of working with YPOC is about dismantling the increasing state violence, and community terror Indigenous, Black, and Brown bodies are subjected to on a daily basis. It is also about fostering collective healing by nourishing young people's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing and capacity to be agents of change in their communities and world.

Healing justice in education entails an understanding that we have a responsibility to cultivate learning for transformation and work to dismantle the logics of coloniality in order for the next seven generations to stand a chance. As committed educators to social justice, it is vital to not only have a critical understanding of the systemic oppression and suffering YPOC face but also of what sources promote individual and collective healing among YPOC and Communities of Color. Genealogies of healing and spiritual activism strongly influence the consciousness of Communities of Color's consciousness in struggle, especially as they encounter the brutality, violence, and geopolitical, economic powers that also marginalized Communities of Color (Abalos, 1998; Anzaldua, 2007; Facio & Lara, 2014; LaDuke, 2005; Mani, 2009; Martinez, 2013; Perez, 2007; Sandoval, 2000). In these contested spaces, community educators and young people engage in deeply healing, spiritual, and embodied ways (Desai, 2020).

Bringing our attention to the inner transformative healing processes of Young People, like DaShawn and Luis, as they engage in healing circles, draw upon their spirituality, and reflect on their purpose and meaning of life is often viewed as anti-intellectual and, in some cases, as "emotional" and "soft" scholarship. The emotional labor of love that it takes to facilitate healing spaces is dismissed as "therapeutic," and in most cases, the only option provided for students who may be struggling emotionally is to be referred to a psychologist. Unfortunately, "healing" in this way is expected to be executed in an office space where "experts" get to diagnose and help "fix" your emotional issues and/or, in some cases, help numb our sense of fragmentations and feelings with pharmaceutical drugs under the disguise of helping to "cure" us. This treatment is given to both our Young People and adults. For YPOC, the stigma of receiving mental health treatment further translates into being labeled a troubled and traumatized Young Person in need of fixing. Consequently, this healing project disrupts the colonial gaze imposed on our understanding of healing and instead explores the ways in which healing and spirituality have shaped the collective consciousness of community educators and YPOC within the context of their activism and lived experience. It explores contemporary community understandings of healing in order to better understand the forms of healing-centered spaces YPOC engage and experience.

With the analytical frame of decolonization and building on the research of other scholars who have drawn strong links between healing, spirituality, and agency, I have worked towards a healing method that allows for focus both on the particularities of the stories and experiences of community educators and practitioners engage in healing spaces with YPOC and the sociopolitical and historical contexts in which institutions shape what counts as healing. It cannot

be ignored how political economies shape the conceptualization of healing in the public discourse and social imaginaries under an agenda of neoliberalism which privileges the "I" and highly values the individual working on self to be more "productive" and "fixed." (Million, 2013). While educational research has both validated and contested student and community experiential knowledge as key to creating more transformative teaching and learning spaces for YPOC (Conchas, 2006; Darder, 20212; Delpit, 1995; Giroux, 2001; Noguera et al., 2006; Oakes, 2006), this has been mostly done from a secular epistemological lens. Yet, healing and the sacred are fundamental to upholding and embodying a more transformative educational epistemology (Delgado et al., 2006; Dillard, 2013; Ginwright, 2011; Gonzalez, 2001; Grande, 2004; Graveline, 1998; hooks, Wane et al., 2011).

However, not much research has examined how community educators and YPOC are building innovative practices that are inclusive of healing to facilitate a sense of positive cultural identity and wellbeing among YPOC. This healing project sheds light on how healing is part of our herstories and histories as Indigenous and Communities of Color in resistance and how what I call healing conocimientos speak to our collective strength and determination to survive but to aspire to thrive. We are not just "damaged" individuals; we are also resilient and powerful agents of change. In the midst of structural oppression and ongoing trauma, YPOC are healing, and they are connecting with each other in meaningful ways.

In the following sections, I begin with a discussion of decolonizing mainstream understandings of healing that dominate in the social sciences. I then elaborate on how I am conceptualizing healing within this healing project and how this work contributes to a more holistic understanding of healing that is rooted in community understandings of healing that emerged from the testimonios of community educators and young people who contributed their conocimientos. The next section situates this work within a larger youth healing justice movement that has emerged in the past two decades and is increasingly gaining momentum during a historical moment in which a lexicon of "healing" is gaining currency among foundations and state-wide efforts to bring about more holistic models of engaging YPOC in social justice. I conclude this introduction with a roadmap of the knowledge documentation presented and the contributions of this healing project.

Decolonizing our understandings of healing

> Healing means far more than emoting or discharging feelings. It is a process of experiencing emotions, gaining insight into their source, and identifying and changing negative beliefs and behaviors. It is a holistic process, which calls on the powers of the mind, the emotions, the body, and the spirit and results in the freeing of these powers for positive action in the social and political world (Graveline, 1998, p. 155).

At the most basic level, healing is understood as restoring someone to health and/or wholeness. This process happens at the physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels. In this way, healing has to do with restoring balance to the bodymindspirit from any disconnection or trauma it may have experienced. Healing can be experienced in multiple ways, and its meaning also shifts across culture and context (Gonzales, 2012). However, too often, when one invokes the concept of healing in the social sciences, the fields of mental health, medical anthropology, and psychology dominate our understanding of healing. Images of impoverished, traumatized, and unhealthy communities of color in need of "healing" may

surface in the imagination of many working professionals. The prevalent understanding of healing in these fields situates it as solely an individual endeavor that takes place in the realms of the mind and the physical body privately (Duran, 2006). Rooted in "science," healing is treated as a phenomenon that can be "observed" and consequently "measured." It affirms a discourse of pathology and trauma, which often fails to make the links to the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization and struggles for self-determination of colonized and oppressed peoples. Under a discourse of pathology, healing interventions work to address the individual symptoms of social suffering and fail to make visible whiteness and white supremacy as systemic structures that are part of the root causes that create the need for healing in the first place (Dillion, 2013).

Moreover, secular western thinking disregards the cultural and spiritual dimensions of non-western forms of healing. When included, non-western healing and spirituality are often appropriated in ways that distort, commodify and take out of context the sacredness of local cultural and spiritual healing practices of Indigenous Peoples[17] and Communities of Color.

> *To speak and write of Indigenous knowledges, healing, and spirituality as a colonized body in the ivory tower necessitates a moment to pause with my readers.*
>
> *To pause as I (re)write in between the margins of imaginary constructs and boundaries and speak back to intellectual discourses and settler imaginary that has perfected the art of amnesia in order to sleep at night and not be tormented by the violent erasure of ancient cultural memory and animal and plant life memory it has destroyed with its culture of death and consumption.*
>
> *A long pause to acknowledge and make visible the violent patterns of colonial settlers stealing resources, stealing land, colonizing communities, and then hijacking and appropriating our sacred symbols and rituals of our cultures in order to strip those knowledges of their healing and spiritual power.*
>
> *Settler colonialism erases, silences, distorts, appropriates, and commodifies our healing and spiritual knowledges only for the benefit of white supremacy and as part of the cultural genocide that has been taken place for more than 500 years in Amerikkka.*
>
> *To pause is to signal a healing movida. A healing movida for a moment of silence to name, grief, and make space for healing our collective wounds.*
>
> *Healing movidas remind us that healing means we are love and we are light. Healing means we are more than the labels and boxes settler colonialism has imposed on our bodies, minds, and spirits. Healing is knowing we are not alone. Healing means we are our ancestors. Healing is knowing we are protected and what we have to say matters.*

[17] I understand Indigenous Peoples of the Americas to refer to the original inhabitants of the land area now known as the United States as well as Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, and their descendants. For Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) "the word Indigenous is a way of including the many diverse communities, language groups, and nations, each with their own identification within a single grouping… 'Indigenous peoples' is a relatively recent term which emerged in the 1970s out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood. It is a term that internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world's colonized peoples" (p. 6-7). Throughout this paper, I will refer to this collective identity as "Indigenous Peoples" and/or "Indigenous Communities."

(Reflection, 2021).

Particularly, in medical anthropology, the concept of "healing" has been one that has been heavily "studied" but through the colonial gaze, which appropriates social constructs of "healing," "spirituality," and "culture" as exotic concepts when researching Indigenous communities. In this way, to bring up the concept of healing within the context of the lives of Indigenous and People of Color is an intricate and multilayered undertaking and impossible to encompass all its complexity and depth in these written pages. In exploring the concepts of healing and spirituality in education, I want to be clear that my intention is not to appropriate or misuse Indigenous Knowledges; I come to these conversations from a place of deep respect and humility given the diversity and multiplicity in cultural knowledge that exists among Indigenous communities. However, this healing project aims to expand our dialogue on how community understandings of healing among community educators and YPOC in the northern occupied Huichin Ohlone territory are interweaving healing practices in their efforts to heal and thrive as a community and how this understanding of healing can inform how we can move forward in co-creating more holistic models of community healing in education. For the purposes of my discussion of healing and education, I will outline the parameters and scope of how healing is conceptualized.

In this work, healing is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing that encompass the multiple layers of our being and how we relate to self and all human and non-human life forces. For many Indigenous cultures around the globe, healing is considered from the perspective of relations—between individuals and the environment and the world at large (Graveline, 1998). Healing is considered from the perspective of *Self-In-Relation to Others*: "we are able to see ourselves and our immanent value as related to and interconnected with others- family, community, the world, those behind and those yet to come" (Graveline, 1998, p.58). This broadens the concept of healing beyond repairing damaged individuals, for healing is understood as a continuous process of restoring the physical and emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing of individuals and communities (Waldram, 2013). It is a process that takes place in a particular historical and social context. Moreover, healing work in this sense is deep-rooted in anti-racism, anti-oppression, and anti-Colonialism. It is about reorienting the ways of being that honor our interconnectedness with each other and the intricate web of life.

At the individual level, healing is about personal transformation and evolution to a higher conscious self (Graveline, 1998) . For many Indigenous and communities of color, this entails a lifelong journey of commitment to being vigilant throughout our lives, given the ways colonization has fragmented and disrupted our ancestral healing ways of being in relation with self and each other (Waldram, 2008). At the collective level, healing can be a political and self-empowering intervention against the forces of oppression (Adelson, 2008; Ginwright, 2011; Anzaldua, 2015). In their study of Cree healing practices, Adelson (1997) found that healing functions as a social movement in response to social suffering caused by colonization and land loss. It also aims to strengthen and renew social relations as well as reconstitute and reaffirm contemporary Cree identity. Similarly, the work of Waldram (1988) addresses the ways spirituality, such as sweat lodges and ceremonies, is being integrated into models of mental and physical medical institutions to help facilitate the healing of First Nations. Moreover, a growing body of literature attempts to integrate a more nuanced understanding of healing that integrates body and mind (Coates et al., 2013). Indigenous scholar from the Arikara (Sahnish) and Hidatsa Nations, Michael Yellow Bird (2013), writes about the power of mindfulness in healing the

trauma of colonialism. Yellow Bird puts forward the framework of neurodecolonization, which refers to all the ways of understanding how our brains, genetics, and immune systems work when under the stressors of colonialism and during optimal decolonization processes (Yellow Bird, 2013). From this perspective, our traditional ceremonies and rituals work to change the brain's capacity to heal from the trauma.

Indigenous and critical educational scholars have illuminated the importance of healing in addressing the wounds of colonization, particularly for YPOC (Archibald, 2008; Cantu-Sanchez et al., 2020; Graveline, 1998; Villanueva, 2013). For YPOC, these healing spaces provide geographies of resistance to political, cultural, and social structures of oppression that weigh heavily on their spirits. I also argue that healing as a response is also a deeply spiritual and embodied praxis that helps to bring about and/facilitate collective healing among young people of color.

> *Healing is love and light. Healing is honoring a way of knowing what runs deep in my flesh and bones. Healing is knowing that I am connected to a life force energy that is about sustaining Life, Harmony, and Balance. Healing is listening to the wisdom of my ancestors that guide me in the wake and dream states. Healing is greeting the sun as it rises to bring warmth and energy to all life on earth. Healing is listening to the whispers of the universe when it speaks to me through the winds that visit me and the many synchronicities that illuminate my path. Healing is witnessing how the sun sets in order for the moon, the stars, and other dimensions to be visible. Healing is a journey and process of letting go of the many internalized stories that no longer serve me to make space to remember ancestral ways of knowing and being to help cultivate seeds of understanding, forgiveness, and compassion. Healing is releasing tears to heal and bring clarity to my inner waters. Healing is breathing self-determination, both as a noun and a verb. Healing is speaking from a place that honors the heart and womb conocimientos that guide my intuition and wisdom. Healing is dreaming and believing in the goodness and sacredness of every child. Healing is magical, liberating, and dynamic, and healing can also be messy, painful, and scary. Healing is writing as ceremony. (Chavez-Mara, 2021)*

Context of A Youth Healing Justice Movement

We who believe in freedom cannot rest
We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes

Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons
Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons

That which touches me most
Is that I had a chance to work with people
Passing on to others that which was passed on to me

To me, young people come first
They have the courage where we fail
And if I can but shed some light as they carry us through the gale

The older I get the better I know that the secret of my going on
Is when the reins are in the hands of the young, who dare to run against the storm
(Reagon, 1988, stanzas 1-5).

In the past decade there has been a national interest in the concept of "healing," especially in the philanthropic community. For the past two decades, a hyper-trauma-informed emphasis has gained currency, and more recently, activists on the frontlines have pushed against this trend to move towards a healing focus for YPOC. This is happening within the context in which a national discourse continues to treat Black and Brown bodies as "dangerous" and young people in particular as "violent." Policies such as prop. 22 in 2000, which resulted in tougher sanctions such as three strikes, which led to young people being tried as adults, which traumatized entire families and generations. Thus, in reaction, a trauma-informed lens made it possible to acknowledge and name this trauma. The carceral state and its policies have had devastating impacts on communities of color and the livelihoods of our future generations (Gilmore, 2007; Rios, 2011). In response, communities of color in resistance have been organizing and responding to the ongoing devastation Young People have been experiencing (Jobin-Leeds, 2016. These critical times require us to be attuned to grassroots political action, the formation of local healing spaces, and the transformative potential of sustaining healing work in order to open possibilities for educators to engage in the praxis of healing. During the time of my data collection (2012-2015), a historical moment was acutely taking form and would culminate during the summer of 2014. The unjust and inhumane death of several Young People at the hands of police would set the stage for an outcry from the community that would lead to mass protests, marches, and organizers coming together to demand healing justice for the death of Young Lives. The death of Michael Brown, only 18, on August 9, 2014, would be the final straw that gave birth to the organized Black Lives Matter movement against police violence and institutionalized racism. This work pays tribute to all the Young Lives that have been killed as a result of police terror:

February 26, 2012: **Trayvon Martin**, 17
Trayvon was shot and killed by neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman, who was acquitted in the case.

October 22, 2013: **Andy Lopez**, 13
Andy was killed by Sonoma County sheriff's deputy Erick Gelhaus. Lopez was walking through a vacant lot when the officer mistook his toy gun for an AK-47.

March 21, 2014: **Alex Nieto**, 28
Alex was eating a burrito and chips at a San Francisco Park when a passerby deemed him suspicious and urged his partner to call 911. Police officers shot Nieto at least 14 times.

August 9, 2014: **Michael Brown**, 18
Michael was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, who responded to reports that Brown had stolen a box of cigars.

November 22, 2014: **Tamir Rice**, 12
Tamir Rice was shot dead in Cleveland, Ohio, by a police officer after reports of a male who was "probably a juvenile" pointing a gun that was "probably fake" at passersby.

February 26, 2015: **Amilcar Perez-Lopez**, 20
Amilcar, an immigrant from Guatemala, was shot four times in the back and once in the head by two plainclothes San Francisco police officers.

Especially in these times of growing instability and state violence, there has been a push by grassroots community actors to bring to the forefront the need to focus on the mental health and healing of urban Young People of Color. Increasingly, these conscious grassroots activists have been making an impact on the national conversation on healing in the philanthropic world. For the most part, much of these efforts have been focused and geared towards boys and young men of color. A national initiative that propelled a greater emphasis on boys and men of color was the "my brother's keeper" initiative that was launched in 2014 in order to invest in supporting boys and men of color (United States My Brother's Keeper Task Force, 2014). Large philanthropic foundations have invested great sums of money in aims to alleviate some of the structural and cultural barriers communities of color face. Thus, in many ways, the articulation and activism by the community and YPOC that has brought visibility to the challenges facing young men of color have moved healing to the forefront of public discourse on mental health and social justice.

As a result, we have also witnessed an increased interest in the foundation world to fund innovative projects that are working towards grappling with systems of oppression and which are being creative and innovative in their approach in working with young people and communities of color. In particular, there has been a more significant effort and intentionality on recognizing healing as part of youth development's lexicon and theory of change. On a national level, for example, large foundations like the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which in 2010 launched their national grant campaign "America Healing." According to the Kellogg Foundation's website, "America healing is a strategy for racial healing toward racial equity and is designed to raise awareness of unconscious biases and inequities and to help communities heal. Our goal is to support and empower communities in their efforts to dismantle the structures that limit opportunities for vulnerable children" (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2010). The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has also made a commitment to empower boys and young men of color to heal, grow, and thrive. In particular, their Forward Promise Initiative included a $12 million investment "to move the field of trauma-informed care forward so we can give young people the support and services they need to heal, grow, and thrive so they can lead healthier, productive lives" (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2010). Such investments are helping to support community activists who are at the frontlines leading the way in relation to working with young people from a deep understanding of the historical trauma but, more importantly, the need to center healing in their praxis.

Particularly, in our state of California, there has been an increased effort by community activists to join forces on spearheading a healing movement that aims to infuse a message of hope and possibility. Collectively, local efforts have been able to bring more attention to the national discussion on the importance of integrating a healing praxis in youth development and

the philanthropic community. However, it is critical to remain vigilant about the ways in which healing is being picked up by foundations as the new "sexy" term around youth engagement and social justice efforts. Increasingly, we are witnessing how many foundations and organizations invoke the concept of healing as a necessary process of dealing with trauma when working with Young People of Color. However, too often, the conversation of healing remains overly focused on "helping" to address the symptoms of trauma and less examination of the links between the trauma we are healing and the history and ongoing impacts of colonization and the self-determination of colonized peoples to map out their present and future paths. Too often, when funding is provided to support healing efforts, there are also strings attached by foundations that are eager to "measure" and abstract the magic formula that leads to YPOC and communities experiencing healing. Hence, a real tension exists given that community educators often do not trust or resist the insistence on "measuring" the short-term effectiveness of healing-centered practices by foundations, especially when it comes to interrogating the sacred dimensions of healing practices. While these foundations' funding sources allow for local efforts to bring about more transformative youth engagement that are validating alternative and community understandings of healing, it is important to remain vigilant about the dangers of institutionalizing community understandings of healing. For these community educators, engaging in healing work with YPOC is a continuous process that is not linear, nor can it be studied in the scientific ways Western thinking imposes.

More recently, researchers on social and youth movements have documented the importance of healing in organizing around issues of social justice (Ginwright, 2015; Jobin-Leeds, 2016). In his recent book, *Hope and Healing in Urban Education: How Urban Activists and Teachers are Reclaiming Matters of the Heart*, Shawn Ginwright (2015) draws on case studies to argue that healing a community is a form of political action and highlights how critical it is to center healing and hope in educational and political strategies. He brings forward the framework of healing justice, which is "based on a clear understanding that injustice and oppression don't simply block opportunities, but also cause psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical harm to individuals and communities" (p.6). It involves 1) transforming the institutions and relationships that are causing the harm in the first place, 2) collectively healing and building hope (p.7). Unlike mainstream approaches to healing that attempt to identify "remedies" only at the individual level, healing justice provides a platform from which to deploy more holistic models of intervention that attempt to address the root of young people's collective suffering and build hope. This framework supports his previous work, which articulated radical healing key to "a process that builds on the capacity of people to act upon their environment in ways that contribute to well-being for the common good. This process contributes to individual well-being, community health, and broader social justice where people can act on behalf of others with hope, joy, and a sense of possibility" (p. 8). Moreover, Ginwright's work brings forward Healing Centered Engagement (HCE), which is a strength-based approach that advances a collective view of healing and works to re-center culture as a central feature in the well-being of young people and communities of color. It aims to bring about a holistic restoration of young people's wellbeing. The following principles inform healing Centered Engagement. It is:

- is explicitly political
- culturally grounded & views healing as the restoration of identity
- is asset driven and focuses on wellbeing rather than symptoms
  supports adult providers with their own healing (Ginwright, 2015)

Developing a critical consciousness focused on systems change that addresses root causes and not just band-aid solutions is a critical first step to mobilizing communities to end systemic oppression. However, it is not enough. Transformative change involves many levels of transformation, which must be inclusive of the personal, spiritual, cultural, and political dimensions. Healing is the process that aids decolonizing of self. We must heal the social suffering caused by colonization grounded in an understanding of the historical as well as the contemporary trauma implicit in systems of oppression. This paradigm shift entails that we draw from our inner power to cultivate our abilities to imagine and build something better for our communities. Otherwise, we risk reproducing relations of domination that sustain the very systems of oppression we attempt to eradicate. Only then can healing function as a mobilizing strategy towards social and political action in our world, one that focuses on finding solutions to self and collective empowerment based on culturally appropriate and local forms of action (Adelson, 2008; Anzaldua, 2002).

Healing activism, as understood in this healing project, affirms that our inner and outer worlds are inseparable, and the creativity that arises from such understanding can help fuel positive change in our communities and world. This healing activism is not new. Historically and presently, Indigenous people and POC have engaged in struggles to defend the earth and their cultures by invoking the sacred as political (LaDuke, 2005). To respond from a place of healing is to strengthen our collective power to infuse our struggles for resistance with potent doses of creativity and imagination to build a better future with our young people. Instead of focusing only on our trauma(s), the healing activism of community educators and YPOC becomes a vehicle for their own healing and for building their capacity to respond to everyday situations of injustice from a place of hope and possibility. Their *decolonizing healing praxis* fuels their visions for radical transformation for their families, communities, and world.

Healing Ofrenda: Coming Full Circle

My past experiences as a community educator of color working *with* low-income YPOC and Communities of Color have provided me with an insider perspective and firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities involved in creating holistic and inclusive models of learning that are intentional and mindful of promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of students and their families. Before graduate school, from 2004 to 2010, I founded and directed an after-school program providing wrap-around services to low-income, first-generation, and immigrant Young People of Color to pursue higher education. As a career counselor and mentor, I worked closely with parents and students to develop academic goals. I fostered a comprehensive learning community that provided educational and social-emotional guidance from the sophomore high school year and throughout college years to each of our cohort of incoming students. I implemented a student-centered praxis that drew on the strengths of my students and their families and provided each student with a support system to nurture their intellectual and emotional growth. A guiding principle that informed my approach with YPOC was a firm belief in each Young Person's ability to reach their full potential. It was critical to infuse this message of hope and love, especially given the context of low expectations YPOC receive from school and many of the adults in their lives (Carter, 2005; Darder, 2012; Delpit, 1995; Freire, 1970).

With more than a decade of experience working with Young People and school educators and leaders, I gained a critical understanding of the ways in which my students and their families were impacted by systems of oppression and how this pain often manifested in their lives and the

lives of their close relations. Moreover, in my own healing praxis with Young People, it was in the process of sharing pieces of my own personal journey of pain and growth with my students that I often experienced the most insight into my own personal healing, which simultaneously helped to build trust and kinship with my students. Over time, this trust provided a bridge to help facilitate a space for YPOC to show up similarly by taking a risk to be vulnerable and share both their pains and joys. These profound personal and professional experiences working *with* Young People, parents, teachers, and the wider community taught me firsthand that, amidst the effects of poverty and violence in underserved communities, fostering community spaces for healing is vital to restoring and nurturing a sense of hope among individuals and the collective spirit and agency of Communities of Color. This firm commitment to working towards fostering the collective well-being of our Young People and future generations would propel me to pursue my graduate studies as a means to delve more deeply into understanding how healing spaces can cultivate hope and agency among YPOC.

Consequently, my research trajectory as a doctoral student focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the ways youth, community activists, and educators call upon the concept of healing as key to dismantling systems of oppression and promoting more holistic and humanizing approaches to nurturing young people's intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing. Furthermore, my trajectory as a community educator committed to healing transformation continued in a variety of ways through the research projects I have engaged in and via my own personal journey navigating my voice and positionality as a researcher. As a scholar, I write with three purposes: 1) to center the importance and value of transformative healing in education within a context of community engagement, 2) to provide a healing paradigm to foster a healing praxis in educational praxis and research, and 3) to join and uplift the many voices of healing justice community educators and grassroots community activists who are fostering the voices of YPOC in their movement to create a healing vision of hope and justice in their communities.

As further referred to as a *healing project*, my dissertation research expands on my insights from my participation in research collaborations that enhanced my understanding of the complexity of doing healing work with YPOC. This *healing project* underscores the importance of drawing from the epistemological understandings of healing and wellbeing already present in our communities in order to foster hope, love, and sustainability with Young People of Color. The testimonials of both community educators and Young People illuminate how community and youth are carving out spaces that draw on their spiritual and cultural understandings to link their individual healing to larger social injustice struggles. As evident across the testimonials of this *knowledge documentation,* when we turn inward and heal our relations, we can help foster our abilities to imagine and build something better for our communities. These findings also suggest that community spaces that foster a decolonizing healing praxis utilize a diverse range of healing modalities to serve as a catalyst for cultivating young people's resilience, hope, and capacity to see themselves as agents of change.

Roadmap to Healing Project

As an ofrenda, this dissertation shares the collective wisdom guiding the *decolonizing healing praxis* of community educators engaging in the larger project of decolonization with YPOC. The healing conocimientos birthed from their testimonios is medicine meant to nourish and facilitate collective healing for and with communities of color. It speaks to the many critical social justice community educators /activists/healers who work in the trenches and who, each

day, pour their hearts out to work with young people in creating healing spaces that nurture their spirit and sustain their social justice activism. It also speaks to leaders and community allies interested in learning more about the ways in which collective healing has and continues to be a critical aspect of transforming ourselves and the world. It aims to encourage ongoing dialogues about what it means to engage in decolonizing healing work and contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and strengths of working with YPOC. Finally, this dissertation, from beginning to end, has been a labor of love, a meditation, and prayer that calls upon all the energies of my ancestors and life source to help heal myself, those before me, and those to come.

In this spirit, I proceed with my ofrenda by calling in the sacred with my own testimonio in terms of what brings me to explore the relationships between healing and social justice and how my lived experiences have shaped my understanding and lens to healing. In my multiple roles as a mother, daughter, sister, partner, educator, and activist, I seek to heal Self-in-Relation[18](Graveline, 1998). To honor and learn from the ancestral Indigenous Knowledges that informs the lens I bring to this work, I present my dissertation chapters via the Four Directions: East, West, North, and South. As taught in many Indigenous communities, each direction represents particular energies and elements, and this knowledge helps inform and shed light on the significance of spirit within my research process and analysis. Each chapter begins with a prayer honoring a particular direction. As such, the organization of my healing project into the four directions is offered as an ofrenda that aims to contribute to decolonizing the Eurocentric gaze that dominates and informs the ways in which YPOC and communities are "researched" in academia. The Four Directions represent a non-linear alternative way to engage and frame this work from a place of love and integrity, and most importantly, as a whole, being committed to healing self-in-relation.

Tlahuizcampa: A Decolonizing Healing Paradigm in Education

Guided by the direction of the Tlahuizcampa (East), where the sun rises and where the sacred masculine resides, I articulate a *decolonizing healing paradigm* to argue that healing is not only a critical aspect of decolonizing Eurocentric modes of thinking and being that privilege linear, secular, and scientific ways of knowing in education but, most importantly, of building the kind of educational projects that can nourish both educators and our future generations in bodymindspirit. Centering healing, spirituality, and Indigenous knowledges to inform this work, a *decolonizing healing paradigm* in education allows us to (re)conceptualize healing not just as a site of resistance against an oppressive colonial educational system but as a process that allows us to engage multiple sites of knowledge production and ways of being that help cultivate more healing relationships with YPOC and among educators and practitioners. I build on the works of decolonial thinkers and Indigenous feminist critiques of the understanding of healing to map the ontological and epistemological lens that informs this work. This chapter aims to contribute to a critical dialogue that brings healing and education into conversation while de-centering western approaches to schooling that often negate the centrality of culture and healing in affirming teaching and learning that happens within a context of community.

[18] Graveline (1998) proposes the model of Self-In-Relation as an Indigenous worldview that recognizes the link between individual responsibility and community wellbeing. This knowledge holds that "each person is responsible for his or her actions In-Relation to the larger community" (p. 57). Through a model of Self-In-Relation, "we are able to see ourselves and our immanent value as related to and interconnected with others- family, community, the world, those behind and those yet to come" (p.58).

Cihuatlampa: Decolonizing Healing Methodology

Guided by the direction of the Cihuatlampa (West), the place for transformation and where the sun rests, I explore the epistemological and methodological implications of employing what I call a decolonizing healing methodology, which seeks to embrace a research space that is both healing and transformative and de-centers colonizing relations of domination in the process of co-creating collective knowledge. Building on existing literature from Indigenous and feminist scholars of color and decolonizing methodologies that challenge dominant ways of conducting research, I discuss the use of a decolonizing healing methodology in the process of gathering testimonios and my role as a researcher. In this way, as decolonizing prayers, it aims to bring complexity and embodiment to disrupt the dichotomy of the colonizer/colonized researcher. I begin with a discussion of my positionality by complicating my multiple identities in relation to research, land, and place. I then explore the power of testimonio in braiding healing conocimientos as a conceptual tool in my methodological approach. Last, I describe my methodological approach, a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM), which seeks to embrace research rooted in an understanding of self-in-relation and is guided by four healing conocimientos: 1) Addressing the Heart of the Matter; 2) Centering Indigenous Ways of Being, 3) Embracing Spirit(s) and Spirituality, and 4) Listening in Mindbodyspirit.

***Mictlampa:* Towards a Decolonizing Healing Praxis**

Guided by the direction of the Mictlampa (North), where the ancestors reside, chapters three and four draw on the testimonios of community activists, educators, and healers of color, or whom I call *SocialJusticeHealing(r)Evolutionaires*, to explore how these practitioners generate collective knowledge and catalyze a healing centered praxis with YPOC. In chapter three, I underline the importance of their testimonios in generating healing conocimientos; subversive knowledges that are critical to shifting the ways healing is mobilized for cultural revitalization and self-determination with YPOC. The understanding of healing that emerges from their testimonios calls for a praxis that is situated within the context of healing justice and the larger project of decolonization. Their healing approach, or what I call a *decolonizing healing praxis,* decenters settler colonialism by restoring the centrality of healing and spirituality when engaging in struggles of decolonization with YPOC and in decolonizing ourselves. Working across their testimonios, a shared healing vision, and a strong commitment to the collective healing of future generations unites them. Chapter four elaborates how *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are developing alternative visions of the future and restoring their capacity to hope and sustain themselves in their commitment to working with YPOC. This work involves many levels of transformation: personal and spiritual, communal, cultural, and political. I identify four *healing conocimientos* that inform their *decolonizing healing praxis*. More intentionally, healing conocimientos center healing at the core of our work with YPOC and foregrounds an understanding of healing that is inclusive of bodymindspirit and is situated within a broader context of colonialism, power, and systems of oppression.

Huizlampa: "A weight was lifted off my body": Youth Culture, Resistance and Hope

Guided by the direction of the Huizlampa (South), the energy of the youth, chapter five examines how Young People of Color understand and make meaning of the relationship between trauma, healing, and agency in their lives. Centering the voices of low-income YPOC provides a much-needed perspective in scholarship that examines the relevance of healing for education. Based on fifteen testimonios of Young People engaged in community-based healing, I explore the ways in which YPOC are taking up issues of zero-tolerance policies, police brutality,

gentrification, and environmental racism in their communities. In this way, YPOC are countering the narrative of youth of color as only violent and/or apathetic, and instead, are working to organize themselves to bring about healing to their collective suffering. This chapter argues that these decolonizing healing spaces present opportunities for Young People to share their individual experiences through the collective process.

Father Sky: **Exploring the Regalos y Retos**

In chapter six, I unpack how a *decolonizing healing praxis* allows *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries* to address some of the challenges that they encounter in their praxis. First, I discuss the ways in which colonial western linear time presents unique challenges to the work of healing and discuss how a *decolonizing healing praxis* speaks to a temporal aspect of healing. Time as healing becomes medicinal in that it allocates time to heal, or rather, to suspend activity in a colonial timeline that is hyper-focused on productivity. I highlight how a *decolonizing healing praxis* makes it possible to disrupt linear time through *SJH(r)Evolutionaries'* praxis of temascal, healing circles, and releasing pain. I also discuss how *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* meet the challenge of deploying a *decolonizing healing praxis* in the context of a capitalist neoliberal agenda that appropriates culture, doesn't support collective spaces for healing, and is about trauma pimping. These challenges underpin the logics of settler colonialism and rationalities in our politics of engaging in healing work. This chapter concludes by situating a *decolonizing healing praxis* as part of a collective prayer: an ongoing prayer to imagining and planting seeds that will help cultivate a healing vision in the hearts and minds of Young People, which transgresses time and space for collective healing to take place for the next seven generations.

Tonanzin: **Towards Decolonizing Healing Praxis**

Drawing on the power of testimonios, this healing project has highlighted how *SJH(r)Evolutionarie*s are creating collective healing spaces for historically marginalized YPOC to engage in healing processes. Honoring the power of Tonanzin, I summarize some of the key lessons guiding the praxis of *SJH(r)Evolutionarie*s and the power and resonance of a *decolonizing healing praxis.* It illuminates the nuances of engaging a *decolonizing healing praxis* and how it strengthens holistic and asset-based approaches to promoting individual and collective healing ofYPOC. I discuss the key lessons that guide the *decolonizing healing praxis* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* and how these lessons help facilitate YPOC's social, emotional, and spiritual healing and strengthen Young People of Color's sense of self and purpose.

Sin Pelos en la Lengua: Testimonio of Healing-Self-in-Relation

i am a spiritual GUERRERA
i am BEAUTIFUL
i am WHOLE
i am POWERFUL
i am SACRED

i am rooted in XICANA and Earth Based SPIRITUALITIES
As my source of inspiration and wisdom
i remain fluid to CHANGE
as the seasons of mama earth and
cultivate inner PEACE

i am committed to a LIFE-LONG journey of TRANSFORMATION
i seek
HEALING, LOVE, JOY, and HARMONY
in ALL my RELATIONS
to activate my highest energetic SELF
and REBIRTH.

OMETEOTL

> Tu autohistoria is not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to shifting winds. Forced to rework your story, you invent new notions of yourself and reality—increasingly multi dimensional versions where body, mind, and spirit interpenetrate in more complex ways.
>
> Anzaldúa, "now let us shift"

Writing the many pages to this healing project I asked for permission and guidance from my ancestors and spirit guides to help me think, speak, and write from a place of love, integrity and truth. Just outside of the library, where I spent many hours dedicated to birthing this project, I had a particular sanctuary next to a small creek where I would lay on the grass to set intentions and release any thoughts and/or tensions weighing heavy on my bodymindspirit (Lara, 2002). In this special sanctuary and among our tree relatives, I build a spiritual connection with a particular tree as my womb tree. In prayer with my womb tree I always asked for continual flow of creativity before entering the library to write. During one of these many sessions laying on mother tonanzin a blue dragonfly visited me. For nearly half an hour I remained still while this beautiful creature took turns resting first on each of my hands and then on my bare feet. Its unexpected landing on my hands and feet was an invitation to learn from its medicine. With deep admiration and humility, I gave thanks and asked this dragonfly spirit for guidance as I reflected in my process of (re)writing self and sharing my testimonio.

My encounter with this blue long tailed and four-winged creature would bring insightful reflections about my own healing journey. Born in the water, the dragonfly remains in its nymph state for up to a period of two years before undergoing metamorphosis to emerge as the beautiful flying creature that we know it to be. Its adult life span is sweet and short for some dragonflies

that live for only a few weeks while others can live up to a year. In many ancient traditions, the dragonfly symbolizes change, especially when it comes to mental and emotional transformation. It represents our journey to self-realization and understanding of the deeper meaning of life. In Japan, for example, the dragonfly is the symbol of joy and rebirth. Being visited for an extended period of time by this blue dragonfly, given its short lifespan, was truly a gift and reminder to focus on the present moment. The spirit of the dragonfly medicine remained present in my heart as I reflected and wrote about my healing process of change, transformation and rebirth. Moreover, the dragonfly would also bring me full circle with Ix-Chel, the moon goddess of creativity, fertility, and healing medicine. A year earlier I had made the voyage to Cozumel, Yucatan where this goddess is venerated in a yearly celebration by Mayan Indigenous communities and which dates back to before the colonization of the Americas. In fact, many women and couples who may be experiencing challenges with fertility make the pilgrimage to pray to her for support and miracles.

In the Mayan tradition, Ix-Chel is celebrated as the mother of all plant life for she was responsible for sending rain to nourish the crops. She is respected and called upon as the protector of women during pregnancy and labor. The story is told that Ix-Chel's beauty captivated all except Kinich Ahau, the Sun God who she loved dearly. As a fine weaver she succeeded in winning over Kinich Ahua's heart via a beautiful cloth she weaved to impress him. They eventually became lovers and she would give birth to four sons with him. Yet, not all approved of their love. Disapproving of their union, in a moment of anger, her grandfather kills Ix-Chel by striking her with lightning. However, dragonfly medicine would come to her rescue. Hundreds of dragonflies gathered around her body and through their healing sounds brought her back to life. Inspired by the intimate connection between the goddess Ix-Chel, the dragonflies, and my own healing; I took the time and space to breathe in the medicine to arrive at a deeper understanding of how change, healing, transformation, and rebirth were all cyclical themes in my own healing journey.

In this spirit, I open this healing project with my own testimonio in terms of what brings me to explore the relationships between healing and social justice and how my lived experiences have shaped my understanding and lens to healing. In my multiple roles as a daughter, granddaughter, mother, sister, auntie, partner, educator, and activist I seek to heal Self-in-Relation (Graveline, 1998). Graveline (1998) proposes the model of Self-In-Relation as an Indigenous worldview that recognizes the link between individual responsibility and community wellbeing. This knowledge holds that "each person is responsible for his or her actions In-Relation to the larger community" (p. 57). Through a model of Self-In-Relation, "we are able to see ourselves and our immanent value as related to and interconnected with others- family, community, the world, those behind and those yet to come" (p.58). Turning inward has allowed me to help heal my wounded spirit and that of generations of women and men in my family that I carry with me.

Thus, my healing takes place within a context of family, community, and All My Relations. I am the daughter of Ramiro Chavez Rangel and Idolina Castañeda Ontiveros, both immigrants who like many poor colonized peoples traveled para el 'Norte' pushed out of their place of origin due to the geopolitics of globalization and border militarization. As a first generation Xicana, I embody the legacies of colonialism and continual colonization of Indigenous peoples of the Americas since European invasion. I am intentional about centering my indigeneity despite the colonizing ways in which I am perceived and placed in boxes as a light skin woman of mixed descent –an ancestral lineage that includes Indigenous, Spanish, and

French ancestry. As a person of mixed descent I am vigilant about the social location and privileges I embody as a "U.S. citizen" of a settler colonial nation standing on stolen and colonized lands.

I have delved into the painful process of beginning to heal the European ancestry imprinted in my bones and blood through my fathers' ancestral lineage. I (re)claim and (re)center the Indigenous ancestral conocimientos of my abuelas. As a Xicana Indigena[19] (Luna, 2012) I am part of a herstory of more than five hundred years of colonization and cultural de-Indianization (Martinez, 201). My body inherits both the collective *soul wound* (Duran, 2006) inflicted by colonization and the spiritual conocimientos that have allowed for resistance and healing to also be part of our stories (Roman, 2012). Our bodies hold precious knowledge that is critical to our individual and collective wellbeing (Gonzales, 2012; Cruz, 2006). In this spirit, I share my educational and healing journey as part of the medicine that has helped heal my wounded spirit and embrace the spiritual strength of my ancestors.

I rewrite my autohistoria specifically naming and examining the effects and sustos oppressive paradigms imprinted throughout my educational journey and how this internal work of bearing witness to my own pain aided the themes of change and transformation of healing Self-In-Relation (Graveline, 1998). These early experiences in relation to race, class, gender, phenotype and teen motherhood engendered my personal testimony and have been a vital source of knowledge and strength that informs my approach to teaching and engaging with urban Young People of Color from diverse backgrounds. The purging of generational trauma facilitated my process of emptying out the many deeply embedded stories and narratives that no longer served me in order to make space to cultivate seeds of decolonial love (Simpson, 2013). Like many of the guerreras before me –poor/working class/first-generation/Women of Color—I evoked spirit(s) and ancestors in order to have the courage to navigate through institutions of higher education and to forge strategies of hope and healing that move us towards collective liberation.

I also interweave my testimonio of how my experience surviving miscarriages was a turning point in my personal journey of healing and rebirth. Decolonizing my womb as a (re)Indigenizing process of healing generational womb trauma allowed me to (re)center the spiritual energy of the feminine in my life as a mother-activist-scholar. I unpack the power of ancestral healing conocimientos in acquiring a deeper understanding of how systems of oppression condition women to stay disconnected from our wombs to repress our sacredness and power (Afua, 2000). Coming into motherhood as a conscious Xicana mother activist allowed me to (re)root myself in the healing conocimientos of my abuelas in order to heal from my miscarriages and embody what I call an epistemology of the body as earth. An epistemology of body as earth calls for a radical healing relationship to our bodies as earth that goes beyond binaries that attempt to fragment us. It honors and embraces our ancestral healing conocimientos of our body as critical to supporting and maintaining our individual and collective wellbeing as educators committed to decolonizing knowledge. In birthing healing justice, I (re)claimed my voice to contest the heteropatriarchial violence and silencing I experienced going through the loss and pain of miscarriage.

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[19] In her essay "Building a Xicana Indigena Philosophical Base" Jennie Luna (2012) asserts how a Xicana Indigena identity is not a mere geographical location; rather, it reflects an ideology and way of life and as such "it is "mujer/woman" –centered and honors, accepts, and respects all people who identify with being Indigenous to this continent and Earth" (pg. 12). Luna's articulation of a Xicana Indigena identity has armed me with a critical consciousness to counter the epistemic violence of Eurocentric modes of thinking and being. A Xicana Indigena epistemological stance honors the processes that embody my spiritual connection to my ancestors and land as valuable knowledges that inform my thinking and methodological approach.

The past decade has been a time of immense personal healing and intellectual growth, transformation, and evolution. I have been researching and writing about the intricacies and challenges of interweaving healing justice when working with low-income Youth of Color. The process of decolonizing my bodymindspirit became a pivotal point of focus in my journey through graduate school. This internal work changed the course of my dissertation work and more importantly, my soul purpose in this lifetime. These two parallel processes—birthing my dissertation and rebirth of self—I came to understand as intricately linked in personal and political ways. In sharing my testimonio, I invite you to remain open minded and heart-centered in order to travel with me as I re(write) my autohistoria. It's an invitation to quiet the hyper-rational mind so you may soak in the medicine that comes to us when we witness hearing/reading/feeling each other's herstories. Inspired by the healing medicine of Ix-Chel and the dragonflies, I weaved the different strands of my testimonio. Sharing my testimonio is premised on an understanding that to begin this healing project with self is an act of resistance and ongoing process of decolonizing self in mindbodyspirit.

Towards an Epistemology of Body as Earth: Generational Womb Trauma and (Re)claiming Healing Conocimientos de mis Abuelas

> By compartiendo historias, ideas, las nepantleras forge bonds across race, gender, and other lines, thus creating a new tribalism. Este quehacer –internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation –changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world.
>
> Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 574

For more than 36 years the geopolitics of the inhumane U.S.-Mexico border separated my tía, Elia Ontiveros, from our family. In 2017, my tía was finally reunited with her loved ones in the United States of Amerikkka. Through her voice she now gets to share many of our family herstories to younger generations and in this way transgress time and space, imposed by imagined borders, to reunite us with our ancestors. Inquiring about my abuelitas, I would be gifted with one of such herstories. I attentively listened with a full heart as my tia Elvia Ontiveros narrated a story about my great-grandmother Rosa Tovar Padilla for the first time. My tia Elvia is a twin and at birth, my grandma Rosa who was her mother's partera, took my tia Elvia with her to help her daughter, my grandmother Lola, raise her. As a result, my tia Elvia was the only out of her siblings to be raised full time by my great grandmother Rosa for the first 10 years of her life. She vividly remembers a story from when she was only nine years old and she experienced a very powerful experience of witnessing my great-grandmother Rosa's gifts as partera. She speaks of a time when my great-grandmother Rosa was called in the early hours of the morning to assist a young couple giving birth to their first child. My tía Elia often stayed behind when my great-grandmother was called at random hours of the night but this time she refused to be left behind. My tía patiently waited in the hall sitting on a bench while my great-grandmother and auntie went inside the room to begin the ceremony of birth. After many hours, my great-grandmother Rosa came out to speak to the father to let him know he needed to urgently look for a clinic given that there were complications with the birth. The baby was breech and the umbilical cord was wrapped around the child's neck. Despite many hours of trying to change the position of the child, my great-grandmother was beginning to feel concern

for the safety of the mother and child. She told the father she did not want to risk the lives of mother and child. In despair, the father held a gun to my great-grandmother's head and threatened her that if his wife and child died she would too. He grabbed her by the arm and told her she couldn't leave the room until his child was born. Frightened, my young auntie witnessed it all. Hours later, despite all the complications, my aunt heard the cry of a child. My great-grandmother's healing hands were able to deliver a healthy child despite all the odds and the susto of having her life threatened in front of her granddaughter. My auntie remembers vividly how the embarrassed father approached my great-grandmother to pay her but she refused to take his money. Instead she responded: "quedate tu dinero ya tienes a tu esposa y hijo y no había necesidad de hacer lo que hiciste[20]*"* (personal reflection, April 19, 2017).

When my mother Idolina Castañeda Ontiveros was born, her ombligo[21] was buried in the heart of a tree in El Valle, Michoacan, by my great-grandmother Rosa Tovar Padilla. Mi abuelita Rosa, a powerful and respected huesera, herbera y partera, buried the placenta and ombligo of all her children and the children of her children just like my great- great-grandmother taught her.[22] In 2004, at the age of 49 my mother visited, for the first time, the beautiful tree where her ombligo still lives. The oldest of eight children, my mother would be the first generation of muxeres to experience the medicalized and colonized experience of giving birth in a hospital room. As a recent immigrant and monolingual Woman of Color in the U.S., she experienced a painful and lonely labor –away from mi abuelita or any family. Despite more than 24 hours of excruciating labor pain, my mother gave birth to me, her first-born child, drug free.[23] Eighteen year later, despite being categorized as "high risk" I would give birth to my own daughter, Itzel Xiadani, with the loving support of my mother. With little medical intervention, I was blessed to give birth to a healthy child. (Re)membering and sharing our birth herstories and womb conocimientos imprinted in the body is critical to healing self for "these birthing stories are medicine" (Gonzales, 2012, p.39). These healing conocimientos are in sharp contrast to the practice of obstetrics, which is founded on principles of pathology and a determination to control (Brodsky, 2008).

Despite the love and healing I experienced as a young mother giving birth to my first child, nothing would have prepared me for the painful experience of enduring a second miscarriage. The emotional and physical pain of experiencing a second ectopic miscarriage and the removal of one of my ovarian tubes crystallized my commitment to self-healing. Unlike western doctors who advised me to return to all my normal activities only two weeks after my surgery, the general wisdom of the muxeres in my family placed me on a strict regimen of self-

[20] Translation: "Keep your money. You have your wife and child and there was no need to do what you did."
[21] Translation: umbilical cord.
[22] My grandmothers' treatment of the placenta and afterbirth as sacred rituals is rooted in ancient Mesoamerica Indigenous birth rituals that continue to be maintained among Indigenous and Mexican Indian communities in Mexico. Gonzales (2012) elaborates on the significance of this birthing and traditional medicine, "Through the ceremonies of the ombligo and placenta, people re-place themselves and become re-membered in the land-within it, among it, around it, above and below it" (56).
[23] First, I want to emphasize that my mother's decision to not adhere to taking drugs during her labor was rooted in an understanding of birth that was taught by her mother and grandmother and this did not entail taking any kinds of drugs, unless your life and that of your child depended on it. Secondly, this position does not in any way judge any women who may choose and/or are given drugs during pregnancy or labor. I believe in promoting traditional Indigenous rites of birthing and healing as a more holistic way of treating birth as ceremony but also believe in making use of western medicine technologies especially when such advancements promote the wellbeing of mother and child and/or can help support life.

care in relation to my miscarriage that lasted for 40 days or what women's knowledge of the womb refers to as the cuarentena.[24] My mothers' advice and all the tips and words of encouragement from women in my family and community of friends who had gone through similar experiences brought comfort and helped my healing process. My mom's voice still echoes in my heart,

> *Reposo completo es necesario ya que la pérdida de un bebe es más traumante para tu cuerpo. Tendrás que cuidarte por cuarenta días de reposo completo. Tomar mucho té de ruda, romero, y canela para calentar tu matriz y sacar todo el frío. Mucho te de arnica también para la sanación de tu herida. Y no olvidar el té de Toronjil para alegrar el espíritu y alma, para que te ayude a tener un corazón contento después de la tormenta. Así lo han hecho nuestras abuelas siempre.*

I gave myself permission to receive the love and wisdom from all the muxeres who unselfishly shared their time and knowledge to help me heal. Immense reflection and growth came from the opportunity to remain still and let the herbs heal my womb. With loving tenderness, I began for the first time to build a relationship with my womb. My womb nurtured the qualities of sensitivity, intuition, and compassion to guide my process of dissolving the many wounds and conditioning inflicted by medical science to separate us from our body as earth.

By carving out spaces for Women of Color to share our birthing stories that come from our bodies and lived experiences Women of Color are redefining and broadening the scope of healing justice; our herstories can serve as consciousness-raising tools that empower younger generations of womxn to decolonize from the medical industrial complex. In my healing journey, my experience decolonizing my womb allowed me to be guided by my womb as a source of creativity and wisdom in my life.[25] The way I move in this world is now guided by an understanding that the womb "is our first orientation on earth" (Gonzales, 2012) and "the birthplace of all our creative abilities" (Afua, 2000). Diving deep into my own depths to heal my womb and then channel this energy to be of service for the world is how I have come to deploy an *epistemology of body as earth* (Chavez-Diaz, 2019) to counter the colonizing ways in which medical science has imposed itself upon my brown body. Knowing that my body is earth and the earth is my body affirms my sacred connection to the creator and the healing of past and future generations. An epistemology of body as earth calls for a radical healing relationship to our bodies as earth that goes beyond binaries that attempt to fragment us. It honors and embraces our ancestral healing conocimientos of our body as critical to supporting and maintaining our individual and collective wellbeing.

A common thread that cuts across womxn of color's writing is the understanding that our spiritual and healing conocimientos are intimately connected to our bodies and lived experiences (Anzaldua, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012; Levins-Morales, 2013; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). A spiritual and healing perspective recognizes our body holds spiritual and healing conocimientos that are vital to our individual and collective wellbeing. The spiritual is embodied and felt

[24]A *cuarentena* is an Indigenous Mexican birth ritual in which a woman who gave birth or had a miscarriage adheres to a ritual time of forty days in which specific self-care instructions are provided on how to heal and recover from birth or miscarriage. These include a range of healing practices including but are not limited to full time bed rest, wearing *fajas*, a special diet, *sobadas, baños*, and drinking certain *hierbas*.

[25] I want to emphasize that this understanding is not meant to exclude women who may not have a physical womb, for they too can still connect with the energy of their womb as a source of wisdom and creativity.

through the body and in this way the body also becomes the site for healing (Alexander, 2005). In *Kindling: Writings on the Body* (2013), radical feminist and activist, Aurora Levins Morales explores the meaning of suffering and healing through the story of her own body and writes from a place that centers her embodied experiences and disrupts the bodymindspirit fragmentation imposed by western thinking. In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, transnational feminist M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) argues for an understanding of body as a medium of spirit, "to know the body is to know it as a medium for the divine" or put differently "it is to understand spiritual work as a type of body praxis, as a form of embodiment" (p.297). For Alexander, the body becomes "a site of memory" for "body and memory are lived in the same body" and "this mutual living, this entanglement, enables us to think and feel these inscriptions as process, a process of embodiment" (p.297-98).

For Cindy Cruz (2006) "the inclusion of the body holds the beginnings of charting new territories in epistemic approaches, where we can begin to develop strategies to rethink our work in education to reflect the multiplicities of language and history in less partial and less distorted ways" (p.72). It is in this light that L. Pérez (1998) contends that women of color's spiritual activism is essential if we want to "interrupt the dream of capitalist and imperialist civilizations and see mas alla." Such activism helps free us from the limitations and discourses that disable us from creating alternative ways of being apart from present dominant structures in secular thinking (p.5). As spiritual healers, feminist scholars continue to push our thinking to (re)define our relation to the spiritual to arrive at new ways of co-existing with one another, the cosmos, and all human and non-human life.

In retrospect, I can appreciate how over the years my healing processes have allowed me to build a larger container to hold myself to be a vessel for my own healing and help support the healing of others. Healing from the toxicity of relations of power present throughout my educational and life journey enabled me to release self-doubt and the many fears I embodied. The cyclical themes of change, transformation, healing, and rebirth made it possible for my heart and spirit to expand and feel connected to something larger than myself. It is the amalgamation of drawing from spiritual and healing conocimientos throughout my journey that has allowed me to peel like an onion the many layers of conditioning in my life and be able to make space in my womb. As my testimonio and that of the many participants who were part of this healing project highlight, our self-healing is interconnected with the healing of others. As we heal ourselves, we work to heal the collective and the earth—for this work is an extension of ourselves and critical to manifesting healing justice in all our relations. In inserting self in this work, I write and speak back to research from a place of power rooted in decolonial love and I resist the ongoing imposition of the academy to silence, distort, and commodify our stories and I am not alone; I carry my ancestors in my flesh and bones. They are my guardians and protective shields lighting up my path in order to continue walking my compromiso to healing justice with courage and strength.

Early Schooling Experiences

My background as the daughter of immigrants and struggles in the face of institutional oppression have shaped who I am today and have cultivated a commitment to social justice from a young age. My yearning and tenacity to pursue my education was inspired in great part by my parents' herstories and histories. The products of great adversity and poverty, there were many layers of spoken and often unspoken painful experiences that shaped my parents' life trajectories and how they raised their children. As racialized immigrants, both of my parents faced overt racism as exploited low-wage workers when they first arrived in the settler colonial nation of the

U.S.A. In the case of my father, to this day, his voice breaks when he shares the humiliation and shame he experienced being physically beaten for standing up against an abusive employer who refused to pay him a month's worth of wages. Instead, this white employer opted to call ICE and both my grandfather and father were deported as a result. Consequently, until both of my parents were able to obtain "legal status" the fear of potential deportation was a constant reminder of their social location. As a means of survival, they pushed themselves to always work hard in order to validate themselves as "good" immigrants. Both adopted a U.S. work ethos that conditioned them to focus on accumulating material wealth for future financial security even if this came at the expense of sacrificing their physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

This often resulted in witnessing my parents modeling unhealthy and unbalanced work lives. During our childhood years, this would result in much pain to my siblings given that our personal safety was violated at times in the hands of family members whom my parents trusted. Breaking the silence regarding the sexual abuse and emotional pain some of us endured was not easy, especially when speaking our truth also brought to the surface the explicit links between our painful experiences and past and present day narratives of generational trauma in my family. Unconsciously, this meant that as a young child, I was forced to grow up fast and mature into adulthood as a mechanism of survival. Moreover, as soon as I was old enough to be proficient in both English and Spanish, I became the family interpreter and helped my parents and large extended family navigate institutions of power and government bureaucracies. In my interactions with these systems of domination as a young person, I was conditioned to see my racial and gender identity from a deficit place. I was often forced to wear the mask of shame and feeling not being worthy enough because of the racial, gendered, and class categories I felt boxed in just for being who I am. I internalized the narrative that as a woman of color the odds were stacked against me and I needed to be a "good" daughter and student to be a "deserving" individual in my community.

Despite the imposition of systems of oppression that weighed heavily on the spirits of my parents, both were also resilient and strong in their faith to persevere in more ways that I could ever give justice to in this work. Both greatly valued the importance of education and instilled in their children a deep respect for learning and knowledge despite having only received a middle school education in Mexico. Despite the toll of oppressive institutional powers on their spirit, this did not prevent my parents from arming us with powerful teachings and wisdom that proved critical in our upbringing and ability to not let our light be overshadowed by white supremacy. I vividly remember the special significance of breakfast as a school age child for these were the only precious moments my mother could spend quality time with us. Every morning my mother prepared us a special breakfast and packed lunch for us before leaving to work 15-hour shifts at our small family business. During these times, my mother would often share herstories about her upbringing and the many hardships her family faced growing up poor. With watery eyes, she shared how due to great financial hardship, she would sometimes be forced to go to school on an empty stomach and go hungry all day. As a child, the lesson of feeling grateful for the food in my tummy would always stay with me and it would be until much later that I would fully comprehend the profound ways in which my mothers' meals nourished much more than my physical body. My mother's cooking was a healing act of love that fed my spirit and fueled my tenacity to persevere. Sharing her lived experiences from childhood and struggles became part of the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) that kept me motivated and inspired to pursue my goals.

Moreover, my father, a gifted storyteller, from a young age cultivated my political consciousness and inspired me to dream of making this world a better place. Through his many platicas[26] about his life struggles, I learned about the importance of courage and righteous anger. His testimonio and critique of racist anti-immigrant rhetoric challenged the master narrative that labeled Mexicans as 'immigrants,' 'illegal aliens' and 'wetbacks.' Instead, my father emphasized how human beings in power created borders out of greed to divide the poor and the rich. Most importantly, he taught us the land is alive and as stewards of the land we must protect it and are not meant to own it. Moreover, like our animal relatives who migrated for survival, human beings are meant to do so too. Thus, migrations have always been part of our histories and connection to this land (Bonfil & Dennis, 1996). Hearing these narratives of resistance and learning about our connection to this land always provided me with a sense of feeling rooted for it allowed me to feel comfortable in my own skin despite the negative stereotypes and hatred that I witnessed towards immigrant Communities of Color. As a high school youth, this political consciousness would lead me to participate in student walkouts to protest racist political discourse and policies such Prop 187, Prop 227 and Prop 209.

Furthermore, I arrived at a deeper level of critical consciousness through my lived experiences in witnessing the blunt realities of racial inequities present in the material conditions of my school and community. Like many poor urban Youth of Color today, I faced great adversity given the systemic school inequities present throughout my K-12 schooling. Throughout my high school trajectory, I was often the only or one of few Latin@ students in the limited honors or advanced courses offered at my school. Many of my Latin@ student peers were often tracked in ESL classes and/or many became discouraged from attending school all together. Witnessing the ways in which the school-to-prison (Winn, 2011; Vaught, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016) pipeline pushed many of my family members and peers out of school was a source of pain and righteous anger that fueled my activism as a young person. For example, both of my younger sisters would be pushed out of high school given the lack of support they experienced in their educational trajectories and instead opted to get their GED. In many ways, my identity as "good student" provided me an advantage and privileges that many of my peers were not so lucky to receive given the ways schooling tracks and places students into boxes of "deserving" and "undeserving" (Conchas, 2006). As a light skin Xicana, I would also experience special treatment at times by both adults and peers in my community and schooling institutions. At other times, my light skin and language became a source of shame when other Students of Color called me White and/or made fun of my accent. These conflicting messages regarding my phenotype and language speak to the ways Young People of Color internalized oppression and consequently reproduce these dynamics supported by a system designed to saturate us with self-hate as Communities of Color.

Additionally, to some extent being raised in the working class – meaning my parents were able to generate a steady income via our small family business to meet all our basic needs and have some extra income for rainy days—provided me with a safety net that many of my large extended family members and peers didn't have. For example, I never faced the threat or fear of eviction because we had the privilege of having steady housing. Eventually my parents became homeowners and went on to acquire additional properties. However, given my parents'

[26] Translation: talks. I use *platicas* to refer to the many conversations that my father felt necessary to share with my siblings and I to cultivate our consciousness about the effects of structural racism. He shares about the many encounters he has experienced with overt racism that included but were not limited to verbal insults, beatings, and labor exploitation.

limited social capital, I was raised in a highly segregated poor inner city neighborhood and attended equally segregated public schools composed of predominantly poor Black and Latin@ students. For my high school graduation, I was one of only 42 students to graduate out of an initial freshmen class of 150. I was also one of only three Latinas to graduate; there were no Latino graduates that year.

When I became a teen mother my senior year in high school, my world would be turned upside-down. I was shamed by some of the adults who I most cared for in my life, including my own father who kicked me out of our home and stopped talking to me for nearly a year. The contradicting tensions of what it meant to be a teen mother at times resulted in internalizing feelings of shame, guilt, and self-doubt. I never stopped to acknowledge this pain. Yet, my determination, the support of my partner and eventually my family and caring teachers and mentors made it possible for me to persevere. Thus, in spite of the school inequities I faced and the challenges of being a teen mother my senior year in high school, I became the first—and remain the only—college graduate in my large extended family. These early experiences in relation to race, class, gender, phenotype and teen motherhood engendered my personal testimony and have been a vital source of knowledge and strength that informs my approach to teaching and engaging with urban Young People of Color from diverse backgrounds.

The concept of susto[27] (Avila, 1999) or what can be understood as spiritual trauma that results from the loss of part of the tonalli, which is one of three components of the soul in the Nahuatl tradition, is a real condition that many People of Color endure in their lives (Avila, 1999; Gonzales, 2012). As a woman of color, there have been many sustos resulting from what have been often oppressive family, cultural, and systemic dynamics that have left an imprint in my body and spirit. In particular, the susto of attending more than twenty-three years of western schooling has meant I have internalized many layers of conditioning, making me a wounded spirit in recovery. It is a wound that has been a source of great suffering but also from this place of pain has come immense growth and self-determination to seek truth, wisdom, and healing to restore my wholeness. Indeed, sharing our stories and speaking our truth is a way to help heal susto, or the returning our tonalli back to the body.

