

Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education

Volume 18

Issue 1 *Breaking the Silence: Telling Our Stories
as an Act of Resistance*

Article 10

September 2019

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Recommended Citation

Aviles, A., & Davila, E. (2019). Un réquiem para la lucha Afro-Boricua: Honoring Moments of Decolonization and Resistance to White Supremacy in Academia. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 18 (1). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.18.1.10>

Un réquiem para la lucha Afro-Boricua

Honoring Moments of Decolonization and Resistance to White Supremacy in Academia

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It's nice that you can claim your clan to purebred pedigree descendancy. But middle passages mark the make-up of my amalgamated Afro-Boricua's ancestry.

—Descendancy, Mayda Del Valle, 2010

Introduction

The shared experiences and othering of people of color (POC) in society serve as the impetus for framing our work as critical Afro-Boricua scholars. Our efforts to center our stories and positionalities are connected to the scant number of faculty of color in higher education in which there are only 6% Black, and 5% Hispanic (not disaggregated by gender) (NCES, 2013). This lack of faculty of color is indicative of the legacy of white supremacy (Wilder, 2013) and the deficit ideologies (Nieto, 2003) that still persist in higher education (and society at large). The impact of deficit ideologies on women of color in higher education has been well documented, most recently in the works of Perlow, Bethea and Wheeler (2014) and Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González and Harris (2012). Thus our continued presence in the academy serves to consistently contest white supremacy, simultaneously creating alternative spaces and approaches to teaching and learning that center humanity. By centering our humanity, we challenge the focus on product and profit in higher

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education and focus on the lives and work of our students, colleagues, as well as our own. We see our role as educators reflected in Ayers' (2004) essay *Between Heaven and Earth: What Is Teaching for?*

Education, no matter where or when it takes place, enables teachers and students alike to become more powerfully and self-consciously alive; it embraces as principle and overarching purpose the aspiration of people to become more fully human; it impels us toward further knowledge, enlightenment, and human community, toward liberation. (p.1)

As Afro-Boricua faculty in higher education, our presence is a purposeful and necessary act in resisting narrow understandings of who has the right to engage in knowledge construction, simultaneously exercising our agency to create and renegotiate knowledge. Coming from spaces of organic intellectualism (Darder & Torres, 2013) compels us to deconstruct the narratives pervasive in higher education rooted in White Supremacist Capital Heteropatriarchy (WSCH) (hooks, 2003). We utilize the WSCH descriptor in recognition that the spaces of higher education we must engage are saturated with ideologies of heteronormativity, and work in tandem with white supremacist capitalist norms to further disenfranchise LGBTQ communities of color. Our use of the term heteropatriarchy instead of patriarchy is a political one in which we recognize/name homophobic practices, and stand in solidarity with LGBTQ folks whose presence is consistently devalued, marginalized or ignored.

We have learned from our families and community members, that knowledge is created everywhere and by everyone. While none of our parents attended college, their *educación* (Valenzuela, 1999) was one created and constantly re-created in community spaces that value humanity, as they lived through the struggle and hope of the late 1950s and 1960s; a time when the nation was shook with movement building from the Civil Rights movement to Vietnam War Protests and many other movements unfolding within global and local contexts. In Chicago, there was a movement swelling from youth street organizations that were being politicized and fighting for social justice. During this time, our parents were young adults, witnessing the Puerto Rican street gang, The Young Lords Organization (YLO), transition from a gang to a human rights organization in 1968; working towards self-determination, and the liberation of all oppressed peoples through activism (Jimenez, 1972). The sociopolitical context of this era included the pretext for the assemblage of YLO. As Ogbar (2006) explains:

Several factors precipitated the development of popular grassroots Puerto Rican nationalism, included larger anti-imperialist struggles, Cold War politics, and the Black Freedom and Women's Liberation movements in the U.S. The new Puerto Rican nationalism of the 1960s developed simultaneously among baby boomers in two different cities, converging and giving rise to the most celebrated Puerto Rican organization of the era, YLO (p. 150)

As beneficiaries of YLO's efforts, we see it as our responsibility and duty to resist WSCH, simultaneously working to re-define and re-imagine educational spaces that

are rooted in humanity, solidarity and justice. Specifically, in this article we seek to: (1) claim and describe our own identity development as Afro-Boricua scholars, (2) amplify the need to develop Black and Brown solidarity/coalitions amongst scholars of color in the academy, building and maintaining liberatory spaces that resist WSCH, and (3) build upon said coalitions as a necessary form of healing and resistance in our efforts to counter the rampant institutional and societal microaggressions that people of color, specifically women of color, encounter daily.

