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Latinx/Chicanx Students on the Path to *Conocimiento*: Critical Reflexivity Journals as Tools for Healing and Resistance in the Trump Era¹

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Abstract

Anzaldúa's concept of *conocimiento* guides our analysis of Latinx/Chicanx students' Critical Reflexivity Journals (CRJ) produced in an Ethnic Studies classroom at a predominantly-white institution. Through a thematic analysis procedure of students' CRJ entries, which we describe as written *testimonios*, we discerned how Latinx/Chicanx students' writings engaged their identities, reflexivity, healing, and resistance on a path toward *conocimiento*. Grounding our theoretical and empirical analysis in Anzaldúan thought, *conocimiento* is characterized by a deep reflexive critical consciousness that unfolds across seven interconnected stages. *Conocimiento* builds toward a liberatory transformation that Anzaldúa describes as spiritual activism, the seventh and final stage of *conocimiento*. The sociohistorical, culturally relevant, and student-centered curricula purported in Ethnic Studies is the focus of much scholarly writings. Our work contributes to this growing theoretical, empirical and pedagogical scholarship by specifically focusing on *conocimiento*. Through an Anzaldúa centered analysis of Latinx/Chicanx students' CRJ we demonstrate how reflexive writings can facilitate students' process of identity formation, reflexivity, healing and resistance from colonial forms of knowledge and oppression. This is especially important when considering the racist and violent sociopolitical context under the Trump Administration.

Key words: Latinx/Chicanx, identity, critical pedagogy, reflexivity, healing, *conocimiento*

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Introduction

Across the United States, the Latinx³ population has increased to an estimate of 56 million people (Flores, 2017). The growth of Latinx communities in the U.S. has tripled since the 1980s, currently accounting for 17% of the total population. These patterns are also reflected in the number of Latinx students who pursue higher education. Since 2000, Latinx undergraduate enrollment in higher education, from community colleges to top-tier universities, has more than doubled (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). About one-third (28%) of Latinx have at least an associate degree, and more than half (54%) completed a bachelor's degree. Yet, when compared to white and African American college students, the proportion of Latinx who graduate in four years is 14% lower, and some take up to six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Although these trends indicate some improvement, Latinx students' higher education enrollment and rates of degree completion do not necessarily reflect significant progress, especially given the projected growth of Latinx youth. Clearly, questions remain regarding the conditions that challenge or support Latinx students' academic thriving. As the Latinx population continues to grow towards a projected number of 106 million by 2050 (Krosstad, 2016), a critical analysis of the state of higher education is warranted. This is especially the case in the wake of the current sociopolitical context following the 2016 Presidential Election.

The Trump Administration has further amplified the racialized neoliberalization of education, as evidenced by the discourses and policies purported by Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. The shift in education from a public good to a private for-profit commodity has stifled progressive affirmative action initiatives aimed at reducing the higher education achievement gap (Jaschick, 2018). Latinx students are likely to be most impacted by these shifts, which align with a culture of meritocratic colorblindness that supersedes any efforts toward equitable race-conscious education reforms. Institutions of higher education that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, together with a sociocultural sense of *comunidad*, are critical to the academic thriving of all students, especially Latinx. This work must combine bottom-up and top-down approaches toward reform. For the latter, the implementation of administrative initiatives, programming, and curricula are necessary structural changes. In terms of the former,

³ We use "Latinx" because it is a more gender inclusive term than the concepts Latino or Latina/o, which refer to a pan-ethnic/racial and transnational community (De Onís, 2017).

bottom-up initiatives can begin in the microcosm of the classroom through pedagogical practices that affirm students' lived experiences. This paper focuses on the former, specifically on creating opportunities for Latinx/Chicanx students to develop reflexive writing as a tool for identity formation, reflexivity, healing, and resistance. We contend that reflexive writing can support students' academic thriving and wellbeing. Given the current sociopolitical context, such opportunities are imperative, as they offer students with the critical social analysis tools to confront, deconstruct and resist the internalization of racism.

Forging spaces for Latinx students to situate themselves in relation to the knowledge produced in the classroom, as well as being positioned as experts of their own lives can have a transformative positive impact on students (Bernal, 2002; Sepúlveda, 2011). Thus, culturally and contextually relevant curricula are crucial to the academic engagement of Latinx students who might not see themselves, or their communities, represented in the course content or at the institution (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). In this article, we make the case for the use of Critical Reflexivity Journals (CRJ) as tools to support the identity formation, reflexivity, healing and resistance of Latinx/Chicanx students at a predominantly-white Jesuit institution of higher education. We posit that facilitating opportunities for reflexive writing can support a process that Anzaldúa described as *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 1987). We therefore engage the following question: How do Latinx/Chicanx students' CRJ reflect assemblages of their identities, reflexivity, healing, and resistance on a path toward *conocimiento*?