Interweaving Múltiple Mundos: Zurda, Muda, Y Lágrimas del Alma

> Our collective shadow-made up of the destructive aspects, psychic wounds, and splits in our own culture-is aroused and we are forced to confront it. In trying to make sense of what's happening, some of us come into deep awareness (conocimiento) of political and spiritual situations and the unconscious mechanisms that abet hate, intolerance, and discord…Conocimiento pushes us into engaging the spirit in confronting our social sickness with new tools and practices whose goal is to effect a shift.
>
> Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 311

It was not until I became an Ethnic Studies scholar hungry for knowledge of my history as a Woman of Color that I learned for the first time about colonization and its lasting impacts on the mindbodyspirit and psychic of both the colonizer/colonized (Anzaldua, 2012; Blaut, 1993;

[27] Avila & Parker (1999) explains susto, or soul loss, happens when we experience a frightening or traumatic event. She elaborates, "this can result in soul loss, a state in which we do not feel fully present or as if we are really ourselves. We experience a feeling that "something is missing" because our spirit, the energetic aura that surrounds us, has been violated" (p.64).

Trask, 1999). Learning about the historical and contemporary root causes and impacts of colonial forces (hegemony, patriarchy, sexism, racism, internalized oppression, capitalism, etc.) allowed me to acknowledge both the generational trauma and present day pain I internalized and the cumulative toll it took on my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. I became aware of the ways my true self was buried under layers and layers of colonizing relations of domination, beliefs, and stories. Through the development of a critical consciousness as an Ethnic Studies scholar, I gained a new language to analyze the relations of domination that had been present in my interactions with family members, community, and dominant culture. I became acutely aware of how schooling and dominant ideologies of what constitutes knowledge subtracted from my culture and identity as a young Person of Color (Valenzuela, 1999). Most importantly, I realized the importance of becoming decolonized and recognized healing as a vital aspect of my process. An awareness or level of reflexivity grounded in healing allowed me to face the internalized oppression I grew up witnessing in my surroundings. This internal work is not always easy and it can be messy and painful to own our past and make peace with the wounded parts of our past and with our loved ones.

Inquiring about our family herstories I learned of the generational gender violence that was a source of pain for both of my parents and large extended family. The heartbreak of witnessing the brutal physical beatings both my maternal and paternal grandmothers endured had a lasting impact on both of my parents. The ways in which family and larger patriarchal societal structures normalized it would bring much shame and lead to unhealthy intimate relationships for some of my family members. While I never witnessed my father being physically abusive to our mother, his coping mechanism of alcoholism would often lead to emotional and verbal abuse towards my mother and us. Making connections to the larger patriarchal systems of oppression that sanction and profit from gender violence allowed me to find the courage to stand up against these acts of violence and eventually also find forgiveness in my heart towards the men in my family. As such, my learning and growth as an Ethnic Studies scholar was critical to being able to bear witness to my own role both in reproducing and challenging the constituted vectors of oppression present in our communities. These were formative years that allowed me to purge layers of deeply embedded pain and support my psychic and emotional decolonization. In turn, this provided a critical foundation that informed my pedagogy and social justice lens as I dedicated myself to community-based work with immigrant Youth of Color and families for over six years upon graduating from college. As educators of color committed to social justice it is essential to engage in continual reflection and examination of self-in-relation for this internal work helps to forge new tools that can take down the master's house (Lorde, 1984). It provides us insights into the ways we can better foster strategies of hope and healing that can move us in the direction of collective liberation.

La Jornada: Tiempo y Espacio para Sanar las Heridas

> Breaking out of your mental and emotional prism and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness—with social, political action, and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges. These conocimientos challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those benefiting from such constructions.
>
> Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 542

A decade after leaving high school, my experience as a first year graduate student shook the very core of who I am and opened up psychic soul wounds. The act of being physically present at UC Berkeley in itself as an Indigenous and/or Person of Color is to experience epistemic and spiritual violence. Just a walk on campus is a reminder that buildings like Kroeber Hall are a stark reality of the ways in which settler colonialism has and continues to be founded on white supremacy. In fact, the public institution of the University of California from which I have obtained my "degree" continues to be silent about how tens of thousands of Native ancestral remains have been "collected" in the name of "science" and are still being held in boxes and cabinets of UC campuses throughout our state. The settler colonialism of the academy unsettled me. It fragmented me when I thought I was the strongest.

The world of academia throughout those first ten months of graduate studies felt like a recolonization of my bodymindspirit. Although I was part of a cohort that included other educators of color committed to social justice and equity, as the only parent in the group, my family obligations made it challenging to carve out time to build community with my peers. I was struggling with the academic demands alone. I felt isolated and overwhelmed by feelings of not being worthy or smart enough to acquire the new language that was expected. A state of feeling muda, sorda, y desorientada vividly describes my experience. For an entire year, I did not utter a single word during class discussions in my required program courses. My fears of speaking up had a paralyzing effect on my body. I struggled to find my voice in my new scholar identity; the feeling of fragmentation weighed heavy on my spirit. Within a settler colonial approach to education curriculum is designed to systematically exclude any thinking or learning that centers spirit and healing from an Indigenous perspective (Wane et al., 2011). This was visible and palpable in my own educational experiences from the day I stepped foot into a classroom as a monolingual Kindergarten student until the day I walked the stage to be hooded with my doctorate degree of philosophy of education. Education in this way becomes a vehicle to reinforce and legitimize settler colonialism (Patel, 2015).

By my second semester, I took a course on power and politics in urban district reform in which we read some of the mainstream texts guiding school reform efforts. While I had been practically silent the previous semester in most of my classes, I gained the courage to begin speaking up, especially because most of the texts we read ignored the intersections of race, class, and gender. Moreover, in my final class presentation I decided to read a reflection piece that I organically wrote in response to my experience that semester. The following excerpt is the piece I read in class:

As a person of color who has lived the educational inequities that continue to plaque our educational system, I am appalled and simply fed up with attempts by educational policies and practices by so called "experts" on our educational system to want to "fix" what they perceive as the evils of our educational system. It's time we uproot our ways of thinking about what defines student success –not merely simply a test score but really doing what it takes to raise healthy well-versed global citizens who will have to tackle many of the pressing issues facing humanity: global warming, poverty, war, diminishing natural resources—the list goes on and on. How about thinking about what our children need to learn in order to create a just and sustainable way of life—this requires creativity and thinking outside the box. For many indigenous cultures—taking care of future generations and mother earth entailed a philosophy that meant taking care of natural resources in a way that ensured that the next 7 generations would be able to enjoy the same quality of life; this involved completely different conversations

and a different way of thinking. Yet, today we are so removed from the generational wisdom of our elders that allowed for a different education for our children and connection to the cycle of life.

But really when I think about it, who really stands to benefit from this rhetoric of "accountability" and "standards?" It's really about maintaining the same old system of hierarchy that has always been an ideological, social, and political project of those in power throughout all of US history. It's really about who controls what counts as supposedly 'good' knowledge and maintaining an oppressive system that continues to dehumanize students of color, their families and communities. Did the conservative white men that sat behind their desks to design our current accountability system ever stop to contemplate the effect these policies would have on the physical bodies of our children, families, and educators? Who can account for the immense stress these so called "tests" as the only measure of student achievement causes on children and who can explain to me whether it was necessary for me to have to take my daughter who was only in 1st grade to the ER a total of three times by the end of the school year because her tummy hurt from all this talk about standards and not reading at grade level. Or who can explain to me why it was necessary for me as a mother of color and advocate who has resisted and challenged the same discourses that objectify our children and community to actually come to internalize my daughter's lack of "performance" as my own parent failure!! Luckily, for me I woke from that nightmare that made me think at some point that maybe I wasn't working hard enough to drill my daughter to these so-called standards! Luckily for me, I have now become educated on the dominant discourses that explain why a philosophy of "standards" and tests were the driving force behind my daughter's school instructional curriculum and school climate because I now have the tools and courage to say enough is enough. I question the very nature and intent of such policies and I have a name to call it: it's white supremacy dressed up in a language that sounds all too familiar. It's a neo-liberal and color-blind language that wants us to believe that if these poor kids of color aren't making it then there must be something wrong with their culture and ethnicity. It's the same old argument and I don't care whether you call it a racist educational system or whether you dress it up under the rhetoric of "accountability" it's all the same to me. Despite how overwhelming and paralyzing the deep sorrow I feel for what our educational system is doing to our children, I am also more determined than ever to not let my burning fire to change things die for it's what gives me the courage to continue to fight for what is RIGHT and JUST FOR OUR CHILDREN AND HUMANITY!

Silence filled the room after I read my piece and for the first time I felt like the angry woman of color in the room. During our short class break right after my presentation, I let the tears pour down my cheeks as I struggled to piece myself back together in order to re-enter the room. It took a lot of courage and strength to return when all I wanted to do was run and find comfort. This is how I ended my first year of graduate school. For the next three days, I could not stop crying and I became paralyzed by the overwhelming feeling of immense sadness. I felt I had poured out my heart that day and with that came a feeling of great vulnerability. I had taken a big leap away from the traditional expectation of how a rational academic scholar is supposed to act and speak. Yet, that day I let out all the demons that had been tormenting the entire school year and not fully knowing it yet, it was also my way of decolonizing the space that I had felt trapped in. That day, *sin pelos en la lengua* I was able to speak my truth as a woman of color in academia.

When the world of academia unsettled my mental and spiritual wellbeing, I found refuge and my way home (re)reading the work of queer feminist Gloria Anzaldua. Anzaldua's prose and theorías of mestiza consciousness, nepantla, facultad, and conocimiento/desconocimientos were a breath of fresh air that validated my experiences of feeling fragmented and broken (Keating & Gonzalez-Lopez, 2011). Most importantly her theories served as healing shields of unconditional and decolonial love (Simpson, 2013) that armed me with the tools and understanding that guided me back to my body as a source of knowledge and truth. Her perseverance to bring up the works of healing, spirit(s), transformation, and the sacred in her writing despite the academy's emphasis on secular binary thinking provided an opening and breakthrough in my own journey navigating my new scholar identity and forever changed my intellectual trajectory and my life-long soul work on this earth. Sadly, despite the significant scholarly contributions of her theories and interdisciplinary approach(Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990, 2002) to the academy, her work continues to be marginalized and dismissed in most graduate programs. Rather than embracing the complexity and depth of her work it is much easier for the critics of her work to minimize her arguments to essentialism.

Through Anzaldua's (2002) conceptualization of conocimiento a platform opened up from which to seek my own self-truth and healing. For the first time, I saw my personal journey of struggle and growth reflected back through the seven stages of conocimiento Anzaldua (2002) outlines: 1) El Arrebato 2) Nepantla 3) The Coatlicue Stage, 4) El Compromiso, 5) Putting Coyolxauqui together, 6) The blow up, and 7) Shifting realities…acting out the vision of spiritual activism. By breaking away from dominant ways of conceptualizing knowledge as strictly confined to the mind my scholar identity felt liberated from feeling hostage in the world of academia. As "subversive knowledges" conocimiento brings complexity and a more holistic understanding of knowledge that integrates emotion, spirituality, and action. For Anzaldua (2002) conocimiento is "a form of spiritual inquiry/activism, reached via creative acts- writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism- both mental and somatic" (p. 542). The freedom to be receptive to cultivating other ways of knowing or conocimientos such as my intuition, the universe's language of synchronicity, and a knowing that arises in the body solidified mi compromiso to healing Self-In-Relation.

Anzaldua's (2002) willingness to expose her wounds and become completely vulnerable allowed her to embark on a path of conocimiento and thus an agent of transformation:

> Using wounds as openings to become vulnerable and available (present) to others means staying in your body. Excessive dwelling on your wounds means leaving your body to live in your thoughts, where your reenact your past hurts, a form of desconocimiento that gives you energy to the past, where it's held ransom. As victim you don't have to take responsibility for making changes. But the cost of victimhood is that nothing in your life changes, especially not your attitudes, beliefs. Instead, why not use pain as a conduit to recognizing another's suffering, even that of the one who inflicted the pain? (p. 572).

As Anzaldua's work teaches us, staying in our bodies facilitates our growth and ability to move through our pain without remaining stuck in the role of victim. In the process of reopening wounds we are presented with an opportunity to release, heal, and do things differently. In my personal healing journey this entailed releasing the many layers of conditioning and repressed pain through my tears. Staying present in my body allowed for these emotional releases to make space in my physical, mental, and spiritual self. It provided me the opportunity to reflect on what

were the stories I internalized about my worth and intellectual ability as a student and how these weighed heavy on my spirit. I became critical of how the internalization of these stories manifested in the body. The painful process of unlearning stories facilitated my ability to let go of what no longer served me well. In this context, el lago de lagrimas that poured out of my soul was more than just a response to the epistemic violence I encountered in academia; the roots of my pain were much deeper than I could perceive. In retrospect, I now understand how my tears not only brought healing to my body and spirit but to the spirit of generations of women whom I carry with me in my heart---mis lagrimas became part of the collective healing that is much needed given the deeply rooted legacies of colonialism in our communities.

By the end of the summer of my first year in graduate school, I was ready to return to higher education, but this time around I had equipped myself with the spiritual conocimientos to continue healing and (re)claiming my spirituality as a tool of resistance and on-going critical reflection (Wane, 2011). The experience of learning from the wisdom of my elders and my body made me aware of the need to include spiritual healing in everyday discourse to address racism and the historical trauma of more than 500 years of colonization on our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual selves. The opportunity to make connections with other Women of Color graduate students and professors on a more intimate and personal level allowed me to not feel as isolated. These women became my support system and through them I now learned about the courses in which professors engaged a more holistic pedagogy and access to these decolonizing spaces of learning and teaching in the academy helped solidify my healing processes.

The following is an excerpt from my journal in which I describe the immense healing I experienced with my parents via the land, tonanzin, as our medium. This reflection was part of my healing journey of self-care and coming back home to me that took place the following fall semester after my first year in graduate school, when I took my first Ethnic Studies graduate course, which would forever change my trajectory as a graduate scholar.

Today, I gave myself permission to heal and be one with the land. For the past couple of hours, I have been working with my father on our family's garden – a project and labor of love we work on every spring and summer. Like my grandfather and previous generations before him, my father grew up on the land and as such has an intimate relationship and knowledge of the land. He has always instilled in all his children and grandchildren this same love for the land and all animal and plant life. Away from the busyness of life in the city, I feel blessed and privileged to have access to this land I call my second home. While my connection to my environment is not limited to rural land, for I am just as grounded as when my feet walk on urban concrete, here I am at peace and fully present in a special way.

Rescatamos casi 30 plantas de chiles que estaban completamente cubiertas por las plantas de tomatillo. These tomatillo plants had grown organically by themselves from last year's harvest and had now overpowered the chile plants we had planted this year. Weeding is such tedious labor but critical to ensuring all our plantitas can thrive. As I pull out all the unwanted weeds, I also offer a meditation on all the things that I may need to weed out in my own life. Shortly after, my mother joined us and it was the most healing and joyful experience to witness my parents work together, laugh, argue, and just talk about life.

My mother is no longer able to contain her laughter- le dio una ataque de risa que le duro como quarenta minutos and ultimately nos contagio a todos. My dad was happy to see mom laugh because she had not laughed in such a long time. However, that hot mid-afternoon she laughed until she could no longer hold her tears. It had been so long since mom had cried tears

of joy. Yes, laughter heals the soul and is a healthy release of all the stress our bodies hold. Dad kept scolding mom about how she needed to come more often to work the garden. While I worked hard on clearing all the tomatillo plants, mi papa aflojaba la tierra para amacizar cada plantita de chile mientras que nos platicaba words of wisdom. The lively interaction between mom and dad made me rejoice for they have been going through a very tough stage in their marriage. Yet, in those moments I could feel their love for one another; something I had questioned even existed anymore. Al oír su voz, sentía que mi madre me acariciaba el alma. Desde lo más profundo del alma nos deleitaba el oído con su voz angelical.

Though my back aches and I was covered in dirt from head to toe, I felt at peace. Estar de rodillas en la tierra y sentir lo fresco de la tierra brought great joy to my heart and spirit. The hot sun 's against my pale skin, me llenaba de energía el cuerpo y alma. La tierra y las plantas curan. Life was all around me. The many insects reminded me of life's abundance and constant movimiento. As we cleared the land, all that we uprooted the cows and goats happily devoured. In this way, our hard labor not only nourished the soil, our bodies, but also fed our animals in what reminded me of the ways colonialism has uprooted and disrupted our interconnection with the cyclical cycles of life. I left my parent's place nourished by the soil, abuelo viento, las estrellas y madre tierra. Cultivating this strong relationship to land with my parents I am able to bring about transformative spiritual healing and grounding in my life and all my relations.[28] (Journal Entry, September 23, 2011)

La Fuerza de mi Abuelita Mueve Montañas

I am sitting in the cold chair of a tiny examination room in a medical facility. This is no ordinary medical visit. After months of numerous tedious and painful examinations, my grandmother Dolores Vargas Ontiveros, cousin, uncle, and I are waiting for the senior doctor to arrive in the room any minute. They will deliver the results to grandmother's latest PT scan. I try my best to keep my posture together even though deep inside I am falling apart. I need to be STRONG. After what felt like an eternity, a thin built blond white woman doctor enters the room. I can still vividly remember her white pale face and how without any signs of emotion begins to break the news to us. She informs us that grandma has stage four cancer and that she is sorry but there is not much they can do for her. She gives us no hope. Instead she lets us know that given her stage of cancer she has approximately six to twelve months of life. Five months after this first diagnosis and after many more examinations and arguments with doctors about defending grandma's choice to not accept chemotherapy and many circles of prayer, this diagnosis went from stage four-cancer to instead doctors recognizing the limitations of their tests. In the end grandma was diagnosed with a small cancer tumor in her uterus. After three months of radiation treatment my grandmother would overcome cancer and remain cancer free for nearly a year. The cancer would return, however, this time with a vengeance and mi abuelita at the age of 82 lost her battle to cancer on March 19, 2014, one day before spring (personal reflection, 2013).

[28] I close this reflection piece by honoring the four directions: east, west, north, and south. In this way, I give thanks to the creator for all the joy and growth I experienced that fall. A special prayer goes out to the woman warrior, Professor Laura E. Perez, who brought us together in this spiritual circle of love and in this way allowed for the gift of collective healing in us. To each of my compañeros in that class, I send all my love and good energy for I will cherish you all in my heart and never again will I feel alone in my journey because I have a new family.

A strong guerrera from humble origins, mi abuelita Dolores had always been the pillar of our family. Prior to being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, grandmother's pristine health was always a source of great pride in our family. In fact, it was only in the last two decades of her life that western medicine was introduced in the form of routine medical exams and check-ups to ensure her continual good health. Being the daughter of a lineage of parteras and healers, grandmother had always been cared for and attended to by her own mother who also taught her about the plants and healing remedios. Mi abuelita's ancestral diet, which consisted mostly of beans, tortillas, y fresh salsa, and her love for the plants is what always kept her in good health and spirit. Yet, beneath her beautiful big brown eyes one could also feel her unspoken pain. Grandmother had lived for years under the terror of my grandfather's sickness and violence. This pain she buried deep inside of her and never really spoke about this part of her life. Ultimately, it would be this deep seeded pain that would eventually manifest into cancer in her womb. Despite the painful process of having to cope with the physical and mental challenges of dealing with cancer in her life, grandmother always remained positive and strong through it all, she did not easily give up.

As one of the main point person's in my family to help with taking grandmother to doctor visits, I would be gifted priceless moments in which I was able to spend quality time with my grandmother and was able to listen and learn from her in-depth knowledge of the herbs and healing teas for the womb. My curiosity for learning about her childhood and my great grandmother's would allow me the opportunity to record her and learn from her strength and knowledge. Despite never having the opportunity to learn to write and read, grandmother had a very extensive knowledge of healing plants and care for the womb that meant she could help cure anything from empacho to healing a woman's womb through massages, oils, and teas in order to help her get pregnant. In fact, it was her love of plants that kept grandmother busy and motivated her to wake up every morning to water despite her pain. She breathed and lived for her plants. She was also a very spiritual person and devoted to la Virgin Maria and every night she would pray her rosario. Her spiritual faith allowed her to have the strength to endure months of agony towards the end of her battle with cancer. It is these many beautiful teachings and conocimientos that still remain with me and are a reminder that not only trauma is passed on. Healing conocimientos are also passed on via our wombs, oral herstories, and healing practices present in our families and communities. These healing conocimientos are also recorded in our bones and run through our blood.

Embracing the spiritual strength of my abuelita allowed me to realize the value of first healing myself in bodymindspirit as constitutive of becoming a whole educator. As an educator, spiritual healing allows me to deepen my own awareness of how dominant discourses on race, class, gender and sexuality are embodied, contested, and re-created in our day-to-day interactions. It allows me to continue to foster compassion and empathy in how I come to understand and make meaning of young people's lived experiences. It is this connection to spirituality L. Pérez (1998) calls "curandera (healer) work: reclaiming and reformulating spiritual worldviews that are empowering to [us] as women" (p.4). For L. Pérez, this curandera work interrupts "the production of gendered, raced, and sexed politics of spirituality and of art" (p.42). By (re)claiming our spiritual and healing conocimientos, which have survived for thousands of years, Chican@s invoke the spiritual strength of our ancestors.

For many women of color in the U.S. and transnational feminists engaging the sacred provides an alternative way of being to secular and colonizing dominant thinking that dominates in struggles of social justice. From this standpoint, women of color's understanding of the

sacred unsettles settler assumptions about the sacred that relegate it to institutions of religion. Institutions of religion colonize the realm of spirituality, and often relegate Indigenous spirituality to paganism. Unlike Western understandings of spirituality that place emphasize on an individualized spirituality supported by a neoliberal framework, Indigenous spirituality recognizes "the connectedness of all things, both animate and inanimate, from past through the present and into the future" and is a "constructive force that speaks through inclusivity and transformation" (Ritskes, 2011, p.415). As such, Indigenous Spirituality and Knowledges emphasize the importance of embodied learning that comes from the lived experiences of the individual and community and our relationship to the natural world. Thus, to (re)claim[29] the sacred presents a vehicle for what Chela Sandoval calls "differential consciousness" or a new kind of subjectivity developed under conditions of multiple oppression. M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) offers, "The central understanding within an epistemology of the Sacred is that of a core/Spirit that is immortal, at once linked to the pulse and energy of creation. It is that living matter that links us to each other, making that which individual simultaneously collective" (p.326). In this way for many Indigenous people and women of color, healing and spirituality are inseparable[30].

At the most basic level, transnational feminist scholar Fernandes (2003) refers to spirituality as "an understanding of the self as encompassing body and mind, as well as spirit" and a "transcendent sense of interconnection that moves beyond the knowable, visible material world" yet is grounded in a form of embodied spirituality (p.10). For African Indigenous educator Wane (2011) the spiritual "is that part of the person concerned with meaning, truth, purpose, or reality, which is the ultimate significance of things. The spiritual dimension is fundamentally experiential and intuitive rather than conceptual" (p. 78). Chicana and queer activist scholar Gloria Anzaldua (2009) speaks of spirituality as:

> [A] source of sustenance, a way of knowing, a path of survival. Like love, spirituality is a relational activity lasting to deep bonds between people, plants, animals, and the forces of nature. Spirituality not only transforms our perceptions of "ordinary" life and relationships with others, but also invites encounters with other realities, other worlds (p.229).

Similarly, for educator and activist hooks (2000) the spiritual refers to the "recognition within everyone that there is a place of mystery in our lives where forces that are beyond human desire or will alter circumstances and/or guide and direct us. I call these forces "divine spirit" (p.77). Moreover, hooks speaks of her spiritual awakening as the ability to love and understands love as a transformative force.

By centering spirituality in my life as a graduate student, I shifted my priorities and thus my thinking in how I came to understand the purpose of my research and work in education. I

[29] I use parentheses in "(re)claim" because it can be contested that certain beliefs, ideas, places were never "un" claimed. In other sections, I understand reclaiming as part of an important process of recognizing that which is denied or ripped from our history and memory as colonized peoples.

[30] Important to remain vigilant about the ways in which healing and spirituality become products open for consumption and commodification. Especially in a context of the New Age movement, one must be critical of the ways in which a free market approach "opens the world's spiritual arena as an opportunity for spiritual exploitation and even capitalist imperialism" (York, 2001, p. 368).

understand my spirituality as not separate from everyday life but rather embedded in an understanding that our daily thoughts, emotions, and actions are interconnected with the universe. It is an understanding of self that is inclusive of mind, body, and spirit. I invoke the spiritual via my connection to the four elements earth, wind, water, fire and my day-to-day interactions with all life on earth, human and non-human. In *Soul Talk*, Akasha Gloria Hull (2001) examines how African American feminists' spiritual consciousness affirms how personal and social change is possible through reconnection with spirit: "Hope emerges when we realize that individual healing and growth …contribute to the wholeness of the group, moving us all that much further in the right direction. As one-by-one we rebirth and re-grow as part of our spiritual maturation, we contribute to the potential wholeness for our larger aggregates –partners, families, work, and friendship circles, communities, the nation, the world, and universe" (p.180). Through the embodiment of my spirituality I came to make sense of my existence and this knowledge allows me to feel grounded and brings purpose to my life. My spirituality is where I go for healing and renewal—thus making it an act of ceremony –and this can take form as an individual or collective embodiment. Thus, I would argue that to not include spirituality in our discussions of education then fails to acknowledge that spirituality plays a central role in the lives of many educators, students, and communities.

Dear Mara,
Always remember to be kind to yourself and that self-care and love is vital to you thriving. While the world seems to revolve on "time" and always having the urgency to fit in as many things as possible in the day as a daughter, mother, sister, partner, educator, and student—NO HAY PRISA! It's not how fast you get there; it's the journey that matters. Love yourself. Accept yourself. You owe it to your ancestors to be the joyful and spiritual warrior they dreamed you to be and embody this message to be passed on to the next seven generations to come.

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Ometeotl. Dando gracias al creador/creadora por este momento. Pidiendo permiso a los cuatros rumos: Tlahuizklampa, Cihuatlampa, Miktlampa, Huitzlampa, abuelo cielo y madre pachamama, a nuestros ancestros, a nuestros abuelitos/as, a los elementos fuego, aire, tierra y agua. Ofreciendo mis rezos de amor, paz, harmonia, y justicia a través de esta agua y que nuestro rezo llegue a cada rincón de nuestra planeta tierra.

Giving thanks to the Creator, Great Spirit, for this beautiful moment. With humility, respect, and love we offer our collective prayers as one heart, one mind, and one spirit. We honor and invoke the healing powers of the seven directions, grandfather Sun, Sky, and the stars, and Grandmother Moon. We honor and ask permission from the ancestors of these lands, the Chochenyo Ohlone Indigenous peoples, and all the spirits, human and non-human, that walked these lands before us and continue to protect it and pray on it.

Sacred waters, from the bottom of our hearts we gather here today to honor you and pray with you. We great humility, I offer you this love letter and prayer:

Precious water, I begin with my deepest apology for all the pain that we have caused you. I ask for forgiveness for all our actions that continue to destroy our sacred web of life and your ability to flow and bring life and healing to every corner of our planet.

Tlazohcamati, gracias agua. Thank you for providing life and healing to every atom, cell, and part of our bodies. We pray that our inner waters may always be in alignment with harmony, balance, and calmness so we may reflect your grand beauty.

Sister water, we send our love to every body of water on our planet, may our love raise your vibration and capacity to heal yourself and carry with you our prayers.

Sacred waters, we pray for all our human and non-human relatives on this planet that depend on you to live and because of environmental racism and destruction must travel long distances and risk their lives, to drink your waters.

Sacred Waters, we pray for all the water protectors and earth guardians in our planet that each day may risk their lives and that of their families to protect you and all life on our planet. May you give them courage, strength, and determination to not give up and continue to stand in solidarity against the privatization and destruction of our waters.

Sacred Waters, we pray that you may touch the hearts and minds of all those in power and leadership so they may shift from a consciousness of death and destruction to one of love and life on earth for the next seven generations and beyond. May you give them courage and strength to make the right decisions and to act from a place of love for all our relatives, human and non-human.

Sacred Waters, we pray that all environmental destruction and depletion of our sacred resources by corporate greed and corrupt governments end now. We pray to keep our sacred relative oil in the ground where it belongs, and wants to be. We pray to stop the commodification and privatization of our waters. May all franking, thrilling, and acts of violence by our human relatives towards our planet earth STOP now. We pray that every human relative on our planet opens their hearts, minds, and spirits to hear the cry of climate change and align themselves to be part of healing justice for our planet.

Sacred waters, may you hear and carry our healing prayers. We envision a world without greed, white supremacy, oppression, nor destruction. We envision a planet in which our children, elders, women, men, and animal relatives can walk and live in harmony and balance and as one with the earth. We pray that you carry with you our collective prayers to every corner of our planet. We believe in the power of your love to heal our planet.[31]

[31] I offered this prayer during my participation in a new moon water ceremony in 2017.

TLAHUITZLAMPA

Honoring the direction of the East
Where the Sun Rises
Place of Beginnings
Enlightenment and Illumination

Calling in the Sacred Masculine Energy
Asking for Sabiduria
Que nos encamine
Hacia la Verdad y Harmonía
Con el universo

Honoring the Element of Air
Sanando los 13 aires
I pray to the winds of change
Planting Seeds of Transformation
May our minds remain Fertile and Fluid
To allow concepts to shift
May the vientos
spread to every corner of our planet our
Collective Healing Vision
and a language of
HOPE
For the next seven generations
Ometeotl

Chapter 1

A *Decolonizing Healing Paradigm* in Educational Research and Praxis

Dear Child,

I want to begin by honoring your **ANCESTORS** and acknowledging that as a child of the creator, I see your **HUMANITY**, your **BEAUTY**, and **SACREDNESS**. I also want to acknowledge that writing these words was not easy and that I speak from a place of **LOVE** and **COMPASSION**. I want to share with you a little about who I am. My name is Mara Chavez, and I am a daughter, granddaughter, mother, sister, healer, and educator. Throughout my upbringing, I, too, have had my share of struggles growing up in the flatlands of Oakland. I became a teen mom by my senior year at McClymonds high school. This brought both a new set of challenges and blessings in my life. Despite the challenges I faced, I was very blessed to have caring adults and mentors along my journey who believed in my potential and **INSPIRED** me to not give up on my **DREAMS**. As a young person, witnessing the many struggles that Young People face in Oakland motivated me to make a difference in my **COMMUNITY**. Today, I am an educator committed to **NOURISHING** the minds, hearts, and spirits of Young People like you, for I truly believe in the **POTENTIAL** of every child. Although I have not had the opportunity to get to know you, I know that behind that tough skin of yours is a story to tell and a **BEAUTIFUL SPIRIT** waiting to shine its **LIGHT** and **SACREDNESS.** I understand that the actions you and your friends took on February 7 are a symptom of bigger issues in our communities. In many ways, as a community, we have failed to provide you with the resources, mentoring, and unconditional love needed to help guide you in your journey. From the bottom of my **HEART**, I want you to know that I **FORGIVE** you for the harm you have caused me. I feel heartbroken, for it is only because you must carry great pain in your heart that you were able to hurt someone who only wanted to help you. Up until that day, I had never once hesitated to stop to help someone in need, but that has changed. My **HEALING** process has not been easy. Nothing justifies violence, and I want you to know that what you did to me is not ok. I want you to know that violence is not your only choice. I have not lived life in your shoes. However, I do overstand that as a young Black boy in Oakland, life is not easy. The odds are greatly against you in terms of the institutional barriers and racism you face on a daily basis. Yet, I also want to **AFFIRM** that, like me, many **CARING** adults in Oakland would be willing to mentor and support you in your journey. I have **HOPE** in you, and I **PRAY** that you too can realize that you are a **PRECIOUS** child of our community and were brought into this world for a great **PURPOSE**.

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At approximately one in the afternoon on February 7, 2014, just a block away from home, I stopped my vehicle to help a group of four to five young boys, approximately between the ages of 11 to 14, who were flagging me for help. They were asking for a jump-start. For a second, I hesitated, but I ignored my gut feeling, and I proceeded to assist them. In the process, I was attacked at gunpoint and beaten by two of the young boys. During the beating, my body was

immobilized by the shock and disbelief at what was happening to me. In the backseat of my car, I had my most valued asset as a graduate student: my laptop containing four years of graduate school writing and dissertation data collection. The moment one of the youth reached out to grab my backpack, the adrenaline of the susto of losing years of writing meant my flight and fight instincts kicked in. I struggled with the kid to rescue my backpack while being pushed and shoved into the harsh concrete that ripped right through my blue jeans and perforated my skin.

Finally, after breaking loose with my backpack in my arms, I ran to knock on the door of the adjacent home. I had no luck in getting anybody to open the door. As I made my way back to the scene, I witnessed how the kid was still struggling to take off in my car since the hand brake was deployed. Meanwhile, the other kids had taken off in the other vehicle. In a moment of despair, I attempted to push the kid off the driver's seat. Suddenly, he pushed hard on the speed pedal, and I found myself desperately holding on to the car door while my feet were in the air as he attempted to speed away. He abruptly stopped, and I took advantage of the opportunity to let go.

In reaction mode, I started running after my car and stopped an oncoming car. Without waiting for a response from the driver, I hopped in the car of a complete stranger and pleaded for him to follow the kid that had stolen my car. The driver, a young Black man in his mid-twenties, looked at me in disbelief because I was in his car. Yet, he obeyed my desperate cry to follow the kid. We chased the kid through the neighborhood, and as we managed to get closer to him, he finally spoke up and asked me, "Does he have a gun?" I answered, "Yes," and naively told him that I didn't think the gun was real because he was just a kid. At that moment, he asked me to lie back so the kid wouldn't see me. As he got really close to the kid in my car, in disbelief, I saw him reach for his gun. Shocked by what I was witnessing, I struggled to catch my breath. In a matter of seconds, we lost sight of my car as the kid sped away. I asked the young man to please take me home, and he started making his way back to the spot where I jumped in his car. When we arrived, there were at least five police cars at the scene of the incident. He pulled to the side curb before reaching the cops to drop me off. As I got out of his car, I thanked him for everything.

For the first time in my life, the sight of the police officers that arrived to investigate the "crime" scene offered a sense of relief.[32] *After taking detailed notes on my ordeal, I was asked a key question, "Are you going to press charges?" Given that I was attacked at gunpoint, the incident would have been reclassified from a misdemeanor to a felony charge if I had pressed charges.*[33] *Again, I felt my body stiffen in reaction to what I was being asked. The thought of having Oakland police chase young boys of color terrified me. My immediate response was NO.*

Shocked by my refusal to press charges, the male officers brought in a woman officer to speak to me. Exhausted and battered with the insistence from the officers to press charges meant that in the end, I was convinced to do so, hoping that this could be an intervention for the young

[32] As an educator, I have an abolitionist stance towards the prison industrial complex and the punitive state. I am committed to creating alternatives to the carceral state when responding to harm done in our communities. Given my stance, when family and community harm arise, my approach is to first respond with compassion and to seek restorative alternatives. The carceral state is the last resort many of us would resort to for justice given the terror police violence has inflicted in our communities. Yet, for the first time, the reality of being physically attacked and harmed propelled me to seek the help of OPD and this sentiment was juxtaposed with the tension of seeking justice in the very systems that are at the root of causing harm, terror, and trauma to our communities in the first place.

[33] I would later find out that in Oakland, given the high rates of car robbery, it is the policy of OPD not to pursue and chase stolen cars given the liability for OPD. However, re-classifying the charges as a felony meant that this authorized OPD to pursue and chase the perpetrator if caught driving in the stolen car.

boys that caused me harm. However, I was left further traumatized by the lack of alternative options to respond to my circumstances from a place that honored my commitment to restorative justice, my humanity, and that of the young boys.

Only hours later, I received a call. Minutes later, a cop arrived at my doorstep to escort me to Children's Hospital to identify the two young boys who were chased by OPD and caught in my car. Luckily, both boys did not suffer any serious injuries. My car, however, was a total loss and without the full coverage to amend for my loss[34]. The act of having to identify the young boy who perpetrated the violence towards me has been one of the most challenging things I have had to do as an educator committed to my community and the next seven generations. Later, I would be informed that the young boy was only 12 years old and came from a family with a long history of gun violence and drug trafficking. For months, I remained unsettled by my complacency as a "victim" of crime in having to identify a child as my "offender." Without any success, I attempted many times to seek restorative justice as an alternative option to deal with the harm caused. When the district attorney finally answered my calls, surprised by my request, he responded that my case did not qualify for restorative justice. While I was never able to address the 12-year-old boy who car jacked me at gunpoint, I wrote him a letter. My intention was to read him my letter. Unfortunately, I was not given the opportunity.

Given the sociopolitical context in East Oakland, my experience of being a "victim" of intra-racial community violence also speaks to the ways gentrification has displaced many Black families and further economically marginalized poor working-class communities of color. Only five months before my incident, my partner and I had bought our first home in what is the geographical area known as the Foothills of Oakland, or that is considered an in-between space marking the racial and class divide line between the Hills and Flatlands of Oakland. While our ancestors have traveled these lands for generations, our newly acquired "ownership" of land makes us settlers in the stolen Ohlone Territory of Huchiun Indigenous Lands.

Living right below the Interstate 580 highway, a major landmark also signaling one's position along the racial and class divide, is a daily reminder of our newly acquired middle-class upward mobility after having lived all our lives in the flatlands of Oakland. Despite our close proximity to one of the most notorious high crime areas, Seminary Ave and High St, we are sheltered from the sounds of gunshots and police sirens, which had been part of our daily experiences growing up in Oakland, by our location in this small community surrounded by some of the last standing redwood trees. Surrounded by what is now primarily working and middle-class professional homeowners, my family and I felt protected by the acquired "safety" our new neighborhood granted us.[35] However, my assumed bubble of "safety" burst in a matter of minutes.

In my process of healing from my experience, I drew on a diverse range of healing modalities to cope with the trauma and pain of having gone through such an ordeal. Specifically,

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[34] I want to give a special thanks to the School of Education for helping facilitate an emergency grant to help cover some of the costs of replacing my car.

[35] Once a historically predominantly Black working and middle class neighborhood, Black families in the past two decades have been pushed out due to the neoliberal and capitalist forces of gentrification which have transformed the racial demographics of the neighborhood. In the last four years of my residence, I witnessed the tragedy of two long standing Black families being forced to sell their properties due to inability to continue paying a high mortgage and then be replaced by white families moving in. Unfortunately, as a homeowner myself in this community, I too, have become part of the settler colonial model of privatizing land and displacing other marginalized communities.

I sought the ancestral medicine of temaskal[36] *for my healing. Going into the temazcalli, I found myself little prepared to face what showed up for me. Entering the earth's womb, fear was not present in my heart. In my mind, I understood what happened to me within a sociopolitical context which allowed me to have compassion for the youth who had inflicted the pain and violence on me. In my heart, I had forgiven the youth, and so, I thought my healing process was complete. However, once in the temazcalli, I was paralyzed by the fear that surfaced in my body, mind, and spirit. I wanted to run out and scream for help. I wanted to run away from the fear, which I did not expect.*

Placing this experience within a context of historical and generational trauma was the missing piece to my healing process. Both my paternal and maternal grandmothers suffered great violence at the hands of my grandfathers. Both lived the terrifying constant fear of having to endure physical and emotional violence at the hands of men. The violence did not end until their children were old enough to defend my grandmothers. Thus, my fear was much deeper than the surface of my lived reality. Yet, one cannot heal what does not show up. In retrospect, I am grateful for the opportunity to heal and peel away another layer of fear. The medicine of the abuelitas y abuelitos and the song prayers in the temescal gave me the courage to face the fears that showed up to help me heal. In this way, I was not only working to heal myself but also the past seven generations of womxn whom I carry in my flesh and bones. The temazcal was a powerful reminder that it is not only trauma that is passed on; our ancestral healing practices to heal our bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits have also been passed on.

I begin with my testimonio as an educator experiencing violence at the hands of children from my own community as an entry point to my discussion of healing within a context of community and settler colonialism[37]. Like my testimonio, writing about the intersections of trauma, healing, and agency in working with Young People of Color (YPOC) is not always easy to unpack. Many questions preoccupied my mind in the days, weeks, months, and years to come after my incident. As a mother and sister, I pondered: Why were these children not in school? Where were their parents? Where are the adults that are supposed to guide and mentor them? This painful event also triggered larger questions about what healing may look like both for the Young People who perpetrated the violence and for myself. Within the context of my research, I was moved to explore more deeply what healing justice looks like at a collective level within a context of community violence and schooling. How do we create spaces to hold the collective pain inflicted by systems of oppression that weigh heavily on the spirits of Young People and our own? How do we heal and sustain ourselves as educators committed to social justice and Young People's wellbeing? Moreover, how does a child go back to school after they have carjacked someone at gunpoint and ended up in a hospital after being chased by the police? How do I

[36] Temazcal is an ancient Indigenous purification sweat ceremony that is traditional to many but not all native peoples of the Americas. Entering the Temazkal is entering the earth's womb and the lava rocks embody the spirit of ancestors, the water poured over the rocks emits steam or the breath of the creator.

[37] In a context of a settler colonial state, like the U.S., the concept of "owning" and occupying stolen land complicates relations between Indigenous and diasporic communities for it is a source of tension that cannot be overlooked. Especially, given the ways in which Indigenous and colonized communities have differently experienced displacement this can result in conflicting strategies on how to challenge and resist white supremacy and ongoing neocolonization. What can be a potential solution to alleviating the suffering of some marginalized Communities of Color can ultimately contribute to the continual oppression of others (Smith, 2010). As such, it is critical to acknowledge the complicated ways in which as colonized and marginalized communities we both partake in and resist ongoing settler colonialism.

return to my role as an educator after such an experience? For months after my ordeal, I experienced episodes of fear at the sight of young Black boys as I navigated moving through various community spaces to work with Young People and youth organizations.

As part of my healing process, I shared my testimonio with family, friends, and sometimes strangers. Adults often reacted with horror at the turn of events and empathy for what I had gone through. This "empathy" did not always extend to the young boys that inflicted the harm. Especially when sharing my story with non-educators, adults often made assumptions about the Young Boys of Color as "criminals" and about their racial/ethnic background and my role as a "victim." As a light-skin Xicanx educator, I was critical and curious about the ways in which individuals reacted to my story, given my positionality as it relates to my gender, class, race, phenotype, speech, and education. If I had been a monolingual immigrant Indigenous Dark woman who got carjacked, would I have been afforded the same kind of empathy and understanding as a victim? Would the cops who arrived to help me have taken the time to call my personal bank to close my bank account and bring a female cop to talk to me? Would I have had the same kind of access I did as a graduate student of the ivory tower to be granted an emergency loan to help purchase a new car? Would I have had the opportunity and privilege to be heard and tell my story? Just like the Young People were racialized and criminalized based on assumptions and ignorance, I, too, was often presumed deserving of empathy and protection as a light skin educated heterosexual woman. In response, I took the opportunity to be in critical dialogue with adults by offering a more humanizing and critical perspective through my voice and testimonio that aimed to disrupt the colonizing ways of thinking in relation to Young People and community violence.

Settler "justice" as I experienced in the judicial system and in the internalized attitudes of how adults reacted and normalized YPOC as only criminals was a profound reminder that social justice becomes an elusive and abstract concept when you make invisible the systems of oppression that create the need for healing in the first place. I was often left pondering: Where does healing meet social justice and vice versa? Sadly, discussions around Youth violence often overlook the need to integrate healing into our conversations of social justice for both students and practitioners. In particular, for the Young People, a critical understanding of the unique and distinctive sources of suffering and contemporary realities of trauma urban YPOC face is an area often overlooked in public discourses and in mainstream educational research and praxis. In helping to contextualize this gap, the ethnographic work of scholars like Carter (2005), Ferguson (2001), and Lopez (2003) reveals how race, gender, and power operate to determine the types of student behaviors that get racialized and gendered. Their work shows how the ideological apparatus that perceives and treats boys and men of color as "deviant" and "threatening" helps to reproduce the structural systems in place that have negative material implications for both young men and women of color. The public school system and the criminal justice system become institutions that regulate and punish Brown and Black bodies and minds and ensure that people of color remain an underclass (see, e.g., Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Rios, 2011). Researchers have also documented how neighborhood conditions affect students' achievement, behavior, and mental health (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997). Moreover, studies have shown how violence disproportionately affects urban YPOC, and some report that between 50% and 96% of urban children have witnessed violence in their lifetimes (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998). Psychologists are now beginning to develop models to account for the cumulative burden that multiple urban stressors place on adults, children, and the functioning of families and communities (Evans, 2004).

For practitioners, the field of counseling psychology has demonstrated how marginalized communities are adversely impacted emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually by the burden of discrimination and racism (Carter, 2007; Brayant-Davis, 2007; Duran et al., 2008; Williams and Mohammed, 2009; Flores, 2013). We also know that the emotional impact of being othered since childhood has been documented as a precursor to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and acts of aggression and violence directed toward the self and others among Youth Of Color (Hardy and Laszloffy, 2005). Likewise, the field of psychology is beginning to address the significance of how distinct conditions of justice can lead to healing and social well-being. The work of psychologist Isaac Prilleltensky (2011) introduces the "wellness as fairness" approach that centers on justice to reinforce the idea that healing happens in a political context and must promote individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community well-being. By defining wellness in terms of justice, the work of Prilleltensky reminds us of our capacity as agents of change that can alter the conditions of injustice. In education, scholars have critiqued how mainstream models of learning and teaching deploy deficit models that do not promote student well-being but rather subtract from students' cultures and serve to marginalize further and silence Students of Color (Darder, 2012; Delpit, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). In addition, the high stress, unsustainable demands, and emotional distress placed on K-12 educators to adhere to subtracting schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) is also dehumanizing and damaging to the well-being of not only the students but also the educators and practitioners who are expected to comply (Freire, 2005; Graveline, 1998, 2004). Not surprisingly, there is pervasive stress, anxiety, and burnout associated with the profession of teaching working with YPOC in social justice efforts (Hakanen et al., 2006; Tartar et al., 2003).

While there is a substantive body of literature from various disciplines that have explored the cumulative impacts of health and socio-economic disparities facing YPOC, regarding the experiences of practitioners, there is less work that makes the links across these various bodies of work in addressing how this knowledge can best assist educators in creating pathways to healing from collective suffering and systemic oppression, both for themselves and their students. With exception, the work of educator Shawn Ginwright (2010) argues for a shift to an asset-based approach to understanding the assets that Youth of Color bring. While his work specifically addresses the lives of African American male students, the *Radical Healing* framework he proposes contributes to building a theoretical and pedagogical approach to creating holistic models of education. His understanding of *Radical Healing* fosters hope, joy, and a sense of possibility with youth as ways to contribute to individual well-being, community health, and broader social justice. Ginwright argues that research on education, social movements, and youth development has not sufficiently addressed the theoretical significance of suffering nor the significance of hope. In this way, Ginwright challenges educators and community practitioners to inspire youth to understand that community conditions are not permanent and that imagining new possibilities is the first step to change. Thus, *Radical Healing* involves building the capacity of Young People to be active agents in creating the communities they envision.

In this light, I share Ginwright's (2010) optimism and hopefulness when he states, "For Young People healing fosters collective optimism and a transformation of spirit that over time contributes to a healthy and vibrant community life for all" (p. 211). He speaks of the significance of caring relationships that connect YPOC to our long histories of resistance as communities of color and how this care "is perhaps one of the most revolutionary antidotes to urban trauma because it facilitates healing and a passion for justice" (Ginwright, 2010, p.211). Thus, this healing project is in response to this calling to create more holistic models of

education by consciously working from a spiritual praxis and decolonizing lens to inform my critical understandings of education as not only a site of struggle but to also see the potential of education as a site of liberatory praxis that brings about healing and transformation for Students of Color, practitioners, and the community at large. As such, this chapter elaborates on the concept of healing as a possible opening for rethinking educational strategies that might yield healing approaches to the larger project of decolonization and liberation when working with historically marginalized and racialized YPOC. Especially in educational research, praxis healing has received little theoretical attention. This gap presents an opportunity for thinking around how healing is conceptualized within a context of community and considering the ways in which healing can provide decolonizing approaches to education both within the classroom and outside the classroom.

Guided by the direction of the East, where the sun rises and where the sacred masculine resides, I, a practitioner and educator committed to healing justice, articulate a *decolonizing healing paradigm* to argue that healing is not only a critical aspect of decolonizing Eurocentric modes of thinking and being that privilege linear, secular, and scientific ways of knowing in education but, most importantly, of building the kind of educational projects that can nourish both educators and our future generations in bodymindspirit (Lara, 2002). Centering healing, spirituality, and Indigenous Knowledges to inform this work, a *decolonizing healing paradigm* in education allows us to (re)conceptualize healing not just as a site of resistance against an oppressive colonial educational system but as a process that allows us to engage multiple sites of knowledge production and ways of being that help cultivate more healing relationships with YPOC and among educators and practitioners. The process of healing in bodymindspirit from my own experience as a practitioner committed to decolonizing self became a pivotal point of focus in my journey to gaining deeper insights to researching and writing about the nuances and complexities of practitioners engaging in healing efforts with Young People.

This chapter aims to contribute to a critical dialogue that brings healing and education into conversation while de-centering Western approaches to schooling that often negate the centrality of culture and healing in affirming teaching and learning that happens within a context of community. Thus, classroom and community spaces that center pedagogies of healing, spirit, and decolonization are vital sites of knowledge production for transformative education that touches not only the lives of our students but also has the potential to transform the minds and hearts of the educators and practitioners themselves. The internal work I undertook helped enlighten the course of my dissertation work and, more importantly, allowed me to speak truth to the healing processes that made it possible to reconceptualize healing work from within as a first step. From this personal and intimate place of living theory in the flesh (Moraga et al., 1981), I build on the works of decolonial thinkers and Indigenous feminist critiques of the understanding of healing to map the ontological and epistemological lens that informs this work. In this way, a *decolonizing healing paradigm* addresses the multilayered dimensions of healing and centers subjugated cultural knowledges as critical to informing the processes that facilitate hope, healing, and political self-determination among YPOC and educators.

This chapter next turns to the existing literature that underscores the impacts of generational and ongoing trauma for communities of color. I discuss the historical and social contexts that help inform a critical understanding of traumas necessitating healing in urban YPOC. I discuss how dominant frameworks of trauma-informed and educational research still operate within a Eurocentric paradigm and fail to address how a decolonizing approach to healing has the potential to foster more humanizing approaches to transformative education. By

drawing from various theoretical approaches that include decolonizing theories, feminist epistemologies and pedagogies, and Indigenous Knowledges, I propose an interdisciplinary approach that centers healing and spirituality on situating educational research and praxis as a sacred task that aims to bring about healing and transformative practices for both educators and students. Thus, a decolonizing lens views education as a key site of resistance, in which youth, parents, educators, and community work to transform educational research and praxis to address the complexity and messiness of engaging in collective healing efforts.

This chapter contributes to an emerging body of literature knowledge focused on voicing and understanding healing through an intersectional, interdisciplinary, and hopeful lens that aims to uplift practices that strengthen the cultural and spiritual well-being of YPOC and educators (Ginwright, 2016; Graveline, 1998; Villanueva, 2013). It emphasizes the need to instill hope by teaching in ways that connect Young People to healing processes that help alleviate the suffering of their communities. It recognizes Young People as knowledgeable and key co-partners in redefining student educational success and collective political agency as a possibility. Moreover, a *decolonizing healing paradigm* provides necessary theoretical tools to support a more nuanced approach to education that promotes student social, physical, psychological, emotional, cultural, and spiritual well-being and the healing of both educators and Young People. In particular, for urban YPOC, alternative processes of healing within urban community settings make it possible for Young People to foster a culture of non-violence, activism, and renewed hope in community justice. This work contributes to this critical discussion of community social well-being by exploring how educational research and praxis have the potential to help cultivate healing spaces to promote tools and modalities of self and collective liberation and its implications for transformative praxis in education.

Why Healing in Education?

In the past two decades, scholars in education have begun to theorize how K-12 institutions of schooling socially and psychologically injure rather than heal wounded learners and how schools can be spaces where teachers, students, and parents can begin to heal from these wounds (Kennedy & Morton, 1999; Koplow, 2002; Olson, 2009). In *Wounded by School*, Olson (2009) examines the wounds of schooling and processes that facilitate healing by highlighting the individual healing stories of students, parents, and teachers. She outlines four stages of healing from school wounds: 1) Self-blame and private shame, 2) Points of light/moments of insight, 3) Grieving: anger and sadness, and 4) Reconciliation: Activism and/engagement in change. While critical of the ways in which schooling tracks and reproduces a hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980), by only highlighting the success stories of some individuals, "healing" from schooling in this work is premised on the trope that wounded individuals can "help themselves" heal in a linear process that does not call for a radical uprooting of the systems of oppression in place that creates the need for healing in the first place. Consequently, this body of work fails to include a critical analysis of the socio-political and interlocking systems of oppression that dehumanize and negatively impact the educational and life trajectories of Young People of Color and the need also to address what it takes for adults to have the mind and heart set necessary to center the role of healing in education within a context of community and settler colonialism.

When YPOC are treated as "at-risk" and damaged individuals in need of healing, we have a limited understanding of the nuances of the present-day lived realities of YPOC. We fail to recognize the ways in which systems of oppression and educational institutions continue to silence and colonize the bodies and spirits of our future generations. To enter our discussion of

healing and education from a starting point that does not place blame on YPOC is to make visible how schooling as a colonial project continues to reproduce structural inequality and colonize the minds, hearts, and spirits of our YPOC. It necessitates for educators and practitioners to embrace a more critical perspective that helps us see both the toll that systems of oppression have on YPOC and their innate resilience and courage to persevere and imagine a different reality. In order to support healing processes with YPOC, we must first identify and recognize what it is that YPOC are healing from. In the following sections, I briefly address some of the bodies of work that facilitate a more critical perspective of how institutions of schooling are an open wound that continues to oppress the bodies, minds, and spirits of our YPOC. In this way, an anti-colonial lens helps to engender a critical consciousness for educators and students to understand the colonial history of systems in place that are at the root of understanding what YPOC are healing from.

A Decolonial Lens to Education

> I look around, and wherever there is colonizers and colonized face to face, I see force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict, and in a parody of education, the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate functionaries, "boys," artisans, office clerks, and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business (Cesaire, 2000).

From the earliest contact with non-Europeans in what we now know as the "Americas" or what was originally named Ixachilan by Indigenous peoples, which translates into "the immense place" (Marin Ruiz, 2009), Europeans established categories of otherness, which defined Europeans as superior and non-Europeans as inferior (Blaut, 1993; Casteneda, 1993; Dussel & Barber, 1995). The colonized were "situated in a natural position of inferiority," and consequently, "their phenotypic traits, as well as their cultural features, were considered inferior" (Quijano & Ennis, 2000, p. 535). The colonization of non-Europeans in the Americas by European colonizers would be replicated on a global scale and thus gave rise to a global racial/ethnic hierarchy, which has been a constitutive element of the development of the capitalist world system's international division of labor (Mignolo & Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2000; Wallerstein, 1979). In the context of U.S. settler colonialism, European colonizers waged a brutal conquest that led to the systemic genocide of Native American communities, the enslavement of Africans for the establishment of a slave system that lasted close to 250 years, the colonization of almost half of Mexico's territory, and to the overseas colonization of Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines in the nineteenth-century justified by U.S. colonial expansion and domination. Thus, the last five hundred years have been devastating to communities of color, and the effects of genocide continue to be felt today on a global scale.

From the beginning of time, the United States of America was built on the premise of white supremacy (Martinez, 2012). Nowhere is this more present than in our public educational system. Schooling is one of the key sites in which settler colonialism reproduces its ideologies and colonial structures to sustain settler colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. As a colonial project, schooling was designed to indoctrinate the minds of Indigenous children and colonize their spirits and bodies (Deloria, 1991). For Native American children, the brutal and violent system of boarding schools was established to kill the indian, save the man (Stout, 2012). Children of African and Mexican descent were denied access to education. It would take long legal battles to gain access to the right to public education and end school segregation (Donato,

1997; Walker, 1996). Moreover, immigrant and poor children of color experience marginalization and othering that is violent to their being and ability to learn (Gandar, 2009). In fact, the moment a Student of Color steps foot in a classroom, they are faced with a structure and set of relations that go counter to everything that is aligned to help them grow and thrive in healthy and healing ways that support their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Schooling as designed by the colonial forces of US settler colonialism was never meant to nurture the sacredness and full potential of children of color. Instead, institutions of schooling have racialized, gendered, and colonized the bodymindspirit of our children in order to reproduce the continual economic oppression of generations to come.

As Aime Cesaire (2000) vividly described in *Discourse in Colonialism,* colonialism or "thingification," as he coined it, exposes the inhumane and destructive nature of colonial rule on the colonized by the colonizer set forth to sustain the empire of capitalism. More than half a century later, Cesaire's potent critique of colonial discourse continues to offer a critical insight into the ways colonial ideology persists and how its hegemonic power imposes a Eurocentric perspective as superior to all other ways of knowing. Like Cesaire, many scholars have critically challenged the prevalent colonial ideologies in order to bring to the forefront the experiences of the colonized under colonialism and its endurance at the cultural, educational, and mental levels (see, e.g., Anzaldua, 2012; Battiste,1998; Fanon, 2005, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2011; Haunani-Kay Trask, 1999; Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Memmi, 1991; Perez, 1999; Quijano, 2000; Said,1978). Scholars have also theorized the need for a decolonizing paradigm to inform educational discourse (see, e.g., Abdi, 2012; Baquedano-López et al., 2014; Dei et al., 2006) given the ways that colonization implemented systems of categorization that presumed the inferiority of the racialized other, and this deficit framing of othering is the foundation from which schooling was birthed. Thus, the question of decolonization is central given that colonialism has not ended, and we see it permeate in how colonial and neo-colonial relations are reproduced in our schools, universities, and other institutional settings.

Today, U.S. public schools continue to maintain existing relations of power and privilege, which serve to segregate, alienate, and disempower Students of Color through a curriculum and teaching pedagogy that is oppressive and colonizing to their minds, bodies, and spirits (Apple, 1979; Freire, 1985; Collins, 2009; Delpit, 1995). Moreover, most educators and policy-makers work from an ahistorical approach that ignores the past/continual impacts of colonialism in present-day educational inequities despite the extensive body of research that demonstrates how power relations operate and how they are designed to fail students because the system was never created for YPOC to succeed. Critical scholars have provided for a deeper understanding of how relations of power operate within institutions of schooling in its broader social, cultural, political, and economic contexts (see, e.g., Apple, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 2001; hooks, 1994; Lipman, 2004; McLaren, 1994; Willis, 1981). Critical scholars have also contributed to our understanding of how dominant discourses on race, racism, and white supremacy structure racial and gendered inequalities that oppress Young People of Color on multiple levels (see, e.g., Banks, 2006; Brayboy et al., 2007; Collins, 2010; Ferguson, 2001; hooks, 1994; Noguera et al.,2006; Valenzuela, 1999). Research has also demonstrated how schools reproduce structural class inequalities that serve to marginalize and deny YPOC access to vital resources that can make a difference in their educational and life trajectories (see, e.g., Anyon, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 1992; Oakes, 1985; Orfield & Gordon, 2001). Scholars have examined how mainstream models of learning and teaching deploy deficit models

that subtract from students' cultures and serve to further marginalize and silence Youth of Color (Darder, 2012; Delpit, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999).

However, mainstream secular Eurocentric paradigms and public discourse in education continue to operate on deficit thinking that believes students, particularly those of low-income backgrounds and Students of Color, fail in school because their cultural and family background prevents them from being "successful" learners (see, e.g., Valencia, 1997, 2002, 2010). From this place of deficit thinking, theories such as "cultural deprivation" (see, e.g., Marans & Lourie, 1967; Pearl, 1997) and "at-risk" (see, e.g., Manning & Baruth, 1994;Valencia & Solorzano, 1997) are used to justify the increasing high school push-out rates[38] and the low college graduation rates for Students of Color without a critical understanding of the interplay of micro and macro forces enacting on the daily lives of urban Young People of Color. Instead, dominant discourses of color-blind ideologies (see, e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2003) on race and notions of meritocracy and individualism want to encourage a belief that race doesn't matter—that if a student of color does not experience academic success, then this student is not working "hard."[39] In this way, schools function to promote and impose an Americanization agenda that privileges Anglo culture and the violent imposition of learning English and U.S. values and traditions at the expense of subjugating all non-Eurocentric ways of learning and being (Darder, 2012). This thinking ascribes to a neoliberal agenda that privileges the accumulation of wealth and "professional" development under the false promises that college degrees will guarantee social upward mobility, independent of who you are. Sadly, many of our children and educators have come to internalize and believe that a student's racial background is irrelevant and/or hinders their academic achievement. Moreover, the persistent use of tracking practices in public schooling instills a culture of low expectations for YPOC, which negatively impacts Young People's perceptions of themselves as students and their self-esteem and the internalization of these experiences.

For Communities of Color in struggle, healing from the onset of colonial education and past and ongoing colonization is a lifelong journey. It can be a complicated, uncertain, messy, painful, and daunting process. In fact, we have been conditioned and socialized through a secular schooling paradigm to avoid healing work at all costs, given the ways in which dominant culture and systems of oppression are set up to entice us to conform to a neoliberal capitalist agenda and school curriculum that is designed to deceive us and fragment our bodymindspirit. The reality is that too often, schooling institutions provide no space or support for our Young People to acknowledge the pain they carry, nor is there any recognition of the cultural and spiritual community knowledges that support them (Cote-Meek, 2014; Ryoo et al., 2009). Moreover, too

[38] I prefer to use the term "pushout" because unlike the term "dropout" that places blame on students, "pushout" accounts for the systemic structures that lead Young People to leave school. Dignity in Schools (DSC), a national campaign, defines a pushout as a student who feels forced out of school not just due to harsh discipline, but because of unsupportive teachers and staff, overcrowding, lack of safety, rigid test-driven curriculum, inadequate resources, and lack of student support services.

