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Beautifully Powerful: A Latcrit Reflection on Coming to an Epistemological Consciousness and the Power of Testimonio

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BEAUTIFULLY POWERFUL: A LATCRIT REFLECTION ON COMING TO AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE POWER OF *TESTIMONIO**

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* The majority of this article is based upon the author’s dissertation, “*Sueños Indocumentados: Using LatCrit to Explore the Testimonios of Undocumented and U.S. Born Chicana College Students on Discourses of Racist Nativism in Education*,” which can be found on file with the author and the *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law*. This article is a reflection piece, prompted by the Fourteenth Annual LatCrit Conference that took place in Washington, D.C. The 2009 conference theme, “*Outsiders Inside: Critical Outsider Theory and Praxis in the Policymaking of the New American Regime*,” along with conversations with LatCrit scholars at this event challenged me to document the journey I have taken in coming to do the work that I do as a LatCrit scholar in the field of education.

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“I myself invent time by conjuring up the voices and the spirits of the women living under brutal repressive regimes . . . because I want to do justice to their voices to tell these women in my own gentle way, that I will fight for them and that they provide me with my own source of humanity.”
*Helena María Viramontes*¹

I. INTRODUCTION

The theme for the Fourteenth Annual LatCrit Conference, “*Outsiders Inside: Critical Outsider Theory and Praxis in the Policymaking of the New American Regime*,” called on critical race scholars to reflect on how we position ourselves and our scholarship as outsiders inside the legal system during the current historical moment, which some scholars call the “new American regime.” As a presenter at this particular conference, I belonged to a relatively small group of Critical Race Theory (“CRT”) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (“LatCrit”) scholars in the field of education. Yet, the year’s conference theme spoke to me as a LatCrit scholar in an academic field outside of the law. For me, the conference theme was a call to critically reflect on my positionality as a metaphorical outsider within the ivory towers of the academy during a historical moment that has become significant and powerful, but at the same time, has made more difficult the task of exposing, deconstructing, and dismantling the systemic racism which continues to oppress Communities of Color in the U.S.

This article is a reflection—a LatCrit reflection documenting my journey on how I arrived to do the work I do, as a LatCrit researcher in the field of education. This LatCrit reflection was prompted by the conference theme and conversations with other critical race theorists that took place at this important meeting on how the process of arriving at the work we do is just as significant as the product we create. In reflecting on and sharing these journeys, we transcend the “outsider” status by creating pathways towards social change in academia. Moreover, documenting this journey attempts to demystify the research process and provide readers with an honest account of how the work we do as marginalized scholars in the academy can be uncertain, painful, messy, and at the same time, beautifully powerful. Similar to Anna Sandoval, I also borrow the words of Chicana author and literary scholar Helena María Viramontes to explain why we, as Chicana scholars in academia, do the work we do. Our goal is to provide a space within the academy for our experiences to be heard and, just as Sandoval states, “to give voice to the women who, for whatever reasons,

1. See Anna Sandoval, *Building up Our Resistance: Chicanas in Academia*, 20 FRONTIERS: J. WOMEN STUD. 86, 86 (1999) (quoting Helena María Viramontes).

cannot tell their story.”²

I am a “newly anointed” Ph.D. in education. My dissertation focused on how discourses of racist nativism emerged in the educational trajectories of undocumented and U.S.-born Chicana college students attending a University of California (“UC”) campus. The dissertation explored the ways dominant racist and nativist perceptions of undocumented Latina/o immigrants shaped the educational experiences of these women and how they responded to these discourses through their struggle, survival, and resistance.³ To document their stories and experiences, I used *testimonio* as LatCrit methodology positioned within a Chicana feminist epistemology.⁴ This approach allowed for the women and I to recognize and draw from our own sources of knowledge as a means to engage in the research process. Thus, *testimonio* as LatCrit methodology has been a journey I traveled with the women that came to inform and shape the research process, ultimately leading me to understand the power of *testimonio* and transformative research.