Literature Review

Anzaldúan Theorizing: *Conocimiento*

A robust scholarship has focused on Gloria E. Anzaldúa's writings and theories, from *borderlands/la frontera* to *mestiza* consciousness to *Nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2002; Keating, 2016). One concept among these theoretical formations is *conocimiento*, which Keating (2006, 2015) points out remains on the margins of Anzaldúan contemporary thought. Despite Anzaldúa's renowned contributions to Chicana, feminist, ethnic, and queer studies, within the social sciences, specifically community psychology (see Silva, 2017 for an exception) there is a dearth of research that has engaged Anzaldúan thought. Although there are some parallels to Freire's (2000) *conscientização* (conscientization), and Martín-Baró's (1984) notion of de-ideologization, *conocimiento* remains understudied (Reza-López, Huerta Charles, & Reyes, 2014).

Few scholarly writings have empirically employed *conocimiento* as a theoretical framework for describing the processes and practices associated with critical consciousness, sociopolitical development, identity formation, healing, and resistance. The limited empirical research is problematic as it leaves *conocimiento* contained within theoretical paradigms outside of the social sciences that could benefit from it, and that deserves to be further applied (Keating, 2006; Sandoval, 2000). Anzaldúa's work, as others have written, embraces a transdisciplinary orientation, and strives toward the fulfillment of ongoing spiritual activism. The concept of *conocimiento* is thus one tool that Anzaldúa developed toward that end.

Conocimiento is an iterative process of conscious de-construction/re-construction of the self, others and the social world. Characterized by seven interdependent interweaving stages, *conocimiento* exposes the individual to deeper, often new and complex, or contradictory, ways of knowing that transcend normativity, hierarchy, objectivity, and duality in thinking and being. Anzaldúa (2002) posits *conocimiento* is a reflexive consciousness marked by a process of:

breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision – mental, emotional, instinctual, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness – with social, political action and lived experience to generate subversive knowledge (p. 120).

In this definition, Anzaldúa describes several domains of *conocimiento*, from the clashing of lived experiences, emotions and thoughts, to the discovery, imagination and creative re-creation of hybrid subjectivities. Unfolding from the borderlands, *conocimiento* troubles the binaries that give way to power. In what follows we describe *conocimiento*, and each of its stages.

The Seven Stages: *Conocimiento* in Praxis. Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* is characterized by seven stages: *el arrebató*, *Nepantla*, *Coatlicue*, the call, putting *Coyolxauhqui* together, the blow-up, and spiritual activism. Each one facilitates a reflexive consciousness toward spiritual activism. *Conocimiento*, rooted in the Spanish word *conocer* (to know), is characterized by a profound sense of reflexive awareness. Reflexivity thus allows for liberation (Martín-Baró, 1984) and a differential consciousness (Sandoval, 2000) toward the decoloniality of mind and being (Maldonado-Torres, 2011).

In the first stage, *el arrebató*, Anzaldúa describes the shattering of subjectivities, experiences, and forms of knowledge taken for granted. This first stage leads the individual out of the comfort zone and into the second stage: *Nepantla*. In *Nepantla*, the clashing of old, new

and complex realities is confronted. Each clash marks an in-between zone, a borderland to be crossed and embraced. In *Nepantla*, the individual begins to acquire the awareness that they are capable of transforming their world and reality. Transformation is not without pain or contention, however. For example, in an auto-ethnography of a school-based community partnership, Silva (2017) described her process of *Nepantla*. Specifically, how she embraced this stage of “unraveling” to engage her personal and professional identities at the intersections of community research collaborations. As a *Nepantlera*, Silva (2017) identified the contradictions of her identities as a Latina researcher engaged in collaborative research with Latinx communities in disempowering educational settings. As a zone of transformation and hybridity, *Nepantla* is characterized as a liminal space where often dualistic or contradictory experiences and positionalities are valued. The equal valuing of these experiences leads to an to the in-between, the borderland that allows for imagination and new possibilities to unfold.