[39] Sadly, this thinking persists in most mainstream circles of education and policy despite prolific scholarly writings explicitly centering race in discussions of education that provide a critical analysis of how race continues to negatively impact students of color in material and nonmaterial ways. Moreover, scholars have shown how segregation, discrimination, racism, ethnicity, gender, place of origin, lack of funding for inner-city schools, and lack of political representation impact the growing *educational debt* for urban Youth of Color. Not surprisingly, declining high school graduation and college-going rates continue to be the reality for most urban school districts -- only 17% of African American Young People between the ages of 25 and 29 and only 11% of Latino youth had earned a college degree in 2005, as compared to 34% of White youth in the same age bracket (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 18).

often, instead of being supported by caring and aware educators, our Young People experience further mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional injury from educators who are often wounded themselves. In addition, when educators are willing to be courageous in practicing a pedagogy of healing, they often feel isolated and without support from their peers or institutions (Dillard, 2006; Hargreaves, 2001; Hart, 201; Graveline, 2004). This makes it challenging to sustain themselves and cultivate a joy for teaching and learning that supports their well-being and that of their students. Not surprisingly, the institution of schooling continues to be a colonizing experience for both educators and students, especially given the ways in which school policies and instruction mandates offer no alternatives but to remain complicit and silent about their own suffering and that of their students and communities. Thus, a theory and practice of healing must emerge in order to help liberate ourselves from the colonial mindset that many of our educators and YPOC have internalized.

A decolonial lens in education challenges the reductionist ways of addressing educational inequities. It forces educators to address the broader historical and political-economic context of global colonial/racial hierarchies. It provides a powerful anti-colonial and decolonizing praxis to challenge power relations based on social structures of race, ethnicity, national origin, class, gender, language, and sexual orientation in education. Understanding the ideology behind colonial relations of power is the first critical step in students and educators working towards changing them. Decolonization in education means unlearning and undoing the ongoing effects of colonization by consciously and critically considering how oppressive structures of education perpetuate trauma and have controlled, misinformed, and silenced the minds and voices of both educators and students. Furthermore, our understanding of what decolonization entails can not ignore the need to integrate healing from U.S. school systems. All the research shows how education is damaging to racialized Students of Color. As such, this work expands this extensive body of scholarship that is critical of how schooling wounds YPOC by centering healing at the forefront of our discussions of what it entails to create a more humanizing and libratory community of learners for our children to thrive.

From Trauma-Informed to Healing Centered

> It is part of our task as revolutionary people, people who want deep-rooted, radical change, to be as whole as it is possible for us to be. This can only be done if we face the reality of what oppression really means in our lives, not as abstract systems subject to analysis, but as an avalanche of traumas leaving a wake of devastation in the lives of real people who nevertheless remain human, unquenchable, complex and full of possibility (Morales, 1998, p.20).

In the past couple of decades, the concept of trauma-informed approaches has gained popularity in the social sciences as a way to understand individual and collective wounds suffered by Native Americans and People of Color (see, e.g., Brave Heart et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2010). Exploring the relationship between trauma and healing is important given how traumatic experiences are part of the colonial material reality we continue to live under neoliberalism. This necessitates a healing response that acknowledges the pain inflicted by systems of oppression. However, mainstream understandings of trauma privileges psychological or psychiatric models and explanations based on a discourse of pathology and divorced of the larger sociocultural and historical contexts (Gottschalk, 2003). Too often, “trauma-informed” approaches are situated

within the confines of a neoliberal agenda that ignores the root causes of trauma. From this deficit model, practitioners insist that YPOC and Communities of Color are "injured" and in need of "healing." Remedies for trauma are then packaged with a diagnosis of personal "healing" supported by western conceptions of "progress" that signal for individuals to work on "self" in order to be a more productive citizen-subjects of neoliberalism (Million, 2013). The emphasis on stories of pain and/or personal trauma in academia is problematic, for it focuses on Communities of Color as *damaged* (Tuck, 2009). This individual focus dismisses how violence against Indigenous and Communities of Color is structural and not always visible in individual stories. The personal and political can easily be conflated by not attending to the specificity of needs for local communities. The hyper-emphasis on the concept of trauma overshadows the stories of resilience, strength, and love that are also part of our healing herstories and histories. It is also important to recognize trauma is not the only lens through which to make sense of our lives and that not all suffering stems from overt violence and traumatic events. In this way, exploring individual suffering must be understood within the context of people's lives.

An understanding of historical trauma acknowledges the collective unresolved grief resulting from the violence of colonization and present-day policies that continue to colonize Indigenous lands and resources and exploit and dehumanize Indigenous Peoples. Recognition of historical trauma brings attention to the ways in which, for Native Americans and other Communities of Color, trauma is not experienced simply as an isolated event. Additionally, if not healed, cumulative and recurring trauma is passed on from generation to generation (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Duran et al., 2008). In *Healing the Soul Wound* (2006), Native psychologist Eduardo Duran addresses the concepts of intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and *soul wound* to present the idea that this trauma is not dealt with in previous generations and is passed on from generation to generation. Duran articulates colonization as a *soul wound* and argues how healing practices and culture are integral to healing from internalized oppression. Thus, a trauma-informed approach that fails to center a system change analysis becomes yet another form of masking the root causes that created the need to heal from trauma in the first place. It is when the gaze is shifted away from placing blame on individuals to instead applying a critical analysis of the ways in which historical trauma and systems of oppression impact individuals and communities that individuals are less likely to blame themselves and others for their living conditions. Instead, an understanding of the complex ways in which institutional and structural oppression operates allows one to see the hidden and overt ways in which our life circumstances and agency can be an outcome of institutional forces beyond our control. Especially when working with YPOC, it is critical not to ignore the material ways in which oppression is embodied, how trauma impacts the body. An integration of historical trauma in educational research and practice requires attention to how this unresolved grief and the need to heal from this grief impacts YPOC, families, and communities.

In her grounding work, Indigenous feminist scholar, Dian Million (2013), focuses on the experiences of Canada First Nations to examine how the roots of theories of trauma were birthed under a human rights agenda that frames the atrocities experienced by colonial neoliberalism under a medicalized framework that pathologizes and moves away from a political and self-determination sovereignty mode. Million argues, "this therapeutic ethos has often lent itself to a reconciliation that does not change the colonial structures but adapts the colonized to the colonial systems as they change" (p. 178). Dillion speaks of the "psychic turn" to signal the ways in which we went from a language of speaking about our health within a social and political framework in the '60s and '70s to speaking about community health issues not in terms of the

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In her grounding work, Indigenous feminist scholar, Dian Million (2013), focuses on the experiences of Canada First Nations to examine how the roots of theories of trauma were birthed under a human rights agenda that frames the atrocities experienced by colonial neoliberalism under a medicalized framework that pathologizes and moves away from a political and self-determination sovereignty mode. Million argues, "this therapeutic ethos has often lent itself to a reconciliation that does not change the colonial structures but adapts the colonized to the colonial systems as they change" (p. 178). Dillion speaks of the "psychic turn" to signal the ways in which we went from a language of speaking about our health within a social and political framework in the '60s and '70s to speaking about community health issues not in terms of the economics or any recognition of the ways in which colonization was achieved. Instead, under a human rights framework, we became "medicalized subjects" that can only view ourselves as victims and with the only option to frame our issues as traumatized.

Dillion (2013) brings our attention to the ways in which gender inequality and gender violence are critical factors to account for in the processes of supporting healing projects of Indigenous self-determination. We can learn from her analysis of how colonization has become linked to contemporary health challenges that are prevalent in many Canadian First Nations, so we can disrupt the ways in which theories of trauma are used to shape Indigenous narratives for justice. As Dillion argues, the therapeutic theory of trauma means that socioeconomic disparities resulting from colonization have been medicalized and defined in settler-colonial terms. Under this model of trauma, a "diagnosis" or interventions to healing will also be informed by settler-colonial agendas. Moreover, while therapeutic narratives speak of healing, it is within the confines of "managing" individuals and dismissing the capacity of Indigenous communities to heal and thrive. More importantly, Dillion's work reminds us of the power of "felt theory" and its potential to arouse people to move, given that if we can feel as a community our wellness, then we can also arouse it. Just like we can be controlled by our feelings by an ethos of trauma, we also have the power to feel together. She makes a call to give individuals more language to talk about what their narrative is and what they are feeling beyond just always speaking from the wounded position. We are experiencing challenging times in which we can't hide our emotions and the pain that we are experiencing at a collective and global scale as a result of systems of oppression. Under an ethos of trauma, we have been given a frame to contain our emotions, our feelings, and thus, everything then gets encapsulated only through a lens of trauma and pain. One may wonder why, if we live in a culture that is soaked in a trauma-informed lens in the schools and mental health, that our youth continue to bleed from ongoing systemic violence? Thus, we must question the strong emphasis on treating YPOC through a trauma-informed lens that is still from a very colonizing lens.

Moreover, we must also be wary of the privileging of trauma experienced by white settlers. New age spirituality by white bodies profiting from the selling of Indigenous cultures and spirituality is a reality that ignores the appropriation of Indigenous healing practices like sweat lodge, smudging, and ceremony while at the same negating the value of these practices in informing and facilitating collective healing with YPOC (York, 2001). Sadly, YPOC often don't have access to these healing practices, given how colonialism has disconnected our Young People from the intergenerational healing knowledges of community elders. As such, the following section aims to engage healing as a process of decolonizing educational research and

praxis. It explores the strengths of community healing-centered approaches that aim to support the larger project of decolonization. It considers moving away from a hyper-focus on trauma-informed to instead recognizing the healing practices and mindset that make it possible to (re)conceptualize healing as a critical process to facilitating collective healing among our Young People and educators. It shifts our attention as committed educators and practitioners to consider co-creating spaces of healing within a context of the community by restoring healing practices that help us heal from the legacies and ongoing settler colonialism and (re)centers the ancestral knowledges that (re)store our ability to imagine a different reality beyond the present-day neoliberalism agenda imposed in teaching and learning.

A Healing Turn: Centering Community Understandings of Healing

How do we begin the processes of healing from an educational system and structure that makes us unwell in bodymindspirit (Lara, 2002) A healing-centered approach in education is about bringing awareness to how there is a need to center healing in our work with YPOC but not from a place of pathology and woundedness. The reality is that many educators and YPOC carry pain, yet this is not the end of our story. There is more to our existence than just being a wounded educator and Young Person. In this way, moving towards a critical healing consciousness in education is about shifting the paradigm to one in which, as educators, we cultivate relationships with our students and learners from a place of love and with an understanding that healing is medicinal to our hearts and spirits. It requires that as practitioners, we remain alert and vigilant about the ways we may wound one another so that we do not reproduce attitudes and behaviors that consciously and subconsciously divide and conquer. If schooling is about colonizing our bodymindspirit, a healing consciousness in education is about making a commitment to embracing and embodying relational ways of being that affirm our interconnectedness with one another and all life on our planet. Moving towards a healing consciousness in education is about consciously working to nurture the healing and spiritual well-being of students and educators as an act of resistance to the oppression that we are subjected to on a daily basis. Healing is a state of consciousness, and a way of being which requires us to alter one's consciousness beyond the colonial ways of being that emphasize objectivity, individualism, and a linear understanding of progress.

More recently, there has been a growing recognition among educators and community activists that healing[40] constitutes a critical intervention to fostering Young People's individual and collective capacity to hope and believe their living conditions can be transformed (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2015; Graveline, 1998; Villanueva, 2012). In particular, we have much to learn from community spaces that foster healing practices which offer a possibility and entry point to reimagine and envision relational ways of being that are not based on ideologies of inferiority and maintaining the domination of the fertile young minds and hearts of our Young People. In these community healing spaces, practitioners are deploying transformative and healing community engagement, which allows for an alternative ontological and epistemological lens to inform their understanding of what collective healing with YPOC and other adult practitioners entails in our present material and nonmaterial reality. For example, The National

[40] One of the dangers in Western thinking is the tendency for market-driven models, which sell a seductive ideology of "newness." Consequently, it is important to be vigilant about the ways in which the concept of "healing" is taken up in mainstream public discourse for there is always the risk of these knowledges being commodified and packaged for the sake of selling an individualized form of healing that does not confront the real and material ways in which systems of oppression impact the lives of communities of color.

Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute (2012) argues for a healing-informed approach rooted in Indigenous principles and practices as necessary to heal from trauma and maintain one's well-being. In this way, *La Cultura Cura Healing Generations* model integrates a culturally grounded approach rooted in Indigenous identity, values, ceremonies, traditions, and principles of healing and well-being. The healing informed approach of *"La Cultural Cura"* holds that within individuals, families, and communities, there exists the knowledge and medicine to heal from trauma and that for true healing to happen, it must be intergenerational in scope. Efforts such as these provide promising and tangible models of how we can begin to address the needs of our Youth of Color in more holistic methods that draw from students' and families' *spiritual capital* (Huber-Perez, 2009) to provide a more culturally-relevant approach to educational, social justice efforts and organizing.

By building the capacity of educators and Young People to maintain their peace and relatedness in the face of injustices, it is possible to work towards (re)storing our wholeness and actions that breathe healing justice. A healing-centered approach supports our internal work in order to address everyday oppression with love and justice and thus strive for greater balance of meeting our material and existential needs. The embrace of a path towards more holistic models of engaging "inner" and "outer" transformation enables individuals and communities to shift our perspective of reality through seeking more meaningful ways of being and relatedness to each other.

In her concept paper, "Healing-Centered Youth Organizing: A framework for Youth Leadership in the 21st Century," community activist Nicole Lee (2014) brings forward a healing model for working with Young People and Communities of Color to collectively challenge and heal from deeply rooted racial and economic inequality. By integrating the "inner" dimension of self-transformation with the "outer" dimension of social transformation, Lee proposes "Healing-Centered Youth Organizing" as a three-fold approach that integrates:

1. *Healing and Transformation* by working to integrate healing with traditional organizing and policy advocacy
2. *Political Engagement, Advocacy, & Organizing* to challenge systems of oppression that perpetuate inequality and maintain the status quo, and
3. *Building Alternative Economic Models* to support community sustainability and the creation of the kind of world we envision.

Healing Centered Organizing places individual and collective emotional and spiritual well-being at the center of social justice. By critically examining the relationship between healing and youth organizing, the work of Lee offers community activists a healing methodology that works to transform us from within and simultaneously works to dismantle systems of oppression.

Furthermore, in "A Conceptual Mapping of Healing Centered Youth Organizing: Building a Case for Healing Justice," Chavez-Diaz and Lee (2015) identify four principles guiding healing centered organizing: 1) Healing is in response to the needs of the community, 2) Healing is political, 3) Healing and organizing intersect, and 4) Healing is found in culture and spirituality. Drawing from participant observation and interviews with community activists, Chavez-Diaz and Lee argue that healing-centered organizing responds to decades of toxic and harmful policies that disproportionately impact low-income YPOC. By drawing on these four principles, healing justice organizers are able to more holistically build resiliency and hope among the Young People, families, and communities with whom they work on a day-to-day

basis. This emerging body of literature demonstrates how educators and community activists are fostering healing spaces and approaches that can help inform a healing paradigm in education and are key partners in supporting ongoing efforts to facilitate collective healing spaces with YPOC.

A *Decolonizing Healing Paradigm*: Embodying a Cultural and Spiritual Shift for Transformation

Before the colonization of what we now identify as "America," it was known in ancient Mexican culture as Cem Anahuac, which translates into a place totally surrounded by water on all four sides. This part of the continent spanned from Nicaragua to Northern Canada (Ruiz, n.d.-a). According to the abuelos y abuelas, the creation of corn would set the tone for the beginning of a thriving civilization, Anahuaca, in which cultural influence is still felt in Mexico profundo (Ruiz, n.d.-b). Anahuaca is based on the philosophy of Toltecayotl, which is about deeply engaging the knowledge of internal work and the art of living in equilibrium in order to balance material and existential needs of the community. Five pillars were the foundation of Totecayotl culture, and these were: Energy, Education, Organization, Nutrition, and Health. The concept of education started at home and entailed a holistic approach that was about educating the whole child and teaching the necessary values and principles in order to prepare them to be self-sufficient. Education for the collective was not about competition and individualism as we have been indoctrinated in western Eurocentric schooling. Education in ancient Anahuaca culture was about strengthening our ability to understand the world, understand each other, and understand self. This learning was not learned in textbooks. Instead, learning came from being in a relationship with our elders and the land.

Yet, the reality is that our present education system is so far from embodying the kind of holistic Anahuaca education system that made it possible to cultivate the intellectual and spiritual development of future generations and thus ensure the continual blossoming of a thriving Anahuca civilization based on the philosophy of Toltecayotl (Ruiz, n.d.-b). Instead, our present-day "banking model of education" (Freire, 1970) expects educators to distance themselves from their students and limits their role as educators to one of simply depositing their knowledge as experts into the minds of students who are treated as empty vessels. In recasting the agreements that govern mainstream teaching and learning in higher education, Rendün (2005) identifies the underlying tenets of the agreement of separation as the following: 1) teaching and learning are linear, and information flows primarily from teacher to student; 2) faculty should keep a distance from their students; 3) faculty are the sole experts in the classroom; 4) teaching is separated from learning and 5) any kind of faculty outreach to students such as validation, caring, or encouragement is more often than not considered a form of coddling students. In the sense they don't have any heart or substance to them, these kinds of empty agreements dominate the kinds of relationships and power dynamics that are imposed both for educators and students.

In order to dismantle and create a new set of agreements that make it possible to redefine education as a liberatory praxis, both for educators and students, educators must reflect deeply about the epistemic and pedagogical implications of considering what it takes in order to foster both the intellectual and spiritual development of our Young People. Most importantly, educators must be willing to embark on their own healing processes in order to have the courage and strength to also care for the mindbodyspirit (Lara, 2002) of their students. It is only when we have addressed our own self-healing as educators that we can begin to address the pain of our students and have the inspiration to teach in such a way that honors their sacredness and potential

to blossom and thrive as healthy members of our community. Katz and Dennis (1991) elaborate on the notion of "teacher as healer":

> The "teacher as healer" is one who, infused with spiritual understanding, seeks to make things whole…seeks to respect and foster interconnectedness –between herself, her students, and the subject matter, between the school, the community, and the universe at large—while respecting each part of these interconnected webs (p.29).

This understanding of "teacher as healer" allows educators to take direct action in creating the conditions that will enable students to become critical agents of social transformation and have the courage to heal the Self-In-Relation (Graveline, 2000). Moreover, "teacher as healer" recognizes education as a sacred task that embodies mind, body, and spirit and works to (re)claim and (re)store the knowledges and ways of being that are healing to our students and support the larger project of decolonizing ourselves and what it means to model for our Young People the kinds of relationships and mentoring that sustains us and allows us to thrive.

For educators and students to grow and thrive as spiritual beings that are interconnected to the greater web of life, we must identify the kind of practices that will provide for the emotional, social, physical, and spiritual well-being of each individual and, thus, the entire community. I propose a *decolonizing healing paradigm* in educational research and praxis to signal a shift in our pedagogical approach in order to (re)center decolonizing healing and spiritual knowledges that are vital to co-creating spaces of learning that are about nurturing our wholeness and ability to thrive. Educators can appreciate and positively influence learning with a deep understanding of students' lives by committing to healing pedagogies that offer a balance of reality and hope that how we teach can lead to an emancipatory healing praxis in education. In what follows, I build on the works of decolonial and Indigenous feminist thinkers that help us arrive at a more nuanced understanding of healing in order to map the ontological and epistemological lens that informs a *decolonizing healing paradigm.* A *decolonizing healing paradigm* aims for educators and practitioners to engage in the processes of healing, beginning with self, and from that place, work is able to transform teaching and learning with implications for transforming educational research and praxis. Unlike the present-day western educational paradigm, which privileges only the cognitive development of our students, a *decolonizing healing paradigm* encompasses three tenets: 1) *foregrounds* healing within a context of the larger project of decolonization to discern the kinds of practices that are conducive to supporting the healing and well being of both educators and YPOC, 2) *centers* Indigenous Knowledges and decolonizing women-centered epistemologies and, 3) is *committed* to nurturing the intellectual and spiritual development of YPOC to nourish and sustain the individual and collective well-being of students and educators and the community at large.

Foregrounds Healing within a context of the larger project of decolonization in Education

> Decolonization means caring and loving for one another and invigorating the body with the effort of surviving on the land. It includes openness to the world and the recognition that decolonization is a collective and creative undertaking, of making something new from everyday encounters, and more importantly, of creating inclusive spaces for these encounters to continually take place (Radu et al., 2014, p. 97)

Redefining what education means and how to go about creating models of learning that move beyond a Eurocentric paradigm as the only legitimate source of knowing, existing, and knowledge production necessitate that we examine how the colonial project of schooling fits into the logics of settler colonialism in terms of who gets to own land or not (Patel, 2016). Patel argues educational research has served functions of settler colonialism more than it has served learning and knowledge. Patel outlines three tenets that educational research should be answerable to learning as transformation, knowledge as impermanent, and genealogies of coloniality. Thus, the privatization of land not only leads to the exploitation of resources but also imposes a way of life that negates the transmission of the kinds of knowledges that are needed for the individual and collective well-being of the larger community. Under settler colonialism, schooling becomes the vehicle by which poor children of color are kept enslaved within the prison walls of the classroom. Decolonization requires uniting our forces to dismantle white supremacy and colonial systems of power and knowledge. Notably, within the context of U.S. imperialism and a neoliberal agenda, we have a responsibility to contest and challenge settler colonialism and stand in struggle and solidarity to challenge multinational corporate greed that continues to exploit Native land, resources, and its people. By recognizing and validating subjugated knowledges that include community conocimientos of healing and spirituality, we can help to transform colonial logics and systems of power and learning that dominate education.

Exploring the connections between autonomy and well-being in a land-based healing program developed by the Cree Nation of Chisasibi, Rudu et al. (2014) articulate the power of reconstructing "healing as political resistance and as a site of identity and cultural renegotiation" given that healing presents:

> Entry into an examination of decolonization because it reflects subject and objective power dynamics and cultural ethos at both the individual and communal levels; anchors identity and Indigeneity at specific temporal and physical sites of production; elucidates the process of cultural change and continuity; and functions as space and means of political resistance and empowerment. In other words, healings foster decolonization by empowering individuals and communities to engage in transforming the Indigenous-State relationship (p. 97)

In this way, healing in relation to decolonization is about challenging the logics of settler colonialism both at the institutional level and in the ways in which colonial thinking informs how we relate to one another and our connection to the earth. Hence, here lies the potential of healing as a decolonizing response and source of collective action that works to disrupt the logics of white supremacy and privatization of land.

The conceptualization of healing I enumerate is three-fold. First, it is premised on the understanding that healing justice must be contextualized within a context of settler colonialism and a critical framework that engages the multiple axes of oppression that systematically fragment our bodymindspirit. From this stance, healing work is political because it's about uprooting us from the colonial mindset many of us have internalized and its resistance in that it responds to larger structures that are oppressive to Indigenous and Peoples of Color. Secondly, healing is not just about repairing what oppression aims to destroy. Healing as understood in this project is rooted in an epistemological stance that sees it as a process of reorienting us to something larger than ourselves and as a site of building relations and healing self-in-relation. Thirdly, healing makes it possible for communities to create spaces that can foster collective

hope, possibility, and agency with Young People of Color. Healing, in this sense, is part of the larger project of decolonizing our individual and collective selves in order to (re)imagine and build a better world for the next seven generations. This necessitates a paradigm shift from a predominant focus on individual health and wellness to also engaging the political domain of collective healing. Healing is, therefore, a relational process that fosters spaces in which relations are strengthened and made possible.

This conceptualization helps to arrive at an understanding of healing as dynamic, vast, and always happening. More specifically, this work understands healing as a regenerative process that is inclusive of our body, mind, and spirit and aims to restore and renew the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Young People, educators, and the broader community. This epistemological intervention is necessary given the ways in which dominant western thought in learning and teaching forces us to split the body, mind, and spirit (Archibald, 2008). It reduces students to only matters of the mind and ignores that learning and teaching are more than just an intellectual exercise (Daly, 2004). In response to the ways in which schooling "subtracts" from the cultures of our students (Valenzuela,1999), there is a growing body of work by critical educators bringing forward healing pedagogies that advance teaching that is transformative and meaningful to the lives of both educators and students is inclusive of mind, body, and spirit (Dillard, 2007; Graveline, 1998; hooks, 2004; Palmer, 1983; Villanueva, 2013). This understanding of healing in its broader social, cultural, political, spiritual, and economic contexts in education foregrounds a critical analysis of the role of healing in sustaining the hope and well-being of Young People in the face of increasing social inequality, environmental destruction, and global social injustice within a context of settler colonialism. It centers on decolonizing approaches in education and understandings of healing rooted in Indigenous Knowledges (IK) and alternative healing modalities that feed the spirit and hearts of Young People and the community at large (Grande, 2004; Graveline, 1998; Villanueva, 2013).

As I elaborate in chapters three and four, the concept of healing developed by community educators and YPOC has not been widely examined in the field of education. In this healing project, I bring forward a decolonizing healing methodology by intentionally centering healing in educational research. I argue that a *decolonizing healing praxis* prompts us to turn inward and think critically about ourselves and the communities with whom we work within the socio-cultural, economic, and historical context in which healing takes place. Drawing on testimonios, I discuss how the concept of healing might be rewritten within a critical discourse that does not negate the spiritual and cultural ramifications of engaging in collective healing with YPOC. Instead, the testimonios of these community educators and YPOC challenge us to examine the unequal relations of power that are the legacy of the colonial past and neocolonial present and the ways in which the cultures of dominant groups have redefined local meanings and dictated social structures in order to co-create a pedagogical movement that aims to foster the well-being of our students and the educators that are supposed to guide the young minds of future generations.

Centering Indigenous Knowledges (IK)

An Indigenous research paradigm aims "to challenge deficit thinking and pathological descriptions of the formerly colonized and reconstruct a body of knowledge that carries hope and promotes transformation and social change among the historically oppressed" (Chilisa, 2012, p.98). Consequently, Indigenous scholars in the academy are articulating new ways to define and carry out research that centers Indigenous Knowledges (IK) and integrates an understanding of

our interconnectedness and relationality as core values of meaning-making and ensuring reciprocity in our relations (see, e.g., Cajete, 2000; Gonzales, 2012; Grande, 2004; Kovach, 2008; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2007). Yet, to claim and reclaim Indigenous ways of knowing is highly contested work, for it entails a political and decolonizing undertaking within a context of Eurocentric hegemony (see, e.g., Dei, 2011). Challenging conventional assumptions that dominate Western social science research methodologies necessitates a search for wholeness and restoring the spiritual, emotional, and physical violence inflicted on oppressed communities through colonial practices (Denzin & Giardina, 2007). For Ritskes (2011), "Indigenous Knowledges are dynamic rather than static, constantly being created and re-created in the face of new obstacles, experiences, and locations, yet never losing what makes it 'indigenous'" (p. 17). While we can not return to living like our ancestors, there is great value in the learning that comes from our elders in order to arm ourselves by weaving our new technologies with the wisdom of ancient teachings that can best equip us to better understand the world, each other, and self with the aim of transforming our present reality.

In *Native Science* (2000) Tewa educator Gregory Cajete articulates an Indigenous epistemology that is based "on the perception gained from using the entire body of our senses in direct participation with the natural world" (p. 2). In this way, Native healing is inclusive of "an ecological dynamic revolving around establishing and maintaining relationships not only to one's own natural healing process but also to spiritual, communal, and environmental healing processes" (p.122). Projecting his positive message of hope, Cajete (2000) calls for an education that includes a:

> transforming vision…must be deep enough to encompass all that we have become, along with all that we must now become as participants in the healing and regeneration of the earth. That vision must open up our future to hope…The education engendered from such a vision must be all-inclusive. Each person must feel that his or her life and work are significant in making such a global reality come into being. The new kind of education, work, and play must embody hope. Hope is, after all, a choice. We have to teach ourselves and others that we can make a difference (p. 290).

I concur with Cajete that our new vision for education must be inclusive of our relationship to the earth and instill hope for our Young People and future generations. This allows for hope in envisioning and creating holistic models of education that act as a liberatory praxis for Students of Color and makes it possible to integrate a pedagogy of body, mind, and spirit.

In "The Sacred Circle: A Process Pedagogy of Healing," Robert Regnier (1994) explores how the use of the Sacred Circle, also called the Medicine Wheel, at a high school in Canada that centers IK serves as the symbol for interpreting healing and illness and is pivotal to implementing education for healing. Healing is understood as the "transition that restores the person, community, and nation to wholeness, connectedness, and balance" (p. 135). As such, healing and teaching are viewed as the transition to meaning in the movement of the Sacred Circle. Regnier identifies a *process pedagogy of healing* as having three phases: belonging, understanding, and critical reflection. For example, practices such as the sweetgrass ceremony and healing circles are incorporated in the school's culture and curriculum and affirm the schools' commitment to a process of healing through the Sacred Circle. This allows students to engage in critical reflection to understand and see their interdependence with each other. This qualitative study helps highlight the potential and promise of initiatives that view healing as

central to fostering the well-being of students in relation to also promoting the overall health and well-being of the larger community. Affirming a students' healthy sense of belonging must also be interconnected with the community's understanding of cultural and spiritual healthy sense of belonging.

Similarly, In *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*, teacher/healer/activist and Metis Aboriginal woman Fyre Jean Graveline (1998) draws from traditional Aboriginal knowledge and the Medicine Wheel to put forward a holistic and healing teaching model. Her healing model is embedded in the circular flow of the four directions: East (conscious-raising and empowerment through First Voice), South (enacting Aboriginal cultural practices), West (healing and community-building pedagogies), and the North (enacting Change). Furthermore, Graveline reminds us that our ancestors enabled their spirits to continue through stories and ceremony despite the genocide and brutality of colonization. This *spiritual resistance* nourished the healing of self and the possibility of collective resistance to challenge domination. By linking individual and community well-being, Native American worldviews share the belief that each person is responsible for his or her actions In-Relation to the larger community. Thus, embracing an understanding of Self-In-Relation allows us to see ourselves as related to and interconnected with all others, including family, community, and the natural world. The work of both Graveline and Regnier (1994) draw attention to initiatives First Nations in Canada are implementing that are inclusive of healing in education, which centers IK and worldviews. This scholarly work provides great insight to educators and researchers seeking to provide culturally relevant education that serves to bring about a decolonizing healing approach to learning and teaching.

Women of Color Healing Epistemologies and Pedagogies in Education

> We cannot begin to help other people deal with their imbalances unless we first begin to heal ourselves and deal with our imbalances…We can only facilitate a healing journey to the degree that we, as healers, have had the courage to journey on our own. If you have not dealt with your own traumas of racism, then how can you help another deal with their internalized inferiority? ...The healer's openness to change is a key element in the healing process. (Graveline, 1998, p. 79)

Educational knowledge emerging from women of color's unique experiences of oppression and practices of teaching, learning, and ways of knowing constitute theories and methods that make it possible to bring about alternative educational epistemologies that embody a praxis of complexity, strength, and hope (see, e.g., Calderon et al., 2012; Delgado et al., 2006; Hurtado, 2003). The work by women of color standpoint epistemologies have provided for an analysis of how race, class, gender, sexuality, and other differences are intertwined and how oppressions occur simultaneously and along various axes of difference (bell hooks, 2000; Castillo, 1994; Collins, 1980, 1998; Lorde, 1984). By acknowledging their multiple positionalities, questioning their degree of subjectivity, and recognizing the shifting nature of shared experience, women of color knowledges offer a critical analyses that help inform educational pedagogies for social change and transformation (Anzaldua, 1987; Dillard, 2007; Sandoval, 2000).

In particular, this work draws from a Chicana Feminist Epistemology, which privileges the ways of knowing that comes from the lived experiences of Chicanas (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Chicana feminist thought invites us to rupture and break loose from schemes that confine us to binary and reductionist thinking. An intersectional approach by Chicana feminists reveals how dominant discourses on whiteness, white supremacy, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and nativity intersect to silence the voices of Chican@ students. It is at these intersections of race, class, gender, language, and immigration status that educational theorists can begin to answer some of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological questions that are required to understand the educational journeys of Youth of Color (see, e.g., Anzaldua, 1987; Delgado Bernal et al., 2002; Lugones, 2007; Perez, 1999). Historically marginalized YPOC necessitate a theoretical approach that calls for complexity and multiplicity in our ways of understanding Young People's perspectives because of their particular positions located at the margin. A Chicana feminist analysis makes it possible for Young People to offer their counter-narratives to the contemporary hegemonic discourses on race, class, gender, and sexuality. It provides room to explore how Young People's particular positionalities of marginalization also provide opportunities for Youth resistance and healing to occur (Delgado, 1998).

In her discussion of the social justice dimensions of Anzaldua's vision of spiritual activism, Keating (2005) elaborates on the role of interconnectedness in facilitating new tactics for survival, resistance, and transformation at the individual and collective levels for Communities of Color. Particularly, at the collective level, interconnectedness allows us to move beyond rigid categories of identity and social location to instead cultivate "inclusionary identities and non oppositional frameworks for social change" (p. 246). Keating highlights that this does not discount the material and social significance that conventional identity categories have in our lives but rather pushes us to move towards recognizing the limitations that these categories can have: "When we base our assessments of others entirely on their social locations, we unnecessarily close ourselves off from potential allies" (Keating, 2005). Speaking power to our innate capacity to engage the world from a place of love, Anzaldua (2009) offers healing insights when she shares:

> Love swells in your body and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone/everything –the aboriginals in Australia, the crows in the forest, the vast Pacific Ocean. You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean—to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing. Te entregas a tu promesa to help your various cultures create new paradigms, new narratives (p. 558).

Anzaldua's conceptualization of spiritual activism strengthens our commonalities and helps to develop broad-based projects for social change. Working from a place that recognizes our interconnectedness challenges the rhetoric and conditioning of individualism that dominant culture imposes in educational settings. It disrupts the pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality that many educators and Young People have internalized and brings to the forefront the perspective that we are all interconnected and need others for our survival and to thrive.

This body of scholarship by women of color thinkers laid the foundational work that helps ground my research. It provides a language and analysis that make it possible to conceptualize transformative healing practices in education for their potential to "dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984, p.112). Together, the contributions by these scholars provide for inclusive and transformative possibilities that acknowledge and engage the particular ways of seeing that women of color scholars bring to the knowledge production process. Most

importantly, this body of work acknowledges the spectrum of differences that exists within and among individuals as points of departure to arrive at new meanings that have the potential to overcome the ideological colonization that oppresses our educators and Young People to best assist them in embodying more healing and healthy relationships with one another.

Fostering the intellectual and spiritual development of YPOC, educators, and the larger community

> To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that ours is not merely to share information but to share in our students' intellectual and spiritual growth. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (bell hooks, 1994, p.13).

For many Indigenous and communities of color, healing and spirituality are central concepts to their way of life and essential to sustaining collective hope and well-being. These healing practices are based on a different ontology and are inclusive of the importance of how we manage our energy and the role of spirit(s) and spirituality in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students (Ruiz, n.d.-a). Taking into account the depth and complexity of local healing knowledges means that healing and spirituality can not be understood as a "thing" that can be measured but rather as a process interwoven into the fabric of the greater web of life that we are each a part of. However, spirituality is taboo in most learning spaces and academic settings in K-12 and higher education. Not surprisingly, most discourses on education rarely seek spirituality as a theoretical framework or way of being that can inform issues of school equity, social justice, healing, and transformation. Too often, spirituality is considered synonymous with religion without any regard to the possibility that one can be spiritual without being religious or vice versa and that for some people, religion and spirituality are intertwined.

Given this ambivalence towards spirituality, one's spiritual sense of being is rendered invisible in teaching and learning when it is relegated to the realm of our 'private life.' While spirituality cannot be confined to any one meaning given the diversity in how people come to understand the spiritual in their lives; to ignore that for many people, spirituality plays a central role in how they make sense of themselves, and the world is to negate the very essence of who they are. By centering the role of spiritual healing, this work fills in a gap in educational literature that overwhelmingly excludes a discussion of spirituality or attempts to compartmentalize spirituality into the realm of religion. My work situates spirituality under a decolonial framework that seeks to embody spirituality as a tool of resistance in our struggles as students, educators, and community members to bring about transformative change and redefine education as the sacred task that makes it possible to nourish the hearts and minds of present and future generations to come. Thus, a conversation of spirituality cannot happen in a vacuum, but one must also address how structures of power and knowledge interplay to colonize the realm of spirituality.[41] A discourse on spiritual individualism serves to silence the collective spirituality

[41] We see this clearly in the ways certain elements of the New Age Movement has appropriated Indigenous ways of knowing and packaged them for 'consumerism' as products that sell a false promise of individual enlightenment or personal development. Indigenous spirituality then becomes the exotic other in which the spiritual is romanticize

that for many Communities of Color has sustained us to not only survive but also remain hopeful in creating alternative models of being to consumerism and capitalism. Ritskes (2011) argues that disregarding the power of collective spirituality allows for spirituality to fall "prey to individualism and relativism" (p.15). Ritskes discusses the importance of problematizing "how different forms of colonial power have been enacted in different ways, in different locations, in different times, in different spaces, and how these might work in conversations with each other" (p. 16) to avoid homogenizing the issues in an anti-colonial framework.

Despite the epistemic privilege of secular thinking, recent scholarship is beginning to disrupt normalizing secular ways of conducting research (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). By articulating alternative ways of understanding and drawing from their spiritualities, scholars are projecting more holistic approaches to conducting research and struggles of social justice in education (Dillard, 2000, 2013; Wane, 2011). For example, feminist scholars have articulated spirituality as an integral and important source of knowledge and being that is inclusive of mindbodyspirit, their relationship to the divine, and the interconnectedness of all beings, human and non-human (Alexander, 2005; Anzaldua, 2009; Fernandes, 2003; Hull, 2001; Mani, 2009; Moraga, 2011; Perez, 2007; Wade-Gayles, 2005). In her discussion of feminism and spirituality, Fernandes (2003) argues that broader transformation of structures of power and inequality can not happen if we do not also simultaneously "transform the internal investments of power that exist within ourselves" (p. 43), and this requires "a firm understanding that there can be no separation between this internal process of confrontation and what we view as external processes of change and transformation" (p. 44).

In education, scholars have integrated spirituality into knowledge production in higher education (Chavez, 2001; Dei, 2011; Dillard, 2000; Graveline, 1998; Shahjahan, 2004; Wane, 2011); as an integrated approach in transformative teaching (Dei, 2002; Hart, 2011; hooks, 2000; O'Sullivan, 1999; Palmer, 1983; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003); as part of a more holistic pedagogy to (re)claim the humanity of students (Kaburu & Landauer, 2013; Ryoo et al., 2009); and as a source of strength from which student's draw upon to persevere (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Huber, 2009). In higher education, educators have articulated the need for integrating spirituality and healing into their teaching praxis as vital to humanizing their students and themselves (Chavez, 2001; Delgado-Bernal et al., 2006; Dillard, 2007; hooks, 2003, 2004; Palmer, 1983; Ritskes, 2011; Ryoo et al., 2009; Wane, 2011). Moreover, Indigenous scholars are centering decolonizing approaches in education and community understandings of healing that center Indigenous Knowledges (Battiste, 1998; Cajete, 2000; Delgado-Bernal et al., 2006; Grande, 2004; Graveline, 1998; Gonzales, 2012). Collectively, these authors articulate how spirituality has been and continues to be a vital source of strength in resisting normative discourses that negate and subjugate alternative forms of knowing and being.

When educators are able to draw from their spiritual learnings to embody a spiritual praxis via their pedagogical approaches in their classrooms, they provide powerful interventions and learning spaces both for their identities as educators and that of their students (Chavez, 2001; Dillard, 2007; Graveline, 1998; hooks, 1994). The colonization of our mind, body, and spirit can not only lead to economic deprivation but also to what Leela Fernandes (2003) calls *spiritual deprivation*, "…a sense of hopelessness and futility in imagining that a different kind of future is possible" (p. 116). Fernandes speaks to the ways in which our work as activists and educators

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and treated as yet another commodity that can be bought and sold via DVDs, personal development books and conferences. Thus, Western New Age spiritualism caters to a 'religious consumer market' that reproduces western hegemonic discourses within the new discourse of spirituality (York, 2001).

has a tendency to valorize resistance at the risk of "evading this sense of hopelessness." By doing so, we can "overlook the spiritual strength which subordinated individuals and groups have displayed when they have persisted with visions of transformation in the face of tremendous obstacles" (Ibid). Thus, this "spiritual learning," according to Fernandes, "is to be gained from those who are subordinated and oppressed." (Fernandes, 2003, p.117). In this way, education that is inclusive of the role of spirituality and spiritual learning has the potential to equip educators and Young People with the tools necessary to engage healing and transformative paradigms in creating models that nourish the spirits of our youth rather than continue to fuel *spiritual deprivation*. Especially in the context of teaching and learning in urban settings, attention to the ways in which educators fuel or resist spiritual deprivation in their research, and pedagogical approach is crucial. Resisting *spiritual deprivation* (Fernandes, 2003) can help make all the difference in relieving some of the psychic wounds students carry and restore hope in the hearts of youth, educators, and community.

In his work, educator David Abalos (1986) argues for a theory of transformation that links us to ourselves, to others, to common problems, and to our sacred sources via the faces of our being: "the personal, political, historical, and sacred" (p. 11). Thus, I agree when Abalos states, "Transformation is a continuous process, and we need one another to participate in the struggle to achieve justice and compassion" (p. 273). For Avalos, education is then "a personal, political, historical, and sacred task" (p. 276). In its sacred face, Abalos centers the role of spirituality in reclaiming cultural identity, moving to social action, and healing from internalized oppression. Similarly, Dei (2002) discusses the role of spirituality and spiritual learning in transformative learning. He understands transformative learning as education that is able to resist oppression and domination by strengthening the individual self and collectives to deal with continued reproduction of colonial and neo-colonial relations in academic institutions. In "Spiritual Knowing and Transformative Learning," Dei understands transformative learning as education that is able to resist oppression and domination by strengthening the individual self and collectives to deal with continued reproduction of colonial and neo-colonial relations in academic institutions. As a critical tool of resistance, spirituality, Dei argues, "is a form in which we identify ourselves and the universal and is, therefore, an implicit way of asserting ourselves collectively and individually as creators and resistors and as agents and subjects of change. Therein lies the critical understanding of spirituality as a powerful tool in resisting miseducation, domination, or oppressive forces of schooling" (p. 131).

Thus, Dei (2002) argues that spirituality and spiritual knowing "are valid bodies of knowledge that can be pursued in schooling to enhance schooling outcomes for a diverse body" (p.131). In their study of examining the role of spirituality in developing a positive cultural identity among adult educators teaching for social transformation, Tisdell and Tolliver's (2003) findings suggest that a spiritually grounded and culturally relevant approach to teaching helped participants in this study facilitate: 1) dealing with internalized oppression and reclaiming cultural identity 2) mediating among multiple identities, 3) crossing culture to facilitate spiritual development and 4) unconscious knowledge-construction processes that are connected to image, symbol, and ritual that are often cultural. The conscious efforts by these educators to draw on their spirituality in their teaching demonstrates how such approaches, not necessary always entailing speaking directly about spirituality, but in their attempts to be authentic, risk being vulnerable in exploring their own cultural identities, and by drawing on cultural image, symbol, and story as sources of accessing the sacred can lead to a pedagogy of transformative education. The implications of their findings point to the importance of spirituality for educators in

supporting emancipatory education, which can have profound shifts in how Young People understand and make sense of their role as agents of change in their schools and communities and thus provide hope for enacting their visions of safe communities.

Similarly, educator Alicia Chavez (2001) explicitly draws from her spirituality by sharing her spiritual learnings as a *Mestiza* faculty in higher education in helping to facilitate empowering and holistic environments for her students. In this way, spirituality moves her to interact with her students "not as a way of doing but as a way of being" (p.77), and she outlines ten principles that, over the years, through reflective practice and listening to various spiritual teachings, have guided her teaching practices. These principles include: live a reflective life, practice balance, embody compassion, hold relationships as a sacred responsibility, maintain connectedness, sustain openness, steward, radiate hopefulness, live simply, and give thanks. Thus, as part of the *balance,* she encourages her students to *hold relationships as sacred* within their learning community *by embodying compassion and respect.* She supports this process by sustaining her own openness as a learner and *radiating hopefulness* about their potential learning community. In the context of witnessing the increasing feelings of loneliness and hopelessness or *spiritual deprivation* (Fernandes, 2003) of students and professionals, Chavez (2001) *radiates hopefulness* among her students by offering hope for creating solutions in the form of ideas and suggestions and by calling people to collectively develop possible strategies. For Chavez (2001), this is one critical way that we can keep hope alive and how this can also facilitate joy, fun, and opportunities for celebration in our work. Working from a framework that resists *spiritual deprivation* and instead centers a theoretical and pedagogical approach that aims to make teaching and learning a sacred task, one in which we come to as whole educators that care for our students in mind, body, and spirit, I argue is the most radical form of liberatory practice one can engage in our everyday practice as educators.

Discussion

> A hope that lives in contingency with the past- one that trusts the beliefs and understandings of our ancestors as well as the power of traditional knowledge…[I]t is a hope that believes in the strength and resiliency of indigenous peoples and communities, recognizing that their struggles are not about inclusion and enfranchisement to the "new world order" but, rather, are part of the indigenous project of sovereignty and indigenization (Grande, 1994, p. 28).

I started this chapter by sharing a very personal experience that speaks power to the reality and complexity of what it means to bring into conversation healing, trauma, and agency in working with Young People of Color. Coming full circle, as I reflect on my experience as an educator committed to co-creating a more just and healing world for present and future generations, I invite you to dream with me that a different reality can be achieved. What if a different story can be told about my experience of violence in the hands of children from my own community? What are the alternatives? How can healing justice take place? What if both the Young People and I would have been given the opportunity to sit in a healing circle to address the harm caused. To acknowledge the pain that not only I experienced in the process of being robbed and beaten, but also the pain these Young People are carrying and which was further exacerbated in the aftermath of the ordeal. What if, in sitting in a healing circle, both parties could have expressed their pain and processed the incident surrounded by the support of

community elders, healers, and caring educators? What if the Young People who perpetrated the pain would have also had access to healers to sage them and help them heal from the susto of committing acts of violence and being pursued by the cops? What if our individual pain had been held in a container surrounded by the collective power of community coming together to affirm us that a different reality is possible? There could be an entire community of caring adults to remind us that forgiveness is healing and that the unconditional love of our community has the power to (re)store our sense of well-being and belonging. Furthermore, there could be an entire community of caring adults to remind us of the power of collective healing spaces and the role we play as educators in co-creating a more loving and healing reality for our children, families, and the larger community.

As I articulated, a *decolonizing healing paradigm* makes it possible to reimagine a different kind of education and one that affirms that healing is not only a critical aspect of decolonizing Eurocentric modes of thinking and being that privilege linear, secular, and scientific ways of knowing in education but most importantly, of building the kind of educational projects that can nourish both educators and our future generations in bodymindspirit. Holistic education must include the spiritual and healing dimensions of learning. Not only is healing an integral part of the identity and self-concept of urban Young People of Color and communities, but it provides a medium through which Young People come to make sense of the world. A pedagogy inclusive of healing is one that is attentive to the spiritual dimensions and formations of identity and the extent to which schooling and toxic social environments can affect the capacity of Young People to believe their lived realities can be transformed. Educators need to be aware of how Young People's individual and collective identities affect their ability to learn and feel empowered in schools and their communities. To address the needs of our Young People in these times of ever-growing racial, social, and economic injustices in our society, it is critical to respond to these challenges prepared with a methodology for teaching and learning that is inclusive of the diverse aspects of students' lives, identities, and experiences, as a basis for promoting more holistic ways of knowing that recognize the humanity of our Young People in its entire totality.

As the Indigenous scholar Sandy Grande (1994) reminds us in the above quote; this requires a decolonial form of hope. In this way, reclaiming and remembering traditional knowledges presents potential spaces for restoring the educators' social, cultural, and spiritual well-being and future generations. Grande's decolonial hope is a reaffirmation of how Indigenous Knowledges offer us a central form of resistance to the colonial forces, given how the historical processes of colonization have devalued our ancestral and traditional ways of knowing. Healing enables the capacity of communities of color to challenge the distorted colonial master narratives that are so prevalent in mainstream educational discourses. As I will elaborate in the chapters that follow, the community healing practices deployed by educators and practitioners present strategies towards decolonization and the empowerment of YPOC. As such, the three tenets I discussed that make up what I understand as a *decolonizing healing paradigm* supports our efforts for healing justice for it: 1) *foregrounds* healing within a context of the larger project of decolonization to discern the kinds of practices that are conducive to supporting the healing and well being of both educators and YPOC, 2) *centers* Indigenous Knowledges and decolonizing women-centered epistemologies and, 3) is *committed* to nurturing the intellectual and spiritual development of YPOC to nourish and sustain the individual and collective well-being of students and educators and the community at large. In this way, a *decolonizing healing paradigm* supports educators to embody an understanding that acknowledges that working

towards healing self, community, and world is a form of political resistance and self-determination needed to support the next seven generations in bodymindspirit.

In the next chapter, direction of the west, I will outline my decolonizing methodology or what I understand as a decolonizing healing methodology. Decolonizing methodologies require ongoing reflexivity and courage to simultaneously navigate and remain whole, given the settler-colonial relations of power embedded in dominant western research. It is a delicate dance that requires us to be rooted in our community healing relations outside of the academy. From an anti-colonial stance, a *decolonial healing methodology* foregrounds the legacies of colonialism and how relations of power get reproduced, contested, and re-created in the research process. It offers methodological insights to challenge Eurocentric deficit discourses that colonize the mindbodyspirit. It provides a decolonizing epistemic, methodological, and pedagogical approach that centers healing *conocimientos* and lived experience as powerful medicine to help facilitate knowledge production that is healing both to the researcher and research subjects.

CIHUATLAMPA

Spirit of the West
Cihuatlampa
Place of Healing,
Renewal, Regeneration, and Shedding
What no longer serves US
And where the sun rests

Tlazocamati
Great Spirit
We honor, respect, and ask permission

Calling the power of the feminine energy
Calling upon the healing powers of
My Abuelitas
Las Curanderas, the Healers, Las Parteras
who guide and live inside of me
and in the healing conocimientos
that continue to heal and strengthened
the muxeres in my family

Calling the element of Water
Agua Es Vida
We Honor and Respect You
We ask for your forgiveness
Given all the pain we cause you
We ask for your guidance and wisdom
In Healing our inner waters
And All Our Relations

Ometeotl

Chapter 2

A Decolonizing Healing Methodology

I graciously gather all my bags and healing medicine as I prepare to go meet with Wanjiro Malyka[42]. I had spent the afternoon cooking homemade enchiladas de papas as part of my offering and commitment to nourish and decolonize our bodies with love and food. With my eight-year old niece, Zaretzi, I make the 10-minute drive to her home. I first met Wanjiro during a healing circle that was part of a six month community pilot project focused on providing healing and support to a diverse range of Bay Area practitioners working with low-income underserved youth and Communities of Color. I was part of the research team that helped to evaluate the program. Wanjiro immediately stood out for her candid voice and presence during check-in and during our end of the program ceremony where she provided insightful, thoughtful, and critical feedback about the program. A few months later, our paths would cross again when we ran into each other at a community healing youth clinic. It was there that we were able to more intimately get to know each other and I would extend her an invitation to participate in my dissertation project.

It is a calm and warm evening when Zaretzi and I arrive at the four-complex apartment at six o'clock. Not able to discern the apartment numbers, I am uncertain whether Wajiro lives on the first or second floor. Suddenly, I can hear her voice in the direction of the stairs. Going up the stairs, I see her and my eyes are drawn to her beautiful blue patterned wrap skirt. Her energy is warm and relaxed. She greets us with a big smile and hug. As we approach her apartment door, a joyful seven year-old reaches out to hug Wanjiro. She warmly introduces us to the young girl and her mother, her next-door neighbor. We remove our shoes before walking on her all beige living carpet. I can appreciate the meditative music in the background as I lay down all my bags. Her space feels peaceful. Beautiful African art and sacred items decorate the long shelves on her living walls. With no sofas or chairs her living space feels spacious. Her beautiful altar especially stands out in the center corner of her living room. In that moment, all the worries and tensions of the day disappear. In her space, I am at home.

Wanjiro's grounding energy can easily make one forget she is home after a long day of teaching and learning with kindergarten children and a hectic commute from the city. Mindful of her precious time, I get started on the task of setting out the food to nourish us. In her kitchen, I can appreciate all kinds of clear jars filled with healthy grains, herbs, and spices. In her stove, she has a pot of freshly made tea and offers us some tea. Wanjiro's teacher instincts kick in and while I set up she chats with my niece and puts a bright smile on her face when she shares her supply of art materials. I am thankful Wanjiro is understanding and makes my niece feel welcome while my sister picks her up. I had encountered all kinds of unexpected challenges that day and I was very close to canceling our gathering. I am happy I didn't. Wanjiro's attentiveness and loving nature towards my niece confirm that she gets it. In our multiple roles we are daughters, mothers, aunts, sisters, educators, healers, and caregivers. Moreover, it takes a village to raise a child and we are part of that village. I ask permission to set up my altar on the living floor right next to her altar. We then eat, drink tea, and chat about our day while my niece makes some art. Before we know it we are sharing our dream of one day having our own healing school and without much effort our visions seem to flow and merge into one. As I walk my niece downstairs when my sister arrives, an immense sense of gratitude fills my heart for I am thankful

[42] All participants in this dissertation have been given pseudonyms.

Zaretzi was part of this healing story. Now, with only the two of us in her living room floor, we make ourselves comfortable for what will be a healing exchange of knowledge, wisdom, sharing of deep life experiences including our sorrows and joys that bring us to this work of healing and social justice.

As I burn copal, I begin to share my testimonio. I speak about my life journey and what informs and brings me to this project. As I unfold my story I openly delve into my family history, struggles, and personal healing journey. Sharing my story is healing. It's my way of setting the tone and modeling speaking from the heart and practicing reciprocity with my participants. With warmth and in an affirming tone, she expresses her gratitude in listening to my story. As I add more copal to the suamador, with respect and humility I ask her to share her story and to reveal as much as she feels comfortable about who she is, what brings her to healing and social justice work as an Educator of Color working with urban youth of color. Before she begins, she gets up to bring two hand weaved African baskets full of herbs. She kindly checks-in and explains that she will work on herbal bundles for an upcoming healing clinic while she shares. She shares how keeping her hands busy is also soothing to her. She reaches out to her baskets and spreads in front of us herbs she has harvested and dried up for her herbal bundles. The smell of sage, rosemary, cider, and lavender are soothing and calming to my senses. In a soft-spoken tone and in a lotus yoga-sitting stand she then begins to share her story. In a quiet and peaceful mind state, I attentively listen in heart, body and spirit as she shares her testimonio. In no particular chronological order she openly shares pieces about her family background, her struggles and healing journey, which slowly began to give me a fuller picture of her beautiful spirit. She speaks of her painful upbringing as a child who grew up in the foster care system. Her life circumstances forced her to grow up fast. Since a young child she learned to cook for herself and take care of her basic needs without much emotional or physical support from adults in her life. Once emancipated from the state her worries continued for now she had to ensure she had enough money to pay for her rent and basic needs. The lack of financial stability was a constant worry that consumed much of her energy as a young adult.

Despite all the tribulations and strong currents she has endured, Wanjiro graduated from a four-year university and went on to obtain her masters and teaching credentials at a top private teaching institution. Presently in her fourth year teaching at a predominantly low-income public school attended by majority Students of Color, Wanjiro gets to do what brings her joy in life. She is a dynamic educator. For the past two years, she has been teaching during her summers in West Africa and during the school year fundraises money to bring school materials such as laptops to the children in the village she teaches. In addition to her educator role, she conducts baby-blessings, just finished getting certified as a yoga instructor, is an Aztec danzante, and volunteers at a community healing clinic collective. In her classroom, she intentionally infuses a healing pedagogy despite the lack of support by her peers as the only Black teacher at a school where more than half of the children are Black.

At length and powerfully articulated, she speaks of the challenges of doing healing work as a colonized body and the depth of what it means to heal the wounds of KKKolonization[43]. She touches upon the importance of collective community healing in our struggles for liberation and

[43] The spelling of colonization as KKKolonization was coined by poverty scholar and community activist Tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia at Prensa Pobre, which is a radical grassroots alternative media run by poverty scholars themselves. The deliberate spelling with KKK is made to place emphasis on the ways in which white supremacy and racism are at the root of past/ongoing colonization of Indigenous and People of Color. In this spirit, I will use this spelling of colonization throughout this chapter.

self-determination. I am deeply touched by her spirit and wisdom. She is an old soul. As she shares deeply healing experiences about her life her hands are also busy at work. I attentively observe as she patiently cleans each sage leaf before adding them to her basket full of healing herbs. Her hand movements animate and infuse her story with a deep sense of connectedness to the earth as medicine. By the end of the evening she had created many of these healing ofrendas to give to friends and community. She places one in my altar for me and we end our time together with a healing ritual she leads. As a woman of African descent part of her journey has been connecting with her Indigenous African Knowledges. I attentively listen with an open heart and much respect as she explains the ritual. We each take turns rubbing the sacred ointment in our wrists and feet and any other part in our body we may want healing. Conducting this ritual together joins us as kindred spirits and sisters in solidarity. I am overwhelmed with emotion and feel a full heart. I am humbled by the experience of learning from this young healing warrior.

In the direction of the west, this chapter began with prayer to set the intention of this work as a healing project. I then delved into my methodological approach with a reflection entry from my field notes that allows my readers to travel with me as I provide a snapshot of how I engage research. This narrative exemplifies the four healing intentions that define my research methodology, or what I call a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM). Interweaving various healing conocimientos this healing project aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways community educators and young People of Color call upon the concept of healing as critical to engaging in struggles to end systemic oppression and promoting more holistic approaches to nurturing young people's individual and collective wellbeing.

Drawing on the testimonios[44] of thirty community educators and more than three years of engagement and participant observation with various community-based healing efforts working towards centering healing when working with Young People of Color in northern California, this *knowledge documentation*[45] (Gonzales, 2012) examines how community educators and practitioners interweave social justice and healing as a critical process by which to facilitate individual and collective healing spaces with urban Young People of Color from marginalized communities. *Testimonios* from community educators and practitioners provided valuable insights on the kinds of healing practices that facilitate healing spaces for Young People and the implications of their praxis both for the adults and Young People's cultural and spiritual wellbeing. Participant observation and my own commitment as an educator and practitioners supporting these efforts, documented individual interactions and provided insights into the types of strategies that foster individual and collective healing and agency with Young People in community spaces.

From firsthand experience, as a community educator and practitioner having to grapple with drafting reports for foundations, I became frustrated with the individualist approach in

[44] Latina Feminist Group (2001) proposes *testimonios* as a method for feminist research praxis. The authors in this anthology speak to the power of story, personal narratives, and how *testimonios* can be legitimate sources of data and evidence. Framed by common political views, a *testimonio* is a way to collectively create knowledge and theory based on experiences.

[45] In *Red Medicine,* Patricia Gonzales (2012) uses the term *knowledge documentation* to refer to the idea of research in order to center Indigenous Knowledges, which she understands as "knowledge that emerges, coalesces, and coheres to a variety of stimuli based on the subjective experience of people who descend from the original inhabitants of a land base, such as the Americas" (p.3). Throughout the rest of this healing project, I will use *knowledge documentation* interchangeably with research in my attempt to decolonize language in ways that are more aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing.

mainstream understanding of healing I witnessed both in scholarship and public discourses spearheaded by philanthropic foundations that is still very much from a therapeutic approach that sees People of Color as damaged. As a result, for my healing project I was committed to not engaging in damaged research, but rather integrating a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the healing experiences of Communities of Color. Collectively, the testimonios of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* uplift the healing conocimientos of these practitioners and depart from mainstream healing discourses rooted in pathology and a language of damage. I draw from Rodriguez's (2014) articulation of "collaborative research relationships"[46] to emphasize the process of exchanging stories without the imposition of colonizing relations of domination that seek to own ideas for the sake of pursuing personal career agendas but rather build on the idea of the exchange of stories that explore healing and social justice for the purposes of contributing to the collective healing of Communities of Color.

Consequently, in order to share the values and lens that informed a DHM, I move away from the traditional social science technical writing that dominates in academia and instead move toward honoring a language that is more reflective of my own experience in being in ritual and ceremony with my participants and in my own research process from beginning to end. In this way, as part of the methodological approach, DHM integrates a process of personal reflection and wellness that is inter-layered throughout the presentation of this work. All protocols and ethical concerns informing the gathering of data are based on the principles of respect and reciprocity. Rituals such as burning copal, making offerings, and particular ways of interacting with participants were an essential part of decolonizing my methodology. In braiding healing conocimientos based on the excerpts of my participants' testimonios, ethnographic data such as fieldnotes, vignettes, prayer, and my personal reflections and heart prose as researcher, DHM offers a nuanced approach by weaving all these various sources of conocimientos in the analysis of data gathered. The interlayered voices of my participants and my own research voice embodied throughout this text itself is a refusal on my part as researcher to conform to mainstream ways of writing and presenting about methodology that objectifies research participants and attempts to make the researcher invisible.

George Yúdice (1985) defines testimonio as "an *authentic* narrative, told by a *witness* who is *moved* to *narrate* by the *urgency* of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.) Emphasizing *popular oral discourse*, the witness portrays his or her own *experience* as a *representative* of a *collective memory* and *identity*. *Truth* is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcizing and setting a right official history" (italics in original) (4). Testimonio can be described as an oral journey to the past that "allows the individual to transform past experience and personal identity, creating a new present and enhancing the future" (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983, p.46). It is a first-person account of one's life experiences with attention to the injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one's life (Aron, 174). Telling one's testimonio is a political act. As such, testimonio produces knowledge based on subjective experience, not as empirical historical facts, but as strategy of cultural survival and resistance. Because testimonio is motivated by visions of transformative change for one's children and the larger community, it is an act of love which draws on lived experience as the basis for knowledge. Only if we can hear the subaltern's individual voice and personal story in the way it is intended to be heard—as the expression of a

[46] Rodriguez (2014) articulates collaborative research relationships in his research approach built on the idea of the exchange of stories that explore maiz culture and maiz narratives and without the colonizing imposition of claiming these stories as "personal intellectual property" nor re-inscribing Western research relationships.

collective reality—can testimonio achieve its aim of individual *and* collective healing and empowerment.

