

## Seeking a Culturally Relevant Ethic of Care for Mexican/Mexican American Youth: a revolucionista ethic of care and its wily, tactical mechanism of humor

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### ABSTRACT

Black and Latina female educators have for centuries prepared children of color to resist dehumanization, claim full citizenship, and transform oppression through culturally specific Critical Feminist Ethics of Care. In 2018, I detailed a Revolucionista Ethic of Care specific to the needs and strengths of Mexican/Mexican American (Mexicanx/a/o) youth which offers a subterranean social justice ethic of care through the curriculum and pedagogy of four female Spanish-speaking New Mexican (Nuevomexicana) and Mexican American (Mexicana) educators. Through this land-based Chicana Feminist Testimonio Methodology, I unearth a resistant, healing Critical Feminist Ethic of Care framework for (Nuevo)Mexicana/o children and communities which enriches the field of Care scholarship through its embodied, land-based epistemologies. I explore the ways in which four (Nuevo)Mexicana educators operationalize play and humor within their Ethic of Care to 1) open access to a mythic time/space continuum wherein they may access the historical and ongoing wounds of injustice fueling them, 2) gleefully travel to students' multiple worlds, and 3) forge liminal spaces of joy for Mexicanx/a/o youth to shape futures of thriving. This work offers ancient, practiced tools of resistance and healing in this new and yet historicized moment of racialized hostility and hate against Communities of Color in the United States.

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## Introduction

[C]onstant trafficking, negotiating, and dialoguing across borders results in a profound new mestizaje...eschew[ing] the racial hierarchies inherent in older mestizaje. We do not allow ourselves to shelter in simplistic colonialistic notions of...difference...We must unchain identity from meanings that can no longer contain it... (Anzaldúa, 2015, 73)

A revolution of mind, heart, and hand is within our grasp if we imagine the world differently—not as a utopia or fantasy but as leveraging what we know about the power of effective care. (Hamington, 2024, 12)

Beginning in 2016, I published a culturally specific critical feminist ethic of care for Mexican/Mexican American<sup>1</sup>—students and their families, which was lived and enacted by four female (Nuevo)Mexicana/o educators teaching along the U.S./Mexico Border. Their Critical Feminist Ethic of Care was a moral, ethical commitment to live, breathe, and enact *good care* (Hamington, 2024) for (Nuevo)Mexicana/o students aimed at transforming, enriching lives, and expanding sociopolitical realities and futures. What I found in seeking to perceive and more deeply understand their culturally specific ethic of care not only led me to *imagine the world differently*—it transformed my every notion of what it means to wage a social justice revolution on behalf of marginalized (Nuevo)Mexicana/o youth. The Revolutionary Care (Hamington, 2024) of these four female (Nuevo)Mexicana educators *unchains* dominant notions of social justice revolution from *externalized forms* that simply *cannot contain it* (Anzaldúa, 2015, 73).

A *Revolucionista Ethic of Care* (Sosa-Provencio, 2018) is a wily, tactical, and reframed social justice revolution that lives and breathes underground, within a protected space made fertile by intergenerational *mestizaje*, the ambiguous, blurring wisdom of survival that Mexicanx/a/o Peoples “of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures, by necessity possess” (Anzaldúa, 1996, 54). As these educators fight for the sanctity of students’ culture, language, residence, academic success, and sense of self, they conceal their work “with centuries of practice g.idi ng their hands” (Michaels, 1996, 39); Mestiza/os have long relied upon our ability to hide in plain sight by reconfiguring, blending and bending reality.

While I, as a (Nuevo)Mexicana researcher, am situated culturally and geographically in relation to these women, I could not fully perceive the unfamiliar sinews of their care revolution

<sup>1</sup> When referring to Mexican-born Peoples, I utilize either *Mexicana/o* or at times *Mexicanx/a/o*. When referring to multigenerational U.S.-born, indigenous heritage, Spanish speaking Peoples of New Mexico, I utilize *Chicanx/a/o* or *Nuevomexican(x)as/os* and while the ‘x’ is a signifier of gender inclusivity, it is used less in line with community usage. When combining these terms, *(Nuevo)Mexicanx/a/o* honors the shared beingness of our larger Peoples who have resisted occupation and colonization distinctly yet who share bloodlines across man-made Borders and ancestral connectedness to land inconceivable within colonial logic (Anzaldúa 1987; Moraga, 2011). When referring to the U.S. diaspora of Spanish-speaking Peoples, I utilize *Latinx/a/o*.

because my own light-skinned *güera* privilege, English dominance, and unquestioned U.S. citizenship has enabled an out-loud revolution on behalf of my People. *Testimonios* of low expectations, segregation, linguistic shaming, and corporal punishment—of being called *dirty Mexican*—have only ever been passed down by the generations above me. In this research, I learned to see beyond my own conspicuous social justice advocacy—to see and more deeply understand theirs and how their Ethic of Care is a revolution not akin to the wars of men. Theirs is a regeneration, a turning, a *revolución* carried in their mind/body/spirit toward a new day of hope.