The third stage, *Coatlicue*, involves dismantling or undoing what is no longer connected to the individual’s process for spiritual activism. *Coatlicue* is the intentional act of confronting the evils that have colonized the mind and body (Anzaldúa, 2002). In facing those internalized oppressions that disempower individuals, decolonization as a process of deconstructing and co-creating knowledge from within is realized (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). *Coatlicue* as an act of decolonization cannot happen in isolation, however. Individuals must be in relation with others to understand how the liberation of a person is tied to the liberation of others (Martín-Baró, 1984; Sandoval, 2000).

Building on *Coatlicue*, Anzaldúa (2002) invokes the fourth stage: the call. In this stage, reflexivity and dialogue are identified as necessary for building solidarity and community. The call is an invitation to enact mutuality through the co-creation of hybrid narratives. Franquiz’s (2010) case study of bilingual/bicultural education shows how two teachers incorporated Anzaldúa’s children’s books⁴ into their student-centered culturally relevant curriculum to support students’ *conocimiento*. Franquiz (2010) also documented how the hybrid narratives fostered opportunities for intersectional solidarity. The piecing together of narratives was an empowering experience for the fifth graders who, via reflections and dialogues of shared

⁴ *Friends from the Other Side / Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993), and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman / Prietita y la Llorona* (1995).

experiences of im/migration and *Latinidad*, reflected the fifth stage: putting *Coyolxauhqui* together.

Hybrid narratives can be empowering. Yet, new ways of thinking and being can create *choques* (Torre & Ayala, 2009). These *choques* can be understood as putting *Coyolxauhqui* together and the sixth stage: the blow-up. Hybrid narratives create shifts toward transformation and decoloniality that may manifest as blow-ups or states of contention. Anzaldúa (2002) describes the blow-up as a lashing out response from a change in perspective or a paradigm shift. However, for those who remain in a state of *desconocimiento* (unknowing), shifting paradigms can be perceived as a threatening to the *status quo*. Indeed, the blow-up can produce a clash of realities that one may not necessarily want to accept. This stage challenges the emotional ties that surface in relation to an individual's *arrebato*. There is a constant shift in paradigms, changing perspectives, and piecing together of *Coyolxauhqui*. An example of this is demonstrated in Hurtado and Gurin's (2004) analysis of Chicana identity in a changing U.S. society, wherein they describe the social engagement model of Chicana that allows them to develop their identities as multiple social adaptations to cultural shifts and transformation in their social context. Drawing from Anzaldúa's (1987) *mestiza* consciousness, Hurtado and Gurin (2004) describe how these moments of blow-up allow for multiple group identification to surface and be embraced, or rejected, thereby creating avenues for the potential dismantling of systems of oppression. Tension with integrity and wholeness is the result of this blow-up stage.

The culmination of *conocimiento* is the seventh stage: spiritual activism. Anzaldúa conceptualizes this stage as the embodiment and enactment of liberation. As Anzaldúa writes:

Spiritual activism is a critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and differences within self and between others ... finding common ground by forming holistic alliances ... enacting spiritual activism (p. 545).

The path of *conocimiento* ends with a praxis of spiritual activism that reflects Lorde's (1984) notion of love as a radical political act. Similarly, hooks (1994) describes love as a practice of freedom, while Sandoval (2000) theorizes love as a technology for social transformation. Sandoval's (2000) differential consciousness reflects Anzaldúa's *conocimiento*. The capacity for openness and receptivity to tension, Anzaldúa (2002) posits, makes people attuned to their experiences of oppression and solidarity, which are necessary for the embodiment of spiritual

activism. We thus describe CRJ as a tool to aid Latinx/Chicanx students' identity formation, reflexivity, healing and resistance toward *conocimiento* in the Trump era.

Methods

University Context

Claradise University⁵ (CU) is a private Jesuit institution located in Northern California. As an institution committed to educating the whole person/student and creating citizen leaders of competence, conscience, and compassion, CU prides itself as being social justice-oriented. These values are at times poorly reflected in the culture of the university, however. The incidents that occurred prior to and following the 2016 Presidential Election underscored the colorblind culture of the institution that rendered the experiences of students of Color⁶ as nominal. In the aftermath of the election race-related incidents heightened at CU—from the defacing of an art installation remembering the disappearance of forty-three students from Ayotzinapa (Trujillo, 2016) to white students drawing a swastika in blood (Nguyen, 2016) to establishing of a Turning Point USA⁷ chapter on campus (Hypeline News, 2018). These incidents, along with the racism experienced by students of Color, reinforced an oppressive climate for students with marginalized identities. In one Ethnic Studies classroom, as students and faculty, we found ourselves processing campus incidents and daily reporting of racism and injustice. For some Latinx/Chicanx students, the CRJ became an outlet for them to embrace their identities, and engage in reflexivity, healing, and resistance. Reflexive writing served as a tool to grapple with experiences of anger, as well as hope and solidarity. Because of the value Latinx/Chicanx students ascribed to the CRJ, we analyzed their writings as these reflected their process of *conocimiento*.