In this article, we utilize counter-narratives to share stories that have and continue to shape our identities as critical scholars in the field of Education. Milner and Howard (2013) state:

In a sense, stories are autobiographical, historical, and grounded in multiple and varied ways of knowing and experiencing the world. Thus, we argue that narratives (and counter-narratives) have important places in the study of teachers, students, policies and related practices in teacher education. Researchers are charged with gathering the storied lives of people and with constructing those represented and lived stories for consumers of them. (p. 540)

Historically, our stories as Puerto Ricans/Boricuas have been silenced in the traditional curriculum, so in our work we resist invisibility by centering our narratives as both data and curricula. Reflecting on, and sharing our stories allows us to weave our collective lived experiences into autoethnographic narratives that offer the context of our development and sustainability as critical educators. We recognize that systems of oppression are pervasive in most institutions and their functions have been normalized in society. Our stories illuminate the agency we possess within larger structures and systems—including those functioning in institutions of higher education—that seek to undermine our institutional and personal work. Despite the daily microaggressions we endure—we choose to stay. In the following sections we illustrate some of the ways in which our presence and work has been encouraged and valued, affirming our efforts to assert our presence as a radical act of resistance to WSCH.

In the first counter-narrative, *Cracking Codes of Whiteness*, we share early experiences negotiating WSCH and the ways in which Puerto Rican identity has been affirmed in our family. In the second counter-narrative, *Tengo Puerto Rico en mi Corazón: A Pedagogy of Solidarity*, we describe and reflect upon our encounter with Puerto Rican history from our families and within the university curriculum and the responses to the systematic oppression of our people we were learning about, informing and shaping our own identity and pedagogy. Finally, in our closing counter narrative, *Cultivating Spaces of Healing*, we discuss our experiences in collaborating with other women of color on projects and educational events. These experiences speak to our recognition and affirmation of Puerto Rico's connections to the African Diaspora informing our need and desire to collectively build with others as a means of healing and our continued resistance to systems and structures built on WSCH. Our recognition of Afro-Puerto Rican identity is nuanced. While

we understand Puerto Ricans as synonymous to Black, societal constructions of who is, or isn't Black (or Latinx) is premised on a Black/White binary, despite the long-standing recognition and subsequent rise of Afro-Latinx scholars, artists, musicians, etc. (e.g. Antonia Pantoja, Celia Cruz, Edward Bonilla-Silva, Arturo Schomburg, Tego Calderon, The Afro-Latino festival in NYC, etc). As a result, when we discuss Black/Brown coalition building, this includes working within the Black/White binary, while also pushing against this narrow framing and understanding of race/ethnicity amongst various communities.

HERstory:

Resisting Whiteness, Cultivating Solidarity and Healing

Cracking Codes of Whiteness

Our youth are tired of being intimidated through tactics that are trying to force my assimilation, causing me to question my creation. You must have mistaken me for Hansel and Gretel, thinking I'd jump into the melting pot!

—Descendency, Mayda Del Valle, 2010

Our parents instilled in us a strong sense of Boricua identity, constantly reminding us of their struggles emigrating from Puerto Rico and the strength/tenacity of Puerto Rican people and culture. We are first cousins, but were raised more like sisters in a large, close-knit Puerto Rican family in Chicago. Our parents' understanding of identity was much more complex than the dichotomous master narrative among Puerto Ricans of rich light-skinned and poor dark-skinned Puerto Ricans in which race is constructed based on an individual's phenotype (Duany, 2002). In our family, being Puerto Rican was much more nuanced given the myriad of complexions, hair textures, nose and lip shapes, eye color, etc. that comprised our familial households and Puerto Rican communities at large. They laid bare Puerto Rico's connections to Africa's middle passage and Spain's colonial conquest of the island's native Taino people. Our family's comprehensive understanding of being Puerto Rican parallels the powerful words of Puerto Rican poet Pedro Pietri, which was first read in 1969 at a rally in support of the New York Young Lords Organization (YLO):