For these four female educators, care is the labor and ethical rootedness of teaching to nourish and equip Mexicanx/a/o youth exists beyond strained resistance, for locking in a resistance stance will not liberate us: “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank... somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 78). Their Ethic of Care is, “fine-tuned for impact and effectiveness as they aim toward the growth and flourishing of others” (Hamington, 2024, 42). These (Nuevo)Mexicana educators heat, hammer, and fold the implements of their Revolucionista Ethic of Care to meet the unique challenge or challenger they and Mexicana/o students face.

Ten years have passed since this data was first collected and analyzed. Since that time, I have come to understand that the sustainability of a Revolucionista Ethic of Care lies in the elusive, identity-dissolving, fluid wisdom of *a new mestiza*, *La Revolucionista* whose constant negotiation of borders has given rise to a radical psychic confluence beyond the biologic which lives “in between different worlds, in nepantla... in intersections, in cusps... that defy binaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality” (Anzaldúa, 2015, 71).

One of the key mechanisms of their *revolución* is a shapeshifting, boundary-defying humor. While in 2016 and 2018, I outlined the multitude of unseen tactics comprising a Revolucionista Ethic of Care, I did not then include humor as one of these because I could not yet perceive it. Over time, I have come to understand and therefore glimpse the edges and ephemeral forms of their humor and play which emerge in individual interviews, focus groups, and classroom curriculum and pedagogy. Through this land-based Chicana Feminist Testimonio Methodology, I unearth a resistant, healing Critical Feminist Ethic of Care framework for (Nuevo)Mexicana/o children and communities which enriches the field of Care scholarship through its embodied, land-based epistemologies. I explore the ways in which four (Nuevo)Mexicana educators operationalize *play* and *humor* within their Ethic of Care to 1) open access to a mythic time/space continuum wherein they may access the historical and ongoing wounds of injustice fueling them, 2) gleefully travel to students’ multiple worlds, and 3) forge liminal spaces of joy for Mexicanx/a/o youth to shape futures of thriving. This work offers ancient, practiced tools of resistance and healing in this new and yet historicized moment of racialized hostility and hate against Communities of Color in the United States.

### **Literature Review: Black, Chicana/Latina Critical Feminist Ethic(s) of Care**

In the U.S. Borderlands, schooling has been one of the most powerful weapons of U.S. imperialism as both Native American and Spanish-speaking children were forced into abusive boarding schools (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006) and segregated English-only schools (Blum-Martínez & Habermann López, 2020) engineered to break them [us] of our names, languages, cultures, sense of community, and dignity. This work stands on the shoulders of centuries of history wherein women of color have cared for, educated, and learned alongside their community's children as the practice of community flourishing and freedom. Drawing from Black Feminism (Collins, 2009; Hooks, 1994; Lorde, 1978), Chicana Feminism (Córdova, 1994; Moraga, 2011; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Martinez-Cruz, 2011), and Latina Feminism (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Latina Feminist Group, 2001), Critical Feminist Ethics of Care are woven by centuries of women engaged in community (re)building in the context of adversity, scarcity, violence, and oppression in all its forms.

Within school spaces, legacies of womanist, collective, antiracist, anticolonial, mind/body/spirit caring—Critical Feminist Ethics of Care—have been most thoroughly documented within the Jim Crow South wherein Black children had unique access to Black and mostly female educators who taught as the practice of freedom (Cross, 1998; Hooks, 1994). Herein, Black female educators cherished and challenged Black students and their families, perceiving and fostering their academic and intellectual richness as a means of community uplift for the transformation of inequity, nihilism, and lovelessness (Siddle Walker, 2000; 2001; Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004).

Critical Feminist Ethics of Care within Mexicanx/a/o, Chicanx/a/o, Latinx/a/o communities are likewise evident, though documented to a lesser degree due to colonial practices placing White educators as teachers for Latinx/a/o youth in order to strip culture, language and dignity (Blum-Martínez & Habermann López, 2020; Gonzales-Berry & Maciel, 2000; Moreno, 2003). In the rural Southwest U.S. where community educators of color have taught Mexicanx/a/o, Chicanx/a/o youth, educators have embodied and operationalized Critical Ethic(s) of Care as a means of resistance and healing for youth facing anti-Blackness and anti-indigeneity targeted across their generations (Gonzales-Berry, 1994; Maestas, 2011; Sosa-Provencio & Sánchez, 2023). Herein, community youth have found intellectual rigor, cultural/historical/sociopolitical consciousness, holistic epistemologies of mind/body/spirit and land connectedness, and love for one's people—the necessary nourishment to see and love themselves beyond the distortions of White dominant schooling (Rolón-Dow, 2005; Sosa-Provencio, 2016a, 2016b, 2018; Valenzuela, 1999, 2016).