Critical Reflexivity Journals (CRJ)

The purpose of CRJ is to facilitate students' reflexivity, critical social analysis, and engagement with course topics. CRJ entries are student reflexive written responses to assigned

⁵ All proper names have been changed to pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of students.

⁶ In line with the work of race scholars (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000), we capitalize "Color" because "people of Color" constitute a group whose experiences and positioning is distinct from whiteness, and the structural race-based privileges associated with being racialized as white.

⁷ Turning Point USA is a conservative right-wing non-profit organization whose mission is "to educate students about free market values." The organization also oversees the Professor Watchlist, which identifies and targets professors whose teaching and research is perceived as oppositional to the goals and values of Turning Point USA (Mele, 2016).

readings⁸, lectures, in-class discussions, and other course material. Students are also encouraged to free-write about relevant lived experiences tied to the course and current social issues. All students enrolled in an introductory Ethnic Studies courses (i.e., *Introduction to Latino/Chicano Studies*) taught by the first author were assigned to submit weekly CRJ entries. Students submitted a notebook or electronic document (e.g., Google doc) of their CRJ entry to the instructor, who within a few days returned them with comments, questions and/or personal reflections to help deepen student's reflexive writings. Through this process, students and instructor engaged in dialogic reflection that helped deepen students' critical reflexivity, or process of *conocimiento*, as reflected in their iterative and final CRJ. Additionally, the process also fostered positive student-instructor relationships. CRJ were graded as complete/incomplete and constituted 15 percent of a student's overall grade. Additionally, CRJ provided students with opportunities to process their thoughts, engage with the content personally (if they wish), and articulate that which they were unable to share during class.

The CRJ we present in this article focus on the reflexive writings of six Latinx/Chicanx students who volunteered and consented to have their journals be a part of this research. In writing about their identities and lived experiences with racism and discrimination, students often described healing and resistance as necessary practices to work through the sociopolitical context. Thus, in aligning our research with the goals of the special issue we specifically focus on CRJ as a tool to facilitate Latinx/Chicanx students' identity formation, reflexivity, healing, and resistance on a path toward *conocimiento* in the midst of the Trump Administration.

Testimonio: A Methodology

In line with a research justice paradigm (Jolivet, 2015) we engaged *testimonio*, which is a methodology that prioritizes and validates socially and politically marginalized people's stories through the gathering of narratives that seek to challenge hegemonic discourses and Euro-centric frameworks (Cruz, 2012). *Testimonio* attempts to dismantle power relationships within social structures, like education institutions (Chávez, 2012). Through a process of reflection, and the sharing and kneading of collective stories, *testimonio* prioritizes the voices and lived experiences of people and communities (Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2016). Of most

⁸ Among these readings are Anzaldúa (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Morraga (2011) *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010*, Galeano (1971/1997) *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, Gonzalez (2011) *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, and other selected readings on Latinx/Chicanx communities in the U.S..

significance, *testimonio* is a method for speaking against oppression because it aims to make heard the voices of those on the margins (Bernal et al., 2016). By linking narratives to social action, *testimonio* privileges stories of personal and collective struggle as sources of knowledge, empowerment, and political strategy for social change (Chávez, 2012). We describe Latinx/Chicanx students' CRJ as *testimonios* and analyzed these through a thematic analysis procedure.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a frequently used data analysis procedure in qualitative research. It is both a method and a tool for analyzing qualitative data via an iterative process of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes discerned from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given its theoretical and methodological flexibility, thematic analysis is also a useful approach for organizing and presenting patterns in the data because it combines inductive and deductive coding procedures. The former involves discerning themes from the data, whilst the latter connects patterns or themes in the data to the existing literature that guide the research.

We employed a thematic analysis procedure to discern themes within the CRJ. Each CRJ was an average of ten pages in length, consisting of individual (one paragraph to one single-spaced page) CRJ entries. We analyzed CRJ from six Latinx/Chicanx students enrolled in an *Introduction to Latino/Chicano Studies* course taught by the first author during the 2017 winter quarter following the 2016 Presidential Election. Most of the CRJ we analyzed were from Ethnic Studies minors or majors in their second, third or fourth year of undergraduate studies. With the exception of one student, all had taken multiple courses with the first author.