Aqui Se Habla Español all the time
 Aqui you salute your flag first
 Aqui there are no dial soap commercials
 Aqui everybody smells good
 Aqui tv dinners do not have a future
 Aqui the men and women admire desire
 and never get tired of each other
 Aqui Que Paso Power is what's happening
 Aqui to be called negrito
 means to be called LOVE

—*Puerto Rican Obituary*, Pietri, 1973

As individuals born and raised in familial spaces that echo Pietri's poetry, we have constantly struggled to break from the codes of Whiteness that Pietri highlights in his poem—both personally and professionally. One of the codes of whiteness in “Puerto Rican Obituary” includes the significance of the word “negrito” as a term of endearment in Puerto Rican culture versus the term “negrito” in mainstream white culture which is used to demean and marginalize our people. This understanding does not negate the colorism¹ that exists within Puerto Rican and other Latinx communities (including our own families). For the purposes of this paper, we focus on the poem's message of unconditional love and centering of humanity. For example, when Pietri states that there are no soap commercials “aqui” yet we are all clean, for us that means that we do not need to assimilate (or consume said commercial) to be fully human and be loved. His words affirm, honor and promote our Afro-Boricua identity.

Familial affirmation of Puerto Rican culture was a constant feature of our childhood. Recalling an experience (Dávila) from 4th grade—the first year in an all-English Chicago Public School (CPS) classroom after transitioning from a bilingual program—where all the students were Latinx and native Spanish speakers and some native English and Spanish speakers, but not fluent enough in English for the school's standards. It was picture day and my mom insisted that I wear a yellow dress with ruffles, and matching yellow hair bows. I was devastated, as I was seeking approval from my new peers and teacher, who were primarily white. I wanted to dress and wear my hair like the “normal” (translation: white) girls in the class. I exclaimed to my mother in my 9-year old rage that the dress was, “too Puerto Rican!” to which my mom quickly responded, “Y que eres?” (“and what are you?”)—an explicit reminder that I WAS/AM Puerto Rican! At the time I didn't understand, but reluctantly wore the dress and bows anyway. Thirty years later I treasure that photograph because I understand now that it was a much-needed lesson in cultural affirmation (Nieto, 2003). That day I received an important message: I was not white and more importantly, I did not need to conform to whiteness. My mother helped me see that being Puerto Rican meant taking pride in my culture while working to navigate my way through the WSCH in the schools that I attended.

Despite the white supremacist deficit narrative about Latinx parents not valuing formal education (Valencia and Black, 2002), our parents saw its critical importance, despite their own lack thereof, and their own struggles with the institutional racism in the school systems both in Puerto Rico and on the mainland. As Ramos-Zayas (2003) found, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) enforced policies and practices detrimental to Puerto Rican students and families, however she also found that the Puerto Rican community resisted these detrimental policies. The normalcy of white supremacy was embedded in the educational institutions we interacted with daily, poisoning our minds with self-doubt, our hearts with shame and pushing us towards assimilation. At this early age we did not have the language or analytical tools to make sense of our lived experiences, however we felt in our

spirits and hearts the negative treatment, low expectations and poor outcomes impacting our *gente* (people)—all of these dynamics embedded in hierarchical constructs of race/ethnicity, gender, language, and citizenship. In our experience, Puerto Rican history was, and is still omitted from the lessons, topics and events that we were exposed to in our respective schools. Instead, we were indoctrinated with the traditional “great” White men master narrative.