Black and Latinx Critical Feminist Care Ethics continue to challenge and reach beyond white Feminist Ethics of Care, which center on White maternal caring, inert practices of feeling *with*

another, and silence regarding the white supremacy, eurocentrism, and power and privilege that racialized communities navigate daily (Thompson, 1998).

### **Attuned Empathy, Knowing Situated in the Corporeal Landscape**

Hamington argues that "...the body is the repository of caring knowledge..." (2015, 83), and I offer that perhaps the bodies of especially female educators of color store the body's knowledge of authentic care through the bloodline wisdom surrounding the historicized contours of what community youth face and, perhaps most importantly, the historicized tactics for engaging *Revolutionary Care*, Tann "internal transformation that leads to relational and institutional change...a revolution of heart and mind that we can all participate in through everyday interactions that aggregate and congeal into a social renovation" (Hamington, 2024, 12). Within the root systems of Mexicana, Chicana, and Latina Critical Feminist Ethics of Care lies epistemologies of mind/body/spirit and land-connectedness to generate new and otherwise unseen paths toward wholeness and the liberation of all Peoples (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Trinidad Galván, 2016). Situating Body as living language of both resistance and healing *made flesh* (Cruz, 2006; Hurtado, 2003) honors the historicized, chromosomal knowing knitted into the very bodies of those who are the inheritors of conquest, colonization, and slavery (Moraga, 2011). According to Trinidad-Galván, centering theory this way enables a guttural-ethereal knowing which has the power to "shatter dichotomous thinking and underscore the need to act, resolve, rewrite history, and suture the violated mind, body, and spirit" (2016, 6). If, to achieve the necessary *attuned empathy* of Hamington's Revolutionary Ethic of Care, one must practice "humility to reflexively check our imagined link and understanding against what we learn through inquiry" (2024, 38).

Chicana Feminist theories of knowing beg the question: What forms can this inquiry journey take? Does delving into one's own chromosomal, *en-fleshed* knowing and the collective histories and knowledge systems stitched into our Brown Bodies underscore or complicate Hamington's *acquisition of knowledge*, which is necessary to care for others (2024, 40)? Does *attuned empathy* into one's own historicized corporeal consciousness of *in-the-flesh* knowledge systems contribute an unforeseen cardinal point to the emotional-vs.-intellectual dichotomy of attuned empathy? Hamington describes good care as either taking the stance of intrinsic caring or in response to the needs expressed by the cared-for, but in the case of Chicana/Mexicana/Latina Critical Feminist Ethics of Care, can *attunement* move one into further communion with their own Brown Female bodies and collective ancestral histories of healing, struggle and resilience? If, as Anzaldúa (2015) urges, "a wound provokes an urgent yearning for wholeness and provides the ground to achieve it," can infusing Critical Feminist Ethics of Care with Chicana feminist mind/body/spirit and land-based epistemologies of



healing resistance enable reciprocal healing and further underscore that, “you don’t heal the wound; the wound heals you” (Anzaldúa, 2015, 89)?

According to Anzaldúa the knowledge and wisdom to operationalize education to protect, fortify, and heal our own community lives in our flesh and bones, for “we know what it is to live under the hammer blow...*Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet wild...Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable” (1987, 44). Perhaps the *acquired knowledge* to wage a Care Revolution on behalf of Mexicana/o youth, which tends to their needs and connects with their deep goodness and promise, *has already begun* (Hamington, 2024)—forged and handed down by our *antepasadas/os*, our ancestors, over centuries as a means of survival and a footpath toward thriving.

## Materials and Methods

I utilized *Testimonio* Methodology which challenges dominant ideology and research epistemologies by placing Chicanas/Mexicanas/Latinas across identity and gender expressions as central authorities to their own experience through narratives of resistance, survival, and resilience amid structural oppression (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). According to Moraga, Chicanos and Chicanas have long “told stories aloud: as weapons...as historical accounts and prophetic warnings, as preachers and teachers against wrongdoing...as prayer.... through this storytelling one’s awareness of the world and its meaning grows and changes” (2011, xvi). *Testimonio* utilizes a confluence of creative methods to uncover guarded experiences navigating race, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality, circumscribed foreignness, (im)migration, language, colonialism, transnationalism, and Catholicism (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).