Our thematic analysis process began with familiarizing ourselves with the data by reading thoroughly each of the CRJ that were completed and submitted at the end of the quarter. We then generated labels or categories for patterns and themes we observed. Through an inductive and deductive process, these categories were then discerned and clustered into themes that reflected the patterns we observed in our data. We engaged consensus coding as a process to aid us in identifying CRJ excerpts that reflected our themes.

Informed by Anzaldúan thought and theorizing on *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2002; Franquiz, 2010; Keating, 2006; Reza-López, Huerta Charles, & Reyes, 2014; Sandoval, 2000; Silva, 2017; Torre & Ayala, 2009), we identified four themes. These consisted of the following: assemblages of identity, reflexivity as a tool for *conocimiento*, healing through *conocimiento*, and

conocimiento as resistance in action. In the following section, we discuss these themes in relation to Latinx/Chicanx students' CRJ.

Findings

Assemblages of Identity

For some Latinx/Chicanx students, terms like Latinx and Chicanx were new found identities. The Ethnic Studies classroom often provided Latinx/Chicanx students with opportunities to learn, engage and see themselves and their communities' stories, past and present, reflected in the curricula. These were empowering moments of discovery, connection, and grounding. Learning about identity from an Anzaldúa perspective allowed Latinx/Chicanx students to understand identities as assemblages, as additive categories that extend beyond, but also trouble, constructions of race, ethnicity, and gender. Anzaldúa's writings (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2002; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015) allowed Latinx/Chicanx students to feel validated and grounded in themselves, as noted in Sofia's CRJ entry:

Anzaldúa's writing style really struck a chord with me. Her effortless interweaving of Spanish into her writing made me think of all the times in high school that I wanted to do that but didn't dare. I felt as if she had somehow gained access to my inner thoughts. A few years back when the Census was being conducted, I remember feeling conflicted about which race box to check. I did some research and decided that none of those boxes described me. That was the first time I identified myself as *mestiza*. Reading Anzaldúa solidified my decision to identify as *mestiza*. The fact that Anzaldúa extends identity beyond ethnicity and race most spoke to me because identity is more to me. Even though I didn't have the words for it before, I see that it's about our common history and the different identities that intersect that make us *mestiza/os*.

Through reading Anzaldúa, Sofia experienced the first stage of *conocimiento*, *el arrebato*, where she was faced with socially constructed racial categories that she did not ascribe to herself nor embrace. Sofia's experiences catapulted her to reflect and deeply engage with her positionalities, and how these were made salient within a sociopolitical context of racialization, nativism, and ethnocentrism. As in the *arrebato* stage, Sofia was exposed to information that shaped her identities and led her to disorientation, or *desconocimiento*. The clashing of her lived experiences, marked by the realization that no race box defined her embodiment as a woman

of Color, led her to identify as a *mestiza*, and push back on the racist nativism. Sofia opted to embrace a political, social and cultural identity as a *mestiza*.

In embracing *conocimiento* through *arrebatos* of racism and cultural hegemony, students like Sofia saw their identities as assemblages that intersected with and were re-produced by social structures. This melding of identities into one was demonstrated in Ignacio's writings:

Not a lot of Mexican-Americans quite understand themselves, let alone what it means to be "Mexican-American." These are titles that validate my very existence. For the younger generation, these terms and ideas allow them to grasp something tangible in this limbo state of being neither American or Mexican. The border is in fact intertwined within our souls, yearning to be set free. Perhaps this is only me, but regardless of the term, Mexican-American is multidimensional with a sociopolitical cultural heritage as our foundation. These are aspects of my life that have made me who I am today: a second-generation Mexican-American.

Ignacio described being caught in *el compromiso*, the crossing from one border to another. As a self-identified American and Mexican, Ignacio embraced the borderland, and a reconciliation of all of his identities. In a sociopolitical context marked by anti-immigration legislation, and the hyper-militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border, for students like Ignacio embodying both identities equally meant a refusal to subscribe to the us v. them, immigrant/foreign-born v. U.S.-born dichotomies. Ignacio realized the multidimensionality of his identities and, as he reflected, he claimed pride in these. Yet, he also remained open to the fluidity of new ways of being and knowing in a time of increased hostility toward Latinx communities and people of Color.