II. COMING TO THE STUDY

Before I continue, it is important to briefly describe the study to provide the context for the journey I describe in this reflection. I conducted this study over a two-year period beginning in 2007, during which a combination of events occurred that led me to explore the experiences of Latina/o undocumented college students. In March 2006, while I was a master’s student in education at UCLA, I co-coordinated the Latina/o

2. *See id.*

3. *See generally* Lindsay Pérez Huber, *Sueños Indocumentados: Using LatCrit to Explore the Testimonios of Undocumented and U.S. Born Chicana College Students on Discourses of Racist Nativism in Education* (March 2010) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles) (on file with author) [hereinafter Huber, *Sueños*].

4. Originally developed in the field of Latin American studies, *testimonio* centers on the participant, who narrates her experiences to reveal exploitative and oppressive conditions while validating her own experiential knowledge. *See generally* JOHN BEVERLEY, *TESTIMONIO: ON THE POLITICS OF TRUTH* (2004); George Yúdice, *Testimonio and Postmodernism*, 18 *LATIN AM. PERSP.* 3 (1991). Combining the basic elements of *testimonio* and LatCrit, *testimonio* interviews function to (1) validate and honor the knowledge and lived experiences of oppressed groups by becoming a part of the research process; (2) challenge dominant ideologies that shape traditional forms of epistemology and methodology; (3) operate within a collective memory that transcends a single experience to that of multiple communities; and (4) move toward racial justice by offering a space within the academy for the stories of People of Color to be heard. This method was designed to capture the complexities of the lived experiences of People of Color whose realities are mediated by multiple forms of oppression. *See* Lindsay Pérez Huber, *Challenging Racist Nativist Framing: Acknowledging the Community Cultural Wealth of Undocumented Chicana College Students to Reframe the Immigration Debate*, 79 *HARV. EDUC. REV.* 704 (2009).

Education Summit Conference with the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (“CSRC”). The conference focused on examining factors necessary to move more Latina/o students through the educational pipeline toward graduate education. The goal of this conference was to forge collaborative relationships between UCLA and the Los Angeles community in order to improve educational opportunities for local Latina/o students. At this conference, I met several students who voiced their concern that the event did not adequately address the experiences of undocumented Latina/o students, who face unique challenges and obstacles in their educations. During the morning of the event, one of our speakers, the superintendent of a local school district, had to excuse himself from the conference and return to his office to tend to an urgent situation, which arose that morning. We learned later throughout the day that thousands of Los Angeles students were walking out of their classrooms in protest against the proposed bill House Resolution 4437 (“H.R. 4437”), also known as the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act.⁵ The proposed bill was a legislative attack on undocumented immigrant communities in the U.S. that would further criminalize undocumented immigrants and immigrant advocates.⁶

The mass mobilization that occurred the day following the March 25, 2006 conference, along with several protests that followed that spring, started a powerful momentum for the immigrant rights movement. Being a participant at these events with hundreds of thousands of others in Los Angeles was a critical moment—a critical race moment—in my graduate career when I decided to dedicate my dissertation work towards continuing the legacy of what took place in the spring of 2006. At that time, I was also a teaching assistant in Chicana/o Studies and Education courses at UCLA. In my classes with undergraduate Latina/o students, some undocumented and most the children of immigrants, we engaged in discussions about the meaning of the protests and the larger immigrant rights movement within the context of their educational goals and aspirations. My students taught

5. Compared to past anti-immigrant legislation in the United States, this bill, introduced by Senators James Sensenbrenner (R, WI) and Peter King (R, NY), was unique in that it was framed as a bill to protect national security and to contribute to anti-terrorist efforts. It proposed that any undocumented immigrant residing in the U.S. be charged with a felony for her/his “illegal” presence in the country, effectively barring her/him from ever gaining legal status in the United States. The bill also sought to charge anyone, regardless of legal status, with a felony who assists or conceals the status of an undocumented immigrant from the U.S. government. *See generally* Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, H.R. 4437, 109th Cong. (2005).