Research questions:

1. What are the *Testimonios* of four Mexicana educators teaching predominantly Mexican/Mexican American, (Nuevo)Mexicana/o children along the U.S./Mexico Border?
2. What curriculum and pedagogy do they utilize to prepare students, and what role do these *Testimonios* play therein?
3. How do classroom curriculum, pedagogy, and individual, intergenerational knowledge illuminate elements of a culturally specific ethic of care for (Nuevo)Mexicana/o children?

## Research Participants

Research participants include Diana Meza, Rosa Maldonado, Priscilla Parra, and Sylvia Rivas<sup>1</sup>. Diana is the daughter of Mexican immigrants who came to the U.S. as a young child. At the

<sup>1</sup> All first and last names of teachers and students are pseudonyms.

time of the study, she taught 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies and History in a Dual Language Charter School centering (Nuevo)Mexicana/o culture and language.

Like Diana, Rosa self-identifies as Mexican/Mexicana. She is the daughter of a Mexican mother who came to this country as a young woman, worked in migrant labor, and supported Rosa as a single mother. At the time of this research, Rosa taught 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Mathematics in the same Dual Language Charter School as Diana.

Priscilla and Sylvia are multigenerational New Mexicans, *Nuevomexicanas*, from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. Priscilla worked in the same large comprehensive high school as Sylvia and taught Health and Law Studies to 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Sylvia taught 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts and ENLACE (*Engaging Latino Communities for Education*), which is part of a statewide collaborative aimed at improving academic access, including toward attainment of higher education for Latinx students.

### Research Site

This research takes place in a mid-size city of nearly 100,000 lying 60 miles from the U.S.–Mexico border. Per capita income (2010) is less than \$20,000, and 20.4% of residents live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010/2017). I chose this site because of its proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border and its large Mexican/Mexican American population. According to U.S. Census Bureau 2011 estimates, the city's ethnic breakdown is predominantly Hispanic (56.8%) and White (37.5%). The school district reported a 73.9% Hispanic enrollment with 14.2% English language learners (District Office of Accountability, Assessment, and Research, 2011), with more than 40% of residents speaking home languages other than English.

### Data Collection

Participant *Testimonios* emerged across multiple data collection methods: (1) two 60–90 minute individual semi-structured interviews; (2) five 90–120 minute focus group interviews (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012); (3) ongoing field observations within and beyond participants' classrooms; (4) my reflective researcher journal; and (5) photographic elicitation (Eisner, 1993).

### Data Analysis

Employing this critical lens as part of a decolonizing Chicana Feminist research epistemology validates participants as centralized subjects capable of self-definition and theory within their own experiences (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Trinidad Galván, 2006). Five focus groups provided a source for data collection and also the space wherein we as co-researchers collectively analyzed data across all other sources including individual and focus group interview transcripts, field observation notes, co-researcher reflections, and shared photographs. Interview transcripts and observation notes were made available to participants for individual and focus group analysis as emerging themes across all data sources provided the basis to sort,

color code, and draw connections between initial and subsequent data. Preliminary data analyses were further contextualized within collective cultural knowledge, academic literature, and further crystallized (Luttrell, 2010) within our own families and circle of (*Nuevo*) *Mexicana/o* friends and colleagues (Dillard, 2000; Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

### **Findings/Results: Humor and Play as Entry into Mythic Time, Gleeful Cohabitation, and New World Creation**

These four *Nuevo/Mexicana* women descend from Indigenous and indigenous-heritage *Mexicanx/a/o* Peoples shaped by continued resistance and resilience amid centuries of Spanish and U.S. attempts at erasure at all levels (Acuña, 1988; Gomez, 2008)—what Vizenor (2008) terms *survivance*, the inherited survival and resilience strategies necessary to endure and resist the annihilation of one's People. Their distinct yet shared histories have fostered in them ways of being rooted in a blending, blurring camouflage that enabled the survival of their generations by allowing them to hide all they held sacred under the guise of conversion and cultural, ethnic syncretism (Moraga, 2011; R. C. Rodríguez, 2014), even within the cornerstones and altars of Catholic churches which they were forced to build (Wake, 2010). Their intergenerational wisdom of *mestizaje* provides hidden spaces wherein Indigenous Peoples and their indigenous-heritage *Mexicanx/a/o* *Chicanx/a/o* descendants have fostered sociopolitical consciousness, organized resistance, asserted humanity, joy and connection, and shaped new worlds of possibility. I detail how these four *Mexicana* educators deploy humor and play as part of their *Revolucionista* Ethic of Care to expose, excise and heal what has harmed them and their (*Nuevo*) *Mexicanx/a/o* Peoples. In their hands and through their *mestiza consciousness* (Delgado Bernal, 2006), the humor and play these women operationalize is not playful distraction from everyday life, “neither mundane nor masculine, but a miracle play with trapdoors and sequins and jokes on the living” (R. Rodríguez, 1996, 22). In the following sections, I describe how they deploy humor to, 1) open access to a circular, mythic time/space continuum wherein the painful, racialized childhood experiences informing their Ethic of Care are chronologically proximate, 2) gleefully travel to and *convivir* [cohabitate] within students' worlds, and 3) shape new worlds for themselves and *Mexicanx/a/o* students where anything is possible.