Although these oppressive structures encumbered our spirits daily, the unwitting consequence was that we were imbued with critical consciousness, power and resistance (Ramos-Zayas, 2003). Our adolescent resistance manifested itself in several ways such as participating in a police brutality march organized by black and brown high school youth (Dávila); joining and creating student clubs focused on social change and Latinx identity affirmation (Aviles). While we did not receive information/lessons in our formal schooling process, our early familial and educational experiences helped us understand that being Puerto Rican encompassed Indigenous, African and European ancestry. Embracing all aspects, in particular our African ancestral lineage, set the stage for coalition building amongst both Black and Brown communities, compelling us to be a part of organizations and events that further affirmed our Afro-Boricua identity; simultaneously laying the groundwork for practices that preserve our cultural pride and promote resistance to oppressive systems and practices.

Tengo Puerto Rico en mi corazón: A Pedagogy of Solidarity

The Chi-town, midwest windy city in me. The be bop, hip hop, non-stop salsa con sabor queen of soul in me...The Taina con dolor in me. The Marvin Gaye and sweetened lemonade on sunny days in me. The descendancy that doesn't deny the darker shades of skin in me...I see you're being blind, not seeing past the kinds of fabricated fictional fables, assaulted ancestral accounts.

—Descendancy, Mayda Del Valle, 2010

The tensions that exist between Latinx and Blacks has been well-documented (Dzidzienyo and Oboler, 2005; Vaca, 2004). However, focusing on differences amongst communities simply serves as a tactic for divisiveness and a perpetual “fight” for resources, access and political power. Recognizing that we all lose when we subscribe to a WSCH social system and structure, should serve as a critical point of collaboration and solidarity amongst Black and Brown communities, including candid and respectful conversations that call out and resist anti-Blackness and White supremacy within our respective communities. Our understanding of these community dynamics serves as a reminder of our need to resist the Black/Brown divide, simultaneously, we deliberately create welcoming spaces for collaboration amongst and within our communities.

Given the historical (and contemporary) connections to Africa amongst Puerto Ricans (and other Latinx populations), there is no denying our African lineage and

its influence on Puerto Rican culture and identity (Santiago, n.d.). Socio-historically, migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. coincided with the second wave of Southern blacks to the northern cities (Aponte, 1990), creating similar experiences for both populations in U.S. cities such as New York and Chicago. Our parents arrived on the mainland from Puerto Rico prior to the height of the civil rights movement, or the mobilization of YLO, but also at a time when activism was very much alive. Many Puerto Rican youth recognized their experiences with racism, housing/employment discrimination and poor living/educational conditions, paralleled that of Blacks, contributing to solidarity efforts with Black youth. Further, given the phenotypic variations amongst Puerto Ricans, many were (and are) seen as Black by law enforcement, teachers, and society writ large. It is of no surprise then, that YLO's mobilization efforts were a reflection and continuation of organizations such as the Black Panther Party (BPP), who took an anti-colonial and militant approach to resisting white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. YLO's philosophy and praxis to addressing inequities resonates with our lived experiences as Afro-Boricuas in Chicago. We often found common ground with our Black classmates—occupying a similar space of “other” in our respective K-20 educational institutions. We have attempted to, and wish to continue to build on the solidarity efforts exemplified by YLO and BPP in our resistance to systems of oppression.

As Betancur (2005) notes “Commonalities associated with their [Latinx and Black] minority condition (*vis-à-vis* opportunity and access) provide the grounds and potential for cooperation” (p. 164). Given these intersections, historical and contemporary complexities of collaboration, and shared histories, our work seeks to put forth a call to recognize, respect, (re)connect and encourage collaboration as means to build solidarity and strength amongst scholars of color in the academy. Martinez (1998) recalls a conversation with Jim Forman (Executive Secretary of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]), in which he urges Latinxs to embrace their black identity. “We’re all Black don’t you see? African people and Mexican people and Puerto Rican people, we are all Black in the eyes of racism. So we must come together as Black” (p. 476). In response to this call, we understand the need to affirm our Afro-Boricua identities as resistance to institutional racism, stemming from White supremacy. Heeding Forman’s call to “come together as Black,” we assert our Afro-Boricua identities as a conscious, deliberate and necessary coalition-building strategy to further create and support anti-oppressive and liberatory spaces within schools and communities. In memoriam of, and in respect to those that have provided a framework in which to situate our lived experiences, pedagogies, and praxes, we briefly describe various individuals and organizations that have laid the foundation for our work. These events and movements serve as the context for our personal/professional development and as models for critical engagement with various social institutions rooted in principles of WSCH.