Fluidity was marked by the embracing of change that can lead to new commitments and a deeper realization of the self in relation to others. Adriana, for example, made such connections:

Today, I was reminded of the power the word Chicana holds, and what it means to identify as Chicana. This identity allows me to embrace my Mexican culture and heritage, while simultaneously recognizing that I am also American. It also validates my experiences and personally encourages me to challenge the stereotypes of women across the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. I recognize that just as I am a Chicana, I am also so many other things that are beyond my control, such a woman of color from a low-income family.

In Anzaldúa's words, Adriana experienced the stage of *Nepantla* as she described her coming to terms with her identities. The clashing of different positionalities marked the feelings of contention Adriana identified. Yet, she embraced and found ease in these contradictory identities because she saw power in their meaning. For example, by identifying as a Chicana, which she conceived to be an empowering identity, Adriana was able to claim power and withstand manifestations of internalized oppression. By experiencing *Nepantla*, Adriana was also able to understand how identities are constructed, and often used to categorize groups of people apart from one another.

Conocimiento, through experiences with *el arrebatado*, *el compromiso* and *Nepantla*, afforded Sofia, Ignacio and Adriana with opportunities for reflexivity. In embracing the assemblages of their identities, Latinx/Chicanx students described their positionalities as interconnected and reflective of their sense of self, relationships to others, and opposition to the hegemony purported by Trump and his supporters. The assemblages of student's identities, as evidenced in Adriana's claim, demonstrated a state of *Nepantla*, of creating a hybrid identity at the borderlands, or in between contact zones that would prove to be useful in their organizing and spiritual activism. The liminal spaces Latinx/Chicanx students described were intersectional experiences that allowed them to experience or forge a path toward *conocimiento*.

Deep Reflexivity as a Tool for *Conocimiento*

Facilitating Latinx/Chicanx students' reflexivity allowed them to develop a sociohistorical awareness, or in Anzaldúan (2002) terms, a state of *Coatlicue*. *Coatlicue* is a necessary stage in *conocimiento* because it forces the person to confront wounds produced from colonialism or intergenerational traumas. Anzaldúa (2002) claims that "knowing is painful because after it happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before" (Anzaldúa as cited in Zaytoun, 2006, p. 105). Indeed new insights can lead to a heightened sense of awareness, as Yadira noted in her CRJ:

I have become increasingly aware of the way my identity is not self-determined but rather shaped by external forces. I cannot deny the influence my context has had on the person I am. I cannot talk about who I am now, without taking a look back to where I have been. While reflecting on my past, my tendency is to try to pinpoint the moment when I first felt I was "different." The moment when I understood that the world I was living in was not meant for me – a woman of color from a working-class family. Each

time I make this attempt, I fail. There is no distinct memory which clearly shows me when that line was drawn, at least not one I can recall. I wonder if this feeling of Otherness, this dissonance between the world I have been given, and the self I seek to understand, was passed down through my blood, through the fear my mother must have held in her heart.

Yadira experienced discomfort in coming to terms with her privileged and oppressed identities. As in the *Coatlicue* stage, Yadira reflected on the times when she tried to pinpoint the sources of her pain yet realized that this world was not made for people like her: working-class women of color. Anzaldúa's stages of *Coatlicue*, the call, and putting *Coyolxauhqui* together, all demonstrate Yadira's embracing of her lived experiences as an outsider on the margins of the *status quo*. When combined, these stages allowed Yadira to come to terms with her past fears and accept who she was becoming. Yadira described these fears as intergenerational wounds passed down to her from her mother, who had experienced racism, sexism and violence. Yadira's discomfort in having recognized the roots of her feeling led her to the fourth stage of *conocimiento*, the call. In this stage, Yadira reflected on intergenerational traumas, and how these surfaced in response to a sociopolitical context that mirrored past experiences of oppression that were presumed to be addressed yet were unearthed under Trump. In putting *Coyolxauhqui* together, Yadira aimed to weave her past with her present.

Anzaldúa (2002) writes about the importance of engaging with the world through reflexivity, *comunidad*, and solidarity in action. This often involved making intergenerational connections, as evidenced in Yadira's remarks. Yet, other students like Adriana pursued the path toward *conocimiento* via a process of "crossing over." In his CRJ, Santiago wrote about his positionality as a Chicano and his embracing of this and other identities:

Throughout the quarter, I have learned to appreciate writing as a process from which I find myself, and how I connect to others. It is through this that I gain greater perspective in the world. Journaling in this class has been extremely impactful in how I gather my thoughts around ideas and people. It also gives me an outlet as a Chicano to talk about my feelings in a constructive manner.