The protocols that guided my research as a scholar were developed for the purpose of conducting my own research on healing and have been an important aspect of this work because they involve transparency and relationships. Conducting healing research is decolonizing work. As such, my research process from beginning to end was wary of the dangers that result from the potential exploitation of knowledge, whether intentional or otherwise, and the misapplication of Western ideas, theories, interpretation, and language to non-western ways of knowing. In the tradition of Indigenous scholars and many scholars of color, my work is committed to helping to solve problems, not just analyzing them. In this way, my research is not neutral. As part of the research process, I was intentional about creating research principles to help inform a healing methodology.

From this healing stance, this chapter seeks to deepen our understanding of healing as a legitimate form of being in the production of knowledge and methodological approach. As established in the previous chapter, I situate healing within an Indigenous and feminist epistemological and decolonial stance that places healing and spirituality at the center of thinking and being in education or what I conceptualize as a *decolonizing healing pardigm*. In this chapter, the central focus is to describe what I call a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM) within the context of my role as researcher and how this approach impacts relationships between researcher and participants. What follows is a discussion of how Indigenous scholars are signaling a healing turn that calls for decolonizing methodologies. I then proceed with a critical examination of my positionality by complicating my multiple identities in relation to research, land, and place. I then discuss the power of testimonio in braiding healing conocimientos as a conceptual tool in my methodological approach. Last, I describe my methodological approach, a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM), which seeks to embrace research rooted in an understanding of self-in-relation and is guided by four healing intentions: 1) Addressing the Heart of the Matter; 2) Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 3) Embracing Spirit and Spirituality, and 4) Listening in Bodymindspirit. Moreover, this text is interlayered with excerpts of Wajiro's testimonio and my reflections as a way to embody a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM) in the actual body of this text.

Healing Movidas that signal a Healing Turn in Research

By centering the healing testimonios of my participants, I challenge the epistemic violence that privileges Eurocentric western ways of knowing at the expense of subjugating non-western knowledges (Smith, 1999; Said, 1978). Fortunately for me, I am not alone. I am rooted in a long tradition of Indigenous and feminist scholars of color who have challenged the imperial gaze in western research and who work with communities in struggle to support the larger project of decolonization (Anzaldua, 1987; Alexandra, 2005; Collins,1991; Grande, 1994; Perez,1999; Levins-Morales, 1998; Sandoval, 2000; Smith, 1999). In Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls for Indigenous scholars to engage in research that is decolonizing or in others words "about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (p.39). Smith's (1999) Indigenous research agenda powerfully conveys elements of healing, decolonization, spirituality and recovery, which help push the boundaries of research beyond linear Eurocentric ways of being and thinking. Thus, an Indigenous research agenda is critical to disrupting the violence of

colonialism in the research process for it engages Indigenous knowledges as valid forms of knowing that exist within the social, cultural, ecological, and epistemological contexts of local communities.

In Indigenous Methodologies, Plains Cree and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2009) writes powerfully of her own personal experiences and journey coming to research from a place that delved deeply into her past memories and intricately bound her with place. Kovach (2015) outlines four central aspects of Indigenous methodologies:

- Holistic Indigenous knowledge systems are a legitimate way of knowing
- Receptivity and relationships between researcher and participants is (or ought to be) a natural part of the research methodology
- Collectivity, as a way of knowing, assumes reciprocity to the community
- Indigenous methods, including story, are a legitimate way of sharing knowledge

Kovach's central focus on: Indigenous knowledge foundation, the relational, the collective, and the methods is an example of how Indigenous researchers are incorporating an Indigenous worldview to bring forward decolonizing methods of research and new tools to transform knowledge production.

Similarly, Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) articulates an Indigenous research paradigm that calls for research itself as the ceremony of maintaining accountability in All Our Relations. Wilson (2008) challenges the tendency to isolate our research from spirit and heart and shares his dream that as researchers, "We may turn away from this isolation to rebuild the connections and relationships that are us, our world, our existence. We need to recognize the inherent spirituality, as well as the everyday applicability, in our research" (p.137). In this way, "knowledge cannot be owned or discovered but is merely a set of relationships that may be given a visible form" (Ibid, p.127). For Wilson, relational accountability "means that the methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)" (p. 99). Wilson contends that the shared aspects of relationality and relational accountability can be put into practice in four ways: 1) how we go about choosing the topics of our research, 2) the methods that we use for data collection 3) the form of analysis, and 4) the presentation of information. Taking the time to reflect and take into account these considerations in my initial processes of knowledge documentation (Gonzales, 2012) proved critical to being able to think outside mainstream research methods and allowed me to engage in decolonizing methods.

This body of work affirms that conducting research from an Indigenous stance entails bringing to the forefront the voices, lived experiences, and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples as valuable and critical to decolonizing knowledge production. In more ways than I could ever describe, access to reading about anti-oppressive and decolonizing methodologies by Indigenous and feminist scholars of color provided a breath of fresh air in what often felt like a suffocating experience as a graduate student witnessing the epistemic privilege of the scientific paradigm being reproduced through course syllabus and esteemed as the highest standard to strive for among the larger research community. In this light, when writing this knowledge documentation I chose to make myself visible not only as a researcher with an agenda, but also as a subject in my research and one that seeks to foster healing and harmony in my life journey.

Centering healing in our epistemological and methodological approach begins with naming KKKolonialism as "the root harm of what needs to be healed" (McCaslin & Breton,

2008) and entails engaging the process of (re)membering and (re)centering traditional healing ways of knowing as a means of restoring balance and harmony in mindbodyspirit of colonized and oppressed Indigenous and People of Color (Gonzales, 2012). Healing is not only necessary to decolonizing our methodologies, it is critical to disrupting the relations of power that maintain and sustain academic imperialism and settler colonialism (Patel, 2016;Wolfe, 1999) In the context of hegemonic colonial structures which have historically excluded and presently continue to exclude, distort, appropriate, and marginalize the knowledges of Indigenous People and People of Color, women, those physically and mentally differently abled, and LGBTQ people, I am intentional about braiding knowledge (Gonzalez, 2001) for the purposes of healing.

Moreover, as a researcher, my refusal (Tuck et al., 2014) is to not portray the healing stories of my participants as one-dimensional to adhere to the academic imperial gaze of the ivory tower. Instead, I explore in depth the complexity and power that exists when sharing our healing stories not just for the sake of research but also as part of something much larger than this project and myself. I am cautious and critical of the ways in which academia collects our stories of pain for commodification or what critical educational scholar Tuck (2009) calls damaged-centered research or research that operates from "a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (p.413). In an open letter to communities, Tuck (2009) argues for educational and social science research to suspend damage or the insistence on documenting damage that portrays Indigenous and Communities of Color as damaged or broken to prove their oppression and pain exists. From beginning to end there have been many moments of refusal throughout this project–instances where I have stopped and reflected about the direction of this work and how much of the stories of participants and my own to reveal or share. This has also included being mindful that some parts of our stories are not meant to be to be written but rather cherished as medicine for the heart. Moreover, the interlayered voices embodied throughout this text itself is a refusal on my part as researcher to conform to mainstream ways of writing and presenting about methodology that objectifies research participants and attempts to make the researcher invisible.

Positionality and Knowing: The Gaze of Researcher as Healer

The privileges placed on Western and male-centered systems of thought and linear approaches to educational methodological approaches limit our understanding of the importance of healing in knowledge production. As researchers of color, there is an ongoing tension that exists with the tools of research we use and reinvent to meet the realities of our communities. Contrary to dominant methodological approaches that call for researchers distancing themselves from their research and research participants to produce "objective" research, scholars of color have explicitly situated and claimed their own subjectivity and positionality to call for theories based on the "flesh and blood" (Moraga et al., 1981). The work of feminists of color Gloria Anzaldua (1987), Patricia Collins (1991), Sandy Grande (2004), bell hooks (1991), Maria Lugones (2007), Cherrie Moraga (1993), Emma Perez (1999), Chela Sandoval (2000) Sandra Harding (1996), Linda T. Smith (1999), Audre Lorde (1984), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) have addressed the challenges, contradictions and sometimes painful experiences they meet head-on both as scholars and members of a community. In Red Pedagogy Sandy Grande (2004) explicitly discusses her identity as Quechua Indigenous woman and her position as a scholar activist to elaborate how her positionality affects her research, perspectives, and interpretation. For Grande (2007) an education for decolonization "must engage a method of analysis and social inquiry that troubles the imperialist aims of unfettered competition, accumulation, and exploitation" and "a

pedagogy that cultivates a sense of political agency and spiritual solidarity" (pg. 320). It is in this third space of not just confronting but reconfiguring ways of thinking and being that can serve as bridges for coalition building and for creating multiple possibilities for a better world (Anzaldua, 1989).

As Indigenous and scholars of color, a critical part of entering our relation to research is speaking truth to our own stories and acknowledging and honoring our multiple positionalities. In my role as researcher, I made a conscious and intentional decision to acknowledge who I am, where I come from, who my ancestors are, what brings me to this work and why this work matters. Moreover, part of my process entailed taking the time to pause for reflection and to ask myself the following: What is my approach to doing research? How does this work align with my soul purpose in life? And, How is this project contributing to the struggles of self-determination and liberation of Peoples of Color? Answering these questions involved a process of turning inward and revisiting my own personal story and my relationship to schooling and research. In this context, I began this healing project by sharing my testimonio as an ofrenda of love and resistance given that a vital aspect of decolonizing research involves inserting the whole self into the knowledge production for lived experience and our stories are a powerful antidote to disrupting the colonial tropes that dominate in western social sciences.

Integrating my whole self into the research process has allowed for my academic identity to embrace my intuition, emotional, and experiential experience as valuable sources of wisdom guiding my process. I further discuss and emphasize in this section how stating our positionality can be messy, healing, and a complex undertaking. In a context of the axes of oppressions –not limited to racism, heteronormativity, ableism, ageism, etc.—that are entrenched in the academic institutions we navigate, it is critical to remain vigilant of how relations of power are contested, reproduced, and embodied in our everyday lives. In this light, I remain critical of how my insider status conducting knowledge documentation in my home community does not make me immune to perpetrating colonizing ways of conducting research.

Given the multiplicity of identities researchers of color embody means I embody both the colonizer and the colonized (Villenas, 2006). As the colonizer I am vigilant about the ways in which 23+ years of western schooling have conditioned me and how the material and social privileges I hold can shape the research process and relations of power between researcher and participants. As the colonized, I am critical of my subjugated positionality in relation to mainstream ways of thinking that dominate in the academy. There are no magic formulas to navigate the multiplicity of contradictions and tensions inherent in the sole act of conducting research. Yet, I strive to make visible and account for the continuum of privilege and oppression that exists in relation to my positionality and the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011). I am critical of the ways in which my social location as an able-bodied, heterosexual, light skinned, working class and college educated Xicana influences how I am perceived and treated by others, how I think about myself and my place in the world, and how I speak and write back to research. Most importantly, I remain rooted in an understanding that I am also much more than the labels and categorizations that mainstream society attempts to impose on my body via discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, and place of origin.

Through reflective journaling and exploring more deeply the ways in which my personal history and community relations with research participants allowed for connections to be made is a concrete example of how my positionality influenced my research. In this way, trust reciprocated between participants and myself was made possible given my established relationships in the community and because of who I am. My identity as a bilingual working

class Xicana raised in the Bay Area helped facilitate an entry point with many of my participants who otherwise may have not been open to participating in sharing their testimonios with me. Thus, I am more than just a colonizer/colonized researcher. I chose to move beyond binary ways of thinking. I engage the shadow parts of the many layers of who I am and I also embrace the possibility of coming to research from a place that (re)centers my sacredness as a being connected to a life force and herstory much older and expansive than myself.

From a Xicana Indigena (Luna, 2012) stance I chose to engage research as healer. My gaze of researcher as healer means my intention is focused on gathering knowledge for the purposes of fostering and promoting the healing conocimientos and practices that community educators engage to promote individual and collective healing and wellbeing of YPOC and Communities of Color. From an Afrocentric Indigenous perspective, Chilisa (2012) speaks of the role of researcher as transformative healer as one which "involves self-reflection and self-questioning about the researcher's responsibilities as well as relationships with others, the living and nonliving" (p.189). To engage as a transformative healer from an African context entails the deep study of self in order "to understand how self is unique yet related to the whole, and to identify his or her life purpose" (Ibid). Building on Chilisa's (2012) conceptualization of researcher as transformative healer I concur that the role of researcher as healer entails an on-going commitment to critical reflection of healing self. It is in the process of healing self and being reflective about our healing journey that as researchers we can make space in our heart and spirit to be a vessel to help facilitate healing for others based on principles of our interrelatedness and connectedness to the greater web of life and all our relations in the research process.

By centering the role of researcher as healer in my knowledge documentation, I do not attempt to profess I am an expert in healing or healing others. To the contrary, I don't believe it is the role of researchers to heal anyone but rather that we can set the intention as researchers to hold the space as sacred and to help facilitate healing in our relationship with others. In other words, healing is not something we do to others but rather an art we engage with others. Placing intention on healing ways of relating between researcher and research participants is especially critical given the ways that research has been colonizing to Communities of Color (Smith, 1999). My disclaimer is that I am novice in the art of healing but speak from a place that honors the knowledge of our ancestors that lives within each of us about what it means to be in a healing relationship with the land, all life forms on this earth, and most importantly with ourselves. In this sense, we are all healers in our own way because we all have within us the medicine to heal ourselves.

Indeed, remaining open to the guidance of my ancestors which often manifested via signs from nature, dreams, and gut feelings as a valid way of knowing was key in my own healing journey and helped inform the direction of my knowledge documentation. As I elaborated in my own testimonio it was deeply listening to my body after a painful miscarriage that compelled me to explore the deeper dimensions of healing outside of the medical industrial complex and its relationship to social justice and decolonization. This shift in consciousness called for a radical healing relationship to my body as earth that goes beyond binaries that attempt to fragment us and negate our spiritual relationship to the land, or what I call an epistemology of body as earth. In this way, my knowledge as a healer comes from my own experiences of what it means to heal myself within a context of colonialism and how to be in healing relationships with all human and non-human life forms, the cosmos, and the land.

I see myself as a healer in my community. I have had some experience healing myself and I feel that is what allows me to volunteer my services. Because we came in as slaves […] our experience has been post traumatic slave syndrome …my experience healing from colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, sexism, and patriarchy, all of its isms. My experience as a woman of African ancestry in America and having to heal from my experience here on these stolen lands and being stolen from my country of origin so yes I see myself as a healer in having to heal myself from surviving in America. And now sharing with others, community members, students, families, and parents of the children sharing with them the strategies I used to heal from the toxic place that was created to kill me, my children, and have me be a slave from capitalism and for capitalism. So sharing how I have survived, and what I do for myself with my students, and my neighbors. This tea helps with this. This smell boosts your immune system. This is what helps me. Maybe it can help you too or you can get on your own healing journey too. This system of colonialism is trying to kill me, it has been. We have had to learn to heal ourselves from the ignorance, the negligence, the killer- colonialism. That's what gave me the credentials, my authority-- colonialism. It's forced me to be intentional about living when this country is all about killing me. I don't want to die. Wanjiro Malyka

La Tierra Nos Connecta: Relationship to Land and Place

> Very few of us live on the land our ancestors were indigenous to. So whose land are we on? Whose labor sustained our families, and whose families did our labor sustain? How did our people take part in the conquest of others, in the destruction of some ecosystem? Most of our lineages are full of movement up and down the ladders of class. Radical genealogy deprives us of self-righteousness and gives us complexity in exchange.
>
> Levins Morales, 2013

With respect and asking permission to the ancestors of this land, I begin with the acknowledgement that this healing project took place in what is the homeland of the Chochenyo Ohlone Nation, or what is now called the Greater San Francisco Bay Area by the settler colonial nation of the United States of America. Not a federally recognized tribe, Chochenyo Ohlone Indigenous People continue to be erased from our history textbooks and suffer the legacies of Spanish colonization and U.S. settler colonialism. This historical context is important to understanding ongoing attacks on Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and the dispossession of poor Indigenous peoples. Examples of their current struggles include the protection and preservation of Ohlone Shellmounds or sacred burial sites[47]. Ohlone Indigenous peoples' determination to save their sacred shellmounds is a testament that Indigenous power, resistance, and activism have always been part of this sacred land.

To speak of healing and transformation without an understanding and acknowledgement that at the root of our oppression is land dispossession of Indigenous peoples is to reproduce and maintain settler colonial violence (Wolfe, 1999). This is especially critical given the ways in

[47] For more information on this pertinent struggle please see film, *Beyond Recognition* (2014), which highlights the activism of two Bay Area Chochenyo Ohlone women and their struggle to protect their ancestor's burial places. Also, as part of their efforts to create more awareness and education on the importance of these burial sites, Indian People Organizing for Change (IPOC), a community-based organization, has organized the Shellmound Peace Walks and yearly demonstrations at the Emeryville Shellmound.

which settler colonial greed for land and US manifest destiny have fabricated what is now known as the Greater Bay Area into a highly sought out geographical location of destination for colonial settlers and dispossessed Peoples of Color.[48] This pattern of displacement persists and is especially evident in the Bay Area in contemporary forms of land grabbing or more accurately, what poverty scholar, Tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia, calls gentriFUKation or the high speed violent removal and displacement of poor Indigenous Peoples, immigrant, and Peoples of Color in order to convert low-income housing to high-income housing to accommodate the growing influx of middle-upper class white populations and Silicon Valley technicians. While not new, this 21st century colonial removal project results in further commodification and privatization of land, resources, and forced removal of poor Indigenous and Communities of Color for the benefit of US imperialism. [49]

Talking about the importance of place in social science inquiry, or what they call critical place inquiry, Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2015) write, "There is a crucial disconnect between the looming consequences of ignoring place and the practices of social science that diminish place; a disconnection that has been fostered over generations of settler colonialism and social science research. Place is significant, and our inquiries will become more significant through this recognition" (p.22). This prompts us to consider as researchers the importance of place in our research and to interrogate ongoing structures of settler colonialism and our relation to these structures and how may these considerations "enable us to respond more ethically and urgently to the priorities of accountability to land, people across places, and future generations" (Ibid). In Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas, Roberto Cintli Rodriguez (2014) provides a powerful example from his extensive knowledge documentation of the resilience of maiz culture in the lives of Mexican, Central and Southern American peoples of how researchers' relations with people and the land become part of the research process that informed the construction of knowledge and a decolonizing methodology. In the process, Rodriguez's brings forward a maiz methodology that is grounded on research protocols, collaborative research relationships, and elder epistemology[50] to ensure ethical and transparent ways and most importantly built on respectful relationships. This body of work is central to bridging the "disconnection" Tuck and McKenzie (2015) posit for it affirms and honors the strength and learning that comes from our relations with place, land, and research participants in the research process.

Thus, it is also important to articulate my relationship to this land and place I call home. Raised in the Bay Area and with more than a decade of experience working with community-based organizations, I call Oakland my home. My parents migrated north from our ancestral lands in what is now known as the states of Michoacan and Jalisco, or more accurately known as Anahuac land by Mexica people (Ruiz, n.d.-a). In our contemporary era of increasing militarism

[48] Important to clarify that there are multiple levels of displacement simultaneously happening. Some colonized bodies were brought to this land by force, such as the experiences of African peoples who were kidnapped from their motherland and brought as slaves to the Americas. Other displaced Peoples of Color have been pushed-out of their homelands as a result of US imperialism. For others, despite their relationship to this land predating European KKKolonization continue to be displaced from their homelands. For a discussion that brings Chican@ Studies in conversations with settler colonialism see, Pullido, 2018.

[49] See panel discussion presented by POOR Magazine/Prensa POBRE on Anti-GentriFUKation Book Tour on youtube at https://youtu.be/-iDXvS9pBpg.

[50] For Cintli Rodriguez (2014), elder epistemology "is listening to elders and acknowledging, rather than seeking to validate, their knowledge." This includes an ethos of respect for stories, oral traditions, and respect for the elders who pass on this precious knowledge (p.22).

and nation-state violence, crossing the Mexico-U.S. border labeled my parents "illegal aliens" to this land. As displaced Peoples of Color, my family settled in the Bay Area and to a certain extent went on to obtain settler status in the form of partaking in the colonial structures of land privatization when they acquired land property. As a recent homeowner myself, I am fully aware of the ways I am also complicit in the settler colonial structure of privatizing land. I stand on land stained with blood. This complicates my relationship to this land.

Moreover, I am critical of my blueprint on mama earth as a colonial citizen of the number one polluter in the world. According to the Worldwatch Institute, with less than 5% of the global population, the United States uses about a quarter of the world's fossil fuel resources –burning up to nearly 25% of the coal, 26% of the oil, and 27% of the world's natural gas (Center for Sustainable Systems, 2021). My class privilege and everyday lifestyle from the moment I wake up to the moment I go to sleep— means I have normalized my level of consumption of energy and resources. By design we have been conditioned to disconnect from facing the reality of our over consumption and destruction of mama earth. A critical aspect of healing my relationship to this land has been about (re)connecting as one with the land for our very existence depends on our ability to (re)center our kinship to land, all animal and plant knowledge. Healing my relationship to land has been about decolonizing my mindbodyspirit by being one with the land (Jimenez, 2006)

Most importantly, I am reminded of the teachings of Indigenous elders that teach us that as living beings we all belong to this land (Cajete, 2000). In fact, the sunrise and sunset, the moon and the stars, and the elements are the same everywhere you go. This stance is not meant to take away from struggles of decolonization that foreground Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. It means we engage in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in supporting struggles of land decolonization, even when this work is not always easy given the ways we are embedded and complicit in maintaining the very same structures we are resisting. Despite these unresolved tensions and contradictions, I am intentional about being respectful of this land as my home from a place that honors the original Ancestors and steward guardians of this sacred land and my spiritual connection to this land. I am rooted in an understanding that I am part of a much older herstory and history of Indigenous peoples of Anahuac land that honor their relationship to land and who still continue to teach young generations like myself the conocimientos of our abuelitos and abuelitas (Bonfil, 1996).

Wilson (2008) reminds us of the importance of our relationship to the land when he elaborates, "Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationship with the land, with their ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being with the land. Rather than viewing ourselves as being in relationship with other people or things, we are the relationships that we hold and are apart of" (p.80). My parents' teaching and joy of being one with the land have taught me more about my spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth than any book or institution of learning can ever teach me. My parents' love for the land has ingrained in me that I am the land and the land is me. As Wilson (2008) and other Indigenous scholars emphasize (McCoy, Tuck, and McKensie, 2016) land is our first teacher. Yet too often institutions of learning continue to dismiss this way of knowing as valuable and critical to our individual and collective survival and that of all life on this planet.

The Power of Testimonios in Braiding Healing Conocimientos

> Conocimiento es otro modo de conectar across colors and other differences to allies also trying to negotiate racial contradictions, survive the stresses and traumas of daily life, and develop a spiritual-imaginal-political vision together. Conocimiento shares a sense of affinity, knowledge, insights, and resources with other groups.
>
> Anzaldua, 2002, p. 571

Narratives are a means of passing down knowledge within Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2009). Moreover, through telling our stories we are able to relate to one another and our community (Archibald, 2008). For many Indigenous scholars, telling our stories is a sacred ceremony (Wilson, 2008; Silko, 1977). Wilson (2008) asserts how sharing our stories is an important way of gathering data and it is through listening to our stories that allows us to understand their value and teachings. As such, I embarked on this healing project by gathering healing stories through the sharing of testimonios.

The practice of testimonio has its roots in oral cultures and human rights struggles in the Americas (Menchu, 1984 Barrios de Chungara, 1978; Partnoy, 1986). For Chicanas, testimonio has been deployed to critically delve into their everyday struggles and build solidarity among women of color (Moraga & Anzaldua, 2002; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Perez-Huber, 2009). As methodology, testimonio involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal, political, spiritual, and intellectual understandings of self and community (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2012). It is a first-person account of one's life experiences with attention to the injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one's life (Aron, 1992). In this way, testimonio "produces knowledge based on subjective experience, not as empirical historical facts, but as strategy of cultural survival and resistance" (Ibid, p.174). It differs from autobiography in that it engages the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experiences within a context of their particular socio-political realities. It provides new approaches to understanding and addressing the struggles of communities of color within our collective histories of oppression.

For many of the participants, the methodology of testimonio provided a familiar entry point to participating in this healing project given that sharing their testimonio has been part of their approach to working and building trust with young people and communities of color. My methodological approach to collecting testimonios included practicing reciprocity by opening with sharing my testimonio with participants. In sharing my own testimonio with each participant, I engaged in the process as researcher and participant. Sharing the vulnerability of speaking truth to both our internal work and commitment to the collective healing of our communities changes the relationship between researcher and participants. My testimonio was not scripted. Instead, I allowed for my story to flow from my heart. Given my herstory and relationship with each of the participants sharing my testimonio took on a different form each time. To varying degrees each participant had prior knowledge about my background and certain aspects of my story. Each time I shared my testimonio provided an opportunity to (re)write my own story and brought immense healing to my soul.

In the exchange of healing testimonios – no only do I partake in (re)writing my own healing journey and, like the testimonios of the community educators and young people who shared their life stories and healing journeys- we bear witness to the power of our collective healing stories in fostering hope and embodying alternative visions rooted in spiritually grounded action. On a personal level, participants' spiritual and healing conocimientos have helped deepen my own healing processes and journey. Feminist activist and herstorian Aurora Levins Morales

(1998) calls this creating medicinal history[51] in order to distill "a legacy of pride, hope, and rebellion from ordinary people's lives" and how these medicine stories can contribute to collective healing in radical ways. Similarly, the healing conocimientos that emerged from testimonios are medicine for the collective healing of communities. By interweaving the testimonios of participants, ethnographic data, my experiences as healer, and analysis the healing stories and themes that emerge are healing conocimientos that challenge the status quo and create a collective "spiritual-imaginal-political vision" (Anzaldua, 2002).

Moreover, by braiding healing conocimientos, I draw from Gonzalez' (2001) methodological approach of trenzas y mestizage or what she understands as the process of braiding "identities, theories, and practices for gathering knowledge while also advancing cross-disciplinary study and transformational research" in order to braid my cultural knowledge and feminist epistemological stance when understanding and making meaning of the healing stories participants shared with me (p.652). As a methodological tool "trenzas and mestizaje dissolves the lines through multidimensional, relational, and collaborative qualitative strategies with those mostly directly involved in the study and practice of education" (p.646). Similarly, braiding healing conocimientos allowed me to interweave my own lived experiences and healing conocimientos with that of my participants in order to more holistically understand their stories and have a more complex analysis about what healing work entails from their perspectives. By braiding the healing conocimientos of my research participants, this work attempts to see the points of intersection, similarities, and differences that sit in a continuum across their testimonios.

> *HEALING TESTIMONIOS. The stories of all those who have dedicated themselves to creating a more just world grounded in heart work. Their stories are a testament of our collective strength and hope in the face of continual genocide, KKKolonization, exploitation of mama earth and human life, and cultural imperialism. Healing stories are medicine and speak to our collective resistance to a normative heteropatriarchal master narrative. These healing stories defy common tropes of poor communities and Youth of Color as only "broken" and "traumatized." These healing stories help nurture the best in us and help bring meaning and hope into our lives.*
>
> *Fieldnote, 2017*

Mi Ofrenda: A Decolonizing Healing Methodology (DHM)

As a researcher committed to decolonizing knowledge, part of my prayer to the universe throughout my graduate studies focused on being able to manifest, create, and bring into being a research project that builds on the strengths and assets of my community and contributes towards struggles of liberation for Peoples of Color. I let this prayer or call to the cosmos and mother tonanzin run deep in my heart, bones, and blood in my hope to put forward my best possible creation or offering to be in the service of the collective healing of my ancestors, present and future generations to come. My prayers were an important aspect of finding my own scholarly voice and they would be answered in how I came to carry out my research. It made it possible for me to persevere and have the courage to engage and embody methods that were meaningful to my life, research participants, and community. Most importantly, focusing my energy and

[51] In *Medicine Stories* (1998) Levins-Morales articulates her interest in history for it medicinal uses or what she understands as "the power of history to provide those healing stories that can restore the humanity of the traumatized, and not for any inherent interest in the past for its own sake" (p.25).

intentions on decolonizing methods allowed me to experience immense healing, therefore changing the course of life for me as a person, scholar, and mother-activist.

Centered in an African context and from an African feminist perspective, Cynthia Dillard (2008) articulates a healing methodology:

> Is both a verb and a noun. Healing is as healing does. As a noun, healing methodology [includes] the indigenous practices/pedagogies that explicitly engage and enact the cultural knowledge, historical and traditional wisdom, politics, and ever-present spiritualities of Africa and her diaspora. …Healing methodology as spirituality, then, is deeply rooted in the Creator's presence within history and within the lives of African ascendant people (p.286).

Healing as a verb is the act of centering our work in cultural practices that honor and respect the ancestral knowledges that we bring. Dillard's healing methodology is guided by five principles: Love, Compassion, Reciprocity, Ritual, and Gratitude. These methodologies in the spirit, or five principles are not prescriptive, but rather are part of engaging spirituality in drawing emphasis to the researcher and the participants becoming more fully human in the process. By engaging such principles, the researcher may experience profound shifts in how they conceptualize and engage methods when research is conducted in a way that is present with "the spiritual nature of our human relationships within our research" (p.82). For Dillard, research is a process that we do in company of others and how we approach our human relationships with the subjects in our research whether we choose or not to be in a more intimate or personal relationship will impact the lessons we will take home and how we decide to ultimately present our research.

My methodological approach builds on this work. Thus, I conceptualize a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM) as a way of being in knowledge documentation that is rooted in Indigenous and women of color feminist epistemology and aims to gather healing conocimientos for the purposes of creating a healing and transformative methodology that decenters colonizing relations of domination. From an anti-colonial stance a decolonial healing methodology foregrounds the legacies of colonialism and how relations of power get reproduced, contested, and re-created in the research process. It offers methodological insights to challenge Eurocentric deficit discourses that colonize the mindbodyspirit. It provides a decolonizing epistemic, methodological, and pedagogical approach that centers healing conocimientos and lived experience as powerful medicine to help facilitate knowledge production that is healing both to the researcher and research subjects. However, decolonizing methodologies require on-going reflexivity and courage to simultaneously navigate and remain whole given the settler colonial relations of power embedded in dominant western research. It's a delicate dance that requires us to be rooted in our community and healing relations outside of the academy.

In this way, this next section begins with a description of the process guiding the incubation of the healing intentions that guide DHM and I discuss the process of taking care of the researcher as a methodological act. Lastly, I discuss and describe the four healing intentions guiding a DHM.

Incubating Healing Intentions in Knowledge Documentation

Thinking research designs or descriptions of methodologies often leave the researcher unattended. In this healing project, I not only reflect on my positionality but I define taking care of the researcher as a methodological act. Taking the time to listen and trust my intuitive

knowing,[52] I learned to remain attentive to the ways in which my inner wisdom guided the intention and direction of this project. Taking this time or detour to heal myself was often in contradiction to the linear ways of thinking and being as a graduate student expected to produce a certain level of "productivity." It is often the norm or expectation as graduate students in training to focus most of our energy meeting academic and funding deadlines and professional milestones that "prove" our academic worth. It is very easy for researchers to get caught up in the "busyness" and ego dance that academia thrives on without any concern for the wellbeing of self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998).

Going against the grain, I was intentional about addressing deeply rooted fears around redefining what I understood as failure and success in my personal and professional life. Prioritizing my own well being and healing gave me the courage to also make hard decisions about which academic relations to let go of and which ones to nurture in order to support the new direction of my knowledge documentation. I took the time to take advantage of my access to individual therapy as a graduate student and for years I have committed to on-going exploration of my self-healing in relation to my multiple roles as mother, daughter, sister, educator, and scholar. In collaboration with a Chicana psychologist who integrates a holistic approach of mindbodyspirit and Indigenous healing practices, these weekly sessions provided a space for me to deeply explore my fears and doubts about what it means to engage in decolonizing methodologies from a place of healing.

From a feminist healing perspective, women of color scholars have explored how they experience the spiritual and how the experience shapes their subjectivity and methodology (Alexander, 2005; Dillard, 2008; Sendejo, 2014; Wane, 2011). Previous works have also considered how the body is a site that can inform the methodological approach in knowledge documentation (Morales, 2013; Trinh 1989). The intention to pay close attention to my own body as the site that informs knowledge production allowed me to reflect on how these insights informed what I looked at, how I went about collecting data, what I asked and how I chose to present the data. A focus on my own bodily experiences and knowledge brought about inner perspectives otherwise invisible to the average researcher. These bodily experiences are central in how I came to understand my place and relation to research and how I made meaning of my methodological approach. It is important to also emphasize that our bodily experiences are shaped by our personal background and sociocultural context and as such it is important to have an awareness that everyone's bodily experience is different and there is no universal way of experiencing our bodies. In my own personal process, insightful reflections and breakthroughs resulted from working from a place that acknowledged and centered my body as knowledgeable.

For example, grounding exercises and ritual became essential practices in my research process that helped me to maintain balance and harmony in my life. To promote my wellbeing and in times of stress, I worked to ground myself with a variety of healing modalities that included but were not limited to laying down and/or walking on the earth with my bare feet, asking our tree ancestors and animal spirits for inspiration and guidance, and soaking the energy of the sun to infuse my work with warmth and love. Praying and setting intentions before my writing and data analyzes are some of the ways I integrated spirit into my methodological process. Moreover, in the last phase of my data analysis and writing I became intimately

[52] For Gloria Anzaldua (2002) this intuitive knowing, or "what inner eye, heart, and gut tell you," when "unmediated by mental constructs is the closest you come to direct knowledge (gnosis) of the world" (542). While "this experience of reality is partial too" like all other knowledge, these conocimientos challenge conventional ways of conducting research.

connected to water as a source of healing and meditation for I developed a new passion for swimming. Swimming up to five days a week during my last two summers of intense writing and reflection allowed me to foster clarity and helped to quiet down the mind in order to be able to think and write from a place that connected my mindbodyheart.

I also learned to pay close attention to my dreams[53], especially during intense periods of vivid dreams about water. In my initial phases of intense personal healing, I often found myself sometimes swimming through murky waters and most often dreams of swimming in clear water in oceans and lakes kept resurfacing. Especially in my last phase of writing my dissertation, my dream state became a key part of my healing and ability to process my own fears, doubts, and insecurities about my work. This would eventually introduce me to Nahualismo --the ancient Toltec art of dreaming—which initiated me on a path of rediscovery and (re)claiming powerful healing traditions of my ancestors (see Magaña, 2015). I learned to integrate ancient and sacred techniques to incubate dreams for healing and to manifest breakthroughs in my dream state that provided cues and reassurance during challenging periods in which my inner critic, self-doubt and fear visited me.

Making connections between these dreams and my own emotional waters, journaling, and talking to others about my dreams was helpful in my healing process. At times, these dreams triggered lágrimas as the manifestation of healing my inner waters. From this place of healing my own emotional waters, I was able to engage research as healer for it encouraged me to integrate approaches that are sensitive, culturally appropriate, and true to my spiritual being. In my knowledge production this included interacting with research participants not simply as "subjects" of my research. I took the time to engage in meaningful ways that included conversations about our personal lives in terms of our emotional wellbeing and our families. In this way, as researcher I was part of a circle of relations who were connected with one another and to which I was also accountable as a member of the same community. The implications of these relationships are that I was able to make intimate connections with each of my participants and community spaces in which I was a part of, not just for the sake of research but as part of the community. Thus, my ability to stay present with this work and in my interactions with others had to do with the clarity, depth, and balance of my inner self and turning inward helped facilitate that process.

Up to this moment, I have discussed the inner work and personal reflection processes that helped informed my methodology, now I will discuss the four healing intentions that guide a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM): Addressing the heart of the matter, Centering Indigenous way of knowing, Embracing spirituality and spirit(s), and Listening with mindbodyspirit. A decolonizing healing methodology encourages innovative thinking to imagine alternative ways of knowing and being to braiding healing conocimientos.

Addressing the HEART of the matter

[53] In a context of Indigenous Knowledge, dreams play a significant role in attaining knowledge that is significant not only to the dreamer but the larger community and can assist the researcher in understanding and making meaning of data (Cajete, 2000; Gonzales, 2000; Gonzales, 2012; Duran, 2006). In *Red Medicine*, Gonzales (2012) understands dreaming as a "cocreative process that involves the bodyspiritland and life-moving power in which there are may or may not be borders between flesh, mind, spirit, cosmos, or place. Dreams are a form of data gathering and method for asking for knowledge, just as are ceremonies" (p. 172).

> The Heart es un corazon con razón, with intelligence, passion, and purpose, a "mindful" heart with ears for listening, eyes for seeing, a mouth with tongue narrowing to a pen tip for speaking/writing.
>
> Anzaldua, 2002, p. 571

In a context of hegemonic structures of knowledge production that privilege the mind at the expense of disconnecting from heart and spirit, to think/speak/write/act from a place that honors our heart energy is to disrupt binary and dominant ways of thinking that attempt to compartmentalize and objectify both the researcher and research participants. As researchers, this shift in paradigm requires us to consider what is the role of the heart in engaging self, others, and our communities. For Anzaldua (2002) creating conocimiento requires a heart armed with intelligence and fine-tuned to all its senses for only then can we truly aspire to work from a place of love and not fear or fragmentation. In this way, to set the intention on addressing the heart of the matter means to give and receive from a place of love in our relations with research participants and communities. Yet, what does it mean to locate the heart in our knowledge documentation? How do we not get caught up in the "head trip" of the ego that academia feeds off and highly rewards when collecting and making sense of our data?

Addressing the heart of the matter entails that we take the time to listen to what the heart has to say, see, and speak. It requires that we follow our heart and trust that the GPS in our heart knows all the best routes. It is by connecting to our heart energy that we learn how to be in healing relations with our participants and more holistically think through and make sense of knowledge gathered. For example, in the early stages of my knowledge documentation locating the heart of my work entailed taking a step back to deeply reflect and journal on the direction, thinking, and kinds of actions I needed to take in order to nurture a peaceful, tranquil, and untroubled heart. In time, I learned how to discern the different messages I received from my heart energy. By listening to the beat and rhythm of my heart, I gave myself permission to let it guide me to my purpose and give meaning to this project. My heartbeat was a reminder of the life force of the creator that is always present within us. Without the beating of our heart we would cease to exist.

From this place, my engagement with participants provided an opportunity to share my love, joy, and laughter. By sharing and receiving, I found myself feeling whole. Moreover, in times of uncertainty in my academic trajectory, I took refuge in knowing that my heart has wisdom and this valuable knowledge makes me whole. This knowledge guides and informs my intellectual and life journey and offers understanding and creative light that comes from the center of my being. As such, I set the intentions to move through this world with love and inner wisdom. Indeed, one of the most radical acts of resistance we can engage as colonized bodies is to love other People of Color and ourselves with the same or greater intensity that the colonizer has injected fear and hatred into our hearts. In "Land, Language, and Decolonial Love" (2016), young nēhiyaw Indigenous activist and writer Erica Violet Lee powerfully writes about loving Indigenous bodies as an act of resistance:

> Daring to claim love and desire for Indigenous bodies in the face of ongoing colonialism is a liberatory act of vulnerability. Allowing love to flow beyond the edges of our skin (in the form of touch), our lips (in the form of language), and our eyes (in the form of tears) is necessary and radical in a world where we're taught to believe those borders are impassable. So when we love each other, it is potent enough to heal the trauma and chase

> away the violence. So when we love it is wider than the prairies. So when we love, the bellies of our ancestors are filled with laughter and good food. When we love each other, pipelines shut down and borders open and logging machines jam.

For Lee, "Indigenous love is radical: because for centuries, colonialism has ruled that Native bodies cannot be beautiful, valuable, and loveable." In this way, to openly love each other and ourselves as colonized bodies is powerful medicine that can help heal the collective wound of colonialism. Coming from a place of radical and decolonial love in my interactions with research participants and sites was key in disrupting the colonial gaze of the ivory tower. It opened me up to be fully present and practice understanding and compassion in my speech and actions. It helped minimize the distance between my research participants and myself for I became more than just simply an "academic researcher." It is in this way, research itself is a "sacred ceremony" for "it is all about building relationships and bridging this sacred space" (Wilson, 2008, p.87).

Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Indigenous ways of knowing unsettle colonizing relations of domination between researchers and research participants. Indigenous ways of knowing are about theorizing from the perspective of Indigenous peoples and those historically marginalized. Indigenous Knowledge is plural given that "indigenous knowledge (and epistemology) embodies the cosmologies, values, cultural beliefs, and web of relationships that exist within specific indigenous communities" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. xiv). It supports the resurgence of traditions that contribute to decolonizing knowledge by reconnecting us to land, community, and culture in transformative ways (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2008). Centering Indigenous ways of knowing allow for the research process to connect place, spirit, and body (See Meyer, 2008; Dei, 2008; Gonzales, 2012). As such, my identity as a danzante or mitotiani of Mexica Danza has allowed me to integrate ancestral ways of knowing in my interactions with research participants, some of whom were either danzantes themselves or part of the danza community.[54] This meant integrating non-linear understandings of time, space, and the body that are aligned to our ancestral ways of being in relation. For example, In Lak'Ech is a Mayan Indigenous concept that guided my Indigenous ways of knowing when relating to research participants.

The concept of In Lak'ech means I am you, and you are me. It is a powerful concept that reminds us of the importance of honoring each other, and of our unity and oneness. It is also an Indigenous concept that I yet have to fully grasp the depth of its meaning. In the Mexica Danza tradition, the concept of In Lak'Ech plays a vital role in how elders teach about how to be in relation with one another. Bay Area community elder Samuelin Martinez[55] (2013) teaches younger generations of healers like myself about how our Mexica culture understands the concept of In Lak' Ech: "We are taught the In lak Ech way of perceiving our humanity in context to all of creation and relations. We are taught to enter relations with respect and permission, with the responsibility of knowing the impact of our actions for the next seven generations" (p. 244). Embodying the concept of In Lak'ech in my research process means I am a mirror for research participants and vice versa. Thus, to work from a place that integrates In Lak'Ech is to shift the

[54] For a history of Danza Azteca in the Bay Area see Luna, 2011.

[55] I would like to especially thank elder Samuelin Martinez, whom I personally know and have participated in his prayer lodge or Temeskal for sharing his wisdom and work. For an in depth and personal account of Samuelin Martinez see his autobiography *AmeriCaCa- The Sounds of Silenced Survivors.*

fundamental relationship of the research process from one based on colonizing relations of power to one based upon ancestral ways of relating to one another.

By practicing In Lak'ech in our daily lives with one another we can truly bring about positivity and transformative change in our world. Embracing In Lak' Ech as part of centering Indigenous ways of knowing entailed walking with humility, respect, and integrity in all my relations. I practiced humility by approaching knowledge documentation as a learner and not the academic "expert" when relating to research participants and when attempting to understand their experiences. I embodied humility by grounding myself on the earth through meditation and rituals to release of any negative thinking and when the ego of the mind interfered with my ability to stay fully present and whole. Respect for the sacred, self, and each of my collaborators guided my interactions and ways of being. At the root of respect is self-love and as such, respect for me entailed coming from a place of loving compassion when speaking, relating, and working with individuals and the spaces I was a part of. By acknowledging and staying present with all the integral parts of who I am, I am able to walk with integrity and respect in All My Relations.

> *There can be a lot of healing from returning and accessing what is your origin. Indigenous knowledge is to hold to what your ancestors were doing. Deeper elements of our spirit, the plant medicine, eating slow food. Speaking to the indigenous wisdom that gives me reason for living. Makes me feel like I have a connection. I am connected to something more. Connected to our ancient foremothers. Knowing that herb and soil, the ocean, universal family is why I am alive. If it wasn't for this medicine and knowledge, there is not much keeping me here.*
>
> *Wanjiro Malyka*

Infusing Spirit(s) and Spirituality

Scholars have argued for the recognition and integration of spirit(s) and spirituality as a legitimate way of constructing knowledge and bringing our whole selves to knowledge production (see Dillard, 2008; Anzaldua, 2002; Sendejo, 2014). In her essay, "Methodologies of the Spirit: Reclaiming Our Lady of Guadalupe and Discovering Tonanzin Within and Beyond the Nepantla of Academia," Texas Chicana Brenda Sendejo (2014) contributes an insightful and powerful discussion of her own spiritual growth in her research methodology through what she defines as "methodologies of the spirit." Methodologies of the spirit recognize the ways in which "spiritual knowing- or knowledge about spirituality and spiritual experiences –can emerge from spiritual interconnections between researcher and participants" (p.100) and in this way the "researcher's own spiritual development, experiences, and trajectory help to inform the research being conducted" (pgs. 84-85). Drawing on Gloria Anzaldua's work, Sendejo describes her experience as one of a state of nepantla, particularly when navigating her own subjectivity for she is often "at once the researcher and the informant" (p. 86). By reclaiming her spiritual relationship to Guadalupe/Tonanzin, Sendejo demonstrates how research can be both infused with spirit and benefit from the spiritual in the process.

Facilitating space as sacred disrupts the dichotomy of the sacred and the secular that is so embedded in institutions of higher learning. Including an altar was one way I intentionally made space to honor spirit(s) in my work and to facilitate a reciprocal relationship between researcher, participants, and place. Embracing spirituality when sharing testimonios included setting up my altar to honor, give thanks, and ask permission to be in relationship with spirit. Moreover, as an Aztec Danzante the significance and symbolism of my altar is rooted in Mexica Indigenous tradition and lineage. The altar is a way to connect with our ancestors, the four directions and the

elements. Objects were placed in the altar to represent the four directions (east, west, north, and south) and four elements (earth, wind, water, fire). When possible copal was burned to mark the space as sacred and as medicine for emotional healing when needed. In some instances sharing our life experiences meant participants and I engaged in rituals that honored spirit and wholeness. For example, the African Indigenous ritual Wanjiro shared with me connected us as sisters in solidarity.

With humility and respect to the diverse spiritual traditions of each of the participants, centering spirit(s) and spirituality was not meant in any way to impose any religious or spiritual beliefs but rather help create a space in which we recognize and honor something greater than ourselves, while recognizing that this could mean different things to different people. Yet, the altar helps to foreground our interconnectedness and interrelatedness in all our relations. While most participants had familiarity with altars, some didn't. Acknowledging the altar then became an opportunity for dialogue and learning rather than a disregard for the sacred.

> *The morning begins with prayer. In my own garden, I am able to harvest rosemary and jasmine. Across from my home, I can harvest pepper tree leaves and lavender. For each plant ally, I make a tobacco offering and prayer. I carefully gather all the sacred items and medicine for decolonize academy. Today is special. I am building a dia de los muertos altar. I will be dedicating this particular altar to all my abuelitas/os. I bring music instruments for the youth to play when honoring the directions. But before heading out to decolonize academy, I make one last important stop. At the heart of fruitvale, I stop for some pan dulce, cinnamon and chocolate to make some hot chocolate en agua. Once at the site, with love and positive intention I begin with the task of getting everything ready for the altar. I set up water, candles, a conch, and copal; each representing an energy and the four directions. I lay out fresh flowers and all the sacred items. For each person I bring a candle to light up to bring in an ancestor or loved one. At the end, the altar feels alive with so much color and good energy. I make an offering of pan dulce and fruit for my ancestors.*
>
> *Fieldnote*

Listening with MindBodySpirit

To listen with mindbodyspirit is to remain fully present. During testimonios, this intention was honored in the ways that I remained attentive to the spoken and unspoken language that included moments of silence, laughter, tears and creation. During data collection and analysis, listening in mindbodyspirit meant integrating my emotions and reflections as part of the process to arrive at a more holistic approach to interacting with my participants instead of what conventional ethnographic research does which is to detach the researcher from it's intuition and emotions. Listening in mindbodyspirit necessitates one to fully emerge wholeheartedly when listening to participants share their stories. It has allowed me to feel the full range of emotions that surfaced as participants shared their challenges, joys, and sometimes deeply painful memories. Transnational feminist Leela Fernandes (2003) articulates active witnessing as a transformative approach to knowledge production for witnessing our research participants entails a sacred process that exposes us to the suffering of others and requires us to respond ethically in understanding their struggles.

With many of the participants there were deeply emotional moments in which tears could speak louder than words. In the process, I often found myself crying with my participants. The release of tears of pain and joy is a healing process. Affirming our humanity and embodying our interconnectedness as beings and our true nature is to be loving towards one another and show empathy. One participant, Carmen shares, "I have told my story many times already without crying and not sure why I am crying." Emotional tears are a response to physical or emotional

pain for we purge our bodies of stress-related chemicals when we cry. It makes us feel better because it restores our chemical balance. For participants and myself, it was healing to the mindbodyspirit to share intimate parts of who we are.

Listening with mindbodyspirit fostered an intimate connection between the healing and spiritual journey of many of the participants who shared their testimonios and my own. This was especially true in the stories of participants in search of bridging their activism, spirituality, and ancestral knowledges in promoting more holistic approaches to working with youth of color. Other times their testimonios incited new directions and insights in my own healing journey and how I came to understand and make sense of this work. Remaining open in mind, heart, and spirit made it possible to listen to the subtle and unsubtle ways in which I received these healing reflections and conocimientos.

Great Spirit
I ask for your guidance and wisdom
In remaining humble and receptive
To your healing powers
And all our relations

Praying for protection of
All our Indigenous and Womxn of Color
Healing warriors in our world
In the struggle
To Heal Mama Earth
Through Loving Acts of Resistance
Now and for future generations to come

Honoring and Celebrating
Healing Stories
Conocimientos que sanan el cuerpoespiritualma

May our healing prayers and activism
Always come from a place
That embodies and manifests:

Corazon,
Indigenous Way of knowing,
Spirit(s) and Spirituality,
And, Listening with mindbodyspirit

I offer these Healing Intentions
As my Prayer to Heal
Self, Community, and our World

Ometeotl

MICTLAMPA

Spirit of the North
Place of Rest
& Transformation

Calling in the Energies of
My Ancestors and Spirit World
Abuelitos y Abuelitas

Calling in the Element of Wind
Honoring Tezcatlipoca
Asking for clarity of thoughts
And humility
To share the guiding
Healing Conocimientos
Of my elders y spiritual warriors

I pray for our
Collective Healing
To be guided by the
Wisdom, Reflection, & Courage
Of our Ancestors

Ometeotl

Chapter 3

SJH(r)Evolunaries:
Testimonios of Decolonizing Healing Praxis

> You can't keep your soul open. All that compassion and empathy for what young people are going through, old people, and your family, and your loved ones because we go to the raw. And we feel it raw. That is how we can transform it into a *remedio* or a poem, or a canto, or a painting. *El floricanto* is what they call where the poets go. That is where the healers go. So with the butterfly medicine we can stay focused with the flower during turbulent times. We take on the beautiful colors of flowers because there is a correlation between healing and the visuals. When entering a healing relationship we need to close up. Started using cocoon medicine mother taught me. The blanket to close up when feeling too raw.
>
> ~Tata Tecolote

I met with community elder Tata Tecolote[56] in the comfort of his home's backyard, also the setting where he conducts community healing ceremonies. To begin, we settled in the coziness of the top level of his tree house. From this viewpoint, we were able to enjoy the sun's warm rays of light and appreciate a spectacular sunny autumn morning surrounded by hummingbirds and redwood trees. My altar was placed on the center table where sage was burned as I attentively listened to Tata Tecolote unfold his life journey. He is a powerful and gifted storyteller. During our time together, I got to experience a full range of emotions that deeply touched my heart and spirit. At times, his animation of stories and dichos brought moments of humor and laughter. This helped to lighten the heaviness that arose when remembering and retelling traumatic experiences. Tata Tecolote was born in 1950. During the Native American Urban Relocation program of the 1950's, his mother and his siblings were forced to relocate to Rainbow City's housing projects, where his family faced great adversity and discrimination within a context of the city's racial and economic segregation. These experiences fueled his motivation to become a community activist during Rainbow City's rich period of Chicano activism in the 60's and 70's. The rise of the Chicano Movement saw the beginning of organized and systemic activism not only to achieve civil and political rights, but also to serve as a process of individual and collective healing. Later, as a licensed clinical social worker he helped create a community mental health clinic, which he directed for nearly three decades.

Tata refers to himself as a "social justice healer offering a traditional healing praxis," and his traditional healing praxis emerged by interweaving his mother's teaching of traditional healing and Paulo Freire's (1970) theory of *pedagogy of the oppressed*. His leadership and multiple roles as a social justice activist, therapist, healer, writer, and traditional Aztec dancer[57] over the past three decades have made him a respected and legendary elder in his community. In addition to working in the capacity of mental health clinician for a youth organization, he offers

[56] All participants, organizations, and cities have been given pseudonyms.

[57] Danza Azteca or "Aztec Dancing" is a complex and ancient form of communications among the nations of central Mexico. It is a living, evolving, cultural tradition filled with the artistic, spiritual, and traditions of the Pre Columbian Aztecs that is practiced throughout Mexico and the U.S. (see Luna, 2011).

free monthly community Temazkal[58] at his home for educators, activists and Young People to receive traditional healing. It is at Tata Tecolote's monthly Temazkal that I was first introduced to his healing praxis. In the process, I encountered many community educators, who like Tata Tecolote, are deploying what I am calling a *decolonizing healing praxis* to nurture hope and a sense that change is possible in the hearts, spirits, and minds of YPOC and community at large. More recently, a critical body of literature seeks to foreground the revitalization of traditional ways of healing to encompass a more critical understanding of the ways in which integrating modalities that promote resilience, resurgence, and renewal of Indigenous healing can more holistically support the wellbeing of Indigenous and Peoples of Color (Norman et al., 2008; Million, 2013).

The opportunity to spend time at various community healing spaces connected me with an amazing network of youth allies and activists. I gathered and analyzed the t*estimonios* of individuals who, like Tata Tecolote, are actively involved in building a healing justice movement. As part of a vibrant healing justice movement—this coalition of people of color activists, educators, healers, and their allies are redefining healing to a more radical approach within a context of decolonization and self-determination. The community educators/practitioners/healers who participated in this healing project draw from a variation of healing modalities, which are part of diverse traditions. These healing tools and modalities have wisdom and power that make them effective with a broad range of YPOC. Community practitioners, like tata Tecolote, emphasize the importance of recognizing and respectfully introducing cultural healing modalities within a context of the community from which they come from. They recognize that Young People come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and family and community histories/herstories, which have their own healing modalities as well. Their approach to healing from trauma centers modalities that are decolonizing, some of which are old across generations and some which are contemporary modalities and others that are adapted from older Indigenous healing practices, tools, and knowledges.

As such, this work honors the creative capacity and constant drive to heal among educators in community settings. As a decolonizing healing project, this work aims to contribute to creating more holistic models of education that nurture individuals' innate resilience to nurture hope and collective healing. By shifting away from a predominant focus on stress and deficiency in relation to community educators' commitment to working with YPOC, this chapter brings together a diverse group of People of Color (POC) who are each in their own way helping to contribute to a larger healing justice movement. They are deploying healing and creative responses to the many challenges of working with YPOC during a historical moment confronted by the unprecedented challenges of globalization, global warming, and increasing global insecurity and state violence.

Based on the *testimonios* of 30 community educators and practitioners*,* this chapter explores their understanding of healing. As a methodological tool, *testimonios* provide great insights into the life experiences and reflexivity of these community educators. By explicitly making a commitment to restoring and renewing Young People's social well-being, as well as

[58] Temazkal is an ancient Indigenous purification sweat ceremony that is traditional to many but not all native peoples of the Americas. Entering the Temazkal is entering the earth's womb and the lava rocks embody the spirit of ancestors, the water poured over the rocks emits steam or the breath of the creator. For Medina (2014) "The process of sweating in the ceremony requires physical and emotional sacrifice. It is a process of letting go of one's fears, of working through material and temporal concerns. It is a process that requires trust, trust in one's creator, and trust in the ceremonial leader or water pourer" (p. 175).

their own, these community educators promote more holistic practices that are inclusive of Young People's body, mind, and spirit. From their *testimonios* emerges a decolonizing healing epistemology that calls upon all adult allies working with YPOC to embrace ways of being and teaching that honor and respect all our relations within a context of our lived realities and the greater web of life. I call this way of being or knowing which centers healing when engaging alternative pedagogies of possibility, a *decolonizing healing praxis (DHP)*. Embracing and embodying a *decolonizing healing praxs* entails a commitment to facilitate healing spaces that provide a context for YPOC to reconceptualize individual challenges as a politicized collective struggle, and through this process create a platform for both YPOC and educators to collectively engage in healing and transformative praxis. Working across their *testimonios*, it is clear that a shared healing vision and a strong commitment to our collective future unites them. They are community educators, activists, teachers, elders, mental health practitioners, healers, and grassroots organizers. I call them *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* or *SJH(r)Evolutionaries.*

Guided by the direction of the north, where the ancestors reside, this chapter draws on the testimonios of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries,* to explore how they generate collective knowledge and catalyse collective healing among YPOC in response to systemic oppression. First, I begin with a description of the research participants and methodology. As elaborated on chapter 2, my methodological approach deploys a decolonizing lens and epistemology that aims to engage alternative forms of knowledge that expand beyond dominant paradigms of thinking in mainstream educational research. I then proceed with a discussion of my use of the term *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* to describe the community educators that participate in this study. Finally, I elaborate on the conceptualization of healing that informs *SJH(r)Evolutionaries.*

Participants

SJH(r)Evolutionaries (n=30) represent a unique sample of practitioners taken from a population of local community educators, activists, teachers, healers, and mental health practitioners. Participants ranged between the ages of 26 to 65 in northern California. This geographical location is of special interest given that it serves as a dynamic location from which to examine the relationship between healing and social justice efforts among community educators and activists who have been working intentionally towards building healthy and safer communities. Especially in the past 25 years there has been a greater focus on mental health and healthy development in working with Young People Of Color (YPOC). This has provided a context for many of these practitioners to pursue alternative strategies in order to better serve YPOC. Participants were located via the networks of community educators and healers whom I engaged with as a practitioner who is also committed to healing justice. Additional practitioners were identified through snowball sampling via the various networks of community healers whom I encountered as an educator committed to embracing more holistic models of learning and teaching. Participants were selected because of their involvement in healing work and activism and prior existing relations in the community.

All participants identified as People of Color (POC) working with low-income YPOC and Communities of Color, majority were of Chican@ and Latin@ backgrounds[59] given the

[59] The term Latin@ includes people from many countries and cultural traditions that are very similar but also different in very important ways. The use of the arroba in "Latin@" and "Chican@" represents an attempt to countering gender binaries. Moreover, it is important to note that the majority of the Latin@ population in the U.S. comes from Mexico and Central America and have ancestral Indigenous cultural roots to this continent rooted in Indigenous or maiz-based culture and knowledge, which is hardly recognized in educational literature (see Batalla,

racial demographics in this community and given the long standing commitment to (re)claiming spiritual and healing modalities among Latinx practitioners. Out of the thirty participants: thirteen are parents; six were raised in a single parent home and two were foster youth; and two participants identify as queer. Half are men and half are women. Seven of the practitioners founded their own community based youth organizations and six of the practitioners are currently executive directors of their organizations. The remaining community educators can be classified in the following areas: twelve are community organizers/activists working for community-based organizations, six are healing activists working as independent consultants in schools and community spaces, and four are mental health counselors committed to collective community healing. All have either collaborated with and/or know at least one other practitioner from this sample; at least twelve work closely together through various collaborative projects and/or as part of youth coalitions. The Appendix includes a summary of all participants and some key characteristics.

Testimonios as Healing

The practice of *testimonio* has its roots in oral cultures and human rights struggles in the Americas (Menchu, 1984; Barrios de Chungara, 1978; Partnoy, 1986). For Chicanas and Latinas *testimonio* has been deployed to deeply and critically delve into their everyday struggles and builds solidarity among women of color (Moraga & Anzaldua, 2002; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). As methodology, *testimonio* involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal, political, spiritual, and intellectual understandings of self and community (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2012). It is a first-person account of one's life experiences with attention to the injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one's life (Aron, 1992, p.174). In this way, *testimonio* "produces knowledge based on subjective experience, not as empirical historical facts, but as strategy of cultural survival and resistance" (Ibid). It differs from autobiography in that it engages the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experiences within a context of their particular socio-political realities. It provides new approaches to understanding and addressing the struggles of Communities Of Color within our collective histories of oppression.

As I elaborated in chapter two, a decolonizing healing methodology (DHM) guided my process of collecting and sharing testimonios as healing and four healing intentions were present: 1) Addressing the Heart of the Matter; 2) Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 3) Embracing Spirit and Spirituality, and 4) Listening in Bodymindspirit. As such, conducting testimonios as healing included setting up my altar to make space for the sacred. The significance and symbolism of the altar is rooted in my Indigenous spirituality as Mexica danzante. As such, objects representing the four directions (east, west, north, and south) and four elements (earth, wind, water, fire) were placed in the altar. When possible I smudged myself and invited the participants to also smudge with sage to cleanse our energies before sharing our *testimonios*, to mark the occasion as sacred, and ask for permission from ancestors to proceed with respect. Permission was asked of each participant to ensure that they were ok with such procedures. After

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1996 for discussion on maiz-based culture and knowledge of Mexico). It is important to note that while many Chican@s acknowledge the multiple strands of their Indigenous or mixed-race ancestries, many have also become detribalized Indigenous peoples given the historical and political context of (neo)colonialism. This means that while many Chican@s know they have Indigenous genealogies and practices they may not have a direct generational link to a specific tribal identity or land base, while others do. For related and additional perspectives on these matters, see, for example: Avila, 1992; Luna, 2011; Gonzalez, 2012.

this initial ritual of ceremony, I (re)introduced myself in a more intimate way by sharing my testimonio and then participants were asked to share their *testimonio.* In the exchange of our t*estimonios*, both participant and ethnographer give and receive. In sharing my own *testimonio,* as *testimonialista,* I was both a researcher and participant in the process. To bring our gathering to closure*,* I also shared food to nourish my participants and as a way to show my gratitude.

Data Analysis

For many of the participants, the methodology of *testimonio* provided a familiar entry point. In addition, supplemental questions regarding their thoughts on healing, generational trauma and spirituality were included to fully capture the practitioners' perspectives and histories. *Testimonios* were gathered in person and took place in fall of 2014 and spring of 2015. Duration of the process ranged between 2 to 4 hours. They were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder and later transcribed. Information that could identify the individuals was removed from transcripts, and pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the research participants. *Testimonio* material was coded based upon thematic content related to their understandings of healing and social justice work. Data collected was analyzed for patterns, themes, and ideas that emerge from *testimonios*. *Testimonios* were coded for two purposes: 1) To explore participants' experiences in the areas of education, healing, and social justice organizing with YPOC, and 2) To construct to the extent possible, first person narratives that capture counter-stories of their healing experiences and how these impact their capacity to engage in collective social justice efforts with YPOC. *Testimonio* coded themes focused on the following areas: the terms used to conceptualize and make meaning of healing, hope, and collective agency and how these processes may foster individual and collective healing from trauma for both adults and youth.