YLO was a critical and self-affirming act of resistance and organizing taken on by young Puerto Ricans in Chicago (as well as New York City and other cit-

ies) seeking to free themselves from a colonial existence. We were not formally introduced to YLO until college (a reflection of the Eurocentric K-12 curriculum). During our undergraduate and graduate studies we learned about the Young Lords Organization (YLO), a Revolutionary Political Party Fighting for the Liberation of All Oppressed People (Lazú 2013). While we were both engaging critical work in education, we discussed this new knowledge and wondered if our family had any role in the assemblage and/or activism of YLO. Little did we know (and perhaps why this work feels so personal), our kin was directly linked to YLO and various family members have shared stories with us from their upbringing within the rise and fall of YLO.

We were particularly drawn to the following YLO points:

We want independence and self-determination for the People of Aztlán and Puerto Rico;

We want an end to the inner-city removal of Latinos and other poor and oppressed people;

We want Latinos and all poor and oppressed people to control the housing to be built in their respective communities so that they can be sure it is fit for human beings and economically reasonable;

We want equality for the sexes;

We want the same good and efficient health care that is given to the rich to be given to Latinos and other poor and oppressed people. HEALTH CARE IS A HUMAN RIGHT;

We want an end to the brutalization and cold-blooded murder of Latinos and all poor and oppressed people. (Jimenez, 1972)

The work of YLO addressed overarching issues (e.g. police brutality, lack of access to health care, social services, etc.) across a myriad of populations, facilitating our understanding that the struggles of Puerto Ricans were intertwined with the struggles of many other marginalized and oppressed peoples. YLO's efforts were intersectional, global and cross generational. This perspective serves as a pillar in our approach to working with, and across Black and Latinx communities; pushing us to consistently work towards racial/ethnic collaborations, specifically amongst our respective communities. YLO's approach and promotion of solidarity also laid the groundwork for the broadening of our understanding of what constitutes "scholarship." As Lazú (2013) notes:

YLO members insisted that their purpose extended even beyond the [Nationalist] ideologies that they carefully studied and shared with the community in the same process. Ideologies were funneled into the objective of raising the consciousness of the people in those communities about the conditions they were living and the options they had for responding to seemingly insurmountable disparities (p. 33).

A key goal of YLO was to raise consciousness, particularly in language that was universal to the larger Puerto Rican community. As Latinas born and raised in a hypersegregated Chicago, we were directly impacted by gentrification, racism, sexism and linguicism, and understand all too well the material and social impact this has had on our lives, as well as the lives of others negatively impacted by capitalism, imperialism, heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. As young graduate students, we felt a direct connection to the angst and will to resist demonstrated by YLO and BPP. We were inspired and humbled by their actions, discipline and determination to resist racism and oppression.

YLO facilitated their goals, through their pedagogy and direct action. YLO had its own newspaper (modeled after *The Black Panther* newspaper). The YLO newspaper promoted an awareness of local and global justice and community empowerment. (Lazú, 2013). Through various community efforts and actions, YLO sought to inform Puerto Ricans of their history, creating opportunities for self-determination and urged them to fight the injustice and imperialism impacting their daily lives. The scholarship of YLO also included a *Women's Position Paper* that denounced machismo and supported the freedom and equality of all women (<http://palante.org/Women.htm>). While there was some resistance among the male leadership of YLO, the critical feminist lens and analysis in which the Lordettes (female Young Lord members) functioned serves as an example of their educational roles as organic intellectuals. Their study of nationalism was not undertaken simply for the consumption of knowledge; the impetus for studying various ideologies was to resist oppression in all its forms, including patriarchy.