Similar to how Yadira developed a sociohistorical awareness, Santiago described how he engaged CRJ as a tool to aid in his reflexive process. For example, Santiago reflected upon a turning point, wherein he learned to express his feelings in an affirming liberating way. Thus, for

Santiago CRJ served multiple purposes such as affording him with a space to express and release his feelings and emotions, thereby allowing him to connect with others. Santiago's practice of reflexively writing about his emotions as a Chicano was imperative to his healing, to creating anti-oppressive narratives, and to embodying solidarity and spiritual activism. In a sociopolitical context marked by race and gender violence against women of Color, the allyship and solidarity of men (as well as white people) is imperative toward building an intersectional movement to end racism, sexism and systemic violence in the Trump Era. The CRJ served as an outlet for Latinx/Chicanx students, specifically men like Santiago to develop *conocimiento*.

Healing through *Conocimiento*

The ability to bring together fragments of experiences, marked by pain, hope, struggle and love for the self and the other, is at the core of what Anzaldúa scholars describe as emancipatory decolonial freedom (Sandoval, 2000; Keating, 2006, 2015). A sense of liberation is attained through healing via a spiritual activism that resonates with what Lorde (1984) describes as radical self-love. Anzaldúa's (2002) *conocimiento*, as seen in Adriana's writings, was characterized by healing through reflexivity and interconnectivity of the past with the present:

In her writings, Anzaldúa talks about the importance of writing to connect not only with you but also with others. Throughout this quarter I have learned to find myself via journaling by critically thinking about the material that I am engaging with. This has also allowed me to connect with others on a different level. Writers like Anzaldúa continually remind me that my experiences, emotions, and struggles, as a Chicana and a woman of color, are valid and should be talked about. Writing has served as an outlet to talk about my feelings and emotions. The multiple course readings have allowed me to work through a sense of healing that is characterized by my ability to connect my lived experiences to historical and structural factors, instead of individual dispositions.

In this excerpt, Adriana described how she connected with Anzaldúa's writings (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015), how this allowed her to reflect on the power of writing and, as we purport, experience the stage of putting *Coyolxauhqui* together. In this stage, the liminal space is embraced regardless of the perceived contradictions or tensions. Tension, however, is significant insofar as it allows the individual to re-ground and shift toward a sense of wholeness. For Adriana, putting *Coyolxauhqui* together was characterized by the piecing together of narratives of affirmation that reflected her identities. Furthermore, she described putting

Coyolxauhqui together and *Nepantla* as complementary experiences that allowed her to weave in narratives and reflections. Consistent with Santiago's experiences, Adriana also described how writing allowed her to express emotions. Despite the oppression encountered, students like Adriana were able to use CRJ as a tool to aid in discerning and resisting experiences of marginality in higher education. The CRJ afforded Latinx/Chicanx students with a space to reflect whilst developing ways to heal, as well as resist. Within the context of higher education, however, rarely are students of Color afforded opportunities to heal or engage socio-emotionally. We claim that under the current sociopolitical context, opportunities for healing that involve reflexivity are necessary, especially as students are affected by the racism that is the hallmark of the Trump Era.

Conocimiento as a Resistance in Action

Conocimiento for Latinx/Chicanx students was also marked by moments of resistance anchored in a commitment to social change. In their CRJ Latinx/Chicanx students described how current social problems, those that existed before and after the election, were systemic manifestations of past injustices. This point was noted in Adriana's excerpt:

Throughout high school and prior to that I was completely unaware of the systemic inequalities that exist in education that impede the advancement of people of color. Over the course of my academic experiences, I have come to recognize the powerful transformative role of ethnic studies in facilitating the development of my identity. I feel empowered as a Chicana to create change and make a difference. I am able to feel connected to not only other Latino/a's but other people of color as well. Learning history from a perspective that is different than that of the master narrative has allowed me to embrace my people's struggles and to understand the experiences that have shaped who I am today.

In learning and reflecting upon the systemic inequalities that women of Color face, Adriana embraced a spiritual activism characterized by a deeply seeded awareness of systemic social issues and the embodying of an intersectional solidarity with others affected by these. The feeling of connectedness to other peoples' struggles exemplified Adriana's solidarity with those affected by forms of oppression. Adriana learned about injustices and marginalization, and this led her to connect those realities to her own life and to consider ways to create change through social action. Under the current sociopolitical context, the ability to connect to other

people's experiences can enable people to create socially just change. Thus, it is critical for communities to unite in a common struggle by leveraging their power and positionalities to serve, learn and engage with others affected by Trump's hegemony.