6. *See id.* (criminalizing undocumented immigrants as well as church clergy, school officials, immigrant advocacy groups, and any individual or organization assisting undocumented immigrants in the United States).

me about the particular challenges undocumented students face in educational institutions and the important linkages between the dominance of the problematic and inhumane in discourse on undocumented immigration and the Latina/o student educational experience. And so, the work began.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

LatCrit uses an overarching framework that examines the intersection of race, class, and gender, while also acknowledging the unique forms of subordination within the Latina/o community based on immigration status, language, phenotype, and ethnicity.⁷ LatCrit thus allows for the specific examination of race and immigration status and led to the development of “racist nativism,” a conceptual tool used to examine the experiences of undocumented immigrant communities.⁸ Discourses of racist nativism exist at the intersections of race, immigration status, gender, and class, and guide dominant perceptions, understandings, and knowledge about undocumented immigrants in the U.S. My dissertation explores how these discourses emerged in the educational trajectories of Chicana students. The dissertation also explores the similarities and differences in the experiences of undocumented and U.S. born women and the strategies these women use to navigate higher education despite the obstacles they encounter.

I positioned my dissertation within a Chicana feminist epistemology which acknowledges Chicana ways of knowing shaped by personal, academic, and professional experiences, as well as, the analytic research processes we engage.⁹ Within this epistemological stance and guided by a LatCrit framework, I used the methodological approach of *testimonio* to conduct, collect, and analyze forty *testimonio* interviews and two focus groups with ten undocumented and ten U.S. born Chicana undergraduate students attending a public, four-year research university in California.¹⁰

The analysis in my dissertation revealed that discourses of racist

7. The LatCrit movement was born of a series of Critical Race Theory debates, which took place in the 1980s and 1990s. The first LatCrit meeting took place in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1995 as part of a Hispanic National Bar Association Law Professors’ Meeting. See LATCRIT INC., LatCrit History, <http://www.law.du.edu/latcrit/LatCritHistory.htm> (last visited Mar. 19, 2010).

8. See Huber, *supra* note 4, at 705 (defining the concept of racist nativism as “notions of the native and non-native—one in which whites have been perceived as native to the United States and all other groups non-native. In this historical moment, racist nativism targets Latina/o undocumented immigrants, regardless of their many contributions to U.S. society as productive community members, as well as other Latinas/os, regardless of citizenship status.”).

9. Huber, *Sueños*, *supra* note 3, at xxii.

10. See *id.*

nativism become lived out through discursive practices of difference the women experienced throughout their educational careers.¹¹ These practices included English dominance, exclusion, and negative perceptions of the women that led to real and serious consequences. The dissertation explored the consequences of these discursive practices of difference, guided by larger racist nativism discourses. These consequences manifested as institutional, personal, and interpersonal effects, causing constraints on educational access and opportunity, hindering the women's physical and psychological well-being, and causing conflict between the women and their peers. Finally, through the lens of community cultural wealth, the dissertation explored the ways that the women drew from multiple skills, abilities, resources, and knowledge within their families and communities to survive, navigate, thrive, and resist in higher education.¹² I also explored an additional form of capital, spiritual capital, which emerged from the analysis.

I concluded the dissertation with theoretical and methodological contributions to the field, as well as contributions for educational policy and practice and immigration advocacy. Specifically, I ended with recommendations that provide steps we can take in continuing the struggle for the rights of undocumented immigrant students, families, and communities. They include supporting the Federal Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (the "DREAM Act") and a call to reframe the immigration debate towards a human rights frame, which reclaims the humanity of undocumented immigrants and recognizes that all people have the inherent right to be treated with dignity and respect, have their strengths recognized, and to have their contributions to society be acknowledged.