We understood our higher education studies as necessary in our efforts to combat the many injustices we experienced and witnessed. Taking a class (Aviles) on Puerto Rican Culture and History exposed the discrimination and exploitation Puerto Ricans endured on the island as well as in the "States." One film, *La Operacion* (Krase, 2014) documented the forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women that benefitted U.S.-based factories and allowed U.S. drug companies to test early versions of birth control—all without the knowledge or consent of the women. This specific history of forced sterilization was one that really penetrated our hearts. In 2008 for the 40th Anniversary of YLO we (Aviles and Dávila) heard a Puerto Rican poet and YLO member, David Hernandez, (later we learned he was also our mothers' cousin) at a community event. "Florencia," a poem about one of our great aunts who was a casualty of *La Operacion* reads, "This was done to my aunt after my cousin Anita was born and after grieving for a while ... she [Florencia] eventually saved money moved to Chicago and got a better job [after losing her only daughter Anita at 16 from a coat hanger operation] she moved back to Puerto Rico and went to work for the same company who forcibly sterilized her" (www.poetrypoetry.com). David's poem provided us an even deeper connection to the history of forced sterilization given that our very kin suffered from this oppressive practice. This personal connection contributes inspiration and fuel for our work as critical scholars.

Moreover, YLO “aligned itself with models of popular education and the political and educational ideals of the 1960s and 1970s Civil Rights Movement, YLO was committed to linking its pedagogical ideas to the students of the social and political environment and ultimately, civic engagement” (Lazú, 2013, p. 45). Inspired by YLO, our pedagogy/scholarship is predicated on our positionality as women of color in which we seek to uncover inequitable/oppressive systems and structures, while simultaneously working towards community empowerment and contributing to the larger movement towards justice. YLO enacted an unapologetic self-determinism and activism becoming part of the legacy of Puerto Rican resistance and consciousness (Lazú, 2013). We see our work as a continuation of Black/Brown coalition building for social justice and as affirmation of our connection to the African Diaspora.

Understanding the critical importance of the need to build community and relationships amongst Black and Brown students, we brought this perspective and approach into our interactions with Black students during our graduate studies. Recognizing there was no formal structure on campus to support graduate students of color, coupled with the support we received from established Black and Brown faculty, a small group of students of color (Aviles and Dávila included) created a space and eventually a more formal organization to support our well-being and completion of the doctoral program. Our group met monthly to discuss concerns about our work, as well as the micro-aggressions we endured in our respective Predominately White Institutions (PWI). What began as an informal space to “vent” about our challenges turned into a critical space in which we viewed each other’s work, provided feedback to one another and supported one another, both personally and professionally.

Our group, the Alliance of Latina/o and Black Graduate Students (ALBGS), set personal and academic goals, and provided each other with feedback, critique and pushed one another to strengthen our scholarship. As aspiring critical scholars of color, we understood that our scholarship would be viewed with increased scrutiny, simply due to our racial/ethnic background. Further, given that many of us engage in research that centers on and interrogates issue of race/class/gender, we wanted to ensure that our work was not only of “high” quality, but more importantly that it was reflective of our collective experiences as people of color, countering the master-narrative pervasive in institutions of higher education.

The collaborations developed in our graduate programs, and the subsequent benefits, strengthened our belief in Black/Brown solidarity, and continue to shape our approach to teaching and learning; specifically the ways in which we support students in PWIs. As students develop their own critical consciousness, they often identify the many inequities inherent in higher education. It is our responsibility as critical educators to create spaces that support student analysis, advocacy and action—on and off campus. To promote and facilitate this, we embed community events that address the many issues impacting their schools and communities (e.g. school-to-prison pipeline, police brutality, immigration, etc.) into our courses and

encourage students to become involved in various justice-based movements (e.g. Black Lives Matter, Ayotzinapa 43, Coalition to Revitalize Dyett, etc.). As Lilla Watson (n.d.) Aboriginal elder, activist and educator from Queensland, Australia states, “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” Liberation of Black and Brown communities is intertwined; this understanding is integral to our coalition building work on and off campus.