My work validates and is inclusive of *inward knowledges* (Kovach, 2009) as part of my knowledge construction, analysis, and reflective processes as researcher. The methods of engaging these knowledges included fasts, ceremonies, dreams, connecting with the land, silence retreats in my own processes, spiritual initiations with sacred medicines, downloads from trips to my homeland to connect with ancestral land memory, and spiritual guidance from teachers. All these experiences and conocimientos were part of the unspoken ways in which energy and memory imprinted in the body also informed my thinking, way of relating, and engaging with my healing project from beginning to end. In addition to maintaining detailed field notes, I also journaled and in this way made space to write and process my emotions, intuitions, and reflections on the research process. By embracing Indigenous methods of deep reflection and ritual in my own processes within the research process, I documented and incorporated how centering spirituality and healing can lead to different insights, relationships, and methods in educational research and praxis.

Defining *SocialJusticeHealing(r)Evolutionaries*[60]

[60] In crafting the final version of the term SJH(r)Evolutionaries for this healing project, I would like to make a special acknowledgement to my good friend and academic peer Alejandro Garcia, whom we worked for long hours supporting each other to complete our dissertations. In solidarity, we shared our thinking and helped process some of our analysis in the final stages of our writing. In one of these many working sessions, I was sharing my conceptualization of this term and how I was struggling with various possible versions that included *SJH practitioners*, *SJH visionaries*, and *SJH revolutionaries,* yet I felt that neither term gave the full justice I was looking for in my conceptualization of this term. Alex then suggested the term (r)evolutionary as an alternative and thus, I came to coin the term *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*. Thus, as part of decolonizing my methodology and writing process, I

The intentional spelling of the term SocialJusticeHealing(r)Evolutionaries, or *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* for short, denotes the multi-layered approach and complexity that this term is meant to articulate. The position of healing in the middle of the words social justice and (r)Evolutionaries is to foreground how this work is centered on healing. Beginning with social justice is key for it distinguishes this healing work from mainstream conceptualizations of healing that relegate it solely to the fate of the individual without any acknowledgment of how systems of oppression impact our healing processes. The use of (r)Evolutionaries is an amalgamation of the words "revolutionary" and "evolutionary."[61] Throughout our herstories and histories of resistance, there have been many revolutionary leaders –individuals who have dedicated their life purpose to the collective liberation of oppressed peoples.

Revolution in the traditional sense is activism that seeks radical change in the form of dismantling systems of oppression. In the 60's and 70's revolutionary movements were about decolonization and self-determination. These revolutionary movements manifested in arm struggles that took place throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa. In the U.S.A. settler colonial context, these global revolutionary movements of resistance also inspired radical resistant and anti-colonial movements and activism that shaped Black, Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Chicano power resistance. This political activism aligned itself with the global resistance against the colonial forces of colonization, imperialism, and capitalism. By challenging and working to dismantle systems of oppression, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are revolutionaries in the traditional sense in that they too seek to eradicate the root causes of oppression, which create the need for individual and collective healing in the first place. In this context, the spelling of (r)Evolutionaries with r in brackets and lowercase is to honor how their healing activism takes place within a context and legacy of more than 500 years of global revolutionary resistance of oppressed peoples but also aims to distinguish that revolution in our times is also revolutionizing our understanding of what revolution entails.

As such, the integration of the spelling (r)Evolutionaries with a capital "E" places emphasis on how as agents of change they are expanding their revolutionary work to also seek transformative radical change that is weaved with wisdom. In other words, their healing activism simultaneously works toward achieving radical revolutionary systemic change and the transformative inner work of decolonizing and healing to evolve to a higher consciousness. Within a context of global warming and increasing global displacement, exploitation, and continual genocide of oppressed peoples, this emphasis on evolving to our higher self is especially critical to the survival of all life on pachamama. Without shifting the individual and collective consciousness of humanity to a higher vibration of love, balance, harmony, and reciprocity then we continue to reproduce and enable a capitalist culture of destruction, greed, and death. In this way, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* dare to plant seeds of resistance laced with imagination and wisdom focused on collective healing, restoring bodymindspirit wholeness, and building from a place of love an inclusive vision of our world with YPOC.

Redefining Healing to meet their lived realities

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forefront the collaborative nature of my work and appreciate and give thanks to all the kind souls that helped illuminate and push my thinking in this work.

[61] I want to make a critical distinction that evolution in this work is referred to as a powerful idea rather than evolution as a science. As such, my discussion of evolutionaries is situated within a context that challenges the limitations of a scientific understanding of evolution that is gene-centered and which dominantes in mainstream public discourse. Evolution as an idea, as understood in this work, is about addressing existential questions that lead us to becoming our highest possible self, individually and collectively.

> At some point I realized we are all walking wounded, and some of us more than others, and if we look at the systems in place it's not hard to understand why we are so injured. If we can look at the impacts of racism, oppression, poverty, access to power and decision-making, and wellness it's not hard to figure out why we are wounded and why we hurt each other and why we hurt ourselves.
>
> Citlalli, Mental Health Practitioner

By embodying a willingness to be vulnerable and commit to their own healing process, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* in this study are redefining mainstream understandings of healing in order to meet their lived realities and that of the YPOC they work *with. SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are able to connect with their heart energy and from this place cultivate a healing consciousness that is about healing and radical transformation from within. As their testimonios highlight, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries'* conceptualization of healing is rooted in a deeper understanding that brings complexity and meaning to engaging in collective healing work with other adults and with YPOC within a context of community. It includes strategies, processes, and structures through which community educators and YPOC integrate healing into their social justice lens and act within it. This form of healing is happening at/in multiple sites and contexts –schools, community-based organizations, homes, block parties, rallies, etc.—with a diverse body of participants involved in promoting cultural, spiritual, and political agency. In this way, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* work within a framework of healing that engenders both a shared ownership of knowledge and commitment to the collective healing of Communities of Color.

The fundamental pillars of understanding healing that emerged across the *testimonios* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* challenge mainstream conceptualizations of healing that dominate in the social sciences. For one, their healing approach is epistemologically grounded in a more holistic understanding of healing that is inclusive of the sacred and does not separate our bodymindspirit connection. In addition, for the majority of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*, their understanding of healing is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and relating. Moreover, by addressing how our individual and collective healing processes are bound to larger issues of social injustice, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are politicizing healing. Their understanding of healing foregrounds a collective response in order to help facilitate healing *with* YPOC. Their healing and activism become vehicles to help open the hearts of YPOC and adult allies to the intrinsic power of collective healing. Lastly, the *decolonizing healing praxis* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* decenters settler colonial ways of being and acting on our world by restoring the centrality of healing and spirituality in struggles of decolonization and decolonizing ourselves.

Individual and Collective Healing Processes are Intertwined

SJH(r)Evolutionaries share an understanding that individual and collective healing processes are not mutually exclusive, but rather intertwined. For *SJH(r)Evolutionaries,* these processes are intertwined given the ways colonization has disrupted and uprooted us from our traditional healing ways of being in relation with all life on earth. Thus, an understanding of healing as a collective process goes counter to mainstream understandings of healing that predominate in mental health and public discourse, which place sole emphasis on the healing of individuals while ignoring its overlap with the collective dimension of healing. In particular, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are acutely aware and mindful of the ways in which oppressed individuals

can end up assuming oppressor roles given the ways in which collective trauma can distort our thinking and ways of being in relation with one another.

While it is true that no one else can do our inner work for us, it is also true that we don't have to do this work in isolation. Indeed, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* highlight how a key part of our individual and collective healing processes entails embracing a willingness to be vulnerable when bringing our pain out of isolation. When individuals are given the opportunity to focus on the collective healing of their bodymindspirit then the collective consciousness shifts. Sharing our lived experiences with oppression gives us a specific set of insights that when shared with others helps to lighten our pains and burdens. In this way, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* work to help foster and facilitate healing spaces for both adults and YPOC to be able to do this collective healing work. These geographies of healing resistance are multifaceted and facilitated by deploying a diverse range of healing modalities not limited to healing circles, the arts, prayer, and access to ancestral healing modalities for bodymindspirit wellbeing. Undeniably, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* recognize that the individual and collective work we do on our bodies, minds, and spirits ripples out into the world in more ways than we can imagine. To illustrate the power of the conceptualization of healing by *SJH(r)Evolutionaries,* I will now highlight the healing testimonio of Xochitl and the voices of Luz, Pedro, and Jae.

A Prayer for Collective Healing Answered

Xochitl is a dedicated mother-activist-community organizer of Native Mesoamerican and Spanish heritage. She is a native of the Bay Area and was raised by hard working immigrants who migrated from their place of origin in Mexico and El Salvador. She was fortunate enough to grow up with a large extended family and part of her upbringing entailed visiting family in El Salvador and Mexico. She describes growing up working-middle class because both of her parents managed to get a college education and eventually her father continued working his family's business. However, she grew up in a very religious Catholic household and the rigidity of growing up in a strict religious household pushed her to live a double life during her teenage years for she did not have the trust to confide in her parents a lot of the questioning and struggles she was facing in her social and developmental growth as a young person in the city. This would result in her teenage years being some of the most challenging and painful years during her upbringing. Sadly, by the age of 17 years old she had experienced being raped twice and having had two abortions—all in silence. This woundedness would eventually lead to more unhealthy intimate relationship in which she would experience further physical and sexual violence from future partners and close friends.

Fortunately, her college years would be a time of great personal and intellectual growth in which she became highly politicized through Xicanismo and Environmental Justice. Despite struggling being labeled a "poor" student during high school, she would go on to receive her BS in Conservation & Resource Studies with an emphasis on Environmental Racism from a top public university. The opportunity to become politically conscious, her own personal experiences of gender violence, and exposure to ceremony would eventually propel her on a path of self-healing and finding her life purpose and spiritual awakening. Through her relationship to *los niños*, peyote, and sweatlodge she would have deeply spiritual awakenings and through these ancestral healing medicines she would put out her prayers to the universe to help her find her path.

Her prayer would be answered at a very critical juncture in her life journey. After more than a decade working for a community based environmental organization, she had reached a

point in her life in which the community work she loved had left her exhausted. Coupled with experiencing a painful traumatic experience giving birth to her daughter in the hands of the medical industrial complex further propelled her with a new sense of seeking deeper healing. Through prayer in her spiritual community she would receive clear visions and connections that would eventually lead her to her vision of providing collective healing in the form of free traditional, non-industrial healing to some of the most vulnerable communities in northern California. This was no easy task but with lots of prayer, dedication, and the collective effort from healers who volunteered their services for free, Xochitl was able to lead in the collective effort of organizing various community healing clinics providing physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional healing for YPOC and gender specific groups. Since 2013, these collective healing clinics have been able to serve thousands of community members who have received much needed non-traditional collective healing. Xochitl states,

> We do it all collectively, it's intentional to create collective and vicarious healing so yes we all have a need to go in there ourselves por lo que nos trae it's also we have to reclaim the experience. We have experienced so much trauma collectively we also have to experience healing collectively and be able to receive vicarious healing just like we receive vicarious trauma from what we witness.

As such, there is an intentional commitment to help increase collective access to traditional and holistic healing modalities for communities most impacted by oppression. Xochitl especially placed emphasis on how their approach to this healing work is what makes the difference between whether it's individualistic or collective. She states,

> It's open to everyone, it's free, we represent as many cultural lineages as we can and it's a collective healing space. It's our prayers at the beginning and the end, an opening and closing circle. We have an orientation to each clinic and we talk and pray about this vision and we name that explicitly. So we are also doing a level of consciousness raising through that in talking about who we are here to serve and why we organize the way we do, what our intention and vision is.

In 2015, Xochilt helped organize their first collective healing clinic targeting YPOC from all genders. Young people were provided individual services in a collective space that included but were not limited to trauma counseling, energy cleanses, somatic bodywork, nutritional counseling, and teen-issues support in a gentle and holistic approach. At this clinic, I was able to witness Xochitl's tireless and dynamic leadership skills as she managed to help keep all aspects of this collective effort running smooth and also conducted welcome introductions to each of the groups of young people being served. In a loving manner and with great patience she addressed each group of about 15 young people by first making them feel welcomed and explaining how this healing clinic was a labor of love made possible because of the collective community efforts of many individuals who are invested in helping young people heal. She goes on to speak about the importance of understanding healing beyond just physical healing:

> One time I was hit by a truck as I was walking down the street. I was physically injured but I was not only physically injured. Like if someone punches you in the face you are not just dealing with a swollen cheek you are also dealing with the shock and that shock

> has an energy and roots itself in your body in different ways. And we don't always know that so even if we have a physical injury from a sport there is always an emotional part of it that we are not prompt to think about. So these are the kinds of things we want to prepare young people for so we can feel good and have the clarity to be present for whatever you want to be present for in your life. For your school, for your family, for your parents, for your home, for your studies, for your sweetheart, for whatever it is that is important for you so you can have good relationships with people and be clean of that.

In her *testimonio,* Xochitl further reflects how recruiting YPOC for this healing clinic was more challenging than for the adult clinics given the barriers young people may face in terms of transportation, obtaining parent permission, and embodying a willingness to access these services. In fact, this was one of their lowest attending clinics but she emphasized the importance of continuing to do this collective work with young people:

> It's also a very critical formative time and so it feels really important to me that we support them. I also feel like there is a fork on the road. That some of them are going to be like fuck it all and some young people can muster the strength to be I am not going to let xyz let me down, or they may numb out which its not what we want. We need everybody on the side of consciousness. On the side of radical love right now. On the side of making positive change in the world. We don't want people in this neutral zone or the status quo place. It felt really important to support young people at the developmental stage and influence where and how they will envision themselves in relation to their own healing and health going forward into adulthood. If we can offer this kind of experience to young people now that will make them feel good, safe, validated. Most of the practitioners in our network are also Black and Brown, they reflect the populations we are targeting.

By modeling a commitment to providing collective community healing to YPOC, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are redefining the work of healing to expand beyond the individualistic approaches that dominate in the medical and social sciences. More importantly, by providing spaces for YPOC to learn about and experience culturally-based and traditional healing, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are raising consciousness around the importance of emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental wellbeing and thus helping to break the taboo around accessing mental health and healing that may be true for many YPOC.

For Luz, who is also a healing practitioner who donates her time at the collective healing clinics, healing is about "holding space" and "transforming ourselves." Luz is a healer, medium/channeler and ceremonialist of Filipina and Indigenous Bontoc and Ibaloi lineage. She is trained in several healing modalities including sound healing, art and color, and crystal/gemstone therapy. Moreover, in 2007, she began studying plant medicine in the *curanderismo*[62] tradition. Her background working with YPOC has focused on youth organizing, immigrant rights, and ecological justice. Luz reflects,

[62]*Curanderismo* is a healing art that comes from ancient Mesoamerica and is steeped in ancient spiritual practice that integrates the use of herbs, rituals, religion, and spirituality to treat physical, spiritual, and emotional illnesses (see Avila and Parker, 2000)..

> Healing is just really holding space and having that intention around transforming ourselves from within in order to transform the planet […] A big part of the healing process is forms of release. Whether it is crying, screaming, or writing down whatever you need to release. And we don't do enough of that as men or women together in public and together in private. We have privatized a lot of our healing, we have to do it on our own all the time and we are asked to do it on our own. We don't hold space for people.

Luz is critical of the ways in which healing is privatized and treated as an endeavor that is the sole responsibility of the individual without any regard to our interconnectedness with each other and the greater web of life. Healing in this way is aligned with an individualistic and consumerist way of being that often packages healing in the form of "self-help" individual remedies marketed in the form of books, workshops, retreats, and trainings promising personal growth and "development" but which also come with a price tag often accessible to only a small group of privileged individuals who can afford it. This is not to minimize the importance of our individual work and how accessing these healing modalities and tools to empower ourselves can be a positive medium of our healing processes for some. However, it is critical to also recognize the ways in which these teachings can be co-opted under a neo-liberal framework when this work is relegated solely as an individual endeavor without any acknowledgement of systems of oppression and how these impact individual and collective agency. For Luz, like other *SJH(r)Evolutionaries,* community healing expands beyond these individualistic approaches and instead encompasses our interconnectedness and need to heal collectively.

Similarly, for Pedro, healing "is acknowledging pain but also acknowledging that you have pain like others have pain and not being afraid to say that." Raised in Chula Vista, California, Pedro spent much of his youth going back and forth between his home in Chula Vista and Tijuana, Mexico. He is a multi-faceted community educator who is a well known published poet, performance artist, playwright, and spoken word artist. He is the co-founder of a community-based organization dedicated to creating spaces for young people to speak their truth through poetry and spoken word. In his current position, he manages a mentorship program for Latino boys focusing on providing academic, mentoring, and cultivating their spiritual and cultural wellbeing to help nurture each students' full potential. The opportunity to facilitate healing circles with Young People has also allowed him a space to process his own pain and more intimately connect with young people. He shared, "I couldn't get enough circles, I wanted more because this was healing to me. The more I broke down in front of kids the more they opened up and trusted me." As such, the process of collective healing entails a willingness to move beyond our fears and comfort zone in order to be able to share our vulnerability. To this point, Pedro stated,

> Telling your pain to another person out loud and their being witnesses in the *circulo* to hear, that might give you that one step over the hill where now you feel more confident about who you are because you have begun the process of healing. You are no longer grieving so much because you're now moving towards 'I am not afraid to talk about it.'

It is important to consider what is at stake when attempting to heal or seek healing for others; *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* place emphasis on how the work of healing extends beyond just the individual. Otherwise, we risk reproducing relations of domination that sustain the very systems of oppression we attempt to eradicate. It is then that healing can function as a mobilizing strategy

towards social and political action in our world, one that focuses on finding solutions to self and collective empowerment based on culturally appropriate and local forms of action.

For Jae, a mental health practitioner of Korean descent, doing our individual healing and the larger collective healing work is key to resisting systemic oppression and violence while creating and building sustainable alternatives with YPOC. For the past more than five years, he has been working in the capacity of Trauma and Healing Program Manager at a community-based youth center serving low-income YPOC. He especially highlights how he feels very grateful to be part of an organization that prioritizes a healing theory of change that works to simultaneously facilitate individual and collective healing spaces *with* YPOC. He reflects:

> We don't shy away from individual healing work, we do the individual healing work cuz that's what we are in charge to do. Part of that is recognizing if we just do the individual interpersonal healing work and don't do the larger collective healing work-acknowledgement of the impacts and the legacy of slavery, if we don't talk about that what we are really doing is putting a tiny Band-Aid on a small leak on a boat that is sinking.

As such, Jae like other *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* believe centering the lived experiences of YPOC is central to our collective liberation. In fact, Jae articulates how one of the guiding principles informing the healing praxis of his organization's work environment is leading *with love* to intentionally resist oppression interpersonally, organizationally, and within the larger community. Thus, part of their healing centered approach is aimed at holding and cultivating a beloved community that meets YPOC where they are and supports them in where they want and need to go, and works to build a collective vision of mental health wellbeing. By resisting the dominant narratives that prioritize individual over collective healing or vice versa, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are creating alternative ways of being that affirm our existence beyond binary or dualistic ways of thinking. He shares,

> Grounding our interpersonal healing within a context of community and recognizing healing needs to happen in all of those levels. Yes, we have individual trauma that we need to heal from; individual work that we need to do and also collective. There is work that is not being done and we have to have a conversation about that so its not that one is more important than other but that really it needs to happen at the same time.

By modeling healthy ways of being in relation and holding their pain collectively, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* co-create alternative ways of healing and being that go beyond the superficial consumerist and rugged individualism mainstream media and culture attempts to impose on YPOC. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* challenge normative discourses that dictate individuals must or can only heal in isolation. For *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* individual and healing processes are intertwined and interrelated.

Conclusion

> I'm not saying that healing is the secret to changing structural racism, structural bias, but I am saying that this type of healing can create a more balanced person and if that is possible then it's possible for someone who is totally traumatized to achieve whatever it

> is that they want to achieve, and that is potential and that's possibility and that's hope and that's what a lot of our kids don't have, it's what a lot of our teachers don't have.
>
> Pedro, Community Educator

While the challenges of working to achieve healing justice in historically marginalized Communities of Color have not become any lighter, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are able to carry this weight with less *carga* on their shoulders. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* in this healing project illuminate an alternative way. Their *testimonios* reveal they have overcome great adversity themselves and through their own processes of self-transformation and healing they have gained great insights into how to promote a diverse range of healing modalities with YPOC. Their individual and collective *decolonizing healing praxis* moves us away from deficit thinking and strengthens our capacity to move towards self-determination. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* bear witness to the power of healing, and as such their healing activism is rooted in anti-racism, anti-oppression, and anti-colonialism work. Their *decolonizing healing praxis* works to dismantle colonial relations of power and to empower YPOC in their healing processes.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries' hybrid approach to centering healing in their lives and praxis helps to cultivate what poet, essayist, and historian Aurora Levins Morales (1998) calls a "politics of integrity, of being whole: A political practice that sacrifices neither the global nor the local, ignores neither the institutional power structures nor their most personal impact on the lives of individual people. That integrates what oppression keeps fracturing. That restores connections, not only in the future we dream of, but right here in the glory, tumultuous, hopeful, messy, and inconsistent present" (p.5). With a great sense of purpose and respect, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are revitalizing healing cultural traditions and building *with* YPOC a collective vision for the future that foregrounds our spiritual and emotional wellbeing in all our relations. The special focus on YPOC is a common theme across social justice movements (Clay, 2012) given the commitment to protect and guide future generations. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* place a special emphasis on reaching out and working with YPOC for they wholeheartedly believe YPOC are key to a healthier present and future.

Table 1: Understanding of Healing

Understanding of Healing	
Mind, body, spirit Comes in many forms Relational Happens at various levels: individual, family, and community Collective process, Grounded in decolonial thinking	
Attributes of Healing: Mutually inclusive process Deeply Reflective Inward process of finding self On-going Non-linear Intergenerational Transformative Interdependence Interconnectedness Inclusive of spirit & culture	**Outcomes of Healing:** Hope Happiness Forgiveness Greater sense of purpose Restores the whole person Feeling less "carga" Emotional & Spiritual well-being Raising Healing Consciousness Greater sense of Agency Healthy outlets of release

Table 2 below provides a brief description of the various kinds of healing modalities that these practitioners deploy under what I am calling a *decolonizing healing praxis.*

Healing Approach	Setting	Target Group & Duration	Key Practices & Healing Modalities
Healing Centered Organizing	• Youth Organizations • After-School Programs	• Target: High School Youth of Color from their local communities • Duration: drop-in, year-long programming, academic school year	• Healing Circles • Youth Organizing • Mindfulness • Spiritual & Cultural Healing • Art: Murals • Community Gardens • Youth Culture
Mental Health & Spiritual Well-Being	• One-to-one sessions • Youth Organizations • Community Health Centers	• Target: Middle School & High School Youth of Color & Families • Duration: individual session(s), on-going monthly events	• One-to-one counseling • Healing Circles • Meditation • Sound Therapy • Mindfulness • Yoga • Theatre of the oppressed • Nature
Youth Development & Healthy WellBeing	• Schools • After school programs • Youth Organizations	• Target: Middle School & High School Youth of Color & Families • Duration: individual session(s), on-going monthly events	• Academic support • Mentoring • Healing Circles • Joven Noble Curriculum
Ancestral & Alternative Healing Modalities	• One-to-one sessions • Community Spaces	• Target: Children, Youth, and Families • Duration: individual session(s), multiple series of workshops, academic school year, on-going community events	• Curanderismo • Drumming • Danza Azteca • Crystal/gemstone therapy • Traditional Indigenous Healing Rituals • Ceremony • Drumming • Temazcal (sweat lodge)

Summary of Participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Ethnicity/Race	Position	College Graduate
Alfonso	32	Male	Mexican	Program Director	Yes, B.A
Aurora	26	Female	Chicana	Community Organizer	Yes, B.A.
Cathy	36	Female	Chinese American	Executive Director	Yes, B.A.
Emiliano	41	Male	Native American/Peruvian & Columbian descent	Executive Director	Yes, B.A., M.D
Jesus	62	Male	Indigenous Chicano	Healer Activist	Yes
Luz	34	Female	Filipina	Healer Activist	Yes, B.A
Manuel	27	Male	Native American/Chicano	Community Organizer	No
Miguel	36	Male	Indigenous Chicano of Mayo/Yaqui roots	Program Director	No
Olin	33	Male	Chicano	Healer Activist	Yes, B.A.
Pedro	42	Male	Latino	Program Manager & Healer Activist	Yes, B.A. M.D.
Raul	26	Male	Chicano	Community Organizer	No
Salvador	40	Male	Chicano	Executive Director	No
Tata Tecolote	65	Male	Chicano	Mental Health Counselor	Yes, B.A., LCSW
Tlaloc	31	Male	Meztiz@ of Mapuche & Spanish descent	Healer Activist	Yes, B.A., M.D
Tonatiuh	64	Male	Chicano	Mental Health Counselor	Yes, B.A., LCSW
Xochitl	39	Female	Salvadorian	Community Organizer	Yes, B.A.

Chapter 4

SJH(r)Evolutionaries:
Towards Decolonizing Healing Conocimientos[63]

> Healing is healing. It's being picked up. Where do we find common ground? Maybe just in the principles, in finding rituals that are relevant to the particular group that you work with at that particular geographical location because without that element it wouldn't be that relevant.
>
> Tonatiuh, mental health practitioner[64]

Immediately upon entering the building, it smells of pine and lemon combined with a dry sweet woody aroma. Inhaling the aroma gives me an instant calming effect; one much needed after a stressful and hectic traffic ride getting here. My senses let me know that it's a familiar scent and one that I know all too well. It's copal[65]. Following the trail of scent, I let it guide me to my final destination. As I enter the space the smell of burning copal lingers inside the room and I can appreciate the white cloud of smoke making its way up to the ceiling. The room is set up with a large circular table and at the center of the table one can appreciate a colorful arrangement of healthy snacks. Meditative music is playing in the background. I am greeted with a warm smile and a firm handshake from the facilitator Jacinto, an experienced community mental health educator. Slowly folks begin to trickle in. Jacinto sits at the end of the table and in a calm demeanor observes as folks settle in and make their way to the circle.

The session begins with personal check-in. Going around the circle, one by one each person has the opportunity to share some of the challenges and/or cargas they face, both in their personal and professional lives. One practitioner shares how given the high need for crisis youth counselors he is now working 60+ hours a week juggling two jobs serving victims of gun violence. In a soft-spoken voice, he shared how his commute between jobs and the disheartening cases that he deals with on a daily basis are taking a toll on his health and family life. Across their stories, the recurring theme of feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by the high demands of working in historically marginalized communities is an ongoing struggle as they strive to maintain a healthy balance between work and their personal lives. As a way to channel the heaviness in the room, Jacinto transitions the group to the parking lot, where we engage in a set of theater of the oppressed activities to help relax the body. For about 40 minutes, participants are preoccupied moving their bodies and energies via a range of diverse techniques. Extended moments of silence are suddenly interrupted with bursts of laughter as some of us awkwardly struggle to make some of the movements. It is apparent from their level of comfort working with each other that this group of folks has a shared level of trust and genuine care for one another.

After a playful and engaging session with our bodies, we then make our way back into the circle. Today is their last official session together. Jacinto opens up the circle for individuals to share any last reflections on their experiences as participants in the Healing the Healers Project.

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[63] I want to express my appreciation and gratitude to my advisor Patricia Baquedano Lopez and my company@s in our Research Group, taught at the University of California, Berkeley in the Fall 2014, the Graduate Fellows at the Institute for the Study of Social Change, the ISSC program advisors, Deborah Dusting, David Minkus, and Christine Trost for their invaluable critical feedback on earlier versions of this chapter.

[64] All places and names are pseudonyms.

[65] Copal is tree resin that is burned for ceremonial and other purposes. Copal is still used by a number of Indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America as incense during sweat lodge ceremonies and danza ceremonies.

Each participant takes a turn sharing his or her reflections and take-ways. I am deeply touched by the level of rawness and wisdom that is shared in the room. Yolanda, an elementary teacher, shares how the space has been critical for her "feeling more grounded." She shares how she struggled getting through a rough year and their meeting sessions provided a space in her life "to be present" when there is "no such space at work for that." Another educator, Alvaro shared how he "enjoyed the process" of being able to gather with an experienced facilitator and how "giving us that space is itself a process of healing." Folks expressed their sadness that this is their final meeting, yet are making plans to continue meeting as a community of comrades to support each other. As I look around the room, I can appreciate a shift in people's facial expressions and body language. Folks seem lighter than how they first arrived.

The collective healing work conducted by community educators who are intentional about supporting healing spaces to empower themselves, share strategies, and tools to support and sustain their work is increasingly gaining momentum among social justice movements (Lee, 2014; Ginwright, 2016). The above cohort is composed of community educators, teachers, activists, organizers and mental health practitioners. These healing circles have been meeting twice a month as part of a six-month pilot program designed to foster a collective healing space to support practitioners working with Young People of Color (YPOC). With the support of experienced mental health practitioners, these healing sessions are intended to provide participants with tools for their own healing and stress-reduction, as well as providing them with strategies to better support poor and low-income YPOC. The use of ritual and hands-on-practices ranging from ritual energy cleanses to libations are some of the ways in which facilitators have been intentional about integrating spiritual healing. Through this process participants collectively engaged in an exploration of self and worked to understand and develop their spiritual selves as part of healing themselves and being able work *with* YPOC in this manner. Unlike Western therapeutic approaches to healing that mostly entail getting rid of symptoms that are present because of trauma, these community educators collectively worked to name and unpack the root causes of their collective trauma and revitalized their strength, courage, and commitment to center healing in their praxis.

These collective spaces for practitioners to come together to share/release their "cargas" and access a variety of healing tools to strengthen their inner and outer work are key. The healing praxis deployed by the facilitators helps practitioners to achieve and maintain wellbeing and healing for themselves and community. Through my engagements as a researcher in these healing spaces I was able to deepen my understanding of what informs these practitioners' understanding of a *decolonizing healing praxis.* By participating in these kinds of collective healing spaces, practitioners are able to draw from a variety of modalities and tools to strengthen their *decolonial healing conocimientos.* As subversive knowledges, *decolonizing healing conocimientos* serve as a platform for *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* to tackle systems of oppression and support collective healing by weaving inner and outer strategies. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries' decolonial healing conocimientos* highlight the insights that come from their own personal healing journeys and commitment to seek healing grounding as part of their social justice work. Bearing witness to the great pain of YPOC and their families, and among their community activist circles has meant their commitment to justice is healing activism. By embracing the power of healing, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are working to help heal the collective trauma and soul wounding that undermines effective social change movements.

The *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* who participated in this healing project represent a very diverse group of individuals, each with a rich and unique life story to share. However, reading across their *testimonios* also reveals their similarities, the intersections and points of juncture that unfold as they reflect on their trajectories of struggle, healing, and commitment to doing social justice work *with* YPOC. The findings from these *testimonios* suggest that community educators in this study strive to create community healing practices to support young people in their individual and collective processes of healing with the goal of cultivating their resilience, hope, and capacity to see themselves as agents of change. From their testimonios, I identity four *decolonizing healing conocimientos*[66] that informs their healing epistemology. I understand *decolonizing healing conocimientos* as subversive knowledges that disrupt the healing *desconocimientos* (Anzaldua, 2009) that dominate in mainstream social sciences. More intentionally, *decolonizing healing conocimientos* center healing at the core of our work with YPOC and foregrounds an understanding of healing that is inclusive of bodymindspirit and is situated within a broader context of colonialism, power, and systems of oppression.

In particular, four *decolonizing healing conocimientos* emerged across all their *testimonios* in terms of what informs their ways of being, knowledge, and praxis:

1) Healing Addresses Root Causes of Trauma
2) Healing is A Way of Life
3) Healing is rooted in culture and spirituality
4) Healing Sustains Larger Project of Decolonization.

These four *decolonizing healing conocimientos* are not mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent. Furthermore, at times some of these *conocimientos* bleed into each other, or overlap, given that the lines that distinguish them get blurred given their complexity and interrelatedness. This is not an exhaustive list outlining their healing praxis nor interpreted in any chronological order. I identify these four *decolonizing healing conocimientos* to highlight some of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries'* key epistemological understanding of healing work *with* YPOC. As a whole, *decolonizing healing conocimientos* highlight how the spiritual and personal growth *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are experiencing is exponential. Through their commitment to life, to love, and growth *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are healing themselves and simultaneously working to heal past generations and the next seven generations. What follows is a brief description of each *decolonizing healing conocimiento* and then highlight a few examples to help illustrate each *conocimiento*. To conclude, I discuss the implications of these principles in helping to inform a *decolonizing healing praxis* in education.

Decolonizing Healing Conocimiento #1: Healing Addresses the Root Causes of Trauma

> Today the vast majority of things that hurt people are a result of generational trauma, industrialization, capitalism, and militarization, including police terror and colonization. We have the social justice movement, some of the sectors, for example, housing: Why don't people have housing? Because the housing speculation market prioritizes their

[66] As I elaborate in my testimonio, my understanding and use of *conocimientos* is inspired and builds on Gloria Anzaldua's (2009) conceptualization of *conocimientos*, which she understood as "a form of spiritual inquiry /activism, reached via creative acts-writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism-both mental and somatic" (p.542).

> bottom line over people having somewhere to live with kids and grandmas. Environmental justice: Polluting industry for insane global markets; people getting cancer and respiratory illnesses; going through refinery explosions and power plant leaks; domestic workers in the labor movement: people being overworked, undercompensated, poor and dangerous conditions, being treated like a number like a machine. All those things. The movement for Black Lives, the immigrant rights movement. Why do we have a social justice movement? Because of all this hurt and harm, that is both historical and present, is happening to people.
>
> Xochitl, Community Organizer

The first *decolonizing healing conocimiento* entails an understanding that healing addresses the root causes of collective trauma. For *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* this requires a critical understanding of what YPOC are healing from which does not ignore the socio-economic political context that creates the need for healing in the first place. It engages a critical dialogue around issues of racial, gender and economic justice within a context of histories of colonization and white supremacy. For Latinx communities, this also means addressing issues of language and immigration justice. In other words, a key step towards healing requires the recognition of systemic oppression and how this creates stress, rage, pain, and hurt in YPOC's bodymindspirit. In turn, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are empathic and understanding of how relations of domination impact YPOC's feelings, thinking, actions, and their interactions with each other. Additionally, coming from similar socioeconomic backgrounds as the YPOC they work with *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* experienced and have overcome great adversity and intentionally draw from their personal *testimonios* to help contextualize the lives of YPOC. Bearing witness to their own pain and struggles provides *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* with insightful strategies in being able to cultivate a healing praxis that addresses the whole individual. Moreover, their understanding of healing is not from a place of trauma rather healing is rooted in an understanding and acknowledgement of trauma, specifically historical and generational trauma. Healing happens working through our traumas.

From this critical stance, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are able to critically unpack punitive and discriminatory policies experienced in the form of police brutality, unjust immigration deportations that separate families, mass incarceration and zero tolerance policies in schools without placing blame on YPOC and their families. There is a common understanding among *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* that these systemic and institutional structures are especially repressive to poor YPOC who are given few opportunities to experience healing spaces that acknowledges the persistent on-going violence and trauma they are subjected to on a daily basis. For some, as the *testimonios* of Tonatiuh, Emiliano, and Raul demonstrate, their personal experiences as former youth impacted by the juvenile prison system has provided them a deeper understanding of psychic and emotional pain YPOC who have been impacted by the prison system carry and internalize. In this way, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* deploy holistic interventions that get to the root and complexity of issues affecting young people and communities of color.

Elder Tonatiuh: Healing from the legacies of Historical Intergenerational Trauma

Elder Tonatiuh draws from many years as a practitioner interweaving mental health and ancestral healing to inform his understanding of *what* Communities of Color are healing from and *why* the need to center healing in his praxis. The opportunity to meet with this very special and respected elder fills my heart with great excitement and anticipation as I make my way to

pick him up from Bart. As I drive us to our final destination, he shares with me of his latest trip he made to Asia with his daughter to deepen his Buddhist practice. Once at our location, we enjoy breakfast and small talk before settling down for what will be a delightful and healing experience. To begin, he opens up by playing his Indigenous flute to ground us in a deeply spiritual way. After burning some sage, he then begins to unfold his story. In a soft-spoken voice, he begins reflecting on his upbringing and experiences as a teen growing up in the 60's. He spoke of the systemic oppression he experienced being raised in the projects and by a single mother working long hours to provide for her children. The lack of resources and support system to cope with the multiple forms of oppression he lived in left him with few alternatives outside a punitive juvenile system that criminalized him and added further injury. By the age of 13, he was spending most of his time detained and in solitary confinement. These were some of the most painful years of his youth.

Later, inspired by the Civil Rights movement in the late 60's, he became politically radicalized as a young Chicano activist. Yet, given entrenched systems of oppression working against him meant that his new political consciousness did not change his material reality. Moreover, the internalization of negative messages he had received about not being "smart" meant he had only reached a fourth grade education. However, after becoming a parent of two children and chronically unemployed, at the age of 27, he gained the courage to pursue his education. Beating the odds, he worked tirelessly to obtain his GED in six months, a bachelor's degree in three years, and eventually his LCSW degree, which focused on Yaqui ancestral community healing. Today, he is a dynamic elder who draws wisdom from his multiple roles as an artist, musician, practicing Buddhist and traditional Indigenous ancestral healer, and a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW). For the past 17 years he has worked intentionally with children, youth, and families in the capacity of school-based and community-based therapist. In his current position he is a Team Supervisor responsible for clinical and administrative supervision of therapists, case managers, and nurses who provide mental health services to children, adolescents and adults.

Informed by these profound lived experiences, he eloquently articulates and contextualizes how as marginalized communities of color, "We are healing from a legacy of historical oppression, of discrimination. We have to heal from this so we are not embedding that in our own behavior with our own children or people who may be different." Tonatiuh speaks of the legacies of historical trauma that are deeply embedded in some of the destructive behavior individuals may project towards one another, their children and themselves. He further adds,

> Maybe healing begins by raising consciousness, maybe the more we can raise that in our lives and the displays that we project, maybe that's a starting point because we can't really change anybody or heal anybody but we do create an influence that can show a path for that.

With this deep understanding and drawing from his experience doing healing work with young people and their families, he further emphasizes the importance of healing relations. He states, "in any healing relationship it's not the theoretical approach of a practice or years of experience it's actually what you bring into the relationship." Thus, his healing approach is based on the value that "it's the relationship that is healing." In this way, he remains hopeful about the ways in which generational trauma can be healed when one takes the time to deeply reflect and be intentional about the kinds of blessings and "cargas" we pass on to the next seven generations.

Similarly, Emiliano draws from his personal experience to promote healing as critical to addressing urban violence and understanding its impact on young people and communities of color. He is the co-founder and executive director of a community based organization dedicated to restorative youth justice that empowers youth and Communities of Color as change agents and is rooted in Indigenous traditional healing. Like elder Tonatiuh, Emiliano was raised by a single mother in the housing projects of a poor inner city. Growing up, he experienced much adversity in the form of racial and economic inequality, as well as domestic violence in his home. The last memory of his father, as a very young boy, was being forced to call the cops on him because of domestic violence. This unresolved pain and the lack of positive male role models in his life eventually led him on a downward spiral that resulted in him facing a long-term prison sentence. At a critical turning point in his life, he received a second opportunity and instead was able to get off on probation. This provided him the opportunity to pursue his education at community college. These were formative years in his personal growth and self-transformation. At community college, Ethnic Studies provided a platform to become a community organizer and his activism on campus led to gaining a foundation as a community organizer grounded in cultural and spiritual healing in the Native American tradition. Emiliano went on to obtain his bachelor of science and a masters degree from a top tier university. Access to higher education nurtured his critical political consciousness and provided an analytical framework to challenge and deconstruct normative paradigms that are oppressive to young people and communities of color.

His own personal hardships as a youth have provided him with a deep understanding that has been critical to being able to contextualize the lives of the youth whom he works with today. Reflecting on his own suffering as a youth, he shared:

> I rebelled against a system that I perceived seemed inherently adverse to me but I ended up doing it in ways that were self-destructive which is a lot of what these young boys and men of color do. Initially it became a way for me to feel a sense of power when you feel powerless in a society where there is such prevalent racism and structural inequalities, such as race, class, gender and so many other things.

Indeed, the *testimonios* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* reveal how they are able to lead resilient lives that are informed by overcoming great adversity and a commitment to see communities thrive. They work towards healing the legacies of colonial oppression and foster transformation from within. By deploying healing strategies that give meaning and purpose in their lives, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* bring attention to the root causes of trauma and the need to create spaces of healing that are inclusive of students' emotional and spiritual wellbeing. To this point, Emiliano shared,

> Our young people are carrying trauma into the school and we are asking them to take time to learn, to pay attention and to regurgitate because of this banking system. But we don't create any space for them to heal, to be able to let go, transform, and be able to move beyond trauma.

As Emiliano elaborated, adult allies working with young people must recognize the trauma they are carrying and the processes that facilitate moving beyond trauma. For Emiliano these healing spaces are critical for young people being able to "let go, transform" and not remain in trauma.

Like Jorge, a policy and strategy analyst and co-founder of a collective that advocates for a health equity-centered approach to justice-based systems argues for a critical understanding of the root causes of oppression impacting young people of color. He recounts how some of his early political organizing skills resulted from spending more than seven years in prison as a young person: "I got locked up and in there I learned a lot of political theory. Coming home I got to do this for the people, I have to make it." Not surprisingly, Jorge has been an active member in his community working toward cultivating opportunities to implement innovative and unprecedented partnership between a variety of system stakeholders, including law enforcement and the county board of supervisors with the aim of developing meaningful alternatives to youth incarceration. For Jorge, this work is critical given the ways:

> Social historical trauma, estrangement and detachment from your land, you're your customs, from a place of hurt, *susto*, from the rape and genocide. More importantly when you break it down, you have to look at it physically, look at it emotionally, mentally and spiritually at what damage has been done. For most folks it's going to be hard to talk about it because you have to pinpoint on what.

Jorge's critical understanding of how colonization has impacted communities of color at a physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental level brings attention to the ways in which for Native Americans and other Communities of Color, trauma is not experienced simply as an isolated event. For Indigenous communities, the concept of historical trauma acknowledges the collective unresolved grief resulting from the violence of colonization and how on-going present day policies that colonize, exploit, and dehumanize Indigenous Peoples continue to scar this open wound (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Duran & Duran, 1995). This understanding of historical trauma is necessary in order to integrate healing practices that aim to heal this unresolved grief from a place of love and commitment to teaching in ways that restore our wholeness and affirms the humanity of young people. Without this understanding the symptoms of oppression are confused for root causes and this shifts the blame on individuals rather than on systems of oppression. Thus the concept of soul wound (Duran, 2016) is important to decolonizing work because it more accurately explains the root cause of historical and present day social injustices and forms of settler colonial violence. In doing so, systemic oppression and interpersonal violence is best understood within a framework that examines the long-term effects of colonialism.

As these practitioners point out, without processes or spaces to heal the trauma that results from more than 500 years of colonization and on-going institutional oppression, young people are left with few alternatives to cope with the pain and rage that runs deep in their bones and blood. Too many of our young people end up stuck in a vicious cycle of violence; not knowing how to channel the pain and rage that consumes their spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Rather than focusing only on the symptoms of trauma young people manifest, community educators focus on understanding the whole person within the sociopolitical context of their lived reality. Moreover, by drawing on ancestral knowledge and cultural healing, they work towards healing the legacies of colonial oppression and foster transformation from within. By deploying healing strategies that give meaning and purpose in their lives, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* bring to the forefront to the root causes of trauma and the need to create spaces of healing that are inclusive of students' mental, physical, emotional and

spiritual wellbeing to better equip them to respond to the systemic oppression experienced on a daily basis by Communities of Color.

Decolonizing Healing Conocimiento #2: Healing as a way of life

> When we talk about healing, I don't think it's something that happens and then you heal. I think it's willing to maintain a healthy relationship to good and bad, to dark to light, morning, night, all those things. Happiness, sadness, woman, man, that it doesn't happen in one or the other it happens in between and can you maintain that way, or will you get frustrated when everything doesn't go your way. Can you balance yourself and that's such a hard thing to do.
>
> Pedro, Community Educator

The second *decolonizing healing conocimiento* is an understanding of healing as a way of life. In other words, healing work begins with self and is a lifelong journey. For *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*, self-healing is a critical intervention in their own transformation and ability to engage in this work with young people from a place of decolonial love. They are deeply aware how systems of oppression can impact young people and their adult peers on an emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual level. Healing self is also political because we live in a settler colonial nation that instills self-hate from the moment we are in our mother's womb and throughout our lives. As such, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* engage alternative healing modalities that help them cope and counter the violence and imposition of neoliberalism. Practicing self-healing is an essential part of their emotional, spiritual, and mental wellbeing and growth. They are able to utilize their gained inside wisdom to live as awakened individuals that are aware of the matrix of oppression, but are not defined by it.

Overwhelmingly, there is a tendency for YPOC to frown upon or dismiss the topics of therapy and mental wellbeing given the taboos associated with accessing these services. Consequently, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are acutely aware that working with historically marginalized youth and communities of color requires intentional doses of self-care and self-love for social justice work can constantly trigger or expose you to dark feelings that if unaddressed can do further damage to self and others. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* share a commitment to maintaining an on-going process of self-healing in their lives and a willingness to be vulnerable in facing their fears, pain, and/or loss has been key in being able to move forward with "less *carga"* (baggage). By modeling self-healing *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are shifting the discourse of underestimating the need for doing our inner work to one in which it is understood that working within a context of systemic oppression requires an ongoing commitment to practicing restoring our wholeness as adults.

As the *testimonios* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* suggest, self-healing allows one to let go and release what no longer serves you well. It nurtures an ability to experience a greater sense of freedom, tranquility, harmony, and balance in one's life. As the *testimonios* of Rosa and Ollin will demonstrate, by explicitly positioning the self as political, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* connect their personal struggles with the collective struggles of the communities they are a part of and with whom they work.

Rosa: A Teacher's Journey from Survival to Thriving

Rosa is a dynamic mother, educator, mentor teacher, and wellness coach. Informed by a critical feminist stance, she grounds her work in a deep commitment to social justice that honors her lived experience as a Black multiethnic woman of working class background. Moreover, enriched by her professional experiences of more than 12 years working with low-income high school young people of color as classroom teacher and student advisor, she made an intentional choice to transfer this wisdom and learning to her new role as teacher facilitator and trainer. In fact, I first encountered Rosa in her capacity as teacher when she opened up the doors to her 9th grade English classroom for me to recruit students for a college pipeline afterschool program I directed prior to becoming a graduate student. After more than two years trying to connect with her for this healing project and more than a decade after our first encounter, I would once again come across a charismatic, bold, brilliant, and resilient spirit. This time, however, the classroom was not our terrain. In her new role as a full time mother of a charming eleven-month-old baby our meeting destination was a family friendly park. Surrounded by trees, I laid out my altar and meal while her baby slept in her baby stroller and we sat on the grass to begin research as ceremony. In more ways than we imagined, our own personal healing journey would bring us full circle when we realized we both had worked with some of the same healers both in our community and in Mexico. Moreover, our healing work around decolonizing our wombs as mothers would deeply connect us as we both shared our birth stories as part of our *testimonios.*

In her capacity as trainer, she has been able to bring together her multiple talents to facilitate healing circles, workshops, and lectures by infusing teaching and learning with a deep commitment to social justice and earth-based healing. Speaking from her heart energy she openly shares how her commitment to healing self shifted her teaching and life trajectory. Along with her three siblings, Rosa faced many hardships and painful experiences growing up poor and as orphans. Despite the great odds, she had the strength to pursue higher education and attended a Jesuit college with a social justice focus. These were some of the hardest years in her life for she remembers living off a hotel while going to college and struggling to help her sister who was struggling with drug use and being bi-polar. While not easy, for her own wellbeing she was forced to leave her siblings and life in LA and relocated to pursue her own calling and life purpose. Indeed, addressing her wounded inner child was not always easy but it was a critical step in her ability to walk carrying less trauma in her life. This commitment to healing self was especially important in relation to her teaching and ability to have healing relationships with her students. She reflects:

> Being able to go back and reclaim my story and understand and integrate my own memories, my own feelings, my own experiences as a youth then allowed me to have this gift of working with young people. There was a natural affinity or connection to youth in our schools but I couldn't really access it without doing my healing work and that made me a really good person to talk about healing with other teachers.

She further reflects how her first years teaching in high needs communities were emotionally draining and extremely challenging. Her first year she was teaching special education at a continuation school and the emotional toll it took on her brought her to a very low-point in her life. Teaching was triggering childhood memories she had repressed and suicidal thoughts were haunting her and bringing unbearable emotional and psychic pain. Her internal voice was crying out for help and this is when she made the decision to seek therapy in her second year of teaching. She recounts:

> For the first part of my journey my healing work was really just my healing work. I was doing it for me. It was my survival. I loved teaching and didn't want to give it up but I couldn't do it without the healing work because without the healing work I felt I was going crazy. It wouldn't be sustainable. I was trying to hold on to my sanity. As soon as I started therapy immediately my teaching practice changed. The more that I healed myself, the more available I was for my students. It started to make such a huge difference with what I was able to do with young people versus the people around me.

Addressing her own wounded inner child through a commitment to therapy not only helped her teaching pedagogy but also freed up her energy to continue deepening her own awareness of the collective need to integrate healing in our work as educators. Eventually, this motivated her to pursue a master degree in psychology with a focus on spirituality. This would take her on a journey of deep spiritual healing for it provided her a space to focus on her own healing with the support of Indigenous elders. In a circle with elders, she was able to process the deep-seated ancestral grief that came up, as a woman of African-descent, from not having had access to elders to teach her these teachings. This would also lead her to immersing herself in the teachings of *curanderismo* and grounding herself in earth-based spiritual healing. Eventually, all this internal work began to pay off for she was able to experience immense release of all the trauma she had lived throughout her life and in this way make space to experience a great sense of joy and empowerment. She reflects:

> I was feeling really good about my life and I was feeling happy, empowered, and I was feeling all these things I hadn't truly embodied ever. For someone like me, a survival of all these things, I remember very distinctively the day I woke up and said, "oh, I am happy, I am a good person" when all of that finally sunk in and their was finally lightness, breath, I remember clearly, exactly the day when I was no longer carrying this burden, the weight of the world on me. I was no longer in survival mode. Moving from surviving to thriving.

BodyMindSpirit Healing

Born in El Paso, Texas, and of Indigenous/Mexican American ancestry**,** Olin is a multi-talented healing artist who dedicates his life to bringing about transformative change rooted in universal Indigenous earth-based practices, mind-body-spirit harmony, and playful joy. He weaves holistic empowerment, permaculture activism, mindfulness-based education, Danza Azteca, and traditional music when mentoring community organizers and young leaders. Over the years, he has learned to listen to the wisdom that comes from his body and has developed a discipline around self-care and self-healing. He integrates yoga and meditation practice as essential components of his ability to replenish his energies and create sustainability in his life. In addition, being raised in the border and in close proximity to the Chihuahua desert, he speaks of the desert plants and the coyotes as some of his first teachers. He integrates the use of traditional Indigenous medicine such as Temazkal[67] and ceremony in his own self-healing: "the

[67] Temazkal is an ancient Indigenous purification sweat ceremony that is traditional to many but not all native peoples of the Americas. Entering the Temazkal is entering the earth's womb and the lava rocks embody the spirit of ancestors, the water poured over the rocks emits steam or the breath of creator. For Medina (2014) "The process of sweating in the ceremony requires physical and emotional sacrifice. It is a process of letting go of one's fears, of

sacred medicines help me clean up." He interweaves his self-healing practices intentionally when activating the creative powers within youth for collective healing:

> I let my body cleanse, go to the sauna, do massages, my yoga, things that are fun, and that *reposo* (resting) time, that quiet time so that everything integrates. I do that and I teach it to the youth too. I sneak it in. We do the martial arts, some capoeira, yoga, danza moves, some breathing and cleanse our lungs and our brains, and then lay down. I play some music, some flute, drums, rattles, and the Atecocolli (conch shell) and I tell them things, and I guide them […] so they release traumas, and then we fill them up with confidence and love and light of the sun, of the music.

As Olin highlights, being attuned to our bodies and utilizing our creative energies to heal our bodies is an important aspect of maintaining wellness and sustainability. While not all *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* possess the same level of rigor and discipline as Olin when it comes to their physical wellbeing, all understand the importance of somatic healing practices in their strategies with young people. For practitioners like Olin, his daily practices of self-healing are critical to being able to project authenticity in his interactions with young people:

> Before I work with the youth or anyone, I ensure I have done my practice that day, that I have given myself that moment to touch my heart, feel my heart, and be grounded so that when I go into that space with the youth I can be myself, I can be authentic, and come from my heart. That helps to create a condition, an environment for me to be real. For me, the body practices help me access the deeper layers.

For Olin, reconnecting with his heart energy is one way he is able to get grounded in his practice and thus be able to model and offer young people confidence and love. Indeed, by engaging the powers of the heart these practitioners are able to tap into their emotional intelligence, their intuition, and the power of love to best model a compassionate model of working with urban youth of color.

However, as *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* have emphasized in their *testimonios* accessing the deeper layers of one's self healing to release traumas and the stories that no longer serve us entails a process of turning inward that is not always easy. It takes courage and inner strength to dig deep within ourselves to heal wounds that may have resulted from childhood and experiences with structural inequalities and systemic oppression over one's life trajectory. In the case of Emiliano, the Temazkal or sweat lodge became a sacred medicine that helped facilitate the deeper layers of his self-healing:

> I began to dig deeper into my own pain from my childhood and just let it out […] I would be in sweat lodge, I would be just bawling, just letting it out. You know we have a lot of negative male socialization that we have internalized and even if we know it is not to be true it is hard to shift. One of the things they tell us is to man up; don't cry. During those years I had a lot of healing to do and still do to this day; I'll share my tears very openly. I am a pretty sensitive guy and that is who I am innately but I had to suppress all those tears during my adolescent years as part of my mask, part of my protection. But what

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working through material and temporal concerns. It is a process that requires trust, trust in one's creator, and trust in the ceremonial leader or water pourer" (p. 175).

> happened is that pain became anger, that anger became rage, and that rage became violence. Those were some of the most violent years in my life because of all those years that I repressed my tears.

Tears that pour from our soul provide cleansing and opportunity to release. In her book *Chicana Without Apology,* Chicana feminist Eden Torres (2003) reminds us that we can learn to heal by making "good use of our pain, memory, and rage" and here lies "the potential for strong and lasting alliances in various political struggles [to] become a reality" (p.46). Moreover, she argues that due to the wounds of conquest we also carry the legacy of our ancestor's suffering in our body and spirit and that these wounds continue to physically manifest themselves in the present day. This historical *susto* or "soul loss" continues to wound the lives of people who have a history of colonization (Duran, 2006). In this way, Torres (2003) contends that crying can cleanse, provide release, and help heal the hurt for we no longer hold the grief in our conscious thought. However, as Emiliano reflected, we are often socialized not to cry and to treat the act of crying as a sign of weakness. Yet the act of crying humanizes us and can help us to heal the embodiment of our pain and suffering.

As Torres (2003) argues, the release of tears is critical to our individual and collective healing especially given the ways colonialism has disrupted our relational ways of being and saturated us with self-hate. The release of our inner waters allows us to makes space to be able to plant other kinds of seeds in our own consciousness—a new way of being, a new idea, belief system, or sense of self which enables us to move past our pains and to evolve as individuals who are part of the greater web of life. Thus, crying tears is part of healing and decolonizing ourselves. To this point, Jorge shares:

> Healing is right next to decolonizing, that's how I talk about my work […] when you let those grandmothers talk to you. That water comes from you. Those tears came out. Little by little that cortisol that fucked you up goes away and allows for all the abundance to come that's how you heal […] It takes you to a really dark space. Like you have to go there. You have to face that trauma, like when you do the middle passage, you have to face the smoking mirror: Tezcatlipoca. If you don't face that shit you will never know how great life can be. If you have not really faced your fears you haven't really acknowledged your beauty.

In facing our fears, we must have the courage to believe that we are not broken or inadequate but rather whole and worthy. We must be brave enough to not believe the many layers of shame and guilt have been imposed by western dominant culture.

This is the "radical revolutionary healing" that Rosa speaks about or what she understands as "healing that restores and empowers people versus pacifying them" for it gives us the courage to stand up against injustice in our world. She states:

> For teachers I think there is a big push on self-care right now, which is good, but still coming from a white perspective. Everyone wants to do yoga and meditation, which is fine there is nothing wrong with these things. But not going to the core, the heart, you are still avoiding yourself, still hiding from the truth. How do you bring in healing that restores and empowers people versus pacifying them. We are not saying feel good so you can still be oppressed so it's this radical revolutionary healing. And that's contentious.

Rosa brings up a very important critique of the ways in which the term self-care has become very trendy among some educators and the general public. This culture of self-care is further co-opted by a neo-liberal agenda of individualism in which we are constantly bombarded with numerous offers to buy "services" that cater to pampering our individual needs and pleasure. And as Rosa affirms, there is nothing wrong with accessing these techniques to bring positive and affirming energy into our lives. However, self-care defined only in terms of "feeling good" is limiting to ongoing struggles of social injustice for Communities of Color. Hence, it is important to also talk about self-care in relation to oppression, trauma, and social justice. As such, self-care and self-love become essential tools in our toolbox to help us be strong in bodymindspirit. This work is especially critical given that a mind, body, spirit, and soul overburdened by stress and trauma will turn action into inaction and burnout. By releasing emotional and psychic toxicity, these practitioners are able to use this free up energy to sustain themselves in building the kind of world they envision.

As the testimonios of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* affirm the work of healing self is a way of life and life-long journey. There are no magic formulas, blueprint, or healing methodology that will guarantee a particular outcome or result. As we grow on our healing journey, so does our ability to serve our greater purpose, to serve with love, and to serve with compassion. It allows us to relearn ways of being and interacting with one another based on our interconnectedness and potential for transformation. As these practitioners work to heal themselves, they are able to release unhealthy patterns in their lives. In doing so, these practitioners are able to tap into their inner strength as a source of power and act from a place of vitality and empowerment. As Audre Lorde says it best, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." In nurturing their highest self, these practitioners fuel their courage to transcend hopelessness, internalized oppression, and cynicism.

***Decolonizing Healing Conocimiento* #3: Healing is a rooted in culture and spirituality**

The third *decolonizing healing conocimiento* is an understanding that healing is rooted in culture and spirituality.[68] *SJH(r)Evolutionaries'* understanding of the spiritual is anchored on the acknowledgement of spirit(s), or what can be understood for some as the common life force within and between all beings or that part of the individual that has to do with finding meaning and purpose. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are intentional about being inclusive of spirit when facilitating community spaces for collective healing. By embracing the power of spirituality that traditionally has healed communities of color, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* integrate ritual and ceremony rooted in community understandings of spiritual well being (see, e.g. Anzaldua, 2002; Facio & Lara, 2014; Roman, 2012). Ritual, ceremony, and prayer are tools used by *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* to access our awareness of our interdependence and help aid the process of individual and collective healing work with YPOC.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries are drawing from communities' diverse cultural and spiritual understandings of wellbeing and share a commitment to harness the power of cultural and spiritual healing that already exists within Communities of Color. Moreover, despite systematic attempts to misinterpret, distort, and in many instances suppress non-western forms of cultural

[68] In the context of this healing project, it is important to note that spirituality and organized religion are understood as two distinct concepts. Thus, one can be religious without necessarily being spiritual and one can be spiritual without being religious. For some individuals there is no separation between the two but rather their spirituality is interconnected with their religious beliefs.

and spiritual traditions, these alternative ways of being and knowing continue to be embraced and practiced to varying degrees in struggles for liberation of Peoples of Color. For most *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* their spirituality is rooted in Indigenous earth based traditions and these play an important role in facilitating the power of culture and spirituality to harness and strengthen grassroots organizing and (re)store our connectedness to *pachamama.*

For Luz, acknowledgement of spirit has been central to deepening her praxis both with YPOC and families. By integrating her background as a multi-disciplinary storyteller, designer, and art maker directly with her social justice work, practitioners like Luz are inclusive of the spiritual –or systems of beliefs, whether institutional or not. For Luz, acknowledgment of spirit in our work entails:

> Allowing spirit to hold the space, for spirit to be there, to be the connecting thread […] acknowledgement of spirit, creator, the earth, nature, the elements, our ancestors whatever you want to call it or see it […] that has to be there first, that is the foundation of it all, there has to also be a level of the intention and folks having an understanding of what it means to go through a transformative process.

Luz, like other *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*, understand spirituality as inseparable from questions of social justice:

> Complete transformation is not just going to happen with what we have been doing, it's not just going to happen through policies and education. We have to completely transform and that means our spirit, our spirits within, our spirits within the collective, our ancestors, and seek that from within.

While for Luz, acknowledging spirit in her practice may come in the form of conducting energy work such a *limpia* (cleanse) or doing crystal work on an individual, other *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* may manifest their spirituality by creating sacred space in the form of altars to honor ancestors and the four directions when conducting healing circles with young people, participating in Temazkal, and/or other rites of passage and healing spiritual traditions.

Particularly in the Bay Area, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are able to access a rich network of community healers and elders who are offering spiritual healing and guidance by drawing on a variety of traditional healing practices and ceremonies. Many are leading sweat lodges, conducting ceremonies with other sacred medicines, and are being intentional about sharing these teachings with YPOC and community activists.[69] They are interweaving what many call a "traditional healing praxis" into their activism to disrupt secular modes of thinking and being in social justice struggles. For Salvador, having access to these sacred healing spaces rooted in spirituality is key for his mental health and wellbeing:

> Only time I can actually sit and just for a moment breath again it's when I sit in the sacred circle. It allows me time to just get out of my head and get more into my spirit, it is the way we now do everything, it is the way I live my life.