IV. COMING TO AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Now that I have explained how I came to do this work and have provided a brief description of the study that I reflect upon, I now describe how I came to my "epistemological consciousness." Through this honest reflection that often only happens in dialogue with others (as with my colleagues at this year's LatCrit conference), I attempt to demystify the research process and explain the struggles I have had working through the inharmonious relationship between academic research and social justice for Communities of Color.

As an educational researcher, I have the privilege of engaging with the

11. *See id.*

12. *See id.* at xxii-xxiii.

academic community and allowing others to hear the *testimonios* of the women who have participated in this study. Throughout the process of conducting and writing my dissertation, I intentionally reflected on the research process that led me to my findings.¹³ I have done so because, as Viramontes beautifully expresses, I want to “do justice” to the *testimonios* of these women, and I want my dissertation to be a means of fighting against the injustice that they face. The dissertation is a form of resistance, and through it I join a larger struggle to fight for the rights of undocumented immigrant communities and women of color in and outside academia. Thus, this work is also personal. Chicana scholars, particularly Chicana feminist scholars have long acknowledged that we cannot separate our personal and academic experiences, and so our work often becomes a form of activism that is motivated by a search for social justice for ourselves, our families, and our communities. I know that I am not alone in feeling a tremendous pressure to produce work that will “do justice” to these communities.

If I could rewind my graduate career to roughly three years ago, when I first began this study, it would have happened more smoothly and no doubt, more quickly. Early on in my graduate work, I did not yet have the skill-set developed to articulate an epistemological stance, but I did have concerns about how I would conduct my dissertation. I was concerned about romanticizing the experiences of Chicana students, and in particular of undocumented Chicanas who have been able to overcome great obstacles to become successful undergraduates at a top-tier research university. I was also concerned about how I would engage in anti-racist, social justice research when the research process itself has historically functioned as a colonial project. A question I asked myself was, “*How could I avoid perpetuating dominant discourse and use this study to disrupt it?*” Later, as I began to collaborate with the women and document their *testimonios*, I asked myself, “*How could I ‘do justice’ to the powerful stories of these women who have shared their experiences with me—from their greatest hopes to their darkest fears?*” My various life experiences, such as working with undocumented Chicana students, training as a Chicana/o studies undergraduate student, training as an education graduate student, and my own family history, informed these concerns. However, three years ago I had yet to read the work of Dolores Delgado Bernal and did not know that these experiences and the concerns they produced were rooted in my own “cultural intuition,” a sense I had developed through my

13. This article is a LatCrit reflection on the process of arriving at the findings of my dissertation study and current work. As such, I do not discuss the findings of this dissertation. However, for the entire dissertation, including findings please see generally, Huber, *Sueños*, *supra* note 3.

own experiences that I brought with me to the research process.¹⁴

The skill set I *did* have at the time was my training in CRT in education, given to me through the mentorship of my advisor, Dr. Daniel Solorzano, a leading CRT scholar in the field. Thus, this study developed from a CRT trajectory, and specifically a LatCrit trajectory. What attracted me to CRT in education and later LatCrit, was CRT's focus on the lived experiences of people of color and the intentional move toward social justice. I was also interested in how LatCrit allowed for an intersectional analysis of the multiple ways Latinas/os can experience subordination. As I described previously, a LatCrit framework led to the development of racist nativism as a means of understanding the experiences of Latina/o undocumented immigrant communities. Through a racist nativism lens I was able to understand how the intersections of race, immigration status, gender, and class manifested in the educational trajectories of the women participants, as told through the participants' *testimonios*. During my exploration of *testimonio* as method in academic research, a critical shift in my dissertation occurred.