### **Portal into Mythic Time Wherein En-Fleshed Pain Becomes the Foundation of Care**

Betrayed for generations, traumatized by racial denigration and exclusion, we are almost buried by grief's heavy pall. We never forget our wounds...For cultural change to occur, members of that culture must move through stages similar to those in the grieving process...establishing a new direction.... you learn not just to survive but to imbue that survival with new meaning...you help heal yourself and others (Anzaldúa, 2015, 88).

According to Howie's work to theorize Irigaray, any endeavors to mend, heal, and strengthen our, “collective relations...requires another style of collectivity, another relationship to space



and time” (Howie, 2008, 105)—it requires a *maternal and mythic time* beyond that which “maps social, intellectual and political history onto a linear line of historical progression” (Howie, 2008, 107). For these women, humor and play provide access to Anzaldúa’s *new direction of healing* through a circular, fluid time/space continuum that defies dominant time constructions as iterative waves pushing humans forward and thus farther away from past experience (Howie, 2008). In the following *Testimonios* delivered through varying forms of laughter, Sylvia and Diana open portals into childhood experiences of racialized trauma and pain that are long past yet live freshly in their Ethic of Care.

Sylvia liberally applies humor and joy through music, dance, and performative assessment. In describing the roots of her pedagogical advocacy on behalf of Mexican and Mexican American students, the role of humor deepens even further. To underscore this, Sylvia tells me about a time wherein humor was weaponized against her and others. As such, she echoes Lugones’ description of dominant constructions of play/playfulness as, “antagonistic... ultimately, [having] to do with contest, with winning, losing, battling... [wherein] ...the rules of the game...inspire hostility” and situate the winner as a *conqueror, imperialist* (2003, 94) who beats, fools, and manipulates the lesser Other. Through uncomfortable laughter and a shaking head communicating renewed shock, Sylvia details how her pedagogy was shaped in her childhood by ‘play’ framed as dehumanization to trick those with the least power:

[M]y dad’s oldest sister, and God forgive me, I’m going to get struck by *lightning* for speaking bad about her but she was merciless to us (laughing, shaking her head)! My grandpa when he retired, my grandpa worked for Stahman [Pecan Farms], when he retired, he had a green thumb, he always sold chile on the side of the road...and we’d always go help him, get the little white buckets and pick the chile and the corn for the people and she’d yell ¡*La Migra!* [Border Patrol!] And we’d run and hide! And we didn’t know what she was talking about but she was mean (nervous laughter). I thought I had to hide from the *migra* cuz I didn’t know what that was...

In Sylvia’s willingness, even at the risk of offending God or nature, to expose the cruelty of her own long-deceased aunt, she reveals her commitment to heal the iterations of pain and terror inflicted upon those who have not held U.S. citizenship. While Sylvia was born in the U.S., the panic it sparked in her is palpable in her pained facial expression and halting laughter. The racing blood and pinpricked flesh that must have electrified her small body crystalized an *in-the-flesh* knowing that defies linear time and slips her into a circular, maternal, *mythic time/space* wherein this moment is the perennial life source of knowing to protect (Nuevo)Mexicanx/a/o students’ dignity, safety, and belonging at all costs.

In the following *Testimonio*, Diana likewise utilizes humor to collapse chronological time and illuminate the racialized, gendered, and classist Othering she experienced as a working-class Mexican-born high school girl. Today, this fierce, strong girl lives in Diana’s ethic of care,

disentangling and disempowering the oppression that her Mexicanx/a/o students still face as immigrants in this country. Diana's use of sarcasm and caricature position her within a history of Mexicana/o working class comedians:

*Aquí no hay Mexicanos* [oh, there are no Mexicans *here*] (sarcastic laugh)...when I got here [to this U.S./Mexico Border town] I was expecting that...*pura raza*...I was the only *beaner* in my class...*con el nopal aquí* [with a cactus on my forehead]...I didn't look like a *single* person...I should have been in the lower level classes and then I would probably meet more of my *gente* [people]...I was in honors classes with girls walking around with their Louis Vuitton and their fricken' Hollister y yo acá con my mediocre...*mochila de la pulga* [and me here with my fleamarket backpack]...like, ok, I didn't know I needed *that* to be in honors ...*Batallaba* [I battled]...But I did just as well as they did.