[69] There is a growing body of literature that addresses the ways spiritual practices (such as sweat lodge) are being integrated in the care of Aboriginal peoples in Canada in psychiatrics and medicine (Waldram, 1998). Critical to also underscore that any one form of Indigenous healing and spirituality is not shared by all members of any given community.

In particular, given the proximity to healers in Mexico and other parts of Latin America, the Bay Area has been a mecca for traditional spiritual healing to flourish. Indeed, many *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* speak of the prophecy of the eagle and the condor uniting or what many understand as the unification of all Indigenous peoples from the north and south in solidarity to do the collective work of evolving to a higher vibration –one based on love, harmony, balance, and restoring our connection to the *pachamama*. This prophecy speaks of the potential of arriving at a new level of consciousness for humanity. In her journey to accessing spiritual and traditional healing medicine, Xochitl reflects:

> I just started to really feel the absence and the need for our cultural traditional ways of taking care of ourselves. I can't just have that only when I go to the sweat lodge or when I go to a peyote meeting. What are the things that we did everyday, how did we live in this way…I just started paying attention to that and connecting with people who knew.

Moreover, when working to organize traditional community collective healing clinics, the role of spirit takes precedence over all other ways of being. For Xochitl the sacred is political and our collective healing entails (re)centering ancestral ways of knowing:

> Our framework is both political and sacred. We take our guidance from the spiritual and natural set of laws and regulations and not the legal framework. And prayer is part of our work. We make things happen through our prayers. We have a sweat lodge or Tobacco prayer.

Xochitl offers her insights on the importance of offering collective community healing that challenges the capitalist ways of thinking that attempt to commodify our ancestrals ways of healing:

> Another political aspect is trying to discommodify the sacred. This is why we invite practitioners to come and offer their services for free. Not only for the people that don't have to pay for it but for themselves and for the integrity of the lineages that their healing modalities come from none which come from a tradition of charging people.

Thus, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* call for deeper healing of our spirit through the acknowledgment of spirituality. Reclamation of ceremonies is powerful spiritual healing medicine. Portman and Garrett (2006) note that Native American healing traditions must be taken in context to their relationship of the four constructs which include: spirituality, community, environment, and self. One of the functions of ceremonial practice through the group is to reaffirm one's sense of connection with that which is sacred. In the traditional Native way, medicine can consist of physical remedies such as herbs, teas, or poultices to treat physical sickness, but medicine "is also the very essence of a person's inner being: it is that which gives a person his or her inner power" (p. 460). In particular, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* share a spiritual vision that teaches intergenerational responsibility and connectedness with *pachamama*. For Xochitl, spiritual healing in relation to the land was her impetus to leave more secular modes of social justice activism. She shares:

> I needed to transition because I had realized that in the movement we are not connecting people *a la tierra*. That actually having a relationship with the earth was hugely missing and there is no amount of political education about systems of oppression that replaces that; that substitutes that. And that our level at which we can support people at becoming empowered and taking back something for themselves was limited without that piece.

She further elaborates how closeness to the sacred medicines brought greater clarity and purpose in her trajectory as grassroots activist in her community:

> When my relationship with the medicine started developing it changed everything. It was just very clear that what I thought of as political values and spiritual values were the same values and that my work needed to be both. *No tiene chiste luchar por la gente mientras se le mete un clavo a la tierra*[70] or fighting for environmental protection at the expense of rights and needs of working class poor Black and Brown People of Color.

Thus, like other *SJH(r)Evolutionaries,* Xochitl is planting healing seeds of resistance that draw from the land. She articulates how their spiritual work is,

> Offering earth based and energy based healing and healing modalities that are rooted in culture. Those healing modalities came from land, the people, and the culture, and they have been doing it for thousands of years so they know what works and what doesn't work because they have been passing it down for generations.

Similarly, for Rose, her discussion of spiritual healing is situated with a context of colonization and trauma of earth and the importance of "coming home to the land." She powerfully articulates:

> Because we are all standing on 500 plus more years of colonization, the deep trauma of the earth and our people is all of our stories. It's just a matter of whether we are in touch with that or not whether we are able to pay attention to it. […] We can't ever fully heal if the earth is not healed. Silly to think of ourselves as separate beings, we have to come back to this land that we live on and that we are a part of. Coming home to ourselves and coming home to the land.

As such, for *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* spiritual healing happens in relation to the land. For example, the healing medicine of sweat lodge is about the reintegration into community practices that help heal trauma of both people and the land. As Duran (2006) reminds us, "when the earth is wounded, the people who are caretakers of the earth also are wounded at a very deep soul level" (p.121). Thus, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* engage in a process of mutual spiritual healing with the land.

Cultura is healing medicina

> Healing is when you are able to sit with elders, and you allow yourself to be taken on a journey, on a journey you can't quantify; you just know they just take you way up there

[70] Translation: There is no point in fighting for the people when we are penetrating mother earth with a nail.

> and you know they took you way up there and its healing when those grandmas they respond and then here come the tears, it's ok mijo it's ok mija now you know I'm on my journey but you need to sit with the Elders because they have the medicine and a message that you need. And if you don't mess with the elders what you are going to do is that you are going to sit in front of a laptop, sit in front of a book you will try to get it that way or will try to go to a training to get it but if you are not connected to the elders then you can't break the chain… It's not about making something new, it's about reconnecting it and allowing that continuum to be fluid.
>
> Jorge, Community Activist and Educator

For *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* culture is a source of strength and renewal. Through culture we learn values, our sense of self, history, and our worldviews (Cajete, 2000; Bonfil, 1996). Our cultures also provide us with a sense of community, a home, and a sense of collective identity (Grande, 2004). Taking pride and (re)claiming cultural ancestral wisdom is essential in arming YPOC with the tools necessary to resist internalized oppression. A positive and affirming cultural identity for YPOC is key given how prominent negative stereotypes in mainstream social media are harming their self-esteem and sense of worth. Consequently, *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries* provide collective spaces for YPOC to participate in ritual, art work, music, and other kinds of healing modalities that provide them with a different narrative; one that celebrates our cultural richness, sense of joy, pride, and deeper meaning of our interconnectedness and relational ways of knowing.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries are intentional in deploying culture as healing especially given the colonizing gaze of Western consumer culture. In our conversations of culture, it is important to understand the relationship between power and culture given that culture does not function in a social vacuum. There is a capitalist logic that supports the various forms of dominant and subordinate power relations that exist (Darder, 2012; Giroux, 1988). As Darder (2012) reminds us: "oppressive conditions are not only maintained through the dominant's culture function to legitimate the interests and values of the dominant groups but also through an ideology that functions to marginalize and invalidate cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge and lived experiences that fall outside of capitalist dominations and exploitation." Moreover, through *cultural invasion* (Freire, 1970) dominant culture employs forms of cultural hegemony to exert domination over POC and we must be vigilant of the ways in which cultural hegemony silences and engenders certain cultural practices.

In this way, the *decolonizing healing praxis* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* aligns with the global movement towards reclaiming Indigenous ways of cultural healing and wellness. For Indigenous Peoples, healing is linked to cultural revitalization and political revitalization, one integral to the other (Grande, 2004; Alfred, 1999). In "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education" Brayboy (2005) problematizes concepts of culture, knowledge, and power to offer alternative ways of understanding these concepts through an Indigenous lens. From an Indigenous perspective, power is an expression of sovereignty and is understood as an energetic force that circulates throughout the universe—both within and outside of individuals (also see Deloria 2001). A dialectical understanding of the relationship between culture, knowledge, and power treats culture as the base for knowledge that ultimately leads to power. Thus, for Brayboy (2005) strategic use of multiple forms of knowledge generates power that is situated, dynamic, and historically influenced. In this sense, cultural reclamation connects *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* with meaningful and powerful healing traditions, which serve to ground them to their

communities and place in the cosmos. Culture is how we are able to pass on knowledge from generation to generation and it is about reaffirming our ties to Ancestral worldviews. As such, it can be a powerful antidote that can help us heal.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries recognize that the power needed to heal our soul wounds already exists within our people and cultural traditions. Thus, their cultural revitalization efforts are working to heal the wounds of colonialism by placing emphasis on the importance of cultural traditional practices that can guide YPOC in their quest for self-determination, collective healing, and survival.

Teachings of La Cultura Cura

For Maestro Jerry Tello**,** community understandings of spiritual and cultural wellbeing are foundational to his praxis in facilitating community healing: "Healing really has to do with first of all being rooted in a spiritual way. It has to be you having a philosophy of life that is interconnected with the sacredness of all things." In particular, his praxis draws on more than thirty years of experience working with Chicano/Latino youth and families. As such, he weaves his life experiences, research-based knowledge, and Indigenous cultural based teachings to facilitate individual and collective healing among families and communities. He is an internationally recognized author and co-founder of a statewide network of Chicano/Latino leaders that promotes a healing informed model of culture heals. In this way, *La Cultura Cura* works towards changing perceptions, systems change, and transformational change. He defines how he understands culture as healing:

> Within every culture, within every family, within every individual is everything necessary, all you need is right there. It's in you. And some people take that individually but I don't mean it that way. You are connected to ancestral wisdom, cultural traditions. The channel of your roots, within that is everything necessary for you to find balance and harmony.

Drawing from this premise, Maestro Jerry Tello developed a culturally relevant curriculum, *Joven Noble,* for young men and boys of color that aims to foster strength, harmony, and balance in families and communities and is rooted in instilling cultural resiliency through spiritual and traditional rites of passage (Tello et al., 2010).

As part of my healing project, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend one of Maestro Jerry Tello's training and healing *circulo*. I was grateful to be present among a full room of social justice minded individuals and what felt like a very engaged and attentive audience. Sitting in my chair, I was taken back with what felt like a wave of electric energy that awakened all my senses with receptivity to embark on a beautiful journey that allowed me to soak in all the medicine. Maestro Tello's *elder epistemology* (Cintli-Rodriguez, 2014) is medicinal in more ways than I could ever describe. He opens up his three-day training with community activists, healers, and educators in ceremony by invoking the four directions for permission and guidance from our ancestors and the creative energies of the universe. He proceeds by sharing an Indigenous story that captivates us all with its positive and meaningful lesson. This story brings in all the four elements –sun, water, wind, and earth by narrating the story of the coyote. Maestro Tello is quite an animated storyteller and he uses musical instruments such as the flute and drumming to share his story.

La Cultura Cura, or cultural-based healing, is premised on the understanding that within our cultures exists the medicine to heal us. As such, *La Cultura Cura* aims to restore one's cultural identity as the foundation of wellbeing for individuals, families, and community. It engages a multigenerational process of learning and/or remembering positive cultural values, principles, customs, and traditions. He shares four ancestral teachings that are foundational to *La Cultura Cura paradigm* and these are: 1) You are WANTED…You are a BLESSING, 2) You have a SACRE PURPOSE, 3) You have TEACHINGS (VALUES) AND TEACHERS to guide, and 4) You are Protected –SAFETY and SECURITY. Thus, Maestro Tello reminds us, *La Cultura Cura* is not "not just a program, it's a way of life." In fact, his commitment to living by example is a testament to this principle. For the past more than three decades, Maestro Tello has been sharing these teachings to activists, leaders, and allies across our state and on a national level. To say he has touched thousands of lives, both adults and young people, is truly an understatement. In fact, his influence in the Bay Area is felt among community-based youth organizations that are implementing *La Cultura Cura* teachings and healing *circulos*. He highlights how when you are not provided with these lessons and teachings, energy weights on you and it's called trauma or "susto." He understands trauma as fear-based living for it creates confusion, hate, self-hate, and rage. He touches upon how the tendency is to diagnose and categorize in order to "control" our young people. He states: "Rather than asking youth what is wrong with you? Instead what is asked, "What happened to you to disconnect your from your sacredness?"

The Power of Healing Circles

We are all gathered in Circle and in the middle is the altar which honors the four directions and the space in which copal is burned to mark the space as sacred, to receive cleansing, and for the smoke to carry our prayers. I brought a white candle with the image of Tonanzin to share for the altar as a way to show my gratitude and reciprocity for giving me the opportunity to share the space in Palabra. [71] Moreover, Maestro Tello shares that there are four reasons why we gather in Circle: 1) Acknowledging Greater Source, 2) To honor beginnings & endings, 3) For rites of passage, and 4) During times of pain and distress. Before Palabra begins, Maestro Jerry shares some insights about the power of holding healing circles and how by the simple act of gathering in a circle we trigger our generic memory that connects us to our ancestors and thus our familiarity with such ceremonial rituals. He places emphasis on the importance of setting our intentions for collective healing. He reminds us that *circulo* always needs intention and purpose and thus needs to stay in the heart. Furthermore, with Palabra comes responsibility and for this reason it becomes important to ensure you have someone to cover holding the space for spiritual energy and someone with experience.

Maestro Tello then begins *Palabra* by passing a talking Sacred Stick. One by one each person is given the opportunity to share some words or whatever they are compelled to share from the heart. It was very powerful to be fully present and immersed in *Palabra*. I was one of only four women in a room surrounded by mostly men who were all sharing their "cargas" and struggles towards inner transformation as men, fathers, partners, and activists. Listening attentively with bodymindspirit to each man sharing their *Palabra* brought about self-healing to me as a woman. In my own healing journey, it took a long time to heal my own anger and pain that was directed at men because of the heteropatriarchy and structural violence I have witnessed and experienced from men towards women both within my family and community. In this way,

[71] Palabra translates to "word" but stands for integrity and connection.

to be in a space in which men were grappling as honorable individuals who were willing to be vulnerable in disclosing and sharing about their personal journey towards self-healing was deeply powerful and emotional on many levels. To bring closure, Maestro Tello asked one of the community organizers to lead us in a closing activity. To close, she asked for each to share a body part that we feel grateful for. Many folks acknowledged their hands for allowing them to work and write their thoughts. Others acknowledged their eyes for allowing them to see all the beauty that surrounds us. A young man acknowledged his feet because given his health complications he felt grateful to be able to walk each day. Many of us acknowledged our heart for reminding us to work from a place of love. It was a very powerful way to end *Palabra* and a full day of deeply spiritual and healing work.

In particular, for many Latinx Young People and their families their cultural beliefs are rooted in Indigenous Knowledges that Chicanx communities and other communities of color continue to practice to various degrees (Flores, 2013; National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute, 2012; Acosta, 2007; Tello et. al., 2010). For example, understandings of healing and spiritual wellbeing for many SJH (r)Evolutionaries are rooted in Aztec, Maya, Yaqui, and Inca Indigenous civilizations that promote balance and harmony, and which inform the heritage of many ChicanxLatinx people in the U.S. Moreover, many SJH (r)Evolutionaries are also strongly influenced by northern Native American ancestral traditions because of relationships of solidarity that have been nurtured over time. As such, rituals, ceremony, and prayer are tools that people have developed to help access an understanding rooted in our interdependence with all life, both human and non-human and sources of life.

For Citlalli, a mother, professional coach, non-profit consultant, apprentice *curandera*, and bilingual/bicultural Mental Health Clinician, healing is deeply rooted in our cultural *conocimientos* of our mothers:

> Started to reconnect with healing from a non-western place. Started remembering that my mom would have people over at our house, strangers for sure, who somehow had heard about my mom. And all I knew was that they would come to our house and my mom would take them to the bedroom and would work with them—massage and *platica*. And I would hear crying and then they would come out and look so relieved. She was also learning how to do tinctures. Always had a *tesito* for whatever your pain was.

These *remedios* are part of the repertoire of healing modalities that present in our families. Elder Tonatiuh speaks about the power of ceremony among Chicanx communities:

> Bringing the concept of *ceremonia* and not making it exclusive to ourselves. For some people these traditions have been stripped away; they are not there. We have them because of the proximity of Mexico, this fluid migration of patterns and reminders but it's not more sacred than someone treating you with good compañia [companion], good respect. I think we should look at ourselves as having something we can share and young people can walk away with these elements as a platform for their own healing.

Elder Tonatiuh goes on to elaborate, "There is something empowering about culture and understanding *cultura*, knowing that you are not born out of a vacuum you know that there is a track history and ancestry, that for some of us that history goes much deeper." Drawing on

Indigenous Knowledges, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are integrating cultural interventions that promote decolonization. To this, Jorge reflects on the role of Indigenous Knowledges:

> Folks will say cultural spiritual stems from our indigenous practices. But can't tell you much beyond that, they don't know a creation story; its great but is doesn't give a social historical context, they can't tell me about the world view of this people; and these teachings they open you up to something really deep -to heal -not just to function in this world. Most programs are made so you can function and advocate. Culture teaches you so you can heal, and connects you to your ancestors.

Drawing from Indigenous Knowledges, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* emphasize the importance of embodied learning that comes from the lived experiences of the individual and community and our relationship to the natural world. Such an understanding of culture allows *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* to see beyond the pains and struggles of victimization to the strength and endurance of cultural survival and resistance of YPOC and their families. In this sense, culture can be a powerful antidote that can help facilitate healing. Likewise, Rose articulates the need to be rooted in the wisdom of our ancestors and the land, and be open to new articulations of Indigeneity:

> Pushing people to look into their own roots, to understand that we all come from Indigenous people and belong to some land, and colonization has disrupted that, so we will never be able to go back. It's not really going back. It's Sankofa- you look to the past to know where you are going. I think that the work that we have is to re-indigenize ourselves. To find a new Indigeneity that is connected to the land now, to who we are now, to listening to spirit and intuition, and learning the rituals that need to happen now. To rediscover but also to actually recreate it to make it new to try not to be like our ancestors but to learn from them and build upon who they are and what they left behind.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries manifest a willingness to treat culture and ancestral wisdom as not static but rather recognize the need to adopt and recreate our Indigeneity to meet our contemporary realities. Such an understanding that sees culture as not static but rather dynamic and how it can also be healing can allow educators and youth to see beyond the pains and struggles of victimization to the strength and endurance of survival and resistance. We can better understand how culture sustains our people in the face of the structures of oppression.

For Emiliano and Raul, learning about their history and using cultural art as a medium of healing have been powerful modalities that have been critical to promoting wellbeing with Chicanx/Latinx urban youth. Emiliano reflected,

> Being able to learn my own history, my own culture, being able to find the language and a theoretical framework to articulate everything I had felt that had been delegitimized by my teachers and the systems that I encountered. Every time I had been discriminated against and I expressed that, it was dismissed. And all of a sudden I had this vocabulary that describes everything I had felt my entire life and it was empowering, but it was also infuriating; and learning my own history, I thought about many of my friends who we lost, who were dead, in prison. How many of us would be in much healthier situations if we would have been taught this since the time we were children.

In another example of an effort to promote cultural pride and healing, Raul has worked to co-create murals and community gardens with local youth from his neighborhood as a means of creating a vision of what beautiful and healthy communities look like: "Murals to beautify our neighborhood with cultural images, images that empower our neighborhood. Not just painting images for the sake of it but using art as a form of healing and transformation for our neighborhoods." Thus, for *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*, cultural healing is necessary for instilling hope and a vision of what can be possible in our communities. In this sense, cultural collective healing projects such as these allow *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* to work from a place of wholeness and not fragmentation.

By deploying cultura as healing medicina, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are engaging in *cultural work* or what Leven-Morales (1998) understands as "the work of infusing people's imagination with possibility, with the belief in a bigger future, is the essential fuel of revolutionary fire." For Levins-Morales (1998), *cultural activism* is the "struggle for the imagination of the oppressed people, for our capacity to see ourselves as human when we are being treated inhumanely." By sharing their *decolonial healing conocimiento* of cultura is healing medicina, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* provide a different narrative. Their understanding of social change is premised on employing grassroots activism and cultural revitalization as powerful tools that aid the larger project of decolonization.

Decolonizing Healing Conocimiento #4: Merging Healing and Social Justice Sustains larger project decolonization

> For me it's not one or the other. Like everything else it's not an and/or it's an and/also. We need to fight for systemic change and we need to do personal and collective healing work in order for the formations and the vehicles and the networks and the relationships that our social change work relies on to actually be sustainable and functional.
>
> Xochitl, Community Organizer

The fourth *decolonizing healing conocimiento* is that merging healing and social justice sustains the larger project of decolonization. While too often healing and social justice activism are treated as separate domains, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* in this healing project see the value and strength of merging both. By merging or bringing into dialogue healing and social justice strategies, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are able to better balance the need for achieving short term and long term goals in their struggles for liberation without the dangers of burning out or reproducing destructive behaviors that get in the way of achieving long term sustainable systemic changes. In other words, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* understand that it is not enough to simply focus on healing communities without also keeping in sight the need to work towards eliminating the systems of oppression that create the suffering in the first place and vice versa. For *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*, it is vital and necessary to merge healing and social justice in order to be able to sustain their activism and their sense of hope and possibility. In particular, I will highlight the voices of community organizers Cathy, Salvador, and Aurora. Both Cathy and Aurora have been immersed in grassroots organizing and social justice movements since their years as high school youth and college students. For both, merging healing and social justice work has been central to being able to implement and promote more holistic strategies to better serve YPOC and communities.

Leading the Way con Corazón

For Salvador, his healing praxis draws from his own personal experiences of self-healing. Out of frustration with traditional models of working with YPOC that divest from their cultures and ignore the need for healing, Salvador founded and became Executive Director of a community-based organization focused on fathers, young people and family empowerment. Raised by migrant parents in a low-income neighborhood, Salvador became involved in gangs and drugs as a young person. He grew up in a violent household and eventually his involvement in gangs resulted in him being incarcerated as a young person. Moreover, he survived a homicide attempt on his life that left him permanently disabled on his left arm. The scars of his violent past are a constant reminder of how blessed he is to be alive today. In a deep moment of reflection and with the sage burning in our altar, Salvador stated in a soft-pitched tone, "It's interesting to be at this point now where all of these experiences have become medicine for others who are struggling to find their way out through the same darkness."

For Salvador, participating in healing circles with elders and other young men who were wounded like him was his entry point to beginning his own healing process. The sharing of *conocimiento* and accessing the ancient medicine of our ancestors via the four elements in the sacred space of a healing circle allowed him to open up and begin the process of shedding the many layers of his pain. Deeply reflecting on the impact of his own healing, he shared:

> Through this process, not only have I become un-rage but I have been able to heal and as a result I have broken generations of pain […] sitting there and imagining that the smoke starts to cleanse me, starts to reconnect my heart and my spirit and my thoughts and my intention was powerful and I wanted others to join me.

Similarly, for Cathy, a fourth generation Chinese American who was born and raised in the Bay Area, there is an urgency to merging healing and social justice in our work with YPOC. While both of her parents were highly educated and she grew up middle class, Cathy experienced her great share of pain from having to cope with the severe mental illness of her mother throughout her childhood. For the most part, Cathy remained silent about these painful years of her life, and she shared that it was this feeling of having no voice and seeking to break through her silence that fueled her passion for social justice from an early age. For the past 16 years, Cathy has been a relentless leader in the areas of labor, community organizing, and policy advocacy work around issues of economic and racial justice. As a young activist right out of college, Cathy became fully immersed as an organizer working with high school youth to defeat Proposition 21[72] in California. Despite the monumental collective efforts that took place across the state to fight the passage of Prop 21, the measure was passed in 2000. Cathy's experience as organizer during this political campaign offered her insightful and lasting lessons. I like helping young people to increase their own power, self-love, and potential. And our healing is interwoven so when I heal it helps others to heal and when others heal it helps me to heal.

On the one hand, Cathy was deeply inspired by the collective sense of mobilization that came out of this movement and continued her involvement in grassroots organizing campaigns

[72] California Proposition 21 was approved by voters in 2000 and has resulted in various changes to California's laws related to the treatment of juvenile offenders. In particular, it greatly increased the prosecutorial discretion as to whether a minor is tried as an adult. This has had detrimental impacts for communities of color for it has shifted the focus of the juvenile justice system from prevention and rehabilitation to incarceration and punishment.

around issues of economic and juvenile justice. On the other hand, she was also greatly disappointed and wounded from witnessing the tensions and conflicts that arose among organizers in the aftermath of Prop 21. These internal divisions resulted in the break up of existing coalitions and in leaders fighting among each other. This painful experience made Cathy acutely aware of the need to integrate healing into existing traditional models of organizing. Particularly when working with YPOC, Cathy saw a need to not only foster young people's leadership but also acknowledge and help carry their pain and suffering. Cathy reflected:

> In the model of organizing, we weren't helping them [youth] to deal with their whole person. We were primarily concerned with their political development as activists and much less with their human development as human beings. […] coming to realize that something about this model was missing. When you have a social model that is just about fixing the structural part of oppression or dealing with the structural part of our liberation, there are other parts that are being neglected.

After realizing that traditional models of youth organizing failed to see the whole individual, Cathy felt compelled to braid healing and social justice organizing in her praxis. Today, Cathy is the founding Executive Director of a community based youth organization dedicated to promoting urban peace by placing an emphasis on healing and cultivating the leadership of YPOC.

For Emiliano, it would take the continued encouragement of a Native American elder who insisted that he attend the sweat lodge in the Navajo tradition for him to experience the value of merging healing and social justice activism in his praxis. Observing Emiliano's passion for social justice as a young organizer at community college, this elder saw the need to share the wisdom of traditional healing medicine in order to nurture Emiliano's growth as a leader. Emiliano reflected on his early years as an organizer,

> When I started this work I didn't realize that organizing was another way that I was numbing my pain. Before I used violence, and certainly weed and alcohol, but then I realized that organizing was also a numbing tactic. Organizing didn't force me to deal with my stuff because I felt self-righteous and committed to a good cause.

As Emiliano reflected, for many social activists it can be very seductive to work 40 to 60 hours a week dedicated to the "cause" without any attention to addressing the need for healing. Yet, overworking ourselves in this way can be a way of masking our internal pains and wounds that often end up manifesting in unhealthy ways in how we may relate to one another.

Likewise, Aurora is deeply committed to braiding healing and social justice with YPOC. Aurora is a first generation Chicana who was born and raised in a predominantly rural and agricultural based community in southern California. The daughter of farm workers, she grew up aware of the persistent poverty and environmental racism that plagues her community. In her experience, healing and social justice go hand in hand, "It's not like it begins with the healing, and then you go to the organizing. Healing is a life journey and organizing to me is also healing; it's liberating, and they converge together, merge together." Bridging healing and social justice work when working with young people means *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are not conducting business as usual but rather focusing on a praxis that aims to address the young person as a whole. For example, Cathy stated:

> I think it means we do more than just traditional organizing with young people, we actually do identity exploration, space to grapple with internalized oppression, or what people also call decolonization, grappling with all the negative messages we have all gotten about what it means to be a person of color, a woman, a man, LBGTQ and really giving people the space to restore their relation with themselves. The other piece is giving space to do work that is healing.

Both Cathy and Aurora work hard to create collective spaces for youth to foster leadership organizing skills and healing in the process. For example, both organizations run year long after school programming in which YPOC have the opportunity to do political work by organizing around issues relevant to young people. As such, young people speak out at their local school board and city council meetings to help push for change in their communities. They also participate in healing circles that combine mindfulness, dialogue, and deep reflection as key elements to organizing for social change.

The merger of healing and social justice enables the capacity of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* to challenge the distorted colonial master narratives that are so prevailing in mainstream public discourse. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* enact healing and social justice strategies that help sustain us in the larger project of decolonization. Reflecting on the power of merging healing and social justice has on the effectiveness of their praxis, Citlalli shares:

> If we as organizers can do such amazing work as we are wounded, it blew my mind to think wow, if we can do this and we are falling apart, what can we do if were whole, what could we do if we had healed those wounds? Can you imagine how powerful, how transformative the work we could do. The different kinds of relationships we would have with each other and within our own organizations and between organizations, across different issues.

For Citlalli, another world of possibilities opened up when she realized the exponential impact social justice activists could have in our world when they work from a place of wholeness. Most importantly, arriving at the realization that healing and social justice are not mutually exclusive but rather we need both/and was a point of departure in her own personal growth and activism:

> Doing it with a lens that we know we are not trying to replace these trainings or retreats with just healing work but we are braiding it in. That both are important, that we need to continue doing this powerful work to transform our schools, our communities, our world, everything and we need to take care of ourselves as we are doing it. And part of that is the wellness and self-care aspect of it and beyond that is the healing. People need to do the healing work to become whole.

More and more youth organizing groups are recognizing that YPOC involved in organizing are suffering the effects of the very systems they are trying to change, and that in order to support YPOC's personal and intellectual growth, there is a need to merge our healing and social justice work. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* see the disconnect between organizing and healing and how a lot of organizing comes from fear and anger, from fighting. *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are

able to see beyond these limitations in order to access and envision new possibilities and ways to engage with YPOC from a place of healing.

Planting Radical Healing Seeds of Change for the Next Seven Generations

> You need new methods but sometimes the new method is a very old one that was forgotten or never really explored as a solution such as these. Maybe its new combinations and maybe what we need is for institutions to open up their concepts of populations and who they are dealing with. We have to change our understanding of what's really at stake. I think that we are expecting to get good results out of methods that don't work and I think that because people are afraid of changing the system because then they have to acknowledge a lot of failure. It goes back to healing, it goes back to pain and nobody wants to admit that they are doing the wrong thing.
>
> Tlaloc, Community Educator

By documenting and sharing the *decolonizing healing conocimientos* guiding the *decolonizing healing praxis* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries,* this healing project aims to help uplift and highlight how this healing work is part of a larger healing justice movement that aims to (re)claim our bodies, cultural healing practices, and spirituality to help restore balance and harmony in all our relations. As presented in chapter three, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* define healing from a decolonized perspective. Such a vision calls for radical collective healing with YPOC and their families. By acknowledging and working to heal the wounds of historical trauma, *SJH(r)Evolutionaires* begin the process of decolonization. In this way, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* emphasize that it's not enough to cultivate the intellect of YPOC by fostering their political consciousness and critical awareness of systems change. Intellectual curiosity must also be met with potent doses of love and spaces for YPOC to facilitate individual and collective healing that nurtures their ability to hope and reimagine a different vision for themselves and our world is possible.

Collectively, the breath of their work brings complexity to the praxis of healing. They help model new possibilities when it comes to promoting teaching and learning that aims to address the full humanity of YPOC and the adults that work with them. As such, the *testimonios* of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* presented here have promising implications for educators committed to social justice education. As I argued in the east direction, a *decolonizing healing framework* in education is not only necessary; it is vital to being able to support the growth, sustainability and wellbeing of both educators and students. Especially for educators teaching within a context of historically marginalized communities, teaching can at times be exhausting, draining, and can lead to burn out given the lack of systemic support and tools to holistically meet the needs of YPOC and empower them to be critical agents of change. A *decolonizing healing praxis* makes it possible for *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* and YPOC to experience individual and collective healing and access more healthy and vibrant pathways of being that acknowledge and restores their wholeness in the process. And this is key to being able to nurture their capacity to dream and imagine new possibilities.

Decolonizing healing conocimientos can help inform a critical dialogue that brings healing and education into conversation and which de-centers Western approaches of schooling that often negate the centrality of culture and spirituality in affirming teaching and learning that happens within a context of community. *Decolonial healing conocimientos* position and

recognizes *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* as producers of knowledge that can help inform transformative spaces of teaching and learning that go beyond the walls of the classroom. Classrooms and community spaces are vital spaces that can help support and sustain collaborative learning that is inclusive of students' cultural background and community.

By weaving together their personal stories, professional, intellectual, and spiritual wisdom, four *decolonizing healing conocimientos* emerged and have the potential to inform pedagogies of healing that acknowledge the wholeness of students and treats learning and teaching as a craft of healing (Villanueva, 2013) rather than a burden. While not all educators may be equipped to be healers in their classrooms and communities, we can work towards creating a healing consciousness among all educators that strives to teach in ways that integrate *decolonizing healing conocimientos.* Being inclusive of *decolonizing healing conocimientos* in educational praxis can prompt new insights among classroom educators. By placing value on existing understandings and practices of healing and wellbeing within students' communities, educators can help instill hope and a language of possibility in their praxis. This is critical to nurturing future generations of young people who see themselves as agents of change committed to transformative social change. Lastly, in their testimonios, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* acknowledge and speak about the challenges of deploying a *decolonizing healing praxis* with YPOC, as I further discuss in chapter six, yet they remain optimistic about planting radical healing seeds of change with YPOC now and for the next seven generations.

HUITZLAMPA

Spirit of the South
Direction of our Children and Youth
Honoring the Element of Fire
Place of Renewal, Cleansing, Perseverance

Calling in the spirit of our Youth Warriors
for Inspiration and Strength
Healing the next Seven Generations
with the courage to
Love and Heal
our collective wounds

Healing our Inner Child
Calling in Play, Creativity, and the Imagination
of our Children
to Co-Create
A more Just and healing world

Ometeotl

Chapter 5

Decolonizing Healing Spaces: Youth of Color Testimonios of Spiritual & Healing Conocimientos

"Mni wiconi! Mni wiconi!" We breathed in the same air. We stomped the same beat. "Water is life! Water is life!" Thousands of voices melted into one as we chanted on October 10, 2016, on Indigenous People's Day, to protest the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline. OurOur Aztec Dance group traveled 1,608 miles to North Dakota to take supplies and offer our spiritual prayers in solidarity. While in peaceful protest and dancing to the beat of the drum, I witnessed how hundreds of heavily armed law enforcement officials surrounded us; however, the strength of our collective prayers was more powerful. Our prayers were not only an act of resistance but one that came from a place of love for our sacred waters and for all life. I was one of only two young women who joined the final prayer led by Indigenous women elders right before we were forced to retrieve from the construction pipeline site. That day 27 people were arrested. In this context, it was powerful and healing to offer our drum beat and dances and be part of the elders' collective prayer as they burned tobacco and sage to the officers surrounding us, for it taught me about the power of love. Showing love to the people who hurt you the most helps heal our communities. It has been life-changing to be a part of the NODAPL movement because it is something that will impact not only my generation but also future generations. Participating in sunrise and water ceremonies while staying at the Red Warrior camp with all our relatives was medicinal to my spirit. It filled my heart with love and hope, all of which is critical not to give up and be able to imagine a healthier earth for the next seven generations. As an agent of change, my healing activism at Standing Rock, the Refinery Healing Walks, and IDLE No More have allowed me to positively contribute to a long history of resistance and activism by people of color. -Youth Activist

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Before leaving my home, I prepared my ofrendas and research tools (digital recorder and IRB forms). Today, I would have the opportunity to collect testimonios from Young People who have engaged in healing and transformative work through La Cultura Cura praxis. I began by setting up my altar to ask permission and guidance from the spirit in the process. I burned some copal for cleansing and to hold the space as sacred. With special care, I also set up an arrangement of healthy snacks on the adjacent table and gave thanks to the elements and Pachamama for the food. As I took a deep breath, I appreciated the love I had poured into creating the altar and food arrangements. As the Young People arrived, I encouraged them to get snacks and make themselves comfortable. Once everyone settled in their seats, I began by acknowledging spirit and my altar. All the Young People present already had familiarity with altars and sharing testimonios through the Cultural Cura praxis. It was comforting to know that I could use copal and sage if needed because sharing our vulnerable selves can unintentionally trigger trauma in others, and it was important to have the medicine to help people close.

I expressed my gratitude and appreciation that they had taken the time to be present. I briefly shared some words about my role as a "researcher." I knew that many of the Young People I was meeting today had experienced some sort of invasion of their privacy and/or intimidation from adults in positions of power; I felt the tension in my body as I spoke the words:

"the researcher from UC Berkeley." My heart began to beat fast, and the thought that these words could have chilling effects on the spirits of some of the Young People unsettles me. I took a deep breath and refocused my energy to my altar, and asked my ancestors for guidance. Once spiritually grounded, I began to speak from the heart and allowed the words to flow from my spirit.

I shared my curiosity to learn more from Young People about how they may experience healing in community spaces. I expressed my commitment to listening with body, mind, and heart to Young People's testimonios and how they make sense of healing in their lives and activism. As an adult ally, I shared that I was very interested in learning more about how adults can help create spaces where Young People of Color can experience collective healing and well-being. I also explained that I would share some forms that provided a written summary of what I had verbally shared and to let them know that I would use some of the new knowledge I gained from their insights, with their permission, to write up my healing project.

As someone who comes from similar communities as many of the Young People, I shared that I was committed to practicing reciprocity in my research. Reciprocity in research means a willingness "to receive and give" in the research process. In asking the Young People to be vulnerable by sharing their testimonios, I, too, needed to be vulnerable. I spoke from the heart, and as an offering, I shared my testimonio. In a very intimate and personal way, I spoke at length about my childhood, my immigrant parents, growing up in a low-income community, and the challenges of becoming a teenage mother. I shared about my educational journey from elementary to college and the many wounds I experienced along the way. It was deeply powerful and healing for me in more ways than I can describe. Sharing my testimonio with what felt like an attentive and captive audience of Young People was truly profound. In sharing my own testimonio, I made a choice to be in a more intimate and humanizing relationship with Young People. It was also an opportunity to speak power to my own truth and also heal a younger version of myself.

As a methodological healing intervention, by inserting myself in the research process, I was inclusive of the cultural and spiritual conocimientos that, as a "researcher," I brought to knowledge production. As I elaborated on the western door of my dissertation, four healing intentions guided my Decolonizing Healing Methodology (DHM). These healing intentions were carried out in the following ways: speaking from my heart when I shared my testimonio, practicing reciprocity and relational ways of being in my interactions with all staff and Young People, sharing food to nourish my participants, and in appreciation of their time, holding space as sacred by embracing spirituality in the research process via my altar and testimonio. After I concluded with my testimonio, I gave Young People the opportunity to stay or opt out of sharing their testimonio. All agreed to proceed. While I met with each Youth individually, others completed forms, ate their meals, and were willing to hang out with each other until it was their turn to meet with me one-to-one.

It was a full day, and I received much more than I could have ever been able to reciprocate to the Young People who met with me and shared their testimonios. Despite my own personal grief, my heart felt full by the end of the evening. Just the day before, I had received news that I was at high risk for a miscarriage and to not have any hope for the survival of my baby. The news was heavy on my spirit, and sadness overwhelmed me. I wanted to stay home to process my own pain. However, it had taken careful planning to make arrangements with all the Young People. I opted to sage myself that morning and embarked on my journey. I felt immense gratitude to witness how each Young Person showed up as their authentic self and was willing to

take risks in sharing intimate parts of who they were and their collective pain through their testimonios. With the feeling of gratitude also came the daunting responsibility of how to share such precious knowledge. In a context in which marginalized low-income Young People of Color are constantly asked to tell their stories of pain in order to validate that they are "deserving" of institutional resources, I feel critical of how research can be yet another form of exploiting their stories and violating their privacy. How do I ensure I am not dwelling on young people's pain to cause more harm? How do I acknowledge trauma without essentializing their stories of pain? How much can I share, and what parts do I choose not to share with academia (Fieldnote, 2016)

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Guided by the direction of Huitzlampa, the energy of the Youth, this chapter explores how *decolonizing healing spaces* nourish Young People's healing processes, spiritual learnings, and agency. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the term spirituality to reflect Young People's understanding of self and how they create meaning and purpose in their lives. This chapter aims to understand better how Young People experience collective healing and how these experiences inspire inner transformation and spiritual connection in their lives. It examines how Young People of Color understand and make meaning of the relationship between trauma, healing, and agency in their lives. While a growing body of scholarship in education explores the realm of spirituality and its implication within teaching and learning (Dillard et al., 2013), we know less about how YPOC understand the role of spirituality in their lives and healing process. This chapter contends that YPOC's understanding of their spiritual selves highlights the intrinsic power of love in their healing processes. Centering the voices of low-income urban Young People of Color provides a much-needed perspective in scholarship that examines the relevance of spiritual healing for decolonizing education. The healing and spiritual conocimientos Young People acquired through their engagement in decolonizing healing spaces help support their visions of possibility and hope *within* their communities.

In this way, Young People of Color are countering the narrative that depicts them as only violent and/or apathetic. Instead, this work highlights how YPOC are working to organize themselves to bring about healing justice in their communities. Healing for these Young People is about creating healing spaces that honor their voices, help facilitate collective healing, and nourish their spirituality. Especially within a context of a Western curriculum, intuitive and spiritual understandings are not valued to the same extent as intellectual or scientific knowledge (Palmer, 2003). The act of embodying spirituality and healing conocimientos involves risks. Young People must feel safe, valued, and listened to in order to show a willingness to be vulnerable and receptive to the realm of spirituality in their healing process. This chapter seeks to illuminate how Young People of Color engage in decolonizing healing spaces within a context of their lived experiences and sociopolitical contexts, and it explores how YPOC understand the role of culture and spirituality in facilitating their healing processes.

This chapter draws from the *testimonios* of fifteen Young People engaged in *decolonizing healing spaces* and highlights how Young People of Color critically interrogate and make sense of trauma, healing, spirituality, and justice in their communities. As we learned from the testimonios from *SJH(E)volutionaries*, not every Young Person who engages in *decolonizing healing spaces* may necessarily experience this kind of transformation and ability to shift their consciousness, given some Young People may need more intensive wrap-around support and resources. Yet, the testimonios of the Young People highlighted in this chapter remind us of the

intrinsic value of creating opportunities for them to tap into the healing and spiritual conocimientos present in their communities to (re)imagine, co-create a different reality for themselves. In this way, Young People are accessing healing ways of knowing that goes beyond the social conditioning they received in schooling and dominant culture (Ginwright, 2010). Understanding the healing experiences of these Young People of Color is powerful and necessary knowledge documentation that can further help deepen our understanding of strategies for building the individual and collective capacity of educators and practitioners working towards transformative systems change with Young People.

To center the voices of Young People, I observed and collected testimonios of Young People engaging in *decolonizing healing spaces* from January 2014 to January 2017. Through the voices of Malcolm, Buddha, Luwalhati, Fernando, Dashawn, and Isabella, this chapter centers Young People's understandings of healing, spirituality, and agency in relation to their lived experiences. In what follows, I weave healing conocimientos based on excerpts from their powerful testimonios, fieldnotes, and vignettes. My personal reflections as a researcher and practitioner in these *decolonizing healings spaces* to uplift and center Young Peoples' healing conocimientos. Through the testimonio of Malcolm, we bear witness to what Young People are healing from and the spiritual trauma that takes a toll on their bodymindspirit, and their spiritual strength in seeing their sacredness despite the state violence dehumanization Young People are subjected to by dominant culture. Through the testimonio of Buddha, we bear witness to the power of "la cultura cura" and Indigenous spiritual healing practices in supporting Young People's healing processes. The testimonio of Luwalhati reminds us of the power of the arts and multiple ways in which Youth culture are spaces that help facilitate collective healing. Finally, the testimonios of Luis, Dashawn, and Isabella speak to the spiritual activism, and resilience Young People embody and are nourishing for the next seven generations. The interlayered voices of the Young People's testimonios and my own researcher's voice are embodied throughout this chapter as a refusal on my part as the researcher to conform to mainstream ways of writing and to present knowledge documentation that objectifies research participants and attempts to make the researcher invisible.

Data Collection & Analysis

Young People of Color (YPOC) (n=15) represent a unique sample of Young People taken from a Youth population that participates in community Youth organizations focused on centering a healing justice framework in their praxis with YPOC. Participants ranged between the ages of 14 to 23. Youth participants were located via the networks of community educators and healers whom I engaged with in community healing spaces, Youth organizations, and as a practitioner who is also committed to healing justice. For many of the Youth participants, the methodology of testimonio provided a familiar entry point. In addition, supplemental questions regarding their thoughts on healing, trauma, and spirituality were included to fully capture the practitioners' perspectives and histories. Testimonios were gathered in person during the fall of 2014 and spring of 2015 and took place in safe spaces that were allocated and arranged via my connection with the Youth organizations. The duration of the testimonios ranged between forty minutes and two hours. They were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder and later transcribed. Information that could identify the individuals was removed from transcripts, and pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

Testimonio material was coded based upon thematic content related to their understandings of healing, trauma, and spirituality. Data collected was analyzed for patterns,

themes, and ideas that emerge from testimonios. Testimonios were coded for two purposes: 1) To explore Youth participants' understandings of healing, trauma, and healing and 2) To construct, to the extent possible, first-person narratives that capture counter-stories of their healing experiences and how these impact their capacity to engage in collective social justice efforts. Testimonio coded themes focused on the following areas: the terms used to conceptualize and make meaning of healing, hope, and collective agency and how these processes may foster individual and collective healing from trauma for the Youth.

"I am worth more than just the streets:" Embodying a Critical Spiritual Consciousness

> Growing up, I didn't look at it as trauma because it was my normal life. It was just my everyday thing. It's what you do, and I look back, and it didn't have to be that way. Choices could have been made, decisions made differently, and whole entire lives could have been differently. -Malcolm

In the above quote, Malcolm powerfully speaks truth which illustrates how Young People have come to normalize a troubling reality; a reality that deeply wounds the life trajectories of Young People while hindering their life choices and ability to live a different reality. As one of several Young People, I met Malcolm, who volunteered to share their *testimonio* and life experiences for my healing project. At first sight, one is immediately struck by Malcolm's powerful presence, for he carries himself with great confidence while also emitting smooth and calming energy. He is fashionably dressed in all black, further delineating his tall thin figure, and his braided cornrows mark his accentuated African hairstyle. Behind his warm smile is a fierce rising young activist that embodies both the adversity and hope that the future holds for visionary young leaders like himself. While I was meeting Malcolm for the first time in this physical plane, our encounter felt like I was reconnecting with a kindred soul from the past, and this gave me the warm feeling of reconnecting with a lost brother from my soul tribe. In the following excerpts from his *testimonio,* Malcolm describes in detail his process of finding self-truth and inner transformation. Throughout his testimonio, Malcolm articulates a sophisticated level of understanding of healing and critical analysis that demonstrates wisdom beyond his years when speaking about the intersections of trauma, healing, and agency. In what is a thoughtful and heartfelt *testimonio,* he shares his personal process of seeking self-truth, deep reflection, and coming full circle with an understanding of healing as love. He also presents a critical critique of the politics of healing and a deep understanding of the links to concepts of soul, spirit, and spirituality.

Malcolm is 18 years of age and self-identifies as a Black young man. He is one of eight siblings and was primarily raised with his older brother and younger sister by a single mother, who inspired him to be a critical thinker and agent of change from a young age. However, the forces at play resulting from his living in a low-income community meant that he was not immune from experiencing dozens of school suspensions, a gang-involved trajectory, community violence, and ultimately, being impacted by the juvenile justice system. In particular, this young man spoke at length about the ways in which the prison industrial complex has had a devastating impact on his life and that of his family. With a heavy heart, the confident young man I first encountered humbled himself by being vulnerable. His voice trembled when he shared:

> I got direct links to that trauma. Listening to my brother talk about how sad he is going to be for the next 20 years of his life. It makes me sick. It has my shoulders really heavy. It has me feeling really nauseous. I was raised strong enough to endure all of this, but still, I am only human, and I am spiritual, and I recognize it and see it as it is. And its spiritual trauma; it's more than just the physical and the mental. I could feel his pain through the phone. I could feel it. It's my family.

Malcolm was able to articulate a deeper understanding of how trauma impacts the body and mind and the spirit of Young People. The "spiritual trauma" Malcolm described as "it's more than just the physical, and the mental" speaks to his understanding of how the pain he feels and carries is also embodied at a deep spiritual level. The spiritual trauma caused by the traumatic experiences of having your loved ones taken away weighs heavy in the hearts of Black and Brown families who are impacted by the carceral state. For Malcolm, his father has been in and out of prison his entire life. His uncle is serving 18 years in prison, and his older brother served a 6-year prison term, was out for a year and a half, and is now serving a 20-year prison sentence. Malcolm's experience is not unique. Moreover, his own experience as a young Black man navigating schooling and the carceral state further delineates the cruelty and violence systems of power have on the bodies of young Black and Brown Boys and Men of Color (Rios, 2011). He shared several stories of being policed by school staff and being accused of things he didn't commit simply because of who he was. These schooling experiences of being "policed" were the origin of some of the early wounding and self-sabotage messaging of "troubled" Youth Malcolm internalized. This pain would lead him to a path of self-destruction and defiance of the law. The embodiment of trauma in the body is making our Young People sick in their bodies and mental well-being. He went on to name how this culture of power still exists in schooling and how the school system is the "enemy." He shared:

> The enemy for me was the school system. There are powers running the system, but it's a system to be broken. It can't be changed because it's not broken. People are trying to pick little things to change to make it better, but you can't fix what ain't broken. It does what it's meant to do. It's very effective. It works very well if you read the statistics.

For Malcolm, schooling was doing precisely what it was meant to do. For Students of Color, in particular, dominant discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality get reproduced in schooling and work to dehumanize them and to construct them as "deviant," "at-risk," and "criminal" (Valencia, 1997). These constructions dehumanize Young People of Color and overlook the spiritual forms of resistance that Young People embody. In having Young People like Malcolm conduct their own analysis from the perspective of race, class, gender, and their lived experience, there exists the possibility for Young People to develop a more reflexive account of their lived experience. By giving students access to *decolonizing healing spaces* and having them reflect on their own circumstances, Young People have an opportunity to analyze the discursive power of schooling. In this way, Young People are able to reconstitute their ideas of learning and their educational experience through a reflective process and to resist the positioning made available to them in dominant discourses. As Malcolm so powerfully demonstrates, Young People are much more than their trauma. Malcolm's spiritual resilience made it possible for him to (re)constitute himself as an agent of change and a knowledgeable subject capable of redefining the project of learning for emancipatory praxis.

A growing and critical body of literature in the fields of psychology has begun to explore the cumulative impacts of health and socio-economic disparities facing communities of color. Scholars in the field of counseling psychology have demonstrated how marginalized communities are adversely impacted emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually by the burden of discrimination and racism (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Carter, 2007; Flores, 2013; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). We also know that the emotional impact of being othered since childhood is a precursor to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and acts of aggression and violence directed toward the self and others among Youth of Color (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005). This body of literature has been critical to deepening our understanding of the ways in which trauma and stress build in our bodies and the dire consequences this cumulative and systemic trauma can have on the well-being of Youth of Color and their families.

For Malcolm, his reality is that he "can only be Black. I can never stop being Black. The one thing I am: me, I am Black." He went on to powerfully state:

> They are going to hate the baby before it gets out the womb. As a body, as a soul, as a human, I am African. And you want to hate on me and want to kill me; put me at a disadvantage solely because I am solely the person I was meant to be. I think that it's because there is a lot of success I can reach.

His words and analysis brought chills to my body as a mother and womb carrier. His critical spiritual consciousness allowed him to call out the ways in which racism and white supremacy begin with the colonization and violation of Black women's wombs (Afua, 2000) as he so powerfully states, "they are going to hate the baby before it gets out the womb." Malcolm's spiritual resilience was also present when he described his body and soul as "African." As such, he was aware that it was the success that he could reach that was and is the greatest threat to white supremacy.

Malcolm went on to elaborate how fear of his success was what ensures that young Black men are "never given an opportunity" but rather given a "role." He reflected:

> I was never given an opportunity. I was always given a role. We are thuggin' it, that's the role for my whole life: we are thuggin' it. It's not happy being in the streets; it's really depressing seeing my family sent away, seeing my homies die, and seeing all this is a lot of trauma, a lot of stress. I was never told that I didn't need to thug it. I was never told that we never used to thug it until the real thugs came and gave us the idea of thuggin'.

In his reflection, Malcolm was not only aware that he was given a "role" that "is a lot of trauma," but he also identified the real thugs. He was well-rounded in his history and referred to the history of colonization of Alkebulan and Anahuac lands and referred to the actual "thugs" as the European colonizers that stole our lands and raped our people, and colonized our minds. For Malcolm, when he found out the "internal truth" of where his people came from, it changed everything for him. He powerfully articulated:

> When I found out the internal truth of my people, I knew the truth to everything. It unlocked everything. I had a new vision on the world. I had about 100 more perspectives to read everything through. I could think from, see through so many lenses that were never available to me. It opened up my mind and my soul. It opened me up all the day

> way. I became conscious at that moment. I value myself a lot more, I am not supposed to die. I am worth more than just the streets. When I found out that I was valuable, and when I found out as self that I valued myself, I walked upright more, I was healthier.

A shift in consciousness provided Malcolm the opportunity to embody his brilliance and sacredness. By learning his "internal truth," he gained a "new vision of the world," and this allowed him to "open up" his "mind" and "soul," and he then knew his value. As he profoundly shared, "I am worth more than just the streets," and as a result, he was able to embody a healthier version of himself when he said, "I walked upright more, I was healthier."

A turning point in Malcolm's life was when he was referred to work with a community-based Youth organization, where for the first time, he was given an opportunity to not play a "role." He had served time in juvenile prison, and upon his release, he was referred to attend a young men's support group as part of his probation requirements. As he began to share how his participation in this program made a difference in his life, I witnessed how his energy began to feel lighter. With a lightness in his expression, he shared how "it's the cultural medicine" that helped facilitate his healing. He stated:

> It's a lot of trauma to grow up in [city], and this place helps heal that trauma. They identify the issue, and then they help you heal it, and it's not like the medicine you eat. It's the real medicine; it's the cultural medicine, the real medicine they used to use before this nation became itself. The good medicine.

Through a philosophy of "La Cultura Cura," community Youth organizations are co-creating spaces for young people to experience spiritual healing through what Malcolm described as the "real medicine." By focusing on facilitating a process of restoring an individual's wholeness, Youth organizations are creating *decolonizing healing spaces* by working with Young People like Malcolm to affirm their sacredness and spiritual conocimientos of their ancestors. Malcolm reflected:

> The whole world is corrupt. But what brings people back is that spiritual healing. I was spiritually healed when I found out that my people created everything that the world ever knew to be in existence.

For Malcolm, "what brings people back is that spiritual healing" and through this process of coming back, or in his case, learning about the greatness of his ancestors. This was what helped him feel "spiritually healed." In this way, we can see how spiritual healing, for Young People like Malcolm, is a way of thinking and being that draws on individuals' strengths and spiritual potential rather than working from a deficit paradigm that too often focuses on what is "wrong" and "lacking." At the root of facilitating spiritual healing is a collective intention to create opportunities for Young People and communities to be vulnerable and experience transformation from within. This healing comes in multiple ways. Malcolm elaborated:

> Spiritual and cultural healing come in a lot of ways. It can be given to you in a lot of ways in a lot of different ways because there are so many different cultures and ways of healing. I think that the best way to heal somebody would be to give them the truth about

> what they want to know about. The truth of self is what the truth is. It's the truth of everything.

The "truth of self" allows Young People like Malcolm to make meaning of their lived experiences and understand the forces at play that are at the root of their individual and collective oppression. Most importantly, the "truth of self" redirects Young People to a space of healing self.

Malcolm went on to share one of the earliest experiences in his healing journey that transformed and shifted his perspective as a Young Person. He was at a Boys and Men of Color Retreat. He reflected on how his initial attitude about going to camp was, "don't nobody look at me for more than 30 seconds." He shared how arriving at a majority Latino space as a young Black man further hyped his already hard demeanor. He reflected, "my body language and attitude were 'don't try anything weird on me.'" As they proceeded to form a big circle to set up guidelines for their retreat, Malcolm placed the spotlight on himself when he shared, "We are all about to speak English." In retrospect, he recognizes how his words came out harsh and how he could have said things differently. However, this became a teaching moment as it stirred up a lot of conversation. When another person reworded his initial statement to, "It's respectful if we can understand each other," it did something to him. The realization of the power that our words carry created an opening for Malcolm to let that medicine come in. It was a turning point for him and the collective energy of space. He reflected:

> We all opened up. Speaking about what hurt us in the past and the things who made us who we are today. Being from [city], I just think I am the hardest man in the world. When we started opening up, all that went away in my head 'cause they introduced me to love when I was being hateful. I came with hatred and left with love. They showed me it was like it was a new invention. It was everyone there: Mexican, Pacific Islanders, Black, Queer, white, all types of people. There was variety.

Malcolm described coming in "with hatred" and leaving "with love," and his words speak volumes to the kinds of breakthroughs Young People can experience when caring adults intentionally co-create safe and collective healing spaces for young men to be vulnerable. He continued:

> I assumed that nobody was hurt. That nobody was in the gang life. And even if I thought they were, I assumed that it was at the smallest level. I thought it wasn't shit compared to what I was going through. One young man opened up about his life story and about his brother being locked up, and the whole aftermath of dealing with his brother being locked up. I started to shed tears. My eyes started getting watery. With every lesson learned, you gain more understanding and peace within yourself. So it's love that grew within. And I understood him on another level because I had been through the same thing. And he described it so on point and graphically; it was like he was telling my story, and I was just sitting there. He spoke, and he was crying, and that's when it really hit me. My whole mindset changed after that. [Elder G] started talking and crying, and that is what really woke me up. It woke my game up. I had been a kid all my life, I'm still a kid, so I was looking towards adults as perfectly responsible, taking care of their shit. This young man told his story and [Elder G] started crying and [Elder G] explained why he was crying

> and why it was ok for him to cry. He explained what crying really meant. That has stayed with me. Anytime I go into a healing circle, and someone may start crying out of nowhere, I understand they are just releasing the pain they have. I understand the deeper levels of crying. He taught me what crying really is; it's releasing emotions.

His testimonio sheds light on the healing power of telling our stories and the power of releasing tears. The release of tears helps to relieve the many layers of pain Young People have accumulated due to being conditioned to internalize toxic forms of masculinity that relegate tears to a sign of weakness. Many of these Young People are carrying deep-seated pain and generational trauma and have never really been given an opportunity to feel, express or release what they have to carry on a daily basis. Moreover, the dominant culture's rugged individualism socializes our Young People to internalize all this pain and to carry it in isolation. Instead, individuals look for ways to numb themselves, and sadly, Young People often only have access to destructive forms and patterns of releasing their pain or traumas. Healing disrupts this vicious cycle of pain.

In a calm and heartfelt reflection, Malcolm delved deeply into the power of inner transformation. He described one of the most potent medicine healings can bring when he described healing as "it's real love." Malcolm reflected:

> I was walking the street so cold. I had frozen my heart solid; had no emotion. And they helped me find the light switch again, 'cause the light switch was gone, I couldn't even turn it back on. And they helped me turn it back on and keep it on, which is the consistency. It's real love. I know what love is, and I was not raised on love. And they introduced me to healing, which is love. It's love. That's what the root is of everything that will make this world better. Individually, they worked on me. They really got you. They really showed me that my people did great things out of love. And the way you heal yourself and help others heal themselves and heal the entire world eventually is to love everybody as if they were your brother.

From Malcolm's vivid descriptions, you can get imagery of what healing feels like and what it feels like to not be healed. For Malcolm, he spoke of him being "so cold" and how he had "frozen" his "heart solid" and, as a result, had "no emotion." Yet, his participation in decolonizing healing spaces made it possible to "find the light switch."

Nearly two years after he shared his testimonio, I reached out to Malcolm to check in with him. I wanted to share a draft I had written about his testimonio. We exchanged various texts, in which he gave me his latest updates. At the time of our exchange, he was filled with excitement because he was actually traveling with his mother to attend a Youth Council conference held by a prominent Youth Foundation. He also shared that he was back in community college, and he was enjoying the classes he was taking. Our exchange was healing, and we agreed to reconnect on his return. Only days later, I received chilling news that I will never forget: Malcolm's life had been cut short as a result of gun violence. My heart dropped, and, in tears, I ran out of the library where, ironically, I found myself writing the pages to this dissertation. No words could bring comfort and help alleviate the pain that a beloved son, grandson, brother, father, nephew, friend, and a rising star was no longer going to be with us. While there is comfort in believing death is simply a transition to the ancestral world as many of our ancestors believed; no collection of words could bring comfort that such a gifted and brilliant

young mind was gone. Malcolm's life story will be remembered and continue to touch lives even beyond his death. His mother began a non-profit organization to continue Malcolm's legacy and deep love for his people and community in his honor.

"Going back to the womb:" Spiritual Conocimientos & The Power of La Cultura Cura

It was a warm and sunny summer day as we made our way to Santa Cruz for what would be a retreat focused on healing and compañerismo. After a nearly two-hour drive, we finally reached our destination. Upon our arrival, we briefly went over the rules and protocols of our site to be respectful, given that we had been given permission to make use of this sacred site. Other than a small outdoor kitchen, a bathroom, a small meeting space, and a brick adobe Temazcalli,[73] We were surrounded by trees and a very green natural landscape. Over the years, this camp has been the site for countless healing retreats by community-based organizations and/or for individuals and community members to simply get away from the chaos of urban life and be able to reconnect with mother earth. The retreat has been organized by community activist and danza elder Roberto, and the invite was extended to their network of young Latinx boys and community activists. I was invited to as part of my role as participant observer and community educator working closely with elder Robert. After taking care of tasks in preparation for dinner and the sweat lodge, Robert gathered everyone to conduct a healing circle. Healing circles allow a group to bear witness to the suffering of each individual. In telling their stories, individuals were able to share their experiences and received validation that they were not alone in their suffering. Everyone spoke from the heart, and I was really touched by the generational wisdom that was shared in the circle. I also shared some deep insights about healing and just let them know how hopeful I felt being there with a circle of young men committed to healing themselves. One of the young men took the time to appreciate me by saying that I had really touched him and left an impact. He thanked me for bringing the feminine balance. Healing circles create space for Young People to speak their truth, to share their stories, fears, hopes, and reflections. Some of the Young People were a bit shyer to share, but all spoke and definitely listened attentively. Bearing witness to the power of sitting in a healing circle with Young People provided me with the experiential learnings to explore how spiritual healing is closely tied to cultural practices and what this means for transformative social change.

In the circle, our elder spoke about the significance of temazcalli and how it's based on ancestral conocimientos that had a holistic understanding of healing in which there was no separation of mind, body, spirit. It was believed that when something happened to you, it affected all parts of you, and in this way, emphasis is placed on ritual and ceremony to bring about spiritual healing. He breaks down the Nahuatl language significance of the word Temescal /Temazcalli as: teme "to bathe" and calli "house" and refers to Temazcalli as our Ancient Indigenous purification sweat ceremony and as "the mother of all medicines." Indeed, the tradition of purifying and healing oneself through ritual sweating was an integral part of the daily practice of many native peoples across Anahuac land. In Ancient temazkal and Lakota inipi (many Chicanos are trained in Lakota tradition), the sweat lodge is entering the earth's womb in order to cleanse, purify, rebirth yourself. It requires physical and emotional sacrifice—it is a process of letting go of one's fears. He then shared about the dress code to enter temazcalli. He explained how one humbles oneself by kissing the mother tonanzin to ask permission to enter her

[73] Temazcal is a prayer lodge. In Nahuatl, *calli* means home and *tema* means entering in a prayerful way. The sweat lodge is also called Inipi and this medicine was shared by the Lakota people to Chicanos.

womb. Inside the temazcalli, one becomes emerged in her warmness and darkness and is provided an opportunity to get rid of any burdens that hurt. Sitting in a circle, we offered songs and prayers to the four directions to open communication between the physical world and the spiritual realm. The hot rocks were brought in and embodied the spirits of our ancestors. When water is poured over them – they emit ancestral spirit & ancestral knowledge (Fieldnote, 2015).