I was first drawn to the method of *testimonio* as a participant in the dissertation study of Dr. Rebeca Burciaga,¹⁵ who at the time was an advanced doctoral student in the same graduate program. As a participant in this study, I provided my own *testimonio* about my educational trajectory and experiences as a Chicana doctoral student in education. I was immediately drawn to the process of *testimonio* through this experience. At this point in my educational career, I had been an interview participant in several research projects, but none were similar to the process of *testimonio*. During her study, I felt she was *really* listening to what I was saying, and not simply recording data. She also kept in contact with me throughout the process of completing her dissertation to update me on the status of her work and to ask clarifying questions about the analysis of my *testimonio*. Although I had read about studies that employed more critical methodological approaches, I had not experienced them as a participant. Through her work, Dr. Burciaga introduced me to *testimonio* as method in educational research and to Chicana feminist epistemology, a framework she used to position her study.

Since this critical experience, I have immersed myself in scholarship that utilizes *testimonio* as a research strategy in education and other disciplines such as anthropology, ethnic studies, humanities, Latin American studies,

14. See generally Dolores Delgado Bernal, *Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research*, 68 HARV. EDUC. REV. 555 (1998).

15. See generally María Rebeca Burciaga, *Chicana Ph.D. Students Living Nепantla: Educación and Aspirations Beyond the Doctorate* (2007) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles) (on file with author).

psychology, and women studies. Through this work, I realized the power of *testimonio* to document and theorize experiences of struggle, survival, and resistance to oppression. This work also influenced how I would use LatCrit in my study—to center the experiences of the women participants.

At the same time I was also drawn to the work of Dolores Delgado Bernal on Chicana feminist epistemology.¹⁶ In her dissertation, Dr. Burciaga explains how a Chicana feminist epistemology could “bring[] the method of *testimonio* to life” in educational research.¹⁷ Delgado Bernal explains how, as Chicana researchers, we can draw upon our life experiences to enhance the research process we engage in as academics, through “cultural intuition”—a perspective that is informed by our multiple identities and personal, professional, and academic experiences, including those in our own communities.¹⁸ In retrospect, I realize that the initial concerns I had about undertaking my dissertation and conscious reflection on the research process and my role in it, are rooted in my own cultural intuition. I then realized that I have been positioning this study within a Chicana feminist epistemology all along.

According to Delgado Bernal “what becomes crucial in a Chicana feminist epistemology goes beyond quantitative versus qualitative methods and lies instead in the methodology employed and in whose experiences and realities are accepted as the foundation of knowledge.”¹⁹ When I began my dissertation, I was mostly concerned with the *how*, or the methodological approach of centering focus on the experiences of the Chicanas in the study. However, coming to consciousness about the epistemological position of the study also challenged me to make connections between this standpoint and a LatCrit theoretical framework. Both a Chicana feminist epistemology and LatCrit allowed me to examine and understand the intersection of race, immigration status, gender, and class in the educational experiences of the Chicana student participants and both call for building theory from the lived experiences of the women. Delgado Bernal explains a Chicana feminist epistemology is one epistemological standpoint, which is a part of what we can call “critical race-gendered epistemologies.”²⁰ Critical-race gendered epistemologies are, “dynamic and encompassing [of] various experiences, standpoints, and

16. See Bernal, *supra* note 14, at 555.

17. Burciaga, *supra* note 15, at 67.

18. See Bernal, *supra* note 14, at 563.

19. *Id.* at 558.

20. See Dolores Delgado Bernal, *Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory and Critical Race-Gendered Epistemologies: Recognizing Students of Color as Holders and Creators of Knowledge*, 8 QUALITATIVE INQUIRY 105, 113 (2002) [hereinafter Bernal, *Critical Race Theory*].

theories that are specific to different groups of people of color.”²¹

Thus, in the process of coming to an epistemological consciousness in my dissertation, it was LatCrit that moved me toward a critical race-gendered standpoint to realize that my personal, professional, and academic experiences, my culture, my community, my multiple identities, and that of my participants, were woven together through a Chicana feminist epistemology. LatCrit has, therefore, been critical in the process of coming to an epistemological consciousness in my work by providing a research lens through which to understand intersectionality and how social structures mediate the lived realities of the students I studied. I could have conducted this study using exclusively a Chicana feminist cultural standpoint, as it affords similar methodological approaches and theoretical orientations. However, this study came from my own grounding in CRT and LatCrit in education, and I am not willing to let go of these critical “frames.” As Delgado Bernal has explained, CRT and LatCrit have helped her “uncover the possibilities” of critical race-gendered epistemologies in her work.²² Both LatCrit and a Chicana feminist epistemology helped me develop a dissertation and produce findings that I believe will help fight for the women in the study. Indeed, these women provided me with my own source of humanity throughout the process of completing the dissertation.