In many ways, Diana's wit and hyperbole equip her to *cantinfliar* in the tradition of Mexican actor and comedian Mario Moreno, *Catínflas*, who used "slapstick humor to deal with the plight of common people with wit and survival strategies. He used double meanings and other linguistic acrobatics, referred to as *cantinfliar*, to confuse and mastermind...the wealthy and representatives of the state" (Carillo, 2006, 182). Herein, Diana enlivens that girl standing on the outside looking in, simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible in her Honors English class. It is important to note that Diana is today a professional educator who in many ways has healed these wounds and works to heal others. Still, as Howie (2008) notes, maternal and chronological time need not be justified against each other—Diana is both standing in a new moment and allowing humor to unify her with adolescent Diana's *en-fleshed* consciousness. Her *Testimonio* renders an image of the distorted caricature she was perceived through—she is not a hardworking, brilliant Mexican-born American child but a *beaner* with the stereotypical Mexican cactus conspicuously growing out of her forehead. As such, Diana opens a "mythic...maternal order [which] introduces a new sensibility...an ethical sensibility...not bound by linear temporality"; Diana's ethic of care is fostered by her capacity to step into the skin of her *alterity*, which allows her to access, "the condition of historical narrative and woman-to-woman sociality" which enables "political intervention" (Howie, 2008, 110). By this exaggerated, cartoon description of herself as a strange mutation, as distorted through the eyes of White peers (Taliaferro-Baszile, 2010), Diana can touch the oppression she experienced in dominant White schooling and fashion an alternate space for reclaiming humanity, worthiness, and success for her and her students.

### *Conviviendo/Cohabiting with Students and Germinating Mirth*

An identity born of negotiating the cracks between worlds...creat[es] a hybrid consciousness that transcends the us versus them mentality of irreconcilable positions,

blurring the boundary between us and others...Proximity and intimacy can close the gap between us and them...nos/otras... (Anzaldúa, 2015, 79)

For these women, humor and play become a sacred “place of pilgrimage, of liminality...where light and dark are highlighted” (Lugones, 2003, 65); their *loving attitude of travel* to both the light and dark spaces of students’ worlds allows them to *convivir* therein—to cohabitate with the unexpected, the newly found, co-created *it*. In every one of their classrooms, moments of downright contagious joy are opportunities to see students with *their* eyes, to witness them as subjects, for without this seeing and understanding *nos/otr@s* from within, Lugones asserts, “we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated” (2003, 85-86). These moments of bursting laughter exist for their own sake—as part of the essential diet of being human—but perhaps more profoundly, Lugones writes, they *enable our existence*. Through sharing joy, these women spiritually transport themselves toward “deep coalition” (Lugones, 2003, 98) with their Mexicana/o students, a particularly lifegiving endeavor in light of what they and their families encounter.

For Priscilla, a multigenerational U.S. (Nuevo)Mexicana who works hard to hold onto her culture for herself and for her son in the context of intergenerational erasure, the humor within her ethic of care allows her to, “resist moral echo chambers and the strict dichotomies of ‘us versus them’” (Hamington, 2024, 40). By purposefully exaggerating her strained relationship to Spanish, Priscilla connects to students at diverse intersections of language,

[T]hey poke fun at me, they get a kick out of how I announce things and I’m finding that if I want to connect with them, I’ll use my funny little Spanish...or just even in the morning, (in mock seriousness, imitating a heavily Anglicized Spanish) ‘buenos días. ¿ Como estaaaas?’ and it’s like, ‘oh...’ (rolling her eyes, imitating her students’ loving embarrassment for her) ...I think they feel like we have a stronger bond when they approach me in Spanish...It’s almost like our own private little conversation...

As Priscilla speaks, the affection she and her students share illuminates her eyes and smile. She performs this exaggerated play as a perfected caricature of a cultural traveler, a ‘gringa’ of sorts who tries hard to speak new words in Spanish but who exists far outside students’ world. By inviting students to *poke fun at her funny little Spanish*, Priscilla demonstrates her willingness to *risk the oppressor/oppressed binary housed in dominant constructions of educator* and instead embraces a, “playful attitude” and an “openness to being a fool” (Lugones, 2003, 96) for her (Nuevo)Mexicanx/a/o students—both heritage and dominant speakers of Spanish. The humor moving within Priscilla’s ethic of care clears a space of *private conversation* within the hegemony of U.S. schooling that solidifies her bond with marginalized students whose humanity, goodness and histories of cultural denigration she sees and knows from *within*.