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The second of four children, Buddha is a first-generation Chicano, born and raised in Rainbow City. Both of his parents are immigrants who migrated from Michoacan, Mexico. Most of his large extended family is based in a rural agricultural city just south of Rainbow City, and many of his cousins are associated with gangs, particularly the Sureños. Throughout his teens, he constantly had to deal with the threat of being targeted in his neighborhood for not being a border brother. He shared experiencing difficulty getting along with his peers because he went to school with the rival gang, mostly the Nortenos. He reflected, "Crazy how I actually did get to survive despite everyone telling me they were going to kill me. I am actually just kind of surprised that I actually did make it here. I am just glad." A turning point in his life was when he started to become involved with an after-school program in his community meant to mentor Young Men, particularly of Latinx descent, through the "El Joven Noble," which is Indigenous based Youth leadership curriculum that supports and guides Young People through their "rites of passage" (see Tello et al., 2010). The opportunity to be immersed in a Youth program that infused a culturally empowering message of "la cultura cura," or culture heals, transformed Buddha's concept of self and his role in his community.

The more Buddha learned about Indigenous cultural rites of passage, the more he became interested in sharing the new knowledge he was learning with other Young Men. Through the many retreats and mentoring he received, he was inspired to take on more of a leadership role and was trained as a Youth leader to hold healing circles and speak about "El Joven Noble" principles with other Young People. For Buddha, being involved in these after-school programs provided him a space to reflect on his life and to know that there were caring adults that were genuinely invested in his success and his wellness. The exposure to mentors and an empowering message of love meant that Buddha was turning his life around from running heavily in the streets to instead beginning a journey of healing himself. When asked about what healing meant for him, Buddha shared:

> Healing to me is when you are at the level where you don't have to use substances to feel better, even if there are problems around you that you are able to handle and that you are just doing better in your life.

For Buddha, healing entailed a process of addressing the pain he had been carrying as a Young Man growing up in a high-poverty community where violence had been normalized to the extent that for him, just being alive was a victory. He shared, "I actually did make it here. I am just glad." Buddha also spoke of the power of tears in his healing. He shared:

> Just having walks. I just think and reflect on what I am going through at the moment. Even sometimes, I just cry. It's just too much, and I just cry, and that is just a way of me taking out anger. I used to punch a lot of things. I don't do that anymore.

This process of experiencing healing manifested in the choices Buddha was now able to make to deal with his problems. He was no longer running away from his pain through the use of substances to numb himself. For Buddha, this was a huge step towards healing himself. He didn't have to just go to hit things to deal with his anger anymore; he could now also walk, reflect, and cry healing tears as healthy forms of releasing his pain.

For Buddha, the opportunity to learn various tools through his participation in El Joven Noble created a space for him to respond differently to his struggles and challenges as a Young Person. He talked about how before being exposed to such cultural knowledges, all he had to deal with his pain was to numb his pain. He candidly reflected:

> Back then, when I was smoking, I would just smoke for any excuse. If I got into a fight with my mother, then I would just go to smoke and waste all my money on weed. Now, I don't have to go to the extent of smoking weed. I just reflect on what happened and go have a talk with my mother about what happened. I don't have to smoke or drink anymore just to feel better. I just reflect on my own. Sometimes, I just write. I just write down my problems and then burn the paper. And that is a way of me not thinking of the problems I am going through.

Buddha is not alone in wanting a quick fix "just to feel better." As a society, we are constantly bombarded and seduced on a daily basis, whether it be social media messages or our consumer-based dominant culture into not wanting to feel any pain and to constantly look outside of self to seek quick but false short-term and temporary gratification. For Young People, like many adults, numbing that pain may just be a smoke or drink away. Yet, Buddha is a testament that sharing and providing Young People with alternative tools and modalities to acknowledge and address their pain in healthy ways can be life-changing. Buddha is now aware and mindful that when challenges come, he can also write and reflect and even do rituals by offering his problems to the fire, instead of just wasting his "money on weed… just to feel better."

For Buddha, his participation and learnings through the El Joven Noble curriculum granted him access to decolonizing healing spaces that taught him different perspectives in life and inspired him to rise up as a leader in his community. He shared about the joy and fun of being in community and, more importantly, the deep spiritual wisdom he gained through participating in retreats for Young leaders, where he not only acquired healthy tools and skills to address life challenges, but he also learned the true meaning of a leader. He reflected:

> Being there helped me a lot because they explained to me what a real leader is; the functions of a leader. They explained how to run circles. It was just a good moment 'cause I was just surrounded by a lot of friends that were also leaders. This was one of the best experiences I had. That retreat helped me a lot.

The significance of having access to spaces for Young People to learn also about their own cultural history is also very humbling and healing for many of the Young People. Especially when schools may not be teaching this critical history, and you are also not getting it at home, these decolonizing healing spaces are key to unlearning the colonial narrative that silences and distorts our histories and People of Color. He shared:

> Just them teaching the raza folks their rights and their own history in general. Not a lot of people know this. It is good that there are people that are willing to share with them 'cause not every parent is going to know about it, not every parent is going to be able to tell their kids the history.

Moreover, Buddha's commitment to sharing the knowledge of healing with younger Youth was impressive. He shared:

> Everything that I learn here I try to tell my friends about so they have a little perspective on what I am doing. Most of them seem interested in it. I just try to talk to them and let them know that the purpose of healing is to find their own spirit, to heal their spirit. The Young People I am around, 16-17years olds, pay attention probably because of the way I talk to them. Like they could be just messing around, and I would just let them know to shut up and listen. They will shut up and listen, and I start breaking things down to them, and they will pay attention, and they will ask questions. It feels good 'cause they are paying attention. It feels good 'cause they are learning things that they usually don't learn at their schools.

As a Joven Noble leader, Buddha had not only gone through his own process of transformation but he was now inspired to help other Young People by sharing the many teachings he was learning. Not surprisingly, Buddha earned the respect and admiration of not only his adult mentors but his peers in his neighborhood, who looked up to him as a wise Young Man. Indeed, there is something very soothing and calming about Buddha's presence when one meets him. He feels like a very grounded Young Man, and he carries himself with a certain gentleness that one would never imagine that Young Men who have had to endure the kinds of violence he has had to witness possess. He became very passionate about his commitment to his peers when he started speaking about why he does what he does when he is trying to plant seeds of healing with his friends who were still heavy in the streets. As Buddha powerfully articulates, "the purpose of healing is to find their own spirit, to heal their spirit." He made it a point when he needs his peers to "shut up and listen," for he knows, all too well, that for many of his peers, the message of finding your own spirit and healing your spirit could make the difference between staying alive and dying. This message of healing their spirit is one that he knows they "don't learn at their schools."

When delving more deeply into his healing journey, Buddha spoke at length about the power of Indigenous practices of healing and how being introduced to these ways of being and healing has been deeply healing and transformative. He shared:

> It was a pretty relaxing experience. At that time, I was having a lot of problems with my mother. Just getting along with her was a big problem. So I went, and I tried to sweat it out. Tried to relax myself. I just feel relaxed when I go in there and sweat. It is just a whole different experience than just staying out here smoking, drinking, and doing all of that to forget about it. Sweating it; it just feels better. It's like going back to the womb. You go in there, and you just try to sweat all your problems out. It was a pretty cool experience. I personally felt like my head get lighter 'cause going in there, I felt my head just really heavy with a lot of thinking with all the problems I had. When I got out of the sweat, I feel calmer, more chilled. My head wasn't hella tense like it was. I just felt really good when we came out.

While Temazcal may not be a healing modality that every Young Person is ready to take on, for it takes great courage to face your fears, Buddha found great refuge in having a space to just "relax" and "sweat it out." The healing power of the temazcal, as I elaborate more in the next chapter, is in the process of returning to our first womb, mother earth's womb. In this way, it's an opportunity to release or bring death to the parts of ourselves that no longer serve us and thus, experience a rebirth. As Buddha describes, "when I got out of the sweat I feel calmer, more chilled" and his head felt "lighter" for the opportunity to sweat out all his problems brought death to his problems, they were released and thus, provided an opportunity to walk with less weight in his spirit and body.

These healing and Indigenous rooted practices are not new to social movements among Black and Brown communities. In particular, the activism that resulted from the Civil Rights movements is a testament to the ways in which political and social activism can be a path toward healing and vice versa. Healing shifts the focus from blaming the individual to recognizing how systems of oppression justice systems wound our Young People. In the Chican@ community, creating healing spaces in the form of healing circles, danza capulli's, and community healing where Chican@s aims to restore the mental, emotional, cultural, and spiritual well-being of Youth, families, and community have sustained Latinx communities. As such, one should not assume that there is something "new" about how Communities of Color integrate healing as critical to social well-being and manifest that change within self, community, and world. In this way, these decolonizing healing spaces have and continue to provide much-needed healing for our Young People. Buddha spoke on the great value of having access to these decolonizing healing spaces in the community:

> I think it's pretty good because they teach you how to heal yourself first before you go out and try to heal the community. There are a lot of folks that are going to say, let's do that and this to change, but they are still getting high, drunk, coked; they can't heal their own spirit before they go out to heal the community spirit. So what [Hope Academy] is doing is cool. It is awesome; they are helping folks heal themselves and then have those folks help others heal.

To move beyond narrow understandings of Youth resilience, it is critical that educators understand and recognize the essential distinctions of cultural experience and cultural resiliency of Youth of Color in order to gain a deeper understanding of the kinds of spaces that support individual and collective healing in the face of the structures of oppression. In particular, for many Latin@ Youth and their families, their cultural beliefs are rooted in traditional Indigenous Knoweldges that, to various degrees, continue to be practiced among Chican@ communities and other communities of color (Acosta, 2009; Flores, 2013; National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute, 2012). Thus, Indigenous Knowledges emphasize the importance of embodied learning that comes from the lived experiences of the individual and community and our relationship to the natural world. Such an understanding of culture allows educators to see beyond the pains and struggles of victimization to the strength and endurance of cultural survival and resistance of Youth of Color and communities and how culture can be a powerful antidote that can help facilitate healing.

Cultivating Seeds of Healing Justice: Art, Resistance and Political Agency

This evening was a night filled with emotion and great excitement. I got there early to help pick up food. In my car, I went to the local vendor, Mrs. Teresa, who has been cooking delicious tamales for this particular Youth program for many years. It felt good to talk to Mrs. Teresa and to know that her homemade cooking would feed us all and add to the healing of the night. I brought the food in, and everyone was very busy getting ready for a wonderful evening to showcase all their wonderful work of the past nine months. Youth were going over their lines. The kitchen was super busy because folks were getting all the food ready: tamales, fresh lemon water, salad, pan dulce, and fruit. The menu was healthy and delicious- decolonizing our diets. Folks began to trickle in. A teacher brought her entire class, and it felt good to have so many middle school students in the audience. Adults also came to support the event. The Youth were in charge of introducing each video and we were in charge of hosting the entire event. Two Youth leaders were the MCs. Once the program began, the magic commenced. Youth presented six short videos that highlighted how Young People were mobilizing to reclaim physical spaces in our city and promote healing by coming together to make art. The skits were moving and deeply touching. It was healing to witness the students perform poetry, perform theater of the oppressed, and invite a panel of Young People from juvenile prison to come to talk about their experiences of being in juvenile prison. This provided a place that humanized them and provided a space to speak their truth. Adults took a behind-the-scenes role, and Youth were completely in charge of the entire program. The night culminated with a huge circle. Folks were able to say a word that reflected how they were feeling at the end of the night. A Youth leader ended with a poem called En Lakesh (Fieldnote, 11/13/2015).

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As a regular participant in their weekly seminar, I arrived at a room full of high school Youth busily interacting with one another as they gradually settled in after a full day in their regular schools. The location was Healing in Action (HIA), a year-long paid training Youth leadership program working with low-income YPOC who have been impacted by systemic violence. Through the arts and political education, HIA works to develop the leadership of YPOC so they may be agents of change in their communities while also working to collectively experience healing in the process. As usual, the afternoon began with a check-in. Youth leader facilitators ask each person to say their name and to "share one thing you need other people to know about how you work in a group." One by one, each Young Person gets to share, and some of the things mentioned include: "People should know that I like time to process information," "People should know I like to be treated with respect," "People should know I am shy and a sensitive person." It was affirming to hear Young People vocalize their needs and to have the collective circle of your peers and adult allies as your witnesses. After check-in, we then transitioned to an icebreaker. Facilitators gave us instructions: "Line up in order of your birthday (just the day) without talking at all!" This icebreaker aimed to teach YPOC about non-verbal communication to support today's theme of storytelling and the importance of recognizing that much of human communication happens non-verbally.

After a playful interaction and struggling to collectively organize ourselves without any verbal cues, we were able to accomplish our task finally. We then broke up into three groups, and each group discussed one quote. Across the walls, in butcher paper, the following three quotes are written in large print:

"The Universe is made of stories, not atoms" by Manuel Rukeyser.

"Stories are the creative conversation of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are currency of human contact" by Robert Mckee.

"Power is the ability to define reality and to have other people respond to your definition as if it were their own" by Dr. Wade Nobles.

Young People were asked to reflect on the following questions in their group: 1) What do the quotes teach us, and 2) Why are stories so powerful? After a short period of collective dialogue, each group then reported back to the larger group on some of the highlights from their conversations. One of three adult allies in the room, Cathy summarized some of their insights and underlined the themes that came up. She emphasized the importance of stories in our day-to-day lives and how stories dictate how we treat each other and how we relate to one another. She underscored how "Our world is held together by stories. The past and future are all held in stories, and what you think is possible is held in stories." She concluded, "story-telling is a big part of the social change process." Moreover, telling our stories is contested terrain, and Communities of Color have a rich history of resistance concerning how and what stories are told, given the power of transforming our reality.

Some students in our group shared some of their memories. Xavier shared a memory from his childhood listening to music on the couch where his mother slept most of the time since she worked at night. He saw himself in the future giving a concert in the Oracle Arena with a famous celebrity like Beyonce. Another young lady shared a memory of when she started drawing her own fashion designs and how since she was a little girl, she has been sketching her designs. Her future entailed her own company logo, which centered a huge heart in the middle. I shared when I graduated from Mills College as an Ethnic Studies scholar and how my future entailed a big heart because I hoped to continue engaging in social justice work as a labor of love for my family, community, and world.

After a short break given for folks to replenish themselves with healthy snacks and an opportunity to interact with one another freely, Cathy then led us in our last activity for the evening. Across the wall hung a large Iceberg chart with the rich history of Rainbow City. We went over the timeline of Rainbow City, highlighting some of the significant events that made this city what it was today. Then she had us all do an exercise where we, too, got to share a part of our story of Rainbow City. They emphasized that we kept in mind: 1) You were in control, each of us had a different comfort edge, and 2) Respect the confidentiality of others. We were then asked to write two snapshots of key things that happened in our life or in our family that made us who we were today and to write a third snapshot about the future that shows the impact that we will have on the story of Rainbow City 10-15 years from now. In small groups, we were allowed the opportunity to share our stories. Afterward, participants had the opportunity to insert their own historical moments from the past and the future in the timeline as hashtag captions.

To end our day, we chanted a powerful quote from activist Assata Shakur:

IT IS OUR DUTY TO FIGHT FOR OUR FREEDOM
IT IS OUR DUTY TO WIN
WE MUST LOVE EACH OTHER AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER

WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS

Hearing us collectively chant these words gave me electric chills throughout my body. As our voices got louder, I could feel my heart fill with the energy in the room (Fieldnote, 11/17/2015).

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Blossoming Xochiquetzal

> Art has always been an outlet for healing. Art is an escape for me to just be myself and be raw. Sometimes, I'm just going to write, or sometimes, I am feeling a certain type of way, and I am just going to dance and let this energy out. But sometimes, something emerges, and I need to share this, tell people this, I need people to know this. I need people to know what I am thinking. So sometimes, it does happen where I want to promote it and share it, and put it on a bigger platform. -Luwalhati

Twenty-two-year-old Luwalhati is a mother, activist, and artist. She identifies as a Filipino woman. Her parents were born in the Philippines and immigrated as children to the United States. At a young age, both were introduced to gang life. At the age of 16, her mother became a teen mom with her older brother, and five years later, she was born. Unfortunately, both of her mother's relationships were not healthy, but she managed to walk out. Her mother left her dad when she was one year old because he had a drug addiction and was in and out of prison. Luwalhati was raised by a strong, hard-working single mother who was also an alcoholic. As a young child, life was not always easy, and she experienced many hardships and turbulent winds along the way. This meant she was forced to mature and grow up fast out of necessity. For example, her mother's drinking habits resulted in her having lots of parties at their home, even during the week. As the oldest female child, Luwalhati constantly had to take on a mother-figure persona, for she would take care of younger children while adults drank. This was the beginning of her "calling" to work with younger generations.

Middle school years were some of the most challenging of her upbringing. Since her mother worked long hours, Luwalhati became very independent and self-sufficient, taking care of her own needs such as cooking for herself and getting to school. However, this kind of level of maturity did not always transfer to her educational experience. Instead, she started getting into a lot of trouble. Moreover, by 6th grade, she had attended eight different schools. By 7th grade, she started smoking and drinking and got suspended for smoking marijuana and being defiant. As a result, she was required as part of her probation to do community service and therapy, which included individual and family counseling. She described how, at that time, this was a very important first intervention and that it helped her to have a space to speak about her pain and hurt with someone who was not her family or a friend.

Growing up, she also witnessed prevailing attitudes among her family that geared her in the direction of consumerism and glamorous material things. She reflected that she "Naturally started to embody that kind of energy." She came up with thousands of dollars by stealing and selling cell phones. Luwalhati was caught stealing a phone in 9th grade when she targeted PE girls and stole a lot of their belongings. In 10th grade, her destructive negative behavior continued as she began skipping school to do drugs and see boys. That year, her school principal caught her

smoking marijuana on 4/20 (colloquially known as National Marijuana Day). While in the principal's office, she got a call that her grandfather had passed away. This was a turning point for her.

Losing her grandfather brought up a lot of pain for Luwalhati, and consequently, she began to feel suicidal. She described, "Not feeling good enough for my family. I started to cut myself. And I didn't want to be there." Her mother's response was to take everything she enjoyed: phone, friends, and also a dance as a form of punishment. During that painful phase in life, she started to write more, which provided her space for herself as "Being reflective in that way was my internal work." This was a key turning point in her life because she started seeing a therapist and expressing herself through the arts. She reflected:

> Before I became a mentor or even a teacher, my first profession was performance. I've been a professional performer since I was 12 years old, and it taught me a lot about myself and also helped me cope with a lot of my traumas. Encourage the Youth to find positive outlets for themselves to deal with their internal selves. Many times, things might go on in their lives, and they might not know who to talk to or what to say but the best first step to take in these times is just to reflect and have a critical conversation with yourself. What did this mean to me? How were others involved? Why did I react that way? How did this affect me? What events lead up to these particular moments? How do I move forward?

She began to apply herself more in her studies, and she was able to raise her GPA from 1.8 to 3.6. and graduated with 3.6. After high school graduation, her mother wanted her to go to the Navy because of her past history of getting in trouble. However, when she got accepted to college, she opted out of the military.

Luwalhati started her healing journey when she became pregnant. She comes from a long line of young mothers who had children out of wedlock. Thus, the expectation from her family was that she was either going to be a teen mother (like her mother) or a criminal (like her dad), or both. While at first, she contemplated an abortion, with the support of her partner, she decided to keep their baby. In this way, her pregnancy also transformed her life and allowed her space to heal her relationship with the masculine energy. She shared a deeply moving reflection:

> The whole process, I tried in every way that I could to transform any negative energy because I thought it would go into my baby, and I didn't want that. I didn't want any negativity to flow through my blood and into him, so I did everything that I could to be happy and positive, and transformative is what I wanted to do. So I continued to write more and more and expose the ugly truth to my past.

Drawing from her lived experiences as a Young Person that struggled and is now a mother, she reflected how these experiences had shaped her praxis with Younger People:

> Focusing on the strengths that I have as a woman and as a nurturer and as an artist, and really trying to cultivate that and figure out what is my pedagogy in life…what praxis is it that I am really committing to every day, and am I being genuine, truthful, and authentic about it. The reason that I do the work that I do is because, number 1, it has always been my duty to watch the kids. Since I became old enough to hold a child, it became my duty.

> Number 2, I have experienced the juvenile system. I have experienced how it brings people down. But then also it's what you make of it. The resources that you get is what you make of it. They made me do therapy and community service. But it grew. Number 3, being a part of Youth development and empowerment programs helped me to self-actualize myself and not try to be so fabricated about who I am just because I want to fit in with people or for people to like me. I have also seen the power that art has to bring people together, to really unify, and create solidarity and community with people of all different backgrounds.

Luwalhati's commitment and passion for cultivating her strengths is impressive and inspiring. She beautifully and powerfully draws from her own lived experiences as a Young Person who struggled to find her voice. It is also her struggles that have now armed her with the wisdom, dedication, and commitment to support other Young People in their healing journeys who may be struggling. Luckily for her, she gets to use her passion for the arts to foster collective healing and strength with YPOC. As the director of a Youth-led organization, she now gets to empower other Young People through a holistic approach that integrates artistic expression, socio-political education, community organizing, healing, and personal transformation. As a talented and gifted spoken artist and dancer herself, she now gets to utilize her gifts to support decolonizing healing spaces that empower other YPOC. She shared:

> One of my paths, besides just being a community organizer, is also being an entertainer and an artist because the ideologies that are perpetuated through popular culture and through digital media are dominantly stereotypical; negative stereotypes that perpetuate misogyny, patriarchy, violence, greed, and materialism. And If I were to be at the same level of the platform that does that but then also as I am going, I keep lifting up other people who have a similar vision for empowerment and social change. We have the potential to create mass consciousness and mass change not just in the institutional level but at the level of people's psychics because, yes, we have to advocate for policy change, real institutional change. But if we don't have the people who are in the right mindset to advocate for these same kinds of things in their everyday lives, then we are not going to make enough of a difference.

Her commitment to using the arts as a vehicle to uplift a "similar vision for empowerment and social change" is materialized through her praxis with YPOC at the Youth Organization she helps to lead and in her approach to life.

"Ceremony Just Kinda like Took the Evil Out:" Holding Spiritual Space for Collective Healing

I met DaShawn and Fernando, two high school seniors, during The Project of Peace March, after our danza group had opened the event in a ceremony. The birthing of The Project of Peace came into existence as a Youth-led initiative with the desire of promoting nonviolence and peace for Young People's schools, neighborhoods, and the larger community. From its inception, these circles and calls for action were a loud cry that poured from YPOC's hearts and the pain of losing loved ones. At their school, in the span of seven months, four of their peers were killed due to community gun violence. With the support of community organizers, students decided to

launch The Project of Peace Initiative with a 74 day-relay fast that began with a school-wide celebration to beautify their school on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It ended on Cesar Chavez Day with a community march and gathering in which local politicians, community leaders, students and families, and the community at large participated to promote unity, healing, and a positive message of peace. By the end of The Project of Peace, close to 200 individuals, including Youth, teachers, and community members, had joined forces in solidarity to take on the challenge. Each day, a new student took on the fast for 24 hours and committed to a peace pledge of meditation and reflection during his or her fast. Two other small urban high schools joined the fast in solidarity. Students also held daily healing circles at school during lunchtime to support fast participants and create a space to share their experiences and speak out on the impacts of violence in their lives. These collective healing spaces were open to any student, teacher, and staff member interested in participating.

I was deeply intrigued when, in a brief conversation, these two students shared that they had been using copal and sage in ceremonies during healing circles each day of their fast. For many Indigenous communities, the burning of sage is a ritual to help cleanse the space of negative energy, ask for guidance from the ancestors, and remember spaces and events as sacred. In my own experience, like for many other women of color, the burning of sage is a ritual practice we integrate to bring calmness and feel spiritually grounded when experiencing hardships in our life. Burning sage, for DaShawn and Fernando, also served to bring spirituality and healing into their work as Youth activists. By interweaving their Indigenous spirituality through the use of the copal and sage, DaShawn and Fernando served as Youth healers in their school and community.

DaShawn and Fernando conducted healing circles each day to cleanse the person breaking their fast and to bless the new person taking on the fast. Healing circles are a process that has been embedded in many Indigenous communities today and dates back to how our ancestors practiced building community and ensured that everyone had a chance to express themselves and heal all our relations. A very important component of holding a circle is the talking stick. The person holding the talking stick is not to be interrupted. This process takes time and patience, but over time, healing circles can be a very powerful process that creates a space in which compassion and community are driving forces in how YPOC relate to one another. As Graveline (1998) reminds us, the power of the physical structure of the circle is that it allows energy to flow from speaker to speaker and creates an opportunity for a different kind of focus and awareness about "the relationship to self, one another, and to the whole" (p.131). In preparation, both DaShawn and Fernando were instructed on the necessary steps to prepare the space for the ceremony. Healing as a sacred space thus helped to build community relations and mobilized students, teachers, and community to collectively heal from the pain that results from the violence they experience in their communities.

Fernando talked at length about his childhood in Mexico. He was born in Oaxaca and raised by his large extended family on a small ranch. His mother, a teacher who had graduated from the school of arts, exposed Fernando throughout his early childhood to the arts and his cultural roots. He immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 7 to reunite with his father and mother, and it wasn't until seven months prior to our conversation that Fernando gained legal status in the U.S. The opportunity to obtain legal U.S. residence has been a massive relief for Fernando because he plans to attend college. He will now be able to qualify for financial support to help fund his college education. His early experience in school was marked by his struggle to learn English, and middle school years for him were "crucial years" because he "developed into the

person" he is today. He also talked at length about his troubled first two years in high school and how for example, he would cut class to smoke and hang out with his friends. As a result, his parents had to relocate him to a charter school in order for him to stay away from gangs and provide a different type of learning environment. Fernando spoke on how, "I wasn't gang-affiliated, [but] when you are known to hang out with certain people …you are profiled as one of them" (see, e.g., Rios, 2011). For his junior year, he would transfer one more time. This time through a friend of his mother, they found out about SOUL charter school, and since then, he has been an active leader in his school and community.

Similar to Fernando, DaShawn also has had challenges and hardships to overcome. DaShawn, who identifies himself as of mixed Native American and African American descent, was born in Detroit and moved out to California with his mother to get away from violence. His father was in the military, so he moved many times throughout his childhood. DaShawn spoke about his early schooling experiences as being a "troubled kid in school, involved in things that were not necessarily good for me." During middle school, he moved to California and was literally kicked out during the first week at the first school he attended and also kicked out within the first month of attending his second school. He reflected on how "due to different situations," "at that time, I am young, and I don't know what I am doing to really deserve this." However, as the work of Fugerson (2004) shows, unfortunately, DaShawn is not alone in his experience, for Black male students are disproportionately labeled "in troubled" and suspended from school in ways that pathologize and racialize them as *bad boys*. He was thus homeschooled for a year and a half before he finally started SOUL Charter, where he has remained for the past four years. Both Fernando and DaShawn expressed a strong sentiment of gratitude and pride for having found a school like SOUL to embrace them and help them develop into the young and positive leaders they are today.

Both DaShawn and Fernando shared with excitement how they were introduced to the medicine and healing circles for the Project of Peace by their dedicated educator, Oscar. Oscar, who is in his early forties and of Afro-Cuban heritage, decided to introduce the healing ceremonies and the medicine of sage as a way to bless the new person taking on the fast each day. In one of these early healing circles, Oscar asked DaShawn to do the moment of peace and for Fernando to do the five agreements of peace, which were part of their ceremony rituals for peace. After that experience, both approached Oscar about their interest in continuing to help lead the ceremonies, and so began their partnership as healers with Oscar at their school. In a city like Brown City, with escalating rates of violence, these healing ceremonies provide spaces of healing for these Youth. In the past three years, SOUL has lost a total of eight students due to street violence. Thus, these healing ceremony circles were deeply felt by the Youth who participated. When speaking about how these ceremonies provided healing for him, Fernando shared the following:

> It's really special. I know me and [DaShawn] especially, we are involved in a lot of things at school, so we get stressed like there is no tomorrow. Those five minutes of the ceremony just kinda took the evil out; it's like you are sitting out and there are thirty rocks on you, and you feel like you just took thirty of them off. You are just relieved. It's spiritual in a way because you get emotional because when you are doing everything, you are thinking a lot. It's like a really beautiful experience.

The opportunity to provide this sense of being "relieved" from all his worries that those "five minutes of ceremony" provided was something that Fernando looked forward to every day. When he was sharing these reflections, Fernando's words and body language radiated a deep sense of respect for his Indigenous roots and spiritual growth. Both DaShawn and Fernando had received some exposure to the art of healing through the medicines from their family. For DaShawn, he talked about his Native American ancestry and how he grew up being exposed to medicine by his elders. DaShawn shared:

> My great-grandmother practiced the medicine, so I had seen it before but didn't really know what it was, and for [Oscar] to present this and explain to me what it's about, it really did something for me. One day, [Fernando] didn't come that day, and it was my first time doing it without him, and I was a little bit nervous, but something had happened before which was really traumatic. I found out someone had cancer in my family. I went to the altar to bless the altar before I could cleanse myself. After I cleansed and smoked myself, I felt relieved, like a weight was lifted off of me. As I did the circle, everything that had happened just went away. To me, I knew then that this medicine is real. What I am doing is real.

While Oscar became the main transmitter of ancestral cultural tradition and spiritual knowledge, Fernando and DaShawn recalled childhood memories of witnessing their mother and/or grandmothers enact healing modalities that drew from their close connection to the land and herbs. Both Young People witnessed elders burning sage and tobacco for collective spiritual healing in their families. At that time, they shared how they were too young to understand or ask about the deep meaning and spiritual significance of these healing practices. However, Oscar helped facilitate a space to validate these Indigenous Knowledges and share profound teachings that both Young People were cut off from in the process of their families being uprooted from their place of origin and from no longer having access to elders. The opportunity to (re)claim these ancestral cultural ways of healing was empowering and positively affirmed their cultural identities beyond the confinement of the classroom walls. Today, thanks to the spiritual resistance of our ancestors to protect our ways of being and knowing, Indigenous peoples and Young People are able to (re)claim and (re)vitalize ancestral traditions without the fear of being tortured, killed, or persecuted (see, e.g., Martin-Hill, 2003).

Moreover, the fact that DaShawn's great-grandmother exposed him to the medicine illustrates how Communities of Color place a special value on spirituality because it continues to be passed on from generation to generation. Despite more than 500 years of colonization, our people continue to hold on to the spiritual learnings of our ancestors, which has taught us about the healing properties of the plants and mother earth. By interweaving their spirituality and activism, both DaShawn and Fernando can be said to be practicing what Perez (2011) calls "decolonizing hybrid spiritualities." For Perez (2011), these decolonizing hybrid spiritualities result because metropolitan urban cities are creating "mestizajes at the level of mixed ethnicities as we all know, but also at the level of mixed cultural, spiritual beliefs and practices" and are "increasingly complex, increasingly mixed, increasingly tolerant of difference, thereby; I would add, increasingly visionary with regard to egalitarian coexistence of cultural difference" (p.161). These two Youth healers illustrate how these decolonizing hybrid spiritualities help nourish, strengthen, and give social courage to our students to heal their bodymindspirit connection.

In asking them about how other students responded to the use of copal and the smudging during the healing circles, they both shared that at first, there were some complaints about the strong smell of copal and sage, but overall, their peers were very receptive and supportive. On one occasion, a student refused to get smudged by DaShawn, and he responded to that student with the following:

> I said then, don't fast, because when we do the smudging and we are asking you to fast. Because we are asking you to cleanse, we are asking you to be relieved of whatever is going on in your life before this ceremony happens while you are meditating. We end with the smudging so that if anything jumps on you or if anything occurs and it's negative, we want it to go away. It's very powerful.

DaShawn also shared about the impact that the healing circles had on other students in their school:

> We made it clear that it was a sacred place and that it was one of those things that you choose into or you choose out, and all the young people that were involved all choose into it. It felt like the circles got bigger and bigger every time because I would hear people talk about it. People you wouldn't expect in our community to fast for this cause. Overall my peers were excited about it. If someone wanted at the end, if there was something burning in them, they could come in front of the altar to get smudge freely, and people would come. It was amazing.

As DaShawn expressed, the use of sage in the healing ceremonies helped bring "people you wouldn't expect" and, in this, helped build community among the student and adult bodies at their school. As I have discussed, as a result of the coloniality of power in the modern/colonial education system, many Youth may not have been exposed to the burning of sage and healing ceremonies as valuable practices because they may have internalized some of the stereotypes in the media and public discourse that label our practices as "pagan," "devil-like worship," "exotic," or simply, just plain 'weird' for many Youth. By foregrounding spirituality in their activism, DaShawn and Fernando as Youth healers illustrate how decolonizing healing spaces have the power to help build decolonizing spaces of community and healing for students and educators.

These Young People of Color are drawing from spiritual conocimientos, which help facilitate decolonizing healing spaces which help them (re)constitute themselves through their spirituality. In this way, Youth establish new practices of governing themselves in relation to self and community via embodying their spiritual conocimientos. This work highlights how Young People are responding to the violence in their communities by embodying their spiritualities for healing and speaking about their experiences. Spiritual resilience becomes central in understanding how Young People activists constitute the self in relation to the other and how the self is constructed through evoking the spiritual through the healing and transformation they experience. Thus, YPOC are creating space for multiple ways of knowing because of a renewed understanding of how their spirituality facilitates their collective healing process and opportunities to enact the sacred as part of their activism.

“It Brings me Back to Our Ancestors:” Spiritual Activism & Healing the Next 7 Generations

> It feels really amazing to connect spiritually with myself in a way that doesn’t really get accepted by western society because we are all so used to having others tell us what to do but being able to listen to creator, listen to spirit, and listen to our own intentions and saying yes to those actions is one of the most amazing feelings 'cause it has really helped me get more closer to my heart and my true feelings. Because a lot of times, I do feel my ancestors are with me when I am praying in these ways. It’s through the animals, many different signs that nature does, that’s a good thing. Making that acknowledgement. ~Isabella

At first glance, Isabella, 22 years old, comes across as a soft-spoken and timid Young Person. However, her bright smile and peaceful, calming demeanor are hard to miss. He leaves a lasting imprint on anyone lucky enough to come across her beautiful spirit. A member of the Northern Cheyenne, Arikara, and Muskogee Creek tribes, she is the proud descendant of a lineage of activists because her grandmother and other family relatives were among some of the pioneers who helped found the first Native American Center and pow-wow in her city. Her ancestors’ spirit of resistance is especially evident whenever she takes over the microphone at any of the many community gatherings and healing ceremonies she has helped organize throughout her region. I have been fortunate to witness how her charisma and heartfelt words, prayers, and reflections win over the hearts of the crowd, which usually responds with an outpouring of claps or affirming AHOs. This young, fierce warrior is also involved in Idle No More, The Run4Salmon, the fight for the sacred land of West Berkeley Shellmound, The Sogorea Te Land Trust Project, Guardians of the Earth, Refinery Healing Walks, and New Moon Water Ceremonies. She is also the youngest leader of the Indigenous Women of the Americas Defending Mother Earth Treaty. Naturally, as an introvert, finding her voice and passion for climate change, healing, and activism has been a journey that has not always been easy

Her connection to the land, to the elements, and her passion for environmental justice have grounded a knowing that “love is the greatest medicine that we have within ourselves.” She powerfully spoke:

> Being able to understand there is medicine within everything and it's not just the medicinal plants, it's in our own actions, it's in the animals, it's in the water, it's in the air that we breathe and the soil in which we walk on because our ancestors walked all along these areas, and many other ancestors of different backgrounds. Reconnecting, finding that reconnecting feeling is powerful and healing. Living in an urban city, we don’t get that intimate space, but whenever we get those moments to disconnect from reality, it’s a reminder that we are human beings on this earth which it’s a small rock compared to the big universe that surrounds us. And that we just have to keep pushing every single day and always remember that love is the greatest medicine that we have within ourselves.

One of the defining moments that embarked her on a path towards organizing and activism began as the result of the huge refinery explosion that took place in her city that impacted more than 15,000 residents who had to receive medical attention due to the severity of the explosion.

Her mom is from North Dakota, and her father is of Italian heritage. She grew up in a low-income urban city. In a deeply emotional and heartfelt moment, she spoke of a harrowing past concerning her father's history, who was 20 years older than her mother. She spoke of the pain of finding out about her father's criminal history and how much this impacted her as a child. Tears began to flow from her sad eyes, and I reached out to burn sage and hold space for her to move through her sadness. She then recounted other moments in her life of deep sadness that have marked her, including her grandfather having cancer, the abuse of alcohol by her loved ones to numb pain, losing friends because of suicide, and her close friend killed when they were mistaken for a gang member. The tears continue to flow. Her vulnerability humbled me, and I honored her courage to open up with moments of silence for her just to be. She shared "I am mentally aware that the alcohol, the drugs, and substance abuse don't need to be used in that way to try to heal yourself." By releasing those tears, Isabella was not just crying for her pain but for the collective wound of her ancestors that she, too, deeply feels in her spirit. Isabella spoke about healing the historical trauma that impacts our communities when she shared:

> Historical trauma is dealt with and well known within the Indigenous community because of everything our ancestors have been through up until my grandparents. They were forced into boarding schools. Through the boarding schools, their language was taken away, the man's hair was cut. Our hair is very sacred to us and cutting it brought about great grief. Each strand holds another ancestor or another being of ourselves, and they were forced into Christianity or to Catholicism. I feel that pain that they went through. It's a huge journey of understanding and accepting what has happened in the past and to move forward and to find that transition to do better, to make a difference and to make change a change, and to be that voice for them and for the next seven generations after us.

Isabella's commitment is to be a voice for "the next seven generations," and part of her own healing journey has been reclaiming the healing practices of her ancestors that were disrupted because of colonization. She recounted a memory of when she was nine years old, and she witnessed how her own family members were disconnected from traditional spiritual ways of being and how she did not understand why at that young age. She shared:

> Growing up didn't have any tobacco, sage, or cider, or none of those traditional medicines. We had bibles and crosses. So that was our way of life. We went to this gathering, and sage was being passed out to anyone who went, and my grandmother automatically said no. But grandmother said if it's not this way, then it's no other way. We can't be practicing both spiritual journeys because that will conflict with others. And at that time, I didn't understand.

Through her activism and relationship building with Native elders in the movement, Isabella has been able to connect with the medicinal and healing ways of her ancestors. For her, this healing process has been deeply spiritual and about deeper connection in all her relations to the natural world and all human and non-human relatives. At the beginning, Isabella felt "hesitant" about using medical practices, especially when she was questioned about her Indigeneity when she didn't have familiarity with some of the healing practices. Yet her wisdom allowed her to know that there is no right way to pray and what matters most is respecting our prayers. She reflected:

> At first, I was a bit hesitant with burning sage or sweat lodge. I have actually never been to a sweat lodge just for personal reasons. I have not been fully drawn to go to one. I remember meeting someone, and they asked, have you ever been to a sweat lodge? And when I said no, they were like, 'Why? Aren't you Native?' Different tribes never did sweat lodges. Some of them do, and some of them don't. I just have not done it, and that is ok. And there are many other ways I can be in prayer and in ceremony.

Indeed, offering her prayers has been a powerful vehicle for Isabella to heal her past and feel connected to her ancestors and, in this way, also gain courage to speak up and fight for healing justice. She shared:

> It's been really eye-opening for me. I have started to really let go of my past, of being a Christian, and started to really understand there is only one creator and knowing that creator is within us and creator is everywhere. Being able to pray whenever I would like to, whether I am going through struggles or if I just really enjoying life. I send off prayers of gratitude or just asking for help, whether it is out loud or to myself in my room, and it has really helped me connect to myself and to the ancestors and spirits who are protecting me. It is paying attention and listening to my gut feelings. Sometimes it can be crazy decisions like speaking publicly out in front of thousands of people attending different rallies and being able to have that presence that Indigenous people are still here.

Connecting to her ancestors and medicinal ways has been deeply healing, she shared:

> Connect more to my ancestors and be in that prayer with everyone. Being connected to the medicine and really understanding the true meanings of why we use these specific medicines and plants when we smudge when we pray. It's so healing. It's so rejuvenating because it brings me back to our ancestors. Our ancestors used the same medicine, if not more or something similar, to do the same thing to gather to pray to make a difference. To make sure that we as people can continue our legacy generation after generation.

With regards to Healing Activism and connection to earth, Isabella shared:

> Being able to walk in that spiritual path of reconnecting to the earth and having all these different ceremonies with the healing walks and the new moon ceremonies and all, it has really opened up my eyes.

This fierce spiritual warrior's commitment to foster the next generation of Young People has allowed her to find her voice. She confidently articulated "I use my voice to reach out to the younger people who are going to have to deal with the consequences of all the decisions that are being made now, and we need to be part of this big movement, part of this healing process." She went on to share:

> I want to connect with the Youth. It is our future that is going to be at risk when we get older, and so it's important to get educated and to be involved so it can resonate with all of our actions and of the life decisions that we make. As long as I can pass the word out

> with the younger people, I'll be happy because now I know that the seed is continuing, I know that they will do greater things.

When sharing about the challenges of doing healing work with Young People, Isabella reflected on her own praxis as Young leader:

> Working with Youth is challenging because of social media; because of capitalism. Them thinking that you need lots of money in the world in order to survive needing or thinking you need these many likes to be popular and it's really isolating our Youth from what is really happening in real time. That is why I just started doing more community- based work and doing things that are fun and, at the same time, incorporating, whether it's sharing my story or my personal path or educating them about natural things such as understanding the difference between compose or recycling but doing it in a fun way. A lot of the times, the Youth, they don't really want to do things as a whole because they get awkward because they think you are putting them in a classroom, and a lot of them, the Youth, don't resonate with the elders, the older people, because they deal with the teachers, having to listen to their teachers in high school in their classroom every single day and me, being a Young Person, being really close to them. I find the language, my personality or my persona, or my character letting them feel welcomed. It's ok to relax. No one is going to lecture. Let's get involved.

When asked in an interview how she imagines a more compassionate world and future, she responded:

> I imagine a world without the fossil fuel industry. I imagine the children, the mothers, and friends playing in clean waters, digging in the soil, harvesting everything that they grew, and everything having an even balance. I imagine that people only see from what's inside. I imagine that we as people can live without a government or a system telling us how we need to live our lives, as we are able to come together in agreement of peace, love, acceptance, and respect for one another, the land, our waters, and ourselves.

Discussion: Spirituality and Youth Activism

As their testimonios highlight, the spiritual healing that the focal Young People experience is not just a form of resistance to Eurocentric secular dominant discourses experienced in schooling and dominant culture. For many of the Young People, engaging Indigenous forms of spirituality connect them to their culture, histories, and ancestors. Ritskes (2011) argues that "any form definition of spirituality needs to acknowledge the value of connection, as conceived in indigenous spirituality, as vital and inherent to its being: a connection to all aspects of the self, connection to history, and connection to a higher power or larger framework" (p. 15). The testimonios of the Young People who participated in this healing project intimately delves into the personal and the experiential nature of their spiritualities. Their testimonios underscore the valuable insights that arise when Young People are given the opportunity to explore how their spirituality informs their understanding and approach to engaging in transformative healing work. Furthermore, this chapter argues that *decolonizing healing spaces* present opportunities for Young People to acknowledge and embody the value of

spiritual conocimientos in their healing journeys. Moreover, it is through their engagement in these *decolonizing healing spaces* that transformation becomes possible and where spiritual conocimientos become a healing and sacred process rather than the dehumanizing and painful processes that many Young People have experienced through schooling and other forms of systemic oppression.

By highlighting excerpts from the testimonios of Young People like Malcolm, Buddha, Luwalhati, Fernando, DaShawn, and Isabella, this chapter invites us to bear witness to the spiritual resilience and potential of the power of healing in the lives of Young People. Through their shared experiences in *decolonizing healing spaces*, Young People are learning how to move beyond their trauma in order to transform their individual and collective tragedies of pain as their basis for collective social action. Their healing activism is an inherently spiritual act, one that makes it possible for Young People to think and feel empowered and hopeful against all odds. Their testimonios assert how Young People are cultivating inner strength, spiritual resilience, and a critical healing consciousness to analyze the power dynamics at play in systems of oppression and, in this way, gaining courage to keep ongoing. Moreover, the insights gained from their testimonios recognizes the processes of decolonizing while fostering spiritual ways of knowing that empower the spiritual resilience of Young People of Color to restore cultural pride and their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Calling in the Spirit of Father Sky,
Honoring the Healing powers of Tonatiuh,
Las Estrellas y La Luna.

Con Respeto y Con Permiso,
Praying for Inspiration, Guidance, and unlimited Possibility
May the smoke of the copal
Take these prayers to reach father sky
So we may be soaked in his precious knowledge
and embody time as healing.

When times get tough,
May we remember to pause
To bring our awareness to our breath
And soak in the medicine from the sun's warm rays
And in each inhale and exhale
May we invite in gratitude,
And release all that no longer serves us.

May we raise our head and palms high to the Sky
To receive the radiant beauty and healing powers
That father Sky bestows upon us All.

May we find comfort in the knowing that
The stars or ancestors are protecting us and looking over us,
That during the our dark nights
The moon gifts us intuition and healing,
And that each day
The sun radiates us with the power of
Vitality and Transformation

Ometeotl

Chapter 6

Decolonizing Healing Praxis: Regalos Y Cargas

A walk inside the doors of the Healing Youth Center [74] (HYC) one can immediately appreciate the safety and comfort that this special space offers to Young People of Color (YPOC) and the local community. A visual tour inside the building showcases Young People's art, inspirational reflection quotes, and portraits of Young People's faces representing the many different shades of Black and Brown Young People who walk through their doors. As a whole, this labor of love provides a colorful collage of patterns and displays that are inviting and healing to one's eyesight and spirit. On any given day, Young People from all walks of life can drop in to attend workshops ranging from healing circles, cooking classes, music-making, and spoken word to receiving individual and/or collective counseling. Since its inception, YPOC has been at the epicenter driving HYC's mission and vision. In fact, HYC was born as a result of the efforts led by Young People who helped organize a listening campaign in which listening circles were held with more than 1,500 of their peers to hear their thoughts about what makes Young People feel safe in their community. In their responses, Young People pointed out the need for physical spaces for them to hang out and feel safe. Indeed, their neighborhood, like many low-income neighborhoods, amplify the paradox of living in an urban city where increasing homicide rates and diminishing socioeconomic opportunities for Communities of Color are in stark contrast with the pockets of higher-income neighborhoods and multi-million polluting industries that continue to exploit the natural and human resources of this community.

For over a decade now, HYC has kept its doors open to YPOC and their organization has been a pioneer in leading the way in helping to uplift a healing-centered approach with other community-based organizations serving Young People of Color throughout the state. More than ever, their healing-centered approach has been critical to addressing the immense loss and recurring trauma YPOC and poor Communities of Color face on a daily basis in their community. In a soft pitch and melancholic tone Jae, who has been the Mental Health Director at HYC for the past more than five years, recalls how in the span of three weeks, staff, Young People, and the community at HYC had to cope with the unexpected killings of three YPOC in their community from gun violence. All three Young People murdered were young Black boys, two of whom were only 14 and 15 years old. The senseless killings of these young boys of color, who were dearly loved by their families and at HYC is enough to leave one in great despair and heartache. For some of the staff members who had closely worked with all three of the Young People murdered, the grief was especially profound. Jae painfully reflects: "We attended three funerals in a month. No kind of training in school can prepare you to hold those conversations." Indeed, there is no kind of training or preparation that can help bring closure to why in our times we are having to bury our babies. No explanation or rationale can do justice or bring peace of mind to the mothers and families of those three Young People. The killings of these Young People add further injury to an open wound that is felt across our nation. The murder of Black and Brown young lives such as Trayvon Martin, Andy Lopez, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Amilcar Perez-Lopez, and many more in the hands of police has sparked critical mass outrage which has led to grassroots movements such as *Black Lives Matter*, a Black-centered political will and movement building project that attempts to bring an end to state-sanctioned violence

[74] All places and names are pseudonyms.

against Black people. There is a growing recognition among these movements to also make space for healing in order to channel the pain, grief, and anger into a fight for justice.

Spaces to grieve are an important part of supporting a *decolonizing healing praxis* and there are not enough spaces to help hold the collective pain of our communities. As educators and practitioners, we must continue to ask ourselves: How do we help hold and facilitate healing spaces for ourselves and for others to be inspired to engage in their healing process? How do we hold on to our humanity and not dehumanize those who may cause us harm? What is the role of the community in facilitating healing justice among educators and Young People? At HYC there is an explicit intention to not let the magnitude of their pain go unrecognized and to respond to their collective pain as staff, Young People, and community in a healing-centered way. Jae shares how a key aspect of beginning the healing process is acknowledging the "trauma we carry as we go into the work" and that "this is not ok." In this way, the organization's healing response to the murder of three of their babies was to shut down all programming for two weeks. The decision to not proceed with business as usual, indeed is a huge leap into a deep recognition that making time to acknowledge the collective pain and to heal is not only a more humane response but one that honors the lives of the Young People through a decolonial lens of understanding time and space. HYC's reclaiming of time and space is decolonial in that it transgresses the normative imposition in schools and spaces that support Young People to stay hyper-focused on meeting institutional milestones given that it's the kind of productivity that gets rewarded and imposed by a neoliberal capitalist agenda that sees numbers and not the lives of real human beings.

Instead, during those two weeks, HYC's response shifted away from the paradigm and the imposition of western linear time. In a capitalist society in which time has been commodified and represents our greatest currency in the labor economy, to pause and/or gift/share our time with and/or in the service of others is indeed a radical act of love in these times. HYC's commitment to making time to honor the loss of the lives of the three Young People shifts from a construct of time as a "commodity" to an understanding of time as healing. In other words, time as healing makes it possible to acknowledge and embody the social, political, deeply spiritual, multi-dimensional, and healing aspects of time. In this way, at HYC time was made each day to hold and facilitate collective healing spaces to mourn their pain and to grieve. Staff, Young People, and community members created beautiful and colorful altars to honor the lives of the three Young People and to remember how they touched the lives of friends and family. In addition, meals were collectively cooked on-site and this became a powerful medium of healing for not only did it nourish their bodies; it also fed their spirits.

Jae reflects how their healing praxis was about "let's just be together" and "the intention to be mindful of being able to hold that space and that staff and community needed that." The response by HYC's staff to tend to their collective grief and that of their Young People and community affirms their humanity and supports their collective healing amidst the ways structural oppression and white supremacy dehumanize and make invisible the pain of Communities of Color. Thus, a *decolonizing healing praxis* signals an important shift in paradigm from traditional models of youth development that have often disregarded the social-emotional and spiritual impact violence has on the hearts and minds of Young People. The articulation and embodiment of a *decolonizing healing praxis* at community-based spaces serving Young People, such as HYC, provide valuable and critical insights into the importance of healing processes in working *with* urban YPOC and what makes *a decolonizing healing praxis* so special.

As I elaborated on chapters three and four, the commitment of *SocialJustice Healing(r)Evolutionaries*, or *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* for short, to a *decolonizing healing praxis* remind us of the power we have as practitioners who care for the wellbeing of our Young People and communities and the collective healing that can happen when we work towards uplifting the healing and spiritual conocimientos that nourish the hearts and spirits of Young People. However, as the testimonios of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* also highlight, engaging in decolonizing healing work is not always easy or light on the spirit. As the experiences of practitioners at HYC demonstrate, it is critical to not romanticize what healing work entails among adults and with Young People. Not only is the loss of Young Lives heavy for the heart and spirit to process in those moments; but the day-to-day grind of serving Young People and running programs, organizations, and schools has a physical toll on the bodies of practitioners. Like in any social justice-oriented community-based praxis, challenges and tensions arise for practitioners committed to long-term transformative and sustainable decolonizing healing activism.

In this chapter, I unpack how a *decolonizing healing praxis* allows *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries* to address some of the challenges that they encounter in their praxis. *First,* I discuss the ways in which colonial western linear time presents unique challenges to the work of healing and discuss how a *decolonizing healing praxis* speaks to a temporal aspect of healing. Time as healing becomes medicinal in that it allocates time to heal, or rather, to suspend activity in a colonial timeline that is hyper-focused on productivity. I highlight how a *decolonizing healing praxis* makes it possible to disrupt linear time through *SJH(r)Evolutionaries'* praxis of temascal, healing circles, and releasing pain. I also discuss how *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* meet the challenge of deploying a *decolonizing healing praxis* in the context of a capitalist neoliberal agenda that appropriates culture, doesn't support collective spaces for healing, and is about trauma pimping. These challenges underpin the logic of settler colonialism and rationalities in our politics of engaging in healing work. This chapter concludes by situating a *decolonizing healing praxis* as part of a collective prayer: an ongoing prayer to imagining and planting seeds that will help cultivate a healing vision in the hearts and minds of Young People which transgresses time and space for collective healing to take place for the next seven generations.

Decolonizing Healing Praxis: Unsettling Colonial western linear time

Colonial western time[75] keeps us trapped on a construct in which we feel we are always running to catch up with time. Not surprisingly, colonial notions of healing confine us and impose a colonial understanding of time. For educators and practitioners, this shows up in working unbalanced schedules and feeling pressured to engage in grind culture, or what community healer states "grind culture is rooted in the belief that in order to be valuable you must be productive...This keeps us on a hamster wheel of productivity and keeps us from experiencing the magic of life" (Thriving_with_heather, 2021). Especially among healing practitioners of Color, this sentiment is fueled by righteous anger, which makes it ok and justifies working ourselves in some instances to death, and feeling that unless you are not working to exhaustion you are not doing enough. Thus, in the current hegemonic construction of temporality, there is no time for healing. There is limited space for healing and educators and practitioners are often dictated to go about their praxis as "business as usual," no matter what pain/trauma/challenges their students or themselves may be experiencing. The motto always being "let's move on."

[75] Scholarship that analyses colonial temporal western time and how it subjugates and oppresses us (see, eg. Adkins, 2017). Scholarship that explores alternatives of understanding time (Anzaldua, 1987; Cruz, 2001; Gonzales, 2012).

When power and knowledge are acknowledged from a critical and decolonizing stance, Young People can become aware of how normalizing discourses found in schooling attempt to socialize educators and students into specific types of knowledge and secular modes of thinking and being that privilege text and Eurocentric grids of intelligibility that impose colonizing linear notions of student "progress" and "intellectual and emotional development." Healing practices that link a *decolonizing healing praxis* and education are at the root of our present-day healing conocimientos which have the power to help shape our subjectivities to support holding time and space for the collective healing of the next seven generations. In the face of increasingly technical and functional forms of schooling and in a context of an ever-increasing linear temporal focus on consumerism, we find that schooling is far removed from promoting a relation of self-based on healing conocimientos that support our collective healing and liberation. Instead, western colonial schooling promotes an ethos of competition, individualism, and meritocracy in education. In holding spaces for Young People to share their stories and conduct their own analysis from the perspective of race, class, gender, and their lived experience, there exists the possibility for Young People to develop a more reflexive account of their lived experience. By giving students access to *decolonizing healing spaces* and having them reflect on their own circumstances, Young People have an opportunity to analyze the discursive power of schooling. In this way, Young People are able to reconstitute their ideas of learning and their educational experience through a reflective process and to resist the colonizing positioning made available to them in dominant discourses.

Moreover, for educators and practitioners working within a context of settler colonialism, a *decolonizing healing praxis* is needed to counter the unsustainability of the social-political systems we seek to transcend. A *decolonizing healing praxis* embodies temporality with a praxis that makes it possible to decolonize our healing imagination and praxis. The exploration of and excavation of these healing moments in the testimonios of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* and my own praxis as allies in these efforts reveal how *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries* are reconfiguring colonial time as moments of possibility and embodied healing pathways to achieve healing justice. The healing temporalities emerging from their testimonios disrupt hegemonic temporalities of time and space. Through the excerpts of *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries'* testimonios and vignettes from my fieldnotes, I capture how practitioners in these challenging moments pivot and in this way underpin the possibility of a *decolonizing healing praxis* in education. In the following sections, I present some of the challenges identified among *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* and how *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are decolonizing time and thus enacting a *decolonizing healing praxis* that transgresses normative linear time through the praxis of temascal, healing circles, and making time for practitioners to release the heaviness of their pain. Moreover, these healing modalities are rooted in Indigenous Knowledges and non-linear ways of temporality embodied through the ancestral traditions of temescal and healing circles that continue to be practiced within a context of community. This *decolonizing healing praxis* is especially embraced among educators and practitioners of color, including those who may not be necessarily recognized as Indigenous, such as Latinx folks in the U.S., yet have much to benefit from such healing practices that are rooted in our ancestral and present-day Indigenous ontologies and ways of being.

Young People of Color: Roses and Thorns

> The main challenge is how do we get their buy-in. I don't think I have had a young person ever come in like, "I need healing." It's not in their lexicon. And I think if we

> were to be that straightforward about how the program is about it, it would turn off a lot of youth. The challenge is you have to start where young people are at and there is a lot of relationship building and trust building in order for the work to start to happen. ~Valeria

One of the challenges encountered when integrating a *decolonizing healing praxis* when working with YPOC is the initial resistance that Young People may have towards engaging in healing processes. As Valeria underscores, a lexicon of healing is not something that is part of most Young People's everyday life. On the contrary, research has shown how even when YPOC have access to school mental health services, this does not mean Young People are accessing it and most importantly they are not receiving the much-needed services over a sustained amount of time (Whitaker et al., 2018). The reasons for this resistance may include but are not limited to the fear of facing their own trauma(s) and/or the initial reaction to categorize healing as doing "therapy" given that for many YPOC there is stigma attached to participating in therapy. Moreover, mainstream research on mental health, like trauma-informed research, follows a linear understanding of healing in which individuals are in need of "fixing" and that only experts can provide prescriptions to achieve a linear pathway towards mental health and wellbeing. As *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* highlight, healing is a process that can't be forced and that process may look different for each individual. Thus, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are acutely aware that healing interventions may not always be successful in reaching out to every Young Person immediately.

To enter healing via a *decolonizing healing praxis* is decolonial in that it provides for alternative pathways to supporting the mental health and wellness of YPOC. It is not meant to replace the mental health and wellbeing resources that are still needed in order to provide access on a more systemic level, especially for YPOC that may need support over a sustained amount of time to cope with severe individual trauma. However, a *decolonizing healing praxis* makes it possible to provide a safe and healing space for YPOC people to be vulnerable and be exposed to healing conocimientos that aim to support their wholeness and emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Access to a culturally-rooted healing praxis that supports the overall mental health and wellbeing of Young People within a context of their community is key to shifting to more healing centered approaches that look at communities for their own *healing conocimientos,* for it is in those communities that you can also find the best practices to promote their own wellness in culturally affirming and healthy ways.

Temazcal: Returning to the womb

> I am not going to heal nobody, I am just going to hold that space that I need and I will actually receive healing and everybody in the space as much as they allow themselves to, they will also experience healing and that is their decision, their own courage to come out to be vulnerable to heal because that is the biggest step. It is a whole process of deep trust and understanding. ~Tlaloc

Temazcal is an ancient Indigenous purification sweat ceremony that is traditional to many but not all Indigenous Peoples of Cem Anahuca[76]. Today, Temazcal is a traditional healing

[76] Prior to the colonization of what we now identify as "America"' was in ancient Mexican culture understood as Cem Anahuac, which translates into a place totally surrounded by water on all four sides and this part of the continent spanned from Nicaragua to Northern Canada (Ruiz, n.d.-a).

tradition that continues to be practiced among Native American and Latinx folks who are connecting and/or (re)claiming their Indigenous traditions. As I highlighted in my testimonio and that of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*, temazkal has been a powerful healing modality that is practiced for deep healing and rebirth. Entering the temazcal is entering decolonial time for in the earth's womb there is a different understanding of time and space. Moreover, the lava rocks used to bring the heat inside the temazcal embody the spirit of ancestors and the water poured over the rocks emits steam or what elders refer to as the breath of the creator. Thus, the temazcal as medicine connects us to deep ancestral time and its multidimensional presence is felt in the body. As such, the teachings of the elders share that when you are in the womb of the earth and you grieve, you are just grieving for yourself (in some cases it may not even be your grief that shows up for healing), you are also grieving for all the ancestors who did not grieve. In the complete darkness of the temazcal, time stops, and the steam that emits from the abuelitas/abuelitos and the sound of the songs offered, allow the flesh and bones to shed tears and toxics that heal more than just the body. Temazcal as a decolonizing healing praxis disrupts hegemonic temporal subjectivities and in this way connects us with the possibility of (re)membering the ancestral memory that is imprinted in the body.

For Tlaloc, an activist in the movements for food, environmental and healing justice, the healing work of temescal requires "deep trust" and "courage" to be vulnerable. Specifically, he spoke at length about some of the challenges he has experienced integrating Indigenous ancestral healing modalities, such as Temazcal, in his praxis with YPOC. As director of a yearlong youth program focused on social justice and healing, Tlaloc worked closely with a small group of urban Young People activists. As part of their training Young People were asked to collectively plan and implement a weeklong healing retreat for themselves. During one of their planning sessions, Tlaloc extended an invitation to the Young People to integrate the healing praxis of Temazcal. The Young People were very receptive to the suggestion and collectively came to a consensus that they wanted to integrate the ceremony as part of their retreat.