Cultivating Spaces of Healing as Resistance

We must be courageous in our willingness to put out fires that we did not start. We are all inheritors of legacies and histories that we did not create; we are all unwitting participants in injustices that we don’t consciously support. Without forgiveness, there is no possibility of unity; without truth-telling, there is no possibility of forgiveness. I urge you all to find ways to be a part of whatever healing you can join in on, whether or not you were a part of the original damage. Let’s let truth and forgiveness bring us to new possibilities of collaboration, trust and unity. COINTELPRO’s stated mission was to disrupt, discredit and destroy. Let’s be part of a movement going in the other direction—to heal, respect, and build up a world we all want and deserve to live in. (Stiner, 2016)

Building on our previous work that focused on the more tangible aspects (e.g. curriculum, workshops, etc.) of our pedagogy (e.g. Peterson & Dávila 2011; Pulido, Cortez, Aviles de Bradley, Miglietta, & Stovall, 2013), in this section we argue for the necessity of creating and maintaining physical and emotional spaces of restoration and healing. The atrocities that have, and continue to be committed against women and people of color in the United States and across the globe take a toll on our minds, spirits and bodies.

Given our positionalities as Afro-Boricua faculty occupying (and seeking to dismantle) space in WSCH institutions of higher education, we posit that an integral component of this work must be self-reflexivity for growth and healing. We argue that a long-term commitment to justice-centered/liberatory work must include a dimension that focuses on transformational healing of self *with* and among others in struggle. In our work, we are learning from and with others, as this too shapes our pedagogy and praxis. Despite the lack of faculty of color in higher education, continuing to develop the mentorship and work we have been inducted into, we aim to build and collaborate with folks doing similar work in order to share our narratives and scaffold one another’s strengths. As Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) reminds us “You have been cast into a race in which the wind is always at your face and the hounds are always at your heels. And to varying degrees this is true of all life. The difference is that you do not have the privilege of living in ignorance of this essential fact” (para 42). Acknowledging racialized and gendered inequities serves as the impetus for collaborative efforts that seek to heal past and current damage occurring within spaces of higher education.

Our efforts to respect and heal come in many forms, one being through our engagement in collaborative projects with other women of color. A consideration of something such as authorship order is informed by our understanding of the WSCH functioning within academia. As an act of solidarity, resistance and healing/love to the mistreatment of women of color in the academy, we discuss and consider each other's positionality when making decisions regarding authorship order. Our approach to shared authorship is grounded in a pedagogy of collectivity and familial relationships. We do not view the project as something to be "completed"; instead we view it as an opportunity to learn, grow, and nurture each other's scholarship and humanity. We consider factors such as: where is our co-author(s) in their tenure process?: what is their teaching/workload?, etc. Further, as part of the writing process, we consciously and deliberately take time to check in with one another about personal situations (partnerships/marriage, divorce, children, familial responsibilities, etc.), centering and honoring our humanity—people over product; process over outcome. What we do in community with colleagues informs the ways in which we understand and interact with our larger social world, including personal relationships and struggles. While these actions may appear minor, it is these "small", but important acts of humanity that help us to nurture and heal. Our discourse guides our actions, and we are continually working to implement restorative and healing practices in spaces that too often dehumanize and objectify us and our work. Lastly, given the impact of injustice on the material and spiritual lives of poor Black and Brown communities, we acknowledge and understand that this work must be done in solidarity with our African-American scholar sisters.

An example in which we consciously created a space of healing in our work was during the planning of an annual student forum. One of our colleagues, Ananka Kesari Shony, an organic intellectual and community activist, introduced the concept of guidance cards to our meetings. Each of us would draw three cards that contained empowering concepts like "wisdom," "purpose," "communication," etc. This practice became routine in our meetings, facilitating a more meaningful and restorative experience within our academic work and spaces. We would end our meetings by drawing three cards, and would take time reflect on and discuss how the concepts/cards we drew applied to personal and professional experiences and/or conflicts occurring in our lives. Again, while this may seem like a minor or insignificant addition to our collective dynamics, taking the time out to "check-in" with one another on a personal and human level allowed for time to reflect, decompress and support one another in negotiating situations and spaces impacting our daily lives.

A Call to Action: ¡Ya basta!

As justice-centered educators, we believe that learning is not confined to a classroom. We also believe that all students, particularly students of color living in

disinvested communities, can and will excel in the area of education, particularly with culturally relevant, justice centered approaches to teaching and learning. Further, given our positionalities as Afro-Boricuas, we work to bridge divides amongst Latinx and Black communities and spaces, recognizing our shared histories, struggles and marginalization within schools and society due to systems and structures of white supremacy. As part of our pedagogy and praxis, we consistently ask ourselves--in what ways can our education be harnessed as a tool to dismantle the system and structure of white supremacy beyond the classroom and in the daily lives of our students, communities and families? As critical scholars, we see this as the crux of our work within and beyond the academy.