Another example of these educators' use of humor and play as a means of *conviviendo* within students' lives happened in Diana's classroom in early December as students were beginning to become fatigued from the long semester. On this day, Diana walks into her 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History class seconds before the bell rings. All her students are already there, milling around in the classroom waiting for class to begin. She wears a perturbed look on her face, and I notice that she is carrying a folded note. As she walks to the front of the class, she announces that she confiscated the note from a student during last class. As she begins opening it, the students sit down immediately in hushed anticipation. To provide the reader background, Diana once shared with me that, in order to minimize distractions caused by passing notes in class, she often threatened to "staple it [notes] to the wall next to my whiteboard. Most students refrained from doing it after the first few juicy "chismes" [gossip] were posted..." As I was witnessing this scene develop, I began to get uncomfortable, fidgeting in my chair alongside the students even as I reassured myself that the care in Diana's classroom was unwavering...but so was her discipline policy. Through the crinkle of the paper in hands, she begins to read, imitating a sassy adolescent voice,

*Whut Up*

*I don't know how to say this so imma just say it I am just writing this to let you know a few thingz. I been meanin' to tell you but you know how everyone is all up in our business...things have been different and we need to talk. There are a lot of thingz on my mind. U n me were so great, like everyone said we were the perfect couple almost as if we were going to be 2gether 4ever. But you been acting real cray lately. Like I feel you don't listen to me, other people and things are more important to you than me. You don't even ask me how I feel or what's good with me. I have been thinkin' about this for a minute and I don't think thingz are working out with US. I just have to say it, its over, Im breaking up with you!! It's like not going to work and I need to be alone. I need to do what I want, not what YOU want all the time. Sorry but Im not sorry, cuz if you payed attention you would have known that we are falling apart. But for real, it is your fault that US is over.*

*Bye, (pause, pause...)*

*The American Colonies*

*Gotchaaaaa (Diana screams, shrieking with delight)!!!!!!*

In this moment, students are abruptly whisked away from what they believed were the enticing details of two students' relationship. The entire class erupts into euphoric laughter mixing shock and relief. Diana is laughing *hard*, relishing her performance. Students sit with mouths agape. Diana regains some composure but maintains a giant smile as she speaks, "Ay, *a los más chismosos eran tan preocupadas por quien era* [ooh, the gossippiest kids were trying hard to figure out who this was from!] ...Alejandro, you were even moving around in your

chair, like all, ‘ooh, I *told* him not to go out with her! *Ooh!!!*’” As she says this, she playfully imitates the fidgeting intrigue that manifested in students’ faces and in their bodies. They respond with surrender at being so thoroughly tricked in this manner and this air of delight lingers for the rest of the class as they begin their American Revolution unit.

This surprise left us all feeling unified as giddiness coursed through the embodied space. As I read through Diana’s ‘breakup’ letter after class, perhaps most intriguing was her familiarity with students’ lexicon and handwriting. When talking to her afterwards, Diana conveys how hard she works each year to authenticate this artifact: “When I decided to write this breakup letter as an introduction to the lesson.... I even wrote it in the messiest handwriting I could produce...Also, I would change it depending on the year and what the new lingo was...” She even makes students promise her and each other to hold the ‘secret’ from next year’s class in order to preserve this joy. Indeed, the rules that govern Diana’s creative play *are not situated in competence but in sacredness* (Lugones, 2003, 95-96): through her Revolucionista Ethic of Care, humor and surprise move through this ceremony of delight and connection as Diana places a candle at the altar of (Nuevo)Mexicanx/a/o students’ emotional and romantic lived worlds, generational and cultural linguistic competencies, and their mind/body/spirit connectedness to each other and to curriculum.

In this third and final section, I outline how these four (Nuevo)Mexicana educators likewise maneuver humor and performance to sculpt a new world beyond this one where anything is possible for their (Nuevo)Mexicana/o students and families.

### **Humor and Performance in the Creation of New Worlds**

For Rosa, her own Brown and female body becomes the historicized landscape wherein students may see radical and loving reflections of themselves and their community that they do not see elsewhere. As a first-generation Mexican daughter, Rosa uses her layered, *in-the-flesh* consciousness and embodied play and performance pedagogies to craft a fresh *place of liminality* (Lugones, 2003) where futures of economic prosperity across gender, race, class, language, and geography are tangible. On Halloween, I see Rosa standing in the hallway before class, dressed more formally than usual. She describes what she has on as a costume of *former nerd turned CEO*. In my field observation notebook, I record the following:

Rosa is dressed as a nerd (used to be a nerd) who is now an executive who makes lots of money. She is wearing a pin-stripe shirt-suit with black medias [hosiery] and high heels. She looks very polished....