Tlaloc took great care in preparing the Young People for the ceremony over a period of months. In fact, elder Tata Tecolote was invited as community healer to speak at length with the Young People about the meaning and significance of Temazcal ceremony for healing. All the rituals and procedures were explained to the Young People prior to the actual ceremony given they were all participating in Temazcal for the first time. However, on the actual day of the ceremony, two of the Young People were emotionally triggered, and they opted not to participate. At first, Tlaloc didn't know how to react and saw it as a failure on his part to successfully facilitate the space for these two Youths. However, after checking in with each Youth about their experience that day, Tlaloc learned from both young people that the process had triggered painful wounds that they were not yet ready to open up. Going through this experience, Tlaloc was reminded that as eager as he may be to share the healing medicine of Temazcal with all YPOC, it is important to honor Young Peoples' healing processes and that not all Youth may be ready to do traditional Indigenous healing practices. Medina (2014) reminds us, "The process of sweating in the ceremony requires physical and emotional sacrifice. It is a process of letting go of one's fears, of working through material and temporal concerns. It is a process that requires trust, trust in one's creator, and trust in the ceremonial leader or water pourer" (p. 175). For Young People, opening up to be vulnerable and sit with the darkness of being inside the temazcal can be scary and it is important to share these sacred medicines with Young People when they are ready to go there in their healing journey. Temazcal as a medicinal

healing modality is powerful and when YPOC are courageous and ready to go there, it is deeply healing and empowering. Buddha, a Youth participant speaks about the power of temazcal,

> It was a pretty relaxing experience. At that time, I was having a lot of problems with my mother. Just getting along with her was a big problem. So I went and I tried to sweat it out. Tried to relax. I just feel relaxed when I go in there and sweat. It is just a whole different experience than just staying out here smoking, drinking and doing all of that to forget about it. Sweating it, it just feels better. It's like going back to the womb. You go in there and you just try to sweat all your problems out. It was a pretty cool experience. I personally felt like my head lighter cuz going in there I felt my head just really heavy with a lot of thinking with all the problems I had. When I got out of the sweat I feel calmer, more chilled. My head wasn't healla tense like it was. I just felt really good when we came out.

Tiempo para Conectar con El Corazón: Healing Circles as medicine

> Honoring the time that is necessary, practicing patience throughout the process and acknowledging one's relationship are all central….Practicing these teachings is not easy given the fast past lifestyle and technologies of contemporary society, yet it is necessary to train and discipline our minds, body and spirit. There are no quick recipes for zapping sacred knowledge into the essences of who we are. (Graveline, 1998, p. 140)

The power of talking and/or healing circles as praxis is that it invites participants to share in the experience by listening and speaking from their heart and from the place connecting with their feelings and emotions. The structure of the circle itself is healing in that it serves as a container to hold the energy and in this way, it establishes a safe and non-hierarchical space for all who are present to take turns speaking without interruptions when the talking piece is shared. As a decolonizing praxis, healing circles disrupt western linear time in that it's an approach that treats time as healing. Holding a circle for healing is not as simple as sitting in a circle and having Young People open up about their wounds. As educators and practitioners, special attention must be given to how to facilitate healing circles for it is critical that we know how to close people when traumas are triggered. As a mental health practitioner, Carmen elaborates on this when she reflects that there is a lot of intentionality that is required in order to hold healing circles that help facilitate collective healing and thus minimize the risk of causing more damage. Carmen elaborates,

> When you hold space in a very loving and healing way, things are going to open up, and so I think it's important to be smart about it and conscious about it and I think that it's important to have people there who are healers and they don't have to be mental health clinicians, they can be curanderas, any other type of healer, it's important that we think that out so that we are not causing more damage so that there is somebody who has the skill set that can help a young person close that up someone who can say, I acknowledge what you are saying, I see you, I hear you, I'm holding space for you, and encouraging them to get the help they need to get or figuring out how to connect them to support and helping them close up cuz it is irresponsible to not do that and damaging.

Similarly, based on his experience facilitating healing circles, Tonatiuh shared how for some Young People that may have suffered great trauma, collective healing circles might not be enough to help cope and/or break through their individual trauma. Tonatiuh shares,

> When you have collective ritual, you will have young people who will fall into ritual with a real certain ease and it's just enough because they already feel connected either as friends, as human beings. You will have young people who will be in a circle with much more trauma, deeper trauma, and the ritual is not going to hold and it's not going to have that kind of continuity because trauma is more individualized. So collectively we can heal and if there is not a whole lot of in-depth trauma usually we can go from there as a collective.

Tonatiuh goes on to reflect on the challenges of facilitating intergenerational healing circles with elders and youth. Listening to elders share their traditional healing praxis is not something that all Young People are ready to hear and/or necessarily find relevant in their life. He shares, "We have young men that come into our group and they don't stay and we have to look at that because in many ways we are not relevant to them." Similarly, in the experience of Tlaloc about introducing temazcal, we see how even when all the best precautions and intentions are taken and even when community healers are brought in to help facilitate these collective spaces, there is no guarantee Young People will show up and are ready to delve into their healing process.

Yet, when educators and community come together to support healing circles it is also important to uplift that Young People who are ready will step up to be those leaders that are courageous and have the inspiration to hold space and time to do collective healing with their peers. As so powerfully stated by Dashawn,

> We made it clear that it was a sacred place and that it was one of those things that you choose into or you choose out and all the young people that were involved, all choose into it. It felt like the circles got bigger and bigger every time because I would hear people talk about it. People you wouldn't expect in our community to fast, fasted for this cause, overall my peers were excited about it. If someone wanted at the end, if there was something burning in them, they could come in front of the altar to get smudge freely and people would come. It was amazing.

Dashawn and his friend Luis, both seniors, took it upon themselves to learn from their mentor and (re)claim their Indigenous ancestral traditions through the power of holding healing circles at their school. Students and teachers were invited to participate in these healing circles and for 72 days, time was allotted during lunchtime to come together and do the collective ritual of holding time as healing through the healing circle.

However, for educators and practitioners who are not familiar with healing circles as pedagogy or have not engaged in healing circles themselves, it is important, to begin with their own healing first and this entails a willingness to learn from elders and community practitioners who from years of experience have gained much wisdom and practice in holding time as healing through the praxis of healing circles. It requires educators to build bridges between educational spaces and the larger community in order to bring in community healers, practitioners, and adult allies to help support the collective healing of our educators and YPOC. It also necessitates making time to build and strengthen networks across the many different community-based

organizations serving YPOC in order to know where to refer our YPOC when needing to wrap around additional support when triggered and/or pain may show up.

From Duality to Oneness: Meeting Young People Where They Are At

> For a lot of young people, the chaos and the trauma and everything they deal with is normal to them. And when you break that normality that is frightening because it's something that they don't know. Even during a meditation for the first time with them, it's really uncomfortable. Some young people will laugh it out, some will get up and get mad and leave the room. It's really uncomfortable to break that mode of being. In the limited time frame, you have to get over those issues that you have been bringing up in the first place, trying something, and dealing with what happens afterwards because it brings up this whole world that is either scary or enticing to them but doesn't fit into anything else that is happening in their lives. It doesn't match. They may have only this one place where they can come and do something like that and they get mad about not having any other places where it exists. It's a lot of work. ~Valeria

In their testimonios, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* spoke at length about the challenges of remaining open and fluid to change in their praxis in order to meet YPOC where they are at. In other words, in order to have a critical understanding of the lived realities many of our youth are facing, adult allies must be willing to give up some of their power in order to foster community and genuine mentorship with YPOC. A need to be flexible and provide various mediums of communication for YPOC to express themselves is critical in order to not push away young people who may otherwise have no other access to collective healing spaces. Moreover, having young adults be in leadership roles is one-way practitioners attempt to bridge the distance between adults and Young People. The special care taken to create a program curriculum that works to integrate a variety of mediums for Young People to voice what matters to them is key. In this way, there is room to meet Young People where they are for it facilitates various outlets for them to articulate their needs, what matters to them, and encourages them to share their struggles and hopes for the future through sharing of their stories.

Especially for YPOC that grew up in the urban metropolitan area, it's such a different reality than previous generations. As Young People, there are already the inherent challenges of developing and going through adolescence, social awkwardness and trying to fit in parental dynamics, and finding their own voice and identity. Moreover, as I discussed in chapter one, a colonial education system means that for many YPOC attending public school is a degrading experience given how the school environment and the atmosphere is very disempowering (cite). Given the uncertainty that many YPOC people experience in their communities and school on a daily basis may result in them feeling unsafe and in constant fight and flight mode. All these various factors may contribute to making it more challenging for some YPOC to open up about what is troubling them and they may not even have the words to express or make sense of everything they may be going through. Jae speaks about the challenges of integrating healing in everything that this youth center does in order to meet Young People where they are at. He shares,

> Not everyone is going to come in and want to talk one-on-one with somebody about everything that they are going through but some people are and some people are just

> going to do music and that is how they heal. So how do we make that as healing as possible? How do we make that as welcoming and safe as possible? It's about integrating all these practices into everything we do so no matter where a young person goes it's inescapable that the community building, the values that our organization carries is in everything they do.

Raul who is from another sister community-based youth organization and he uplifts this when he shares,

> We got to meet them where they are at. Not everyone wants to just learn about their culture. They are still heavy out there. Still rough around the edges and you can't just be like hey come over here to ceremony. It don't work like that cuz some of them are not ready for that.

Thus, it is critical that adults be willing to meet Young People where they are for it may be that the concept of healing may not be part of every Young Person's everyday lexicon or understanding of themselves. Planting seeds with YPOC and having the patience to take baby steps with them to introduce them to the power of a *decolonizing healing praxis* takes time and patience. The results may not always be immediate nor be linear in the process either.

As the experiences of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* shared, YPOC may not see healing practices focused on Indigenous ancestral healing as relevant to their life. Moreover, not all YPOC experiencing trauma are going to be receptive to calls to organize and act politically in terms of seeking social justice via a healing-informed approach. Similarly, not all Youth are likely to engage in and become transformed by meeting with other youth in social justice healing circles and may require more intensive healing processes over longer periods to be able to initiate a shift. There are differences based upon age, gender, and past experiences, and as such, there is variation and differences in participation rates and degrees of learning and transformation among the Young People that experience a *decolonizing healing praxis.* The truth is there is no magic formula that can guarantee success or the "outcomes" that adults may be attached/invested to see in Young People in the short term. For many of the *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* that bring forward a *decolonizing healing praxis*, they are learning through trial and error to not subscribe to the desired outcome but rather move through the work from a place that honors our love and commitment to working with Young People in transformative and meaningful ways. Thus this work is a humble attempt to help uplift some of the many teachings and healing conocimientos that have helped *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* in this life-long commitment to doing collective healing *with* Young People.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries: Roses and Thorns

> Healing is not optional. It is vital to thrive. Healing requires a conscious effort. It requires an allotted time dedicated to it. It comes in so many forms. It comes through relationships with other people. Making the time to be intimate and to feel held, supported, loved, and being given an opportunity to release. ~Yollotl, school teacher

> The big thing with adults is that they have to get past their walls. Adults put a lot of investment into feeling like they know, needing to know, needing to be empowered,

> needing to be the authority, needing to be right. And all of that has to do with their trauma and the ways in which they have built their lives around ego, and difficulty with facing the shadow of themselves. ~Rosa, school teacher & trainer

For Yollotl, a teacher working in a high-needs low-income school serving predominantly low-income Young People of Color (YPOC) it is not an understatement when she shared, "Healing is not optional. It is vital to thrive." Particularly, the high stress, unsustainable demands, and emotional distress placed on K-12 educators in public schools impact teachers' ability to teach at their best and most importantly can negatively impact their wellbeing and that of their students. Although all teachers experience stress, these stressors are specially compounded for teachers of color who often experience higher rates of burnout and mental health exhaustion (Brunsting et al, 2014; Cormier et al., 2021). Especially for educators of color who share similar backgrounds as their students, the expectations of meeting state standards and being judged by their "failure" to raise the bar when low-income and historically marginalized do not perform well on these tests can weigh heavily on their hearts. Moreover, research has shown how the high-stress teachers' experience affects teachers' self-perceptions, their interactions with and perceptions of parents and students, and ultimately this has an impact on their wellbeing and that of their students (Herman et al., 2020). This level of unwellness can often lead us to disconnect from one another, from our environment, and from the healing practices that have sustained our ancestors and which are often marginalized in education research and praxis. As I elaborated in chapter one, when exploring how we can foster the wellbeing of both educators and Young People, we can not ignore how socio-historical and institutional structures have a toll on our bodymindspirit. We cannot pretend to live in a vacuum that ignores that climate crisis, racism, colonialism, neoliberalism, and cultural repression of healing practices impact our abilities to teach and the educational trajectories of our students.

Burnout rates among educators and practitioners is real. Moreover, the self-sabotage that is present in social justice movements continues to divide and conquer our solidarity and healing efforts. There are youth advocates and leaders who just don't see the value in making time to heal our collective wounds for they see the work of healing as an "individualistic" endeavor. Moreover, there are educators and practitioners that self-sabotage their healing by hiding in "productivity" and it justified in their eyes, as Rosa so candidly expresses,

> People of color our tendency is to be codependent with our students, to overwork, and not look at ways we are still duplicating internalized oppression. It's the reflection of putting your healing first when the narrative is to put kids first but it doesn't feel sound or feel right or comfortable to put themselves first because it goes against the dominant narrative.

The dominant narrative "to put kids first" harbors a sentiment of righteousness that overpowers what is common wisdom: we can't begin to help anybody unless we help ourselves first. Even when you fly in an airplane, you are advised by the flight attendants that in case of an emergency you place the air mask on yourself first before you attempt to help another person put on their mask. Yet, unhealthy attachments and codependency with our students can blur our ability to see beyond the "crisis." Rosa goes on to reflect,

> In work like teaching or any service work, it is very easy to try to disassociate from your shadow because "I am serving the people" so you stop reflecting because you feel "I am a good person and I am done" and not see all the different ways you are promoting implicit bias, microaggressions, codependency.

As Rosa elaborates, to "stop reflecting" or the absence of holding time for healing comes with consequences to self and our relations. Especially for educators and practitioners who work in the trenches, it can be very enticing to "disassociate from your shadow" or create blind spots in our praxis given that we may justify working long hours being in service of the Young People to avoid doing our own healing work. On a similar note, Mario also reflects after years as a practitioner being in the trenches,

> I have a long history of working with young folks in different various communities, specifically working with youth of color, specifically with low-income folks, LBTGQ youth and have seen how trauma really affected those communities and I really started this as a young person myself. So as a young person working with young folks, dealing with my own trauma always came up in the work. And as I have aged into an adult ally I have realized ok this is still happening. How can I take care of myself a little better so I am not traumatizing the young folks I am working with. I can do things like I know this is bad, this is hurting them but never really going past beyond trauma. Getting away from crisis management to a really healing space.

How do we move "away from crisis management" and flow into "a really healing space"? Unfortunately, as SJH(r)Evolutionaries have emphasized throughout their testimonios there are no easy answers nor is there a prescription that guarantees success. In fact, as Jae stated in my intro vignette of HYC and Rosa also affirms, there is no "training" as understood in most teaching or professional development programs that can really teach you how to do healing work. Rosa shares,

> You can't really train people externally to say this is how you do restorative justice, actually they need a process through which they heal, and they restore themselves and come into relationship with themselves and one another, and the earth, and community, then what we do will be restorative.

Most teaching programs are based on settler logic of learning which emphasizes technical training and professional development that aims to teach you skills and theories to achieve success in your pedagogy. Yet, as Rosa highlights, doing healing work entails a non-linear process that aims to restore our relationship to self, the earth, and community because only then "what we do will be restorative." This entails that educators and practitioners are willing to be courageous to engage in critical reflection of their own praxis, a reflection that is not just surface level but disrupts western paradigms of being and relating for otherwise by default many of us will continue to reproduce colonizing relationships in our families, our work, and with YPOC. As Tonanzin powerfully reminds us, addressing internalized oppression requires up to shows up in a different way:

> Needing to flip the paradigm because what I identified is that without doing that and continuously doing that decolonizing work with ourselves, even when we have good intentions, we do it with a settler colonial mindset and way because that's what we are, that's what we have internalized, that's what we have done all our lives. It's second nature. Most of us didn't grow up in Indigenous or traditional ways, even when there are those threads that have survived in our families, there is always that happening.

Moreover, time as healing or the disruption of unhealthy patterns and behaviors that make us sick and unwell is key to overcoming the colonial mindset that has led us to internalize a savior mentality and keep us engaging in codependent relationships with our peers and YPOC. Moving beyond hegemonic models of healing that have had us internalize a never-ending "crisis" requires that we shift our thinking and pressure of wanting to simply check off a to-do list to instead be willing to show up in ways that are more present with self and others. As elaborated in chapter four, for SHJ(r)Evolutionaries this may entail focusing less on engaging the minds of Young People to instead integrating ways that shift our relation to time as healing, such as practicing rituals to honor beginning and endings, burning of medicine when permitted, facilitating cleaning ceremonies, and storytelling are some ways in which we can create space and time for embodied learning that honors our whole selves.

The weight of holding YPOC's pain: Espacio y Tiempo para Sanar

> The young people we work for are wounded in a lot of ways. I have seen the worst of it and it's not pretty to watch. It's not pretty to watch a whole family wounded. To enter into that context and be like this is what we need to do to help heal this young man […] But the mother is extremely wounded, the father is extremely wounded; the sister is extremely wounded; the brother is extremely wounded. All of a sudden, it becomes too much and you don't know what to do. You don't know who to focus on, who to prioritize, how do I help this young man who is in my charge as my mentee if I can't provide for everyone here to be healed because the only way he can heal is if he can trust and right now he doesn't trust anyone. ~Pedro

SJH(r)Evolutionaries articulated the ongoing struggle of not always being able to hold on to the pain of young people in sustainable ways. Many shared examples of moments in their praxis when they felt they could be doing more when in reality they were already doing all they could possibly do to support the youth and families whom they work with. Most expressed how their commitment and passion for nurturing the next generations of Young People compelled them to go the extra mile in working towards the collective healing of our youth and communities but this also often came at the cost of working long hours and often doing so by neglecting their own needs. For many, this also entailed a willingness to take on some of the pain that our youth bring with them. At the same time, many emphasized the importance of knowing that you can't heal anyone but rather attempt to provide youth with support and tools necessary for them to be able to carry their pain with less weight on their shoulders. Finding ways to provide this support without necessarily taking their pain on as your own is crucial to maintaining your own wellbeing. Yet, here lies the tension for many of these practitioners for letting go and releasing the collective wound they may carry in doing social justice healing work is not always an easy task.

Practitioner Pedro openly spoke at length about the tensions that arise when facilitating the pain of young people. He candidly shared about a period in his life when he struggled with his own personal pain of coping with divorce in the midst of doing intensive healing work with really wounded youth. Sharing his own personal pain with his youth during healing circles opened up the space for him to also be able to experience collective healing in the process. Yet, being able to both hold and release the pain of young people while maintaining one's well-being requires a firm commitment to finding healthy outlets to release those cargas. As Pedro shares, not doing so can lead to a lack of balance and impatience with the work: "I hold a lot of people's pain along with my own. Some people's purpose is to do that. Be a container for pain, as long as they know how to cleanse it. Some people are good at holding it but don't know how to cleanse it. I struggle with it all the time; the selfishness that goes into the work and the lack of balance."

Like Pedro, many of the participants struggled at times to keep a healthy balance given the high needs of the communities with whom they work. And for some this may come easier than for others. For example, Salvador reflects on how witnessing that the demand in his neighborhood is much more than his organization's capacity to make a difference is emotionally draining. He shares, "It does burn you out a lot because for every young man there are a lot of them out there that need guidance, nurturing, and support." Moreover, the ongoing demands of running programming and always seeking new funds to continue the work add another layer of pressure that makes it hard to maintain a healthy balance. This is especially true for practitioners who maintain an open-door policy for youth to drop in for this may entail setting aside whatever projects you are working on in order to attend to the needs of the youth.

Especially when thinking about how to integrate healing into the classroom, Pedro discussed the challenges of capacity that may come up in terms of who can do this work in our schools. He was critical about the expectation of having educators as healers in their classrooms:

> Trauma of immigration, trauma of poverty, trauma of racism, trauma of war, all those things are present in our youth. They are part of their whole identity and they bring those things into their classrooms. And to ask a teacher whose job is to educate a young man on algebra to try to access this kid's pain, find a point of healing is a lot to ask for a teacher who you pay $42K a year to teach because you are asking that teacher to take some pain without perhaps giving that teacher an outlet for it.

When we think of an individual teacher taking on the pain of 20+ students in their classroom, the thought itself seems daunting and impractical. Furthermore, as Rosa also shares,

> If people are working in trauma impacted environments then it is a responsibility to provide them with trauma informed care so that in turn they can provide that for the youth. But no matter who they are, their politics, where they come from, if they don't have a healthy and consistent space to put that then there is literally no real other option then to duplicate oppression. Literally that is part of the system's function is that we never have space to breathe, we never have time to come back together, it keeps us fractured, disassembled, confused. Healing is not for its sake, partially yes, but ultimately so we are capable and able to sustain our freedom fight.

Rosa's analysis of how the "system's function is that we never have space to breathe" and how "it keeps us fractured, disassembled, confused" get to the root of why "healing is not for its sake"

but rather "so we are capable and able to sustain our freedom fight." As she shared these words, they resonated deeply within my soul when I think of all the legendary leaders, dear friends, and family we have lost in the struggle for justice because the system is overburdening, in this case to death. Yet, things could have been different. It is not humane for anyone to carry the weight of our collective pain alone, even when these systems isolate us and individualize our pain.

However, if we can think of the care of our students as the responsibility of all of us together including educators, healers, community members, parents, and the students themselves then the thought of collectively caring for our students may not seem as overwhelming. One person alone may not be able to make all the difference in the world but collectively we can work towards nurturing and creating more healing spaces in our schools and communities that can help us carry on our collective pain with less weight on our shoulders. However, as activists/educators/healers/leaders engaged in social justice work, there are many challenges and demands that place a heavy burden in our lives. Attention to the intersections of community care, activism, and sustainability is important in being able to maintain a healthy balance in which practitioners working with urban Youth can find ways to collectively care for youth and themselves in light of the ongoing trauma that our communities face. In all reality, there may not always be concrete or easy solutions to the challenges identified. However, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* shared a passion to persevere no matter what the odds are given that each sees their work as a lifelong commitment to creating models in which communities are thriving and instilling hope in the hearts and minds of Young People of Color.

Embracing Indigenous Ways of Knowing within a Context of Cultural Appropriation

> In order to talk about "la cultura cura" and conduct circulos, something cultural that has a tone of spirituality cuz it does, I think that it is very important to bring ethics, integrity, and respect to the Native culture to the Native People that should be the first foundation. Cuz there are too many people making exceptions to the rules without knowing the rules. Cuz that is a way to describe in tradition there is a way of knowing things. Some things we don't question, we might not know all the answers, but a medicine or spiritual leader that we trust will say, "we do it this way." And we don't have to always ask why. Because then we are trying to analyze it with our linear thought process and dissect it. For years they may say to do it this way and don't do that, and you may not understand, but if you stay in it, years later it may come to you why.

For many Indigenous and Communities Of Color integrating traditional practices of healing and spirituality is one form of affirming their cultural identity. In this way, Indigenous Knowledges emphasize the importance of embodied learning that comes from the lived experiences of the individual and community and our relationship to the natural world (cite). As elder Cauhtli reminds us "la cultura cura" and within this understanding that culture heals is deeper knowing that within our culture is also the medicine, conocimientos, and strength to help us in our processes of healing. As elder Cauhtli shares in the above quote, that journey of "la cultura cura" draws from our Indigenous spiritualities, and these sacred knowledges and ways of relating require "ethics, integrity, and respect" for Native culture and this is foundational. He further goes on to elaborate on how this way of knowing is embodied and that it necessitates deep listening to medicine and spiritual leaders rather than asking questions. And by "trying to analyze it with our linear thought process and dissect it" we attempt to impose a colonial way of

thinking and conditioning which colonial schooling has drilled on us, when in reality these teachings and healing processes can only be felt and experienced in the heart. In other words, the hyper-focus on teaching in schooling that is based on learning that comes only from a credentialed teacher and whose task is training the mind and intellect of our Young People is not helpful here for it is not so much about "always" asking "why" as it is about patiently sitting with time to let the medicine or knowledges sink in for sometimes it may be "years later it may come to you why."

It is also critical to recognize that tradition and culture itself is not static: "it exists in history and is constantly self-creating by the necessity to respond to given conditions" (Graveline, 2000, p.20). In her discussion of culture and tradition, Garroute quotes Cherokee great grandmother Joyce Johnson:

> Nowadays we [Indian People] have "culture" and we have "tradition," and they can be separate….Culture has to do with outward things that let other people see that you are Indian: what we eat, what we wear, the things we make. Those can be *part* of our teachings from the past; some parts of culture come from spiritual teachings. But some things that have become part of culture might even be bad. […] Tradition is what is passed on orally, and it tells you the way you are *supposed* to be. It has to give us good. It has to give us growth. It is the lessons that were taught us by the ancient ones and the elders to help [each of] us be a better person, and closer to the Creator. And we have to use it in the way it is intended. It's spiritual (p.191).

As such, we cannot assume that any form of traditional healing and spiritual practice is commonly and equally shared by all members of any given group. It is important to highlight that within these community spaces, culture is not understood as static but rather is enacted in fluid ways. When drawing upon Indigenous traditional modalities of healing to promote wellbeing careful attention must be given to how these practices are introduced. It must always be done so with the utmost respect for the diverse spiritual traditions that exist among YPOC. Elder Cuauhtli reminds us,

> I use a lot of Native culture and traditions because that is what I understand. Kids parents', cuz we are in the city but even in the reservations, may be evangelists or even Mormons, or even extreme Catholics. Some Catholics may be against Native Culture because they don't understand. You don't want a conflict with the kid's family unless the parents are ok with it.

On a similar note, Mario also reflected on the tensions they have experienced when integrating cultural healing practices, they share,

> I have learned various cultural practices and so how do you respect the various cultural practices in the group and bring those cultural practices without tokenizing, co-opting cultures that are not your own, that is always a challenge. A lot of the young people I work with come from a specific religious practice and so calling on some traditional practices sometimes calls into question their religious practices. So how do you balance that? I think the initial hard thing is getting young people to be open to it in the

> beginning; once they get past "what is this weird thing" it works. Also trying to balance it out so that it's not therapy because young people might spot that right away.

It is important when introducing Indigenous rooted spirituality and healing practices that it is done in a way that respects the context and tradition which you are sharing with the Young People and that a distinction is made between spirituality and religion. That sharing sacred space is not the same as imposing religion and that respect for each person's religious faith is the key in creating a safe and sacred space in which we can come together to honor our spiritualities with love and compassion. This is especially important given the context that many Young People, especially Latinx youth, have been disconnected from their Indigenous roots because of colonization and migration.

While *SJH(r)Evolutionaries*, like Elder Cauhtli, become transmitters of ancestral cultural tradition and spiritual knowledge for the Young People, on some occasions, Young People may recall childhood memories of witnessing their grandmothers and/or relatives enacting healing modalities that drew from their close connection to the land and herbs, and/or Indigenous rooted spirituality. Thus, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* like Elder Cuauhtli are key in helping to facilitate spaces to validate these knowledges and share profound teachings that Young People are many times cut off from in the process of their families being uprooted from their place of origin and/or from no longer having access to elders. Elder Cuauhtli goes on to elaborate how there are times when as practitioners committed to these ways you also have to allow room to improvise when attempting to share medicinal ways in places or spaces that do not allow it. He shares,

> The place or space that you are at, let's say you are at a school you can't always, cuz schools have this church and state thing. Some principals, like in some hot areas, don't care. They are supportive, they make the call cuz they are in a war zone. So they rather have you burn some sage, offer a song, or do some danza. Take the kids to a ceremony. They rather you do that than worry about the kid getting shot in the street because there is war going on. But most places are really restricted with what you can do. So you can bring in the same values, you don't always have to have all the medicine; the feathers and the sage. You don't also want to be an exploiter of it, there probably is a time for it, but there are other things you can do. You can teach about it before you take it to any ceremony.

The opportunity to (re)claim these ancestral cultural ways of healing can be empowering and positively affirm YPOC's cultural identities beyond the confinement of the classroom walls. Today, thanks to the spiritual resistance of our ancestors to protect our ways of being and knowing, Indigenous peoples and Young People are able to (re)claim and (re)vitalize ancestral traditions without the fear of being tortured, killed, or persecuted (see Martin-Hill, 2003).

Moreover, Eurocentric understandings of spirituality have centered the individual at the expense of dismissing the power of community and healing relationships. Especially, when introducing Indigenous Knowledges we must be very mindful and thoughtful to not do so in ways that are colonizing to those knowledges, and vigilance around issues of cultural appropriation is critical. Elder Cuahtli warns us about the ways these knowledges can be exploited and misused,

> How we approach ceremony, everyone knows how easily exploited the Native culture is. People making a buck for themselves or a name for themselves, you name it. A good friend told me, some people like to go to sweatlodge because they like the euphoria feeling, like a rush or a buzz or something and that's why they go there, they are not really praying. They are going to go get the buzz so it's a temporary fix.

Within a context of settler colonialism and neoliberalism everything from what we eat, breathe, and do and in this case also the sacred is commodified. Sadly, it's not hard to understand how even the most sacred knowledges and practices can be internalized for some as a "temporary fix" and/or even as exotic medicine that when practiced makes you spiritually "better" than others. In other words, even educators, practitioners, and healers are not immune to internalizing colonizing behaviors that reproduce a culture of "taking" and/or "benefiting" in some monetary way from the sacred and healing conocimientos that were shared as medicine by our ancestors and were not for sale nor consumption.

Furthermore, in his discussion of culture as healing, Jae discusses issues of cultural appropriation that come up for POC using healing practices, not from their own lineages. It is especially important to remain vigilant about the ways in which culture is appropriated especially within a context of imperialism, capitalism, oppression, and assimilation. Cultural appropriation is especially wounding given that it is an extension of centuries of racism, genocide, and oppression. The dangers of co-optation and the tensions of bringing Indigenous rooted practices are real. For example, Jae speaks about his tensions with doing Libations

> A lot of the practices I learned were not Korean but from a lot of Black and Brown struggles and healing work that has happened in this community. A lot of the practices I was introduced to come from those legacies. Is it my role? Is it my place? And at the same time knowing that it's what young people need. That's what young people gravitated towards. I am still very mindful of what I am practicing and how I am practicing. What I carry with me is asking in what ways is this helping a young person grow, heal, come back to their own? That's the priority for me.

The level of critical reflection and thoughtfulness expressed by Jae about his own positionality in relation to the cultural spiritual practices he shares with YPOC demonstrates how *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* make it possible to hold collective spaces as healing from a decolonial lens and commitment to respect and share these sacred knowledges with the YPOC who are ready to receive them. Moreover, Jae goes on to powerfully articulate how these healing knowledges are not new but rather are being (re)membered and (re)centered and passed on to sustain us. He states,

> Honoring that this is work that has been happening for generations, honoring that this healing work isn't something that we are on the cutting edge of front line new healing best practices. That actually we are just going back to what we already knew. Research is sharing that we carry trauma in our DNA and that it can be passed on through generations. Part of my learning here was that our healing can also be carried on through generations and also our resistance, and resilience and all of those things that have brought us this far and being able to tap into all of those.

From a critical healing perspective, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* engage culture with the goal of supporting social change efforts that empower YPOC and protect cultural traditions. These ongoing decolonizing efforts are needed because of the long history of struggle against settler-colonial violence and cultural genocide that colonized Peoples of Color have been subjected to for the past more than 500 years (Blaut, 1993; Fanon, 1965; Martinez, 2013a, 2013b).

Trauma Pimping within a context of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

> This sense that we need to bear openly with our young people and their painful stories so that we can pull out a reaction from funders in order to move them to start investing in young people. It's hard cuz you want to uplift the voices of our young people. Allow them to be the pilots navigating their own healing and storytelling. And we recognize that it's super important and priority and recognize there are folks that vulture it and feed off of it.~ Jae

As Jae so eloquently expressed, marginalized low-income Young People of Color are constantly asked to tell their stories of pain in order to validate they are "deserving" of institutional resources, and *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are critical of how this can be yet another form of exploiting Young People's stories and violating their privacy. Jae, like other social justice practitioners, is constantly asking of organization efforts: How do we ensure we are not dwelling into young people's pain to cause more harm? How do we acknowledge trauma without essentializing their stories of pain? How much can we share and what parts do we choose not to share with funders? Especially, in these times of growing instability and state violence, there has been a push by grassroots community actors to bring to the forefront the need to focus on the mental health and healing of urban Young People of Color. As a result, we have also witnessed an increased interest in the foundation world to fund innovative projects that are working towards grappling with systems of oppression and which are being creative and innovative in their approach in working with young people and communities of color. Such investments are helping to support community activists who are at the frontlines leading the way in relation to working with young people from a deep understanding of the historical trauma but more importantly the need to center healing in their praxis.

However, it is critical to remain vigilant about the ways in which healing is being picked up by foundations and when funding is provided to support healing efforts, there are also strings attached by foundations that are eager to "measure" and abstract the magic formula that leads to YPOC and communities experiencing healing. Hence, a real tension exists given that community educators often do not trust or resist the insistence on "measuring" the short-term effectiveness of healing-centered practices by foundations, especially when it comes to interrogating the sacred dimensions of healing practices. While the funding sources provided by these foundations are allowing for local efforts to bring about more transformative youth engagement that are validating alternative and community understandings of healing, it is important to remain vigilant about the dangers of institutionalizing community understandings of healing. For these community educators, engaging in healing work with YPOC is a continuous process that is not linear nor can it be studied in the scientific ways that western thinking imposes.

Thus, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* face the tension between the demands of funding sources on the one hand and meeting their community needs for these do not always go hand in hand[77]. The political logic wherein funding "experts" or philanthropists determine what strategies and what issues to prioritize is referred to social justice movements leaders as the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) (cite). In the world of NPIC, this can lead to organizations having to fight for crumbs and behavior among practitioners that harbor competitions and ultimately using the Young People to gain status, fame, and funding sources to continue the machine. Jae truthfully speaks to these tensions,

> Careful about creating spaces for young people to tell their stories and about protecting them from folks that want to profit or benefit from them. Whether it's money or their own credibility, it's heavy in the work that we do because that is what brings people to tears. That's what moves people to action and we know it's with our young peoples' bodies on the frontline that it's happening. It's their stories. It's their pain that is being broadcast to the world and there is no filter, no protection. We are mindful of what stories are being shared, how they are being shared, and who the audience is. We also don't want to not tell the stories because that is the reality of what our young people are facing. ~Jae

As Jae expresses, being "mindful of what stories are being shared, how they are being shared, and who is the audience" is key to ensuring practitioners are not giving in to damaged research (Tuck, 2009). *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* acknowledge and are inclusive of the local and diverse knowledges of healing and well-being that exists within students' communities as critical to their theories of change. Thus, as I have shared through their testimonios in chapter four, we can better understand how healing conocimientos have and continue to sustain YPOC in the face of the structures of oppression. Yet, practitioners are presented with the challenge of having to assess impact in the context of what one practitioner spoke about "interrogating the sacred," which refers to the probing of practices and ceremonies considered sacred for the purpose of measuring growth or success. This is especially problematic when there are elements of the medicine, ceremony, and experience that will not/cannot be shared and that cannot be measured.

Thus, in deploying a *decolonizing healing praxis*, it is important to be vigilant and reflective around the ways in which colonial subjectivity and power dynamics show up when mediating funding sources to keep your doors open and doing so without having to sell your soul to the devil. We must continually critically ask ourselves as educators and practitioners: What is the colonial thinking, attitudes, behaviors, and practices embedded when receiving institutional funding? What must be healed in order for transformative change to take place? There is a lot that educators and practitioners can learn from how healing with YPOC is happening within a

[77] To various degrees, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* expressed the tensions with having to assess the impact of their healing work with YPOC for funders. In the research world, evaluation of effectiveness of program activities is primarily focused on quantitative data and case management databases that monitor progress, what can be improved, and barriers to participation. Staff are often asked to accumulate anecdotal evidence of success stories from past and current participants. Current assessments may come from pre and post student assessments and participant satisfaction in the program. Their assessments are often guided by partnership with independent evaluators that are working to help refine measures of outcomes. Moreover, SJH(r)Evolutionaries also expressed challenges with keeping track of impact over time and for practitioners working with more vulnerable youth populations there is concern on how to assess success given the ongoing trauma immigrant and Indigenous children are facing. A critique is that too often the focus of evaluation is solely based on how to get Young People indoctrinated into the system, while ignoring historical and generational trauma.

context of community and the ways in which *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are reflective and transparent about the challenges and struggles they encounter when deploying a *decolonizing healing praxis* in supporting their efforts to sustain healing justice over the long run. One can not escape that material reality in which schools and community-based organizations are having to make compromises and negotiations in order to remain humane in their approach and defend what is sacred. Jae's reflection illuminates this tension,

> We recognize it's a fine line. We know that systems that exist that fund that push mental health, this understanding of mental health, the field of psychology, we know that is grounded and rooted in colonialism and imperialism and that it comes from that world. Our stance is that when you want to young people into boxes and put our community into boxes or you want to label us or you want to do diagnosis we know that that comes from a model that traditionally separates that divides that continue to oppress communities of color and young people and that most affected, the most impacted and vulnerable, and we know that in order to shift that we have to challenge it head on--- as an organization we know we have to do evidence based practices, we know we have to gather data, we do research in a way that they can understand---it's important to do because we need to shift.

Moreover, not every healing intervention works with every Young Person given that different approaches work with different people. Not all YPOC have the same needs and experiences, so this calls for variation in the types of strategies and interventions taken by *SJH(r)Evolutionarie*s in order to support Young People's activism and wellbeing, as well as their own. Many times, *SJH(r)Evolutionarie*s are having to do an intricate dance in order to change and redefine their metrics of success, and how they choose to view the progress of the program in order to push against the hegemonic norm and practices that are often imposed by philanthropic and government funding.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries speak about the dangers of institutionalizing a healing-centered approach. In particular, Jae highlights the importance of being mindful that the nature of doing healing work is specific to the context of local communities: "It's not like the results will be applicable everywhere." Jae goes on to share how their work is about, "Trying to promote this practice of being responsible to the community that you are serving, doing the work in an honorable way, respectful way. […] It's more about the intention more than the way in which you do it, than the language or the model. What you should follow is our intention of listening." Jae elaborates on this tension:

> Restorative Justice –hot topic now—some folks are just trying to get these contracts and are about packaging, commercializing it, forgetting that these are Indigenous practices that have never left. It is important to acknowledge this history and strength that we have in the communities. Let's build a partnership to do this work together. Let's have a conversation about it.

As such, one should not assume that there is something "new" about how communities of color integrate healing as critical to the social and cultural wellbeing of communities. One of the dangers in Western thinking is the tendency for market-driven models, which sell a seductive ideology of "newness." Consequently, it is important to be vigilant about the ways in which the concept of "healing" is taken up in mainstream public discourse for there is always the risk of

these knowledges being commodified and packaged for the sake of selling an individualized form of healing that does not confront the real and material ways in which systems of oppression impact the lives of communities of color.

Concluding Thoughts: *Decolonizing Healing Praxis* as Prayer

> Do you know what a prayer is? If you know what a prayer truly is then this is a prayer. You go to ceremonies, to church, or other kinds of beliefs, and keep going and it's good to reaffirm your beliefs, to recharge your batteries. But the question is, what happened to that first prayer? Where is that first prayer at? It should be on-going: "Creator, I ask for help today, I ask for blessings, help my family, help my loved ones, help this person in this neighborhood to be better than they were, protect them, keep them safe and healthy." When your prayers get answered, do you know? Do you realize your prayers were answered? There are songs that say do it this way and if you do it this way then the things you are asking for will come true. To me, I have seen so many successes. The whole thing to sustain yourself, you have to remember it is all a prayer; continue your prayer. You pray with your body, with your mind, with your heart. Can your heart think? Can your soul feel? Can your mind be emotional? Heart, mind, soul and your body. Like in danza, "soy danzante por amor a mis gritos y a mi dios con mis pasos, voy diciendo mis secretos guardare." So when you are doing your pasos, your activities with the youth, with your family, it's all a prayer. When you know that and you feel that, you won't get tired. And if you do that is just your body. ~Elder Cuauhtli

As I have highlighted throughout this chapter, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* meet the challenges of the hegemonic temporal imposition of time and the politics of healing in a neoliberal settler-colonial context by understanding their commitment to a *decolonizing healing praxis* as part of their soul purpose and engagement towards supporting the collective healing, self-determination, and agency of YPOC. Their *decolonizing healing praxis* affirms embodied and anti-oppressive teachings and learnings that support the larger project of decolonizing self and the imposition of the colonizer in the present and how it negates everything that existed before and the possibility of a more healed future. Yet, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are countering these challenges through a *decolonizing healing praxis*, which allows them to move beyond colonial epistemologies and subjectivities of settler colonialism by disrupting the hegemonic linear temporal narrative of time as colonizing. Through a *decolonizing healing praxis*, they are embodying healing times of political co-creation with YPOC. Through the excerpts of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries'* testimonios, I highlighted moments through which their embodied temporalities disrupt colonial time and space in order for healing possibilities to be co-created with YPOC. Through these decolonizing and healing encounters among each other and *with* YPOC, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* enflesh a *decolonizing healing praxis* through moments of decolonial time and/or moments in which time and space allow to affirm relational ways of being and reconnection with *healing conocimientos* that help bring about more healing and transformative change that supports the wellbeing of both the Young People, and the adults that work with them. During these decolonizing healing encounters, time is paused for decolonizing healing to take place.

In this way, understanding their *decolonizing healing praxis* as an ongoing prayer gives us hope in the context of Eurocentric western culture in which an imposed hegemonic temporality and/or ineffective use of our energies makes us unwell and sick. Moreover, the pain

in our communities feels immense, like we are constantly drowning in an ocean with strong waves and currents and with no life jacket. Yet, dominant discourses in education make invisible the double work of our energia and the impact and burden it has in the present when there is no time and/or transformative change to transgress our present energias. Hardly is there any humane and/or healing acknowledgment nor collective healing spaces to hold the heaviness of witnessing the tragedy of pain and death of our Young People. As our babies, Young People are at the crossroads of our embodied temporalities and *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries* feel their pain and their hurt is palpable and visible to their hearts and spirits. *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries* are deeply aware and mindful that in Young People, we can acknowledge the past for they carry their ancestors in their flesh, we can learn a nuanced perspective of the present reality through their lived experience and eyes, and we can see the future in them for they embody what is to come. In other words, Young People encapsulate all three dimensions of time, for in them we can see the past (what was), the present (what is), and the future (what is to be). When we support holding space and time for Young People to experience collective healing and/or a place to release the energy of pain and trauma, we are helping them to transgress energy and in this way, we help Young People create space to give back to our communities in empowering and liberatory ways.

Thus, the prayer of *SHJ(r)Evolutionaries* uplifts how through a *decolonizing healing praxis*, educators and practitioners can embark with Young People on a healing journey that ships away and helps to transcend binary thinking and internalized colonialism. By deploying a *decolonizing healing praxis* to facilitate healing of the soul wound, this becomes a healing journey that has the power to help us move from duality to oneness. It makes space and time to acknowledge that we are everything: the pain, the hurt, and the strength, and the wisdom and healing conocimientos help us to arrive there. We can not deny duality but *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* help us experience it as an expression of love. It's about no longer being mentally and spiritually enslaved by settler colonialism. May we continue the prayer….

Tonanzin

Madre Tierra
Dando gracias por tu abundancia
Siempre
Pedimos perdón por
Todo el daño que te causamos
Ya que tu siempre
Sigues bendiciéndonos
Con tu gran amor

Madre Pachachama
Te ofrezco mis rezos
Llenos de amor y esperanza

Tonanzin
May you protect and guide
Our Young People and Spiritual Warriors
May they stay
Grounded and Rooted in your
Loving creation and Abundance
Always

Fertile soils may
You continue to bless us
With the plant medicine and
Healing Conocimientos
For our Young People
To always remember
Your beauty and
See themselves
Reflected in your
Unconditional love and great potential

Ometeotl

Tonanzin: Prayer
to Pachamama

I arrived at approximately 4pm in the afternoon with my homemade Mexican rice recipe, which my mom helped me prepare to share for our gathering. Not surprisingly, I find elder Cuahtli in the community kitchen warming up his homemade chicken mole he had prepared the night before. For elder Cuatli, cooking and having meals with young people and their families is an important part of building trust and supporting collective healing. He warmly greeted me with a smile and hug; making me always feel at home. For the past three decades, Elder Cuauhtli has been working to bring an end to barrio violence in urban communities of color by mentoring and advocating for young people of color. He has volunteered countless hours at county juvenile halls to bring cultural and spiritual healing to young people. He has a long history of helping to organize peace runs and marches to help bring awareness to issues of social justice. Today, Elder Cuauhtli brings us together in a special gathering to celebrate the high school graduation of three of their young people from their young men's class they teach at a continuation public school. They have invited the graduates, their parents and family, staff and community.

Meanwhile, Manuel and Raul are setting up the tables and chairs for the celebration to begin. In the background one can appreciate a ranchera song from Vicente Fernandes as folks are greeting and having small talk. I began to circulate congratulations cards I bought for everyone to sign. Once all three students and their parents arrive, elder Cauhtli starts warming up tortillas with Jesus, one of the young people. The smell of warm maiz tortillas from our local tortilleria gives me a warm cozy feeling; it reminds me of my grandmother's home cooking and fresh made tortillas. In appreciation of their parents, part of the celebration is for each of the students to serve their parents' meal. This is a significant decolonizing elder teaching moment for it is often the norm in many traditional Latinx families for the mother, or female figures to serve the meals and cater to husbands and sons. However, that evening these gender-domesticating roles were transgressed. The mole was prepared by a healing and spiritual male figure and it was the sons that served their parents and guests their meals. To break our meal, I shared a few words to give thanks for our celebration and expressed gratitude for the food that was going to nourish our bodies and spirit. I expressed our gratitude to pachamama for the nourishments on our table and the hands that helped make our meal possible.

All three students celebrated have been attending the young men's yearlong class taught at HOPE Academy, one of few public continuation schools. At HOPE Academy students are given the opportunity to recover credits in a safe space, which offers a variety of classes that focus on providing young people wrap-around services and education with the ultimate goal of them graduating with a high school diploma. For many students of color struggling through a dysfunctional school system, HOPE Academy, as an alternative, is their last resort after having been pushed out of traditional comprehensive public high schools. In fact, the student population at HOPE Academy is made up of some of the highest-needs students, many of whom are gang-impacted, and have been marginalized and/or impacted by the juvenile system.

Today marks a huge milestone for the students' families. As first generation immigrant Latinx youth, they are the first in their families to graduate from high school. The great sense of pride and accomplishment is deeply felt in the room as one can appreciate the happy grins in people's faces. After folks have had a chance to enjoy their meal, Elder Cuauhtli begins acknowledgements by thanking everyone for being present this evening and then turns it over to

program teachers to share some words about each young person. Jesus is applauded for always being "bien acomedido" for he always took initiative during class time to distribute snacks and help clean afterwards. Moreover, he stood out as a positive model of a healthy young man who loves to exercise and rides his bike. Jose is appreciated for always being "very reliable," and as the one of the longest Youth members in the organization, he considers himself family with staff, often attending BBQ's and baseball games with them. Antonio is highlighted for his enthusiasm and confianza to always ask questions and wanting to learn more. He has the most experience in participating in "cultura cura" and engaging in joven noble curriculum. It is apparent from their appreciations that they have really taken the time to get to know each youth and really care about the Young People. All three Youth are very impressive and committed to the youth organization.

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The testimonios of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* speak to the power of embodying a *decolonizing healing praxis* in their day-to-day actions and how they relate with other adults and Young People. As the entry vignette I shared highlights, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* embrace ways of being that recognizes Young People as a blessing, instills a culture of love, models authenticity, and centers the intentionality of healing. By aligning with their sole purpose and learning to heal and transform colonizing modes of being and relations of domination in their work with Young People, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* tap into the transformative power of healing conocimientos and being in relation. Their *decolonizing healing praxis* encourages activists, teachers, to understand the impact we have on students as a function of the quality of our relationships with young people. Transformative change has to do with how we are inside and our way of being. A *decolonizing healing praxis* is not just about integrating healing in our thinking but most importantly, how we embody a healing consciousness in how we relate to young people.

As I elaborated through the many pages of this healing project, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are facilitating collective healing spaces by placing value on spirit, interconnectedness, and the political perspectives of YPOC. Thus, a *decolonizing healing praxis* is happening at/in multiple sites and contexts – at schools, youth organizations, and in community spaces. By focusing on building the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of Young People, I argue a *decolonizing healing praxis* serves to promote cultural, personal, and collective political agency of Young People. Moreover, by reclaiming cultural practices and Indigenous Knowledges, these community-based healing spaces become politicized. They act as political bodies when they begin to challenge dominant concepts and structures of domination and power that are oppressive to Young People and Communities Of Color. A *decolonizing healing praxis* makes it possible for Young People to reclaim alternative ways of understanding self in relation to community. Working from a decolonizing healing paradigm that centers healing, a *decolonizing healing praxis* engenders both a shared ownership of knowledge and commitment to the collective healing of entire communities.

Drawing on the power of testimonios, this healing project has highlighted how *SJH(r)Evolutionarie*s are creating collective healing spaces for historically marginalized Young People of Color to engage in healing processes. Honoring the power of Tonanzin, I summarize some of the key lessons guiding the praxis of *SJH(r)Evolutionarie*s and the power and resonance of a *decolonizing healing praxis.* It illuminates the nuances of engaging a *decolonizing healing praxis* and how it strengthens holistic and asset-based approaches to promoting individual and collective healing of Young People of Color. I discuss the key lessons that guide the

decolonizing healing praxis of *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* and how these lessons help facilitate YPOC's social emotional and spiritual healing and strengthen Young People of Color's sense of self and purpose. I share excerpts from their testimonios to demonstrate how *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* put into practice and embody a *decolonizing healing praxis*. I draw from *SJH(r)Evolutionaries' testimonios* to further elaborate on the complexity and interpretation of their praxis.

Lesson #1: Healing Spaces are Love Based & Treat Every Young Person as Sacred

SJH(r)Evolutionaries believe in community healing as resistance and take a heart-centered approach to this work. For Emiliano, treating every Young Person as a "blessing" is key, he shares:

> Work with young people to help them unwrap their gifts. Recognizing that every young person is a blessing in our traditional ways. That each of us has a sacred purpose to share with this world.

For Juan, love is "like a shield" and embodying a healing consciousness offers an alternative to the "false consciousness" that is so ingrained in mainstream thinking. He reflects:

> Because I really believe it, and I believe in the people, and I believe in love. It becomes like a shield; nothing is going to come at you. Most people will either doubt, will believe the lies, the corruption, and the false consciousness. You already lost the battle; you don't even believe any more. Always reminding them they are about something and letting them know they can do it.

For elder Cuahtli:

> So when the kid walks inside the door you shake their hand and you welcome them. You don't look at what color they are wearing if they are sagging or not. "Hey put your pants up or take off that pañuelo," that is not your first introduction to a kid. You say hello, how are you, I hope you are doing good because you were not there for all those things that built up for that kid leading up to that. Embracing a kid and not enough programs do that.

Lesson #2: Healing Relationships with YPOC necessitate Intentionality & Authenticity

Pedro shares:

> Healing practices are about first creating relationships with each other and space where people feel safe enough to step out of the isolation to counteract the concept of pulling up yourself by your own boot strap –that's it's all on you-- and in fact acknowledging that I need everyone here that is with me.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries also agree that a core quality of embodying healing centered relationships with YPOC is being authentic. Neisha elaborates on her view of the importance of this quality when she shares:

> Authenticity, it's so important that you be real with these kids because they see right through it if you are not. The thing is they actually respect you more if you are honest that you don't know. Don't go in thinking you know. I think that this is actually a problem a lot of black teachers make here, because we are Black and we are from the community so to speak. We go into a lot of these positions thinking that we know what these kids are going through. But really you don't really know. You may think you know but until they start really opening up to you; you have no idea of what they are going through individually. We come in and we just think we are going to change everything and we don't give them an opportunity to get to know us and that's a problem.

Lesson #3: Healing Spaces Uplift Young People's Voices and Facilitate opportunities to be Leaders

SJH(r)Evolutionaries are intentional about facilitating spaces for Young People to reclaim their own power and voice. Drawing on many years of experience working with some of the most marginalized and traumatized YPOC and families, elder Tio Tecolote emphasizes the importance of fostering the voices of Young People:

> You give them [youth] their space, their voice, and you foster it and their real raw self will emerge. You don't get hung up on everything that has to be spoken because silence and body language matter. I am more concerned about people that have repressed it all, lost their voice. Looking at their energy, volume of voice, and calling in all my attention to the silence. Be comfortable being with silence.

When provided with the mentoring and opportunity to be leaders, young people will often step up to the challenge.

> When you open the space and young people take it, young people raise the bar and will let go of something super deep and then that inspires another young person and that sets the tone for those spaces.

Futurist thinking--- imagining a different reality is possible:

> Uplifting our Young People's voices to be the stewards of change and challenging our current structures and dreaming of something better, of something new. That we recognize that it's not going to be us. It's not the old folks that are going to dream something new, it's kind of a burden young people have always carried. So how do we as adults become allies to them? How do we support their cause and that idea of partnership with young people in the community that I think is very important.

Lesson #4: Countering Collective Pain Requires Saturating our work with Healing Acts that feed our Spirit and Model for YPOC on an on-going basis

When working to mitigate the effects of systemic oppression and violence with YPOC, *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* are acutely aware that it is not enough to focus on challenging the material injustices that result from relations of domination. Healing not only requires naming and understanding the "soul wounding" of past and on-going colonization, but also embodying a

healing praxis that draws on our strengths and cultural assets to help ameliorate the material and social emotional impact of white supremacy and systems of oppression on our mindbodyspirit. Elder Cuautli shares:

> If I am going to have a circulo with the kids and we are here to talk about the change of life and the responsibility of manhood. If we start with acknowledging the four directions, I want to make sure I can explain to those kids as much as possible that each direction has a gift. Each direction has an ability. And I am careful not to use the word power because people take power and they want to rob power. That is that western way of thinking. Some people will use power in a context of creative and powerful. Well, I like to use the word ability instead of power. If we understand these ways and we center ourselves, it doesn't give us power, some people might say otherwise, I say it gives us the ability to understand what healing is first. In western medicine they call it cognitive behavior therapy, we call it healing a wounded spirit. And it is an ongoing thing.

Jae's reflections brings us full circle by reminding us of the importance in modeling a *decolonizing healing praxis* in how we choose to work with more intentionality in order to counter the heaviness of our collective pain:

> I feel as heavy and painful as it gets; it gets met with the same level of joy and community. And I am very grateful that I get that here, with my peers, with my chosen family. And I am just very intentional about I am going to feel ok about not doing anything for a few hours and being more mindful about how I am doing things that I already love and how do I gather new skills that also fill my spirit.

Rose speaks to how showing up with YPOC from a place of having done her own healing work and deploying acts of love allowed her to witness the impact it had on her students:

> I was always at events and helping them organize around things that they cared about, pushing them to care about each other. I started to see the kids shifting. They were changing, not just getting better grades, which is what other people expected. They were changing as people. They were becoming happier, calmer, more peaceful, more well adjusted people, people who cared about social justice, people who cared, who wanted to be in community. As I started to notice that, it changed me on many levels. This is so powerful because as I am healing that is allowing me to do the work, and because I am doing it with that intentionality, they are healing too. I started to see this loop happening.

Lesson#5: Holding space to listen to Young People is key to holding healing spaces for them to have healthy outlets to release

For Xochitl, modeling a *decolonizing healing praxis* with urban Young People entails creating space to listen to Young People's voices, and indeed holding space to listen to them is revolutionary:

> We have found that communication and listening workshops have been a part of healing too. It is so complicated what Young People are facing; there are so many levels of trauma and often chaos that they are experiencing that even a simple workshop on how to

> listen is revolutionary. It's something very different from what they experience in their daily lives.

Similarly, Raul speaks about the importance of holding space for Young People to just talk:

> A lot of times these kids just need someone to talk to. Holding a circle with them. Just letting them just get stuff off their chest, stuff that has been bothering them.

For Yolanda, healing her own wounded younger self has meant she is more attentive to holding space to listen to her students and honor their voices:

> I feel it takes me back to my childhood. Grew up in a much more punitive environment. It's generational. Sometimes it's family. From an early age I experienced a lot of not being heard or seen. It made me more aware. I was not allowed to speak and so I have experienced this drive to have everyone be heard. As a result, I am more aware of the needs of others being heard. Part of healing is making sure our voices come out because when we hold it in it builds up to the point that we may not recognize where it started. To attempt to heal requires so much effort because you don't know what you are unpacking anymore. Working with youth, I want to make them aware of that: start speaking, let it out, don't hold in.
>
> When I got to take youth home after meetings I got to know them on a more personal level. That's when I realized that there was so much suffering that was going on and we didn't know about it. Doing the work they were resilient and powerful. They would go in front of the school board and state legislature in education, speak at rallies, and they were so dynamic and powerful. And then they were falling apart. At home they were dealing with domestic violence and their own depression, they were dealing with lack of housing, you name it.

Lesson #6: Healing Spaces bring about and help facilitate Joy Making & Mental Wellbeing

Jae speaks about the importance of remaining innovative in how we engage YPOC in healing spaces and how healing for YPOC can come in multiple ways. For example, he shares that there have been times when Young People have expressed being overwhelmed with being in so many circles how "they are tired of sitting with their emotions." Jae expresses how it is important to keep this in mind especially given the reality that for many YPOC being vulnerable in their community is a risk. For example, at their youth center YPOC have access to a range of different healing modalities that may be more relevant to them. One of such spaces is a spoken-word writing group focused on processing loss and working through grief. Although this group is not called a healing group, the writing process of working through grief is healing. Having diverse healing spaces is critical to being able to reach a broader audience of Young People. Similarly, Aurora shares:

> Using engaging ways to bring them into this movement is something we need to be more intentional. You have to be creative, bring in the arts, spoken word, hip-hop. Making it fun for them and at the same time planting in that seed and growing it into a passion for them to continue doing this.

With a smile, Elder Cuahtli shares:

> Fun, happiness, laughter. "I am glad to see you." A place that they are happy to come to first of all. There are times when kids will have a melt down or a break down because they are going through something, plus they are going through hormonal changes of teenage years, so they may need that time where they need to cry on your shoulder and you walk them through that. But you gotta have fun. You got to have laughter and happiness. Do you want a bunch of kids coming here and then the staff person is grouchy or not giving the kids a time of day. You got to be like, "Hey how are you doing!" cuz then even you will feel it and if you are feeling it then the kids will feel it. And if the kids are not feeling it then there is an issue. You want them to enjoy themselves and be kids, they got to be kids. They are going to act differently; they are not adults. A good day is fun, productive, and "I can't wait for the next day." I've had kids say that.

SJH(r)Evolutionaries are cognizant that YPOC do not always make the connections immediately but there is value in providing them with the opportunity to experience individual and collective healing space by being our true authentic selves. By being real and sharing our strengths and shortcomings as educators, we can work collectively to help create a positive space where young people can openly engage in dialogue and reflection about the things they care about. It is important to be willing to step out of our comfort zone to be able to provide these experiences that help nurture the individual as a whole.

Implications and Conclusion

> Long-term activism requires more or less reliable, ongoing sources of hopefulness, faith, joy, and trust because it is a matter of believing in and working for possibilities that are nowhere in sight.
>
> Levins Morales, 1998, p.127

> I'm not saying that this [healing] is the secret to changing structural racism, structural bias, but I am saying that this type of healing can create a more balanced person and if that is possible then it's possible for someone who is totally traumatized to achieve whatever it is that they want to achieve, and that is potential and that's possibility and that's hope and that's what a lot of our kids don't have, it's what a lot of our teachers don't have.
>
> ~Pedro

The SJH(r)Evolutionaries participating in this study show tremendous hope. Their testimonios reveal they have overcome great adversity themselves and how through their processes of self-transformation and healing, they have gained great insights into promoting a diverse range of healing modalities with Young People and communities. While the challenges of achieving social justice in historically marginalized communities have not become any lighter, these social justice healing practitioners can carry this weight with less "baggage" on their shoulders. They express a lifelong commitment to being long-distance runners in our struggles for liberation from all forms of oppression. By centering the intersection of healing and trauma in

their work with urban YPOC, SJH(r)Evolutionaries reimagine how success is defined and are inclusive of bodymindspirit in the process. Together, the breadth of their work brings complexity to the praxis of healing. They help model new possibilities when it comes to promoting teaching and learning that aims to address the full humanity of our Young People and that of educators. From their testimonios emerges a healing imperative that calls upon all educators to embrace ways of being and teaching that honor and respect our humanity within a context of our lived realities and the greater web of life.

In a society in which too often the dominant master narrative views Young People of Color as a "problem," and mainstream approaches treat youth and families in ways that dehumanize and wounds their spirit, the *SJH(r)Evolutionaries* in this study illuminate an alternative way. Their hybrid approach to working with urban YPOC helps to cultivate what poet, essayist, and historian Aurora Levins Morales has called a "politics of integrity, of being whole: A political practice that sacrifices neither the global nor the local, ignores neither the institutional power structures nor their most personal impact on the lives of individual people. That integrates what oppression keeps fracturing. That restores connections, not only in the future we dream of, but right here in the glory, tumultuous, hopeful, messy, and inconsistent present" (1998, 5). Like Morales' thoughtful words have highlighted, holistic approaches to peoples' lives are necessary and needed when doing healing work

As such, the testimonios of SJH(r)Evolutionaries presented here have promising implications for educators committed to social justice education. Integrating healing in education is necessary; it is vital to support the growth, sustainability, and wellbeing of both educators and Young People. Especially for educators working within a context of historically marginalized communities, teaching can at times be exhausting, draining, and can lead to burn out given the lack of systemic support and tools for educators to holistically meet the needs of their students and empower them to be critical thinkers. Creating healing spaces in our schools for educators and students to experience individual and collective healing can provide more healthy and vibrant pathways of being that acknowledges and recognize their whole humanity in the process. And this is key to being able to foster both students' and educators' wellbeing and their capacity to dream and imagine new possibilities. Educators can help instill hope and a language of possibility in their praxis by placing value on existing understandings and practices of healing and well-being within students' communities. This approach is critical to nurturing future generations of Young People who see themselves as agents of change committed to transformative social change.

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