V. THE POWER OF *TESTIMONIO*

Coming to an epistemological consciousness was a journey that I clearly have not taken on my own. The work of past scholars, particularly Women of Color, has helped me tremendously in coming to recognize and uncover the foundations of the work I do. Equally as important in this journey are the women who participated in the dissertation with me. Together, through our discussions and theorizing, they have helped me realize the power of *testimonio*, Chicana feminist epistemology, and what it means to engage cultural intuition in the research process. Through *testimonio* positioned within a Chicana feminist epistemology, guided by a LatCrit framework, we have learned to trust ourselves in the ways we know, understand, and interpret the world and recognize this knowledge as valid and valuable to the research process. For me, engaging in cultural intuition became most clear during the collaborative data analysis process that we participated in during the focus groups for the study. As previously mentioned, these focus groups served as collaborative sites of data analysis (rather than a group interview as traditionally used) where the women engaged in

21. *Id.*

22. *See id.* at 110.

discussions about how data would be analyzed, interpreted, and categorized. These focus groups also provided an opportunity to reflect on the process of *testimonio*.

At the end of each focus group, I asked the women to share their thoughts on the process of *testimonio* in which we had engaged. Lourdes,²³ a third year sociology major and undocumented student shared:

I saw it as kind of a reflection, because I know things that I lived through, I ignored them at the moment, but then thinking about them, like when I told you everything, I was just like, wow! I have been through a lot! And it hadn't hit me, because I just keep thinking, ok, another day, another day, another day, but then if you think back on all of it, it's like wow! I'm sure it's like that for all of us . . . because we go through so many things daily and we don't think about [it] . . . And it's like wow! And I'm still here! So it gets me thinking about stuff. Then like you told me you were proud of me, and I was like, hey I'm proud of myself too! (laugh) So to me it's a reflection.

Lourdes described the process of *testimonio* as a “reflection” where she was able to look back on her past experiences and truly realize the meaning of persistence in pursuing her education, despite the many barriers she encountered. Beatriz, a fourth year sociology major and undocumented student expressed:

Just to have a space where I could start from the beginning (laugh). Not everyone has . . . many hours to do both interviews. A lot of my close friends know a lot about me and my own history . . . my hopes and my faith and they know the struggle, but I think having this type of step, where you let enough space for us to say our stories, I feel like I was not rushed so it gave me freedom to say much more. I think in a way it also scratched *heridas que*, that I guess I have to say . . . because sometimes I was not able to say everything with such detail so it hurt at the end. It was healing as well, because . . . just to be able to say everything with detail and not holding back, it's just like having someone having enough time [to listen].²⁴

Beatriz explained that the process “scratched *heridas*” (scratched wounds), allowing her to speak freely and with detail about difficult experiences that she does not often get to share with others. Not being able to fully explain these painful experiences leaves her feeling hurt, as if a wound had been scratched, because she can only begin to share these experiences and is not able to feel the relief of fully expressing herself.

23. Each name used in this study is a pseudonym. All actual names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants. See generally Huber, *Sueños*, *supra* note 3.