While at the time, I was focused on how these women were teaching for social justice in their classrooms, I did not then see the nuance of how Rosa’s costume signified a theatrical stage that was itself one of the most powerful weapons of a Revolucionista Ethic of Care and its undetectable war. Through this performance which comes by way of her body, Rosa shapes



her body as *mestizaje*, a “syncretic form of consciousness made up of transversions and crossings...[a] political operation...function[ing] as a working chiasmus (a mobile crossing) between races, genders, sexes, cultures, languages, and nations” (Sandoval, 1998, 352) to transverse this world by challenging what her students have accepted as normal and possible at the intersections of who they are. In line with Anzaldúa (2015), Rosa’s embodiment of a new psychologically hybridized identity echoes: “identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in jaulas (cages) and limit the growth of our individual and collective lives. We need fresh terms and open-ended tags that portray us in all our complexities and potentialities” (Anzaldúa, 2015, 66).

While this performative moment could be challenged as solidifying dominant culture notions of success, Hamington reminds, “revolution does not require perfection”—the *Revolucionista Ethic of Care* of these four Mexicana educators is akin to a “process revolution for a process morality of continually growing and changing humans” (2024, 220). Rosa offers her Mexicana/o students *fresh terms, in new possibilities of being* beyond the binaries that trap them, that trap us. As Lugones writes: “Women of Color...cannot stand on my ground that is not also a crossing...” (Lugones, 2003, 98), Rosa’s performance signifies a crossing into an alternate world wherein powerful CEOs and students so personally committed to intellectual and academic pursuits that it shapes their identity (nerds) can be embodied in the Brown, immigrant, and female body. Though playful, Rosa’s performance reveals the very serious nature of her ethic of care to transform the imagined into a realized world.

In another moment of humor touching ground within body, Rosa recounts the ways in which she has been marginalized at the intersection of her female left-handedness—as a *zurda*. She shares this *Testimonio* through sharp laughter for the poetic justice it delivered to those who denigrated and excluded her,

*Mis primos son machistas* [my cousins are sexist]. They own a welding shop and...‘*puros hombres aquí, no pueden entrar las mujeres* [just men in here, women can’t enter]’ ...I received a lot...for being not just female, for being left-handed ...*tenía primo que se sentaba en un lado* [I had a cousin who would sit to one side of me]...I’d eat with my left hand and he would hit me...‘*Que, ¡las mujeres no deben de ser zurdas!* [‘Women shouldn’t be left-handed!]]’... *a fuerza tenía que comer con la derecho* [I had to eat with my right hand] ... I became, I’m right-handed.... And then he married a *zurda*! And one of his daughters is *zurda*!

At this point, Rosa is laughing heartily at the absurdity and irony of this turn of events. Not only does she recall a childhood wherein her *zurda*-ness was forced out of her; she relishes in a mythical world where those who *Other* you are then forced to see themselves *in* you and, therefore must accept your shared humanity. According to Medina, Chicanas must find ways to honor ourselves, our bodies, our intellect beyond the constructions of others—must “form [our] own healing and self-empowerment...rituals that...serve as models for other Chicanas”

(1998, 207-208). Within her Revolucionista Ethic of Care, Rosa's humor and playfulness become rituals enshrining her and her students' self-worth and dignity so they may see themselves in fullness, goodness, and within futures where anything at all is possible.

## Discussion

Since the rise of Donald Trump, the United States has experienced White Nationalism and violence unparalleled in modern times (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2023). With his stunning victory on November 5, 2024 and impending return to the White House, the majority of U.S. voters have again endorsed inhumanities against Latinx communities<sup>1</sup> which celebrate police brutality, invalidate victims of rape while promoting their abusers to the U.S. Supreme Court and Presidency, suspend protections for those who are undocumented, cut resources to low-income families, lock migrant Latinx children in cages separated from their parents, and more. As I write this on the day after the election, Hamington's words echo: "the care revolution will not arrive through tearing down a symbolic wall or overthrowing a government...[but] as a process...Maybe it has already begun" (Hamington, 2024, 217). The Revolucionista Ethic of Care these women carry *is centuries in the making* (Martinez-Cruz, 2011; R. C. Rodríguez, 2014; Wake, 2010). Through their humor, play, performance, sarcasm, and wit, these educators reframe social justice revolution as one fought by way of spirit to strengthen coalitions among us as Anzaldúa's *interconnected webs (telarañas)*, meld unforeseen spaces and new ways of being which will continue to feed and protect us, and extend us into each other's' worlds, hearts in hand, equipped with ancient tactics of resistance, healing, and flourishing to bring about a brighter day.

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<sup>1</sup> The inhumanities that the Trump administration has wielded have not in any way been limited to Latinx communities; but while a Revolucionista Ethic of Care builds solidarity across identity and communities, to cite injustices exacted across all groups and individuals is beyond the scope of this paper.

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