Indeed, by confronting those conditions of oppression that produce moments of discomfort, or *desconocimiento*, acts of resistance aimed at social change are possible. Isabel, like Adriana, found her way through *conocimiento* via resistance to oppression

The various ethnic studies courses I have taken have enabled me with the tools necessary to develop my [research] skills, my ability to affect policy and structural level changes and work with students. This experience has influenced me to pursue a career in academia where I will have the opportunity to explore the relationships between educational practices and structures, as well as analyze existing frameworks to conduct research for social change.

Anzaldúa's (2002) putting *Coyolxauhqui* together is described as a state where people create a new description of reality through narratives. Isabel exemplified this stage when she embraced and saw strength in her newfound knowledge and identity as an aspiring educator. Isabel was putting *Coyolxauhqui* together by reinventing herself and developing a new lens through which to see the world. Anzaldúa (2002) describes the need to create new paradigms and ways of knowing and being that align with and reflect one's sense of true self. It is in the stages of *Nepantla*, *Coatlicue*, the call, and putting *Coyolxauhqui* together that new visions for change are thus imagined. Most significantly these understandings echo a commitment to engage a praxis that strives to redress social inequities. For Isabel, a new sense of self, one that aligned with values of transformation and liberation, reflected Anzaldúa's final stage of *conocimiento*: spiritual activism. Through this process, Isabel expressed the desire to develop the critical intellectual tools to understand how power structures shape social conditions of injustice, including the hegemonic discourses purported by Trump and his followers, and how these conditions can be changed through knowledge, action and spiritual activism in times of pain.

Discussion and Conclusion

Anzaldúa's concept of *conocimiento* informed our analysis of Latinx/Chicanx student's CRJ produced within the context of the Ethnic Studies classroom at a predominantly-white institution. Through a thematic analysis procedure, we discerned four themes: assemblages of identity, reflexivity, healing, and resistance. As demonstrated in Latinx/Chicanx students' CRJ,

these themes interweaved Anzaldúa's (2002) seven stages of *conocimiento*. We posit that Ethnic Studies curricula that create space for and facilitate a process of *conocimiento* can support students' academic thriving and wellbeing, especially in times of heightened explicit racism that saturates institutions of higher education. Facilitating Anzaldúa-oriented pedagogies, which allow for Latinx/Chicanx student reflexivity, are especially important when considering the sociopolitical context of racism and nativism unfolding under the Trump Administration.

Our work makes two significant contributions to Latinx/Chicanx studies, Anzaldúan theorizing, and allied disciplines. Moreover, our contributions shed light on how Latinx/Chicanx students, and Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogies forge sites of resistance in the Trump Era. First, as multidisciplinary educators and researchers, we must leverage our own positionality to make space for new epistemologies, methodologies, and pedagogical tools that empower and center the voices, experiences and subjectivities of our most marginalized and under-represented students. We must attend to the ways in which the sociopolitical context, beyond the walls of the neoliberal university, inevitably shapes the wellbeing, thriving and academic engagement of our students. Because Latinx/Chicanx students often embody the borderlands and *Nepantla* that Anzaldúa characterized as contention but also liberation, as educators we must make space for those subjectivities to surface in the classroom. We must be intentional in our pedagogy for social justice and engagement in Anzaldúa-oriented teaching practices that validate and empower Latinx/Chicanx students. Doing so can provide students with the skills and tools to embody *conocimiento* toward a praxis of spiritual activism within and outside of the classroom.

Second, some institutions of higher education continue to be hostile places for Latinx/Chicanx students, including students with intersecting positionalities, such as Dreamers. Recognizing the intersectional experiences of Latinx/Chicanx students and the multidimensional assemblages of their identities is important for developing micro- and macro- level interventions conducive to supporting their wellbeing and thriving. In times of heightened racism and violence targeting Latinx/Chicanx communities, critical pedagogies of praxis must be developed and engaged to resist oppression. Student-centered pedagogies that incorporate reflexive critically conscious and culturally centered curricula are crucial antidotes against oppression, and necessary to transform pain and anger into liberation, decolonial knowledge, intersectional solidarity, and political action. As educators, we must be radically malleable in our pedagogies

to allow for *conocimiento* to surface within and through our students and ourselves. In this article we have provided one example of how we facilitated such opportunities for ourselves in mutual learning and *acompañamiento* toward *conocimiento*.

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