24. See *id.*

Beatriz described having a space where she was able to share her story without limitations as “healing.” Raquel, a fourth year Chicana/o Studies major and undocumented student shared:

I know that it was an inspiration when I was taking my first Chicano Studies class, like wow, we’re talking about our history and [I] had never read about like a Chicana experience Sometimes it was hard for me to come out with the answers you were asking, and it was hard for me ‘cause I had never questioned it. I always felt like my experience was not important, it wasn’t pointed out, and with this, it was like ‘Wow, there’s a lot of us!’ I felt like I related to a lot of students here [at the focus group] . . . It was empowering for me to hear their stories . . . and it was hard. Every time I would answer a question, when I went home, I was like ‘Oh, I should have said this, I should have said that, or, omigod, now I can relate it! Now I can connect it to my experience, why is it our experiences that are not being told in the textbooks? And that was very powerful for me.²⁵

Raquel described the process as “empowering” in being able to relate her experiences with others and reflect on how her experiences are connected to what she was learning in her courses as a Chicana/o Studies major. Arcadia, a third year neuroscience major and undocumented student described the process:

I thought it was like a therapy session [everyone laughs]. Hearing what you had written down [during the reflection exercise], that was fun. It was like, ‘Oh I felt that before,’ or ‘Oh man, I haven’t felt that before.’ It was just fun hearing everybody’s stories, that was really good. Hearing what we all have to go through. I really liked it and talking with you, it felt good to just let everything go. It’s [important] because other people are gonna read this and see what we have to go through, so I really liked it.²⁶

Arcadia shared how she enjoyed hearing the experiences of other students in the focus group who have felt similar and differently in their experiences as Chicana students. She highlighted the importance of telling her story because other people will learn what these women must “go through.” In her description she suggested there is a sense of advocacy in sharing one’s *testimonio* because others will learn from the shared experiences. Silvia, a third year undocumented Chicana/o Studies and history major explained that the process “helped to get the bigger picture of our lives and our individual stories.”

Following these focus groups and conversations, the women and I have arrived at an understanding of *testimonio* which incorporates their own

25. *Id.*

26. *Id.*

descriptions of what this process has been like for them—a *verbal journey of a witness who reflects and speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future*. The women described *testimonio* as a process that allows them to reflect, heal, and feel empowered, while knowing that in sharing their stories others will listen and learn. This collective understanding of *testimonio* is exactly how I describe *testimonio* in the dissertation and other articles that have come from this work.²⁷

Reflecting on the process of *testimonio* myself, I realize that it is the ways we have engaged collectively in our cultural intuition that makes *testimonio* so powerful. We engaged our own ways of knowing from our personal, academic, and professional experiences in this process to discuss, agree, disagree, share, and theorize. *Testimonio*, Chicana feminist epistemology, and LatCrit have allowed us, unapologetically, to enter *ourselves* into this work, centering our lived experiences and recognizing each of us as “holders and creators of knowledge.”²⁸ *Testimonio*, Chicana feminist epistemology, and LatCrit each played a critical role in how this study developed as a continuous process that built upon the scholarship, theoretical analysis, and experiences of many others both inside and outside of academia.

VI. CONCLUSION

This LatCrit reflection shows that, as academic scholars, we do not arrive at our work alone. Rather, our work is part of a collective experience of others inside and outside of the academy who share similar ideas about creating a reality better than the one in which we live. Often, we go along this journey with many uncertainties; it is non-linear, and it can be painful. It is messy. But, when we arrive at that moment when we know we have revealed and discovered something important, something that no one has exactly explained before, that in some way helps to better understand the experiences of Communities of Color, the journey, in all its uncertainty, pain, and messiness, becomes something beautifully powerful.

27. See generally Lindsay Pérez Huber, *Disrupting Apartheid of Knowledge: Testimonio as Methodology in Latina/o Critical Race Research in Education*, 22 INT’L J. QUALITATIVE STUD. EDUC. 639 (2009); Lindsay Pérez Huber, *Building Critical Race Methodologies in Educational Research: A Research Note on Critical Race Testimonio*, 4 FLA. INT’L L. REV. 159 (2008); Huber, *Sueños*, *supra* note 3.

28. See Bernal, *Critical Race Theory*, *supra* note 14, at 106.