Small practices of humanity not only benefit us—this work positively impacts and affirms our college students as well. Our process of engagement was reflected in the final program generated for an annual student forum in which community members, teachers and students experiences and voices were centered. During a Student Panel session (student forum discussed above), a group of young folks from an alternative high school in Chicago shared the ways in which their schools discriminated against, dehumanized and ultimately forced them out. They keenly and explicitly articulated the manner in which their new school space served as a direct interruption to these degrading practices leading to a re-centering of their humanity--and having a direct impact on their understanding of themselves and systems/structures of oppression. After the event, a Latinx student in one of my (Aviles) educational foundations courses wrote the following:

I can relate to the student panelists about outside influences that prevented them from continuing their education. I was almost pushed out of high school by the staff. I grew up in a single parent home. I used to work after school to help my mom out. My mother had two jobs to provide for us. We were five siblings and a parent living in a small apartment. The majority of my siblings did not graduate high school. They decided to work instead of continuing their education. Like the panelists at the forum, we also had to make hard decisions that affected us for the rest of our lives. The support in the schools was unheard of...The schools at that time did not offer alternative education. The counselors were biased; one of my counselors in high school told me to drop out and go to mechanics school. When I was a high school student I did not understand why I was upset at the world. I had a hard time expressing my emotions just like the panelists. The negative influences surrounded me just like the forum panelists. Sometimes I made irresponsible decisions just like the panelists. I now wonder how my life would have turned out if I were exposed to Social Emotional Learning. I'm sure it would have been different and with less suffering...The more attention we give to the student's emotional state the fewer problems we will have. As a future teacher I will help students use Social Emotional Learning to become productive members of our society.

This future educator has not only internalized the critical importance of healing into his own pedagogical approach with students, he is also able to connect their stories to his own, further developing his understanding and analysis of their shared

schooling experiences and the structures that create unjust conditions. Our pedagogical approaches seek to counter harmful practices with humanity, restoration and love. These efforts are especially needed in the current context of education in which the larger national agenda of privatization is more concerned with test scores, discipline and order, than facilitating the development of young people in reaching their fullest humanity.

Continuing to build upon the mentorship and work we have been inducted into, we seek to continue to create opportunities that build solidarity amongst Black and Brown faculty as an act of resistance and self-determination within institutions of higher education. Often these collaborations lead to networks and professional organizations that provide literal and figurative space(s) to collaborate and grow through shared community. Other times these networks provide support when we are resisting the oppressive symptoms of white supremacy and its subsequent microaggressions. One of those instances occurred several years ago as one of the authors struggled to keep teaching courses that unpacked concepts of institutional racism and white privilege primarily to middle class suburban students at a PWI. The process of co-writing an article based on this teaching challenge side by side with a sister scholar, (Peterson and Dávila, 2011) became an act of love and a process of healing. Peterson and Dávila (2011) reflect:

Both instructors enter into the course with the bold expectation that critical examination of the forces that influence the hegemonic practice so many of us engage in is the catalyst for change in school systems and higher educational institutions. Not only would that process be liberatory for the students and for the instructor but it would contribute to liberatory practice in schooling. (p. 39)

Despite student (administrative and structural) resistance, we must persist. As Darder (2011) reminds us “Freire deeply believed that the rebuilding of solidarity among educators was a vital and necessary radical objective because solidarity moved against the grain of ‘capitalisms’ intrinsic perversity” (p. 186). We urge educators to create and sustain safe spaces that facilitate student, faculty and community learning that suspends damage (Tuck, 2009), serving to center and highlight counter narratives that affirm multiple identities in our effort to resist, transform and heal.

Note

¹ See Dzidzienyo and Oboler, 2005; Vaca, 2004; and Duany, 2002 for discussion on racism/colorism that exists in Puerto Rico and other Caribbean/Latin@ communities.

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