



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 20 Issue 2

2026

AMAE Special Double Issue, Part 2

Muxerista Pedagogies and Praxis:

Art, Activism, and Scholarship as Resistance and Restoration

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***Seeds from the Land: A Muxerista Testimonio of Ancestral Memory,
Spirit Restoration, & Pedagogies of the Home***

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Abstract

This article presents an intergenerational *testimonio* of my grandmother, Clarita. I explore how acts of care, language, and memory become methods of survival and resistance within educational spaces that have historically erased women like her. I examine how *apapachadas*, spiritual embraces, function as healing practices and knowledge production. Building on the works of Revilla (2004), Delgado Bernal (2001), and Anzaldúa (2012), home is our first classroom and abolitionist site. This is where care becomes theory and memory becomes pedagogy. As a granddaughter-scholar, this writing is both remembrance and restoration. It is a return to the stories that shaped my understanding of learning, resilience, and belonging. I interweave Clarita's story with my own healing, storytelling, and everyday resistance. This work contributes to ongoing conversations about Muxerista pedagogy by offering a lived example of theory-in-practice, rooted in love, labor, and legacy.

Keywords: spirit restoration, *testimonio*, muxerista pedagogy, pedagogies of the home, abolitionist education

Figure I

My Grandmother Clarita, 1963, Modesto Junior College, California.



Introduction

Before institutions tried to limit her, my Grandmother, Clarita, defined herself through movement, culture, and joy. In Figure I, captured in 1963 at Modesto Junior College in California, she dances *Jarabe Tapatío*, her skirt in motion, her head lifted with confidence. This photograph is more than a family keepsake. It is an archival offering through time, a memory that reminds us that resistance begins in the body and in the memories it carries.

Like the rose that grew from the concrete, my Grandmother's spirit pushed through the cracks of racism, labor, and loss to bloom in places that were never made for her. That image of growth reminds me of the women in my family, who kept finding ways to rise and bloom even when the ground beneath them was hard and unforgiving.

While this work centers on my Grandmother Clarita's story, it also traces how the inequities she faced, such as racism, classism, and linguistic discrimination, ripple across generations. My Mother and I have each encountered these systems in new forms, she within the classroom, I within the academy. Though the contexts shift, the struggle remains connected. Her story is the seed, ours the branches, growing toward the same light of survival and transformation. Through the methodology of *testimonio*, I trace how spirit restoration, femtorship, and intergenerational survival have shaped our journeys as Muxeristas. Drawing from Revilla's (2022) framing of spirit protectors and spirit restorers, I read my Grandmother's

life as both pedagogy and archive. Her labor and love are not just memories, but theories in motion.

Central to my work is a guiding question: How do working-class Mexican American women transform everyday acts of care into forms of resistance and healing? To explore this question, I offer the framework of *apapachadas*, a term rooted in the Nahuatl word *apapachar*, meaning “to caress with the soul.” I expand this concept by theorizing *apapachadas* as elements of Muxerista and abolitionist pedagogies of care, and by creating my own definition of healing with the soul, emerging from the home, the classroom, and the community.

I conceptualize *apapachadas* as embodied practices that sustain dignity within violent institutions. They offer a way to understand how women like my Grandmother and Mother built life-affirming practices within institutions that attempted to erase them. Through intergenerational *testimonio*, I seek not only to honor their stories but also to demonstrate how care, refusal, healing, and memory become abolitionist acts. This work follows the evolving vision of Muxerista pedagogy (Revilla, 2004; Revilla et al., 2022), a living practice of resistance, care, and spirit restoration. As a Granddaughter-scholar, I see my writing as part of this ever-evolving movement, one that holds storytelling, femtorship, and healing as radical educational acts. Through my Grandmother’s testimonios, I seek to honor everyday activism and transformative love, defining Muxerista praxis. It is Muxerista theory in practice. The next section grounds my position in this lineage and shows how our stories became a shared pedagogy of survival and transformation.

Intergenerational Testimonio: Positionality and Method

I write from the in-between, where the women in my life, my Grandmother and my Mother, shape how I understand the world and how I move throughout academia. I am both their witness and their legacy holder. This piece emerges from what Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) calls *Nepantla*, a space between worlds, where survival, migration, and knowledge pass through generations as lessons of care and resistance. Throughout this piece, I intentionally capitalize the words *Mother* and *Grandmother* to honor them not only as familial figures, but as epistemological and spiritual sources of knowledge. This capitalization is an act of admiration and resistance. It honors their lived experiences, wisdom, and care as theoretical lineages equal to any found in academia. By naming them in this way, I highlight their power as educators,

healers, and cultural theorists within our family's genealogy. In their hands, healing is not just care work but cultural work, a pedagogy of love restoring what the world too often takes.

This essay draws on *intergenerational testimonio*, a co-created narrative between my Grandmother, my Mother, and me. Rather than a single interview, it has unfolded over years of *pláticas* in my Grandmother's room, family stories in our living room, and afternoons sorting photographs at the kitchen table. Testimonio structures how knowledge circulates in our family, how I honor her story while tracing my own becoming as a scholar.

I understand this approach as a Muxerista and decolonial methodology rooted in relationship, accountability, and love. Following Delgado Bernal et al. (2012), *testimonios* center lived experience as theory and as political resistance. By co-constructing my Grandmother's narrative, I resist the academic tendency to separate researcher from participant. Our stories are braided across three generations, woven together through healing, culture, and the wisdom of those who came before us. Our shared act of remembering becomes a practice of *apapachar*, to heal with the soul, a gesture that restores spirit while refusing erasure.

Through this method, I also situate my own academic journey alongside hers. My Grandmother attended Modesto Junior College, the community college that served our rural community, in the 1960s; my Mother in the 1990s; and I in 2014—three generations, sixty years apart, yet bound by the same struggle and perseverance. By writing from within this lineage, I recognize the classroom, the field, and the home as interlocking sites of knowledge production. My goal is not simply to be a storyteller, but to use it to theorize *apapachadas*, the everyday acts of care that become a pedagogy of survival and spirit restoration. These are stories of women who did not just survive but taught me how to live, to love, and to resist.

In the next section, I turn to my Grandmother's early experiences of migration and education as a living *testimonio*. These stories show how working-class Mexican American women transform pain into pedagogy and survival into healing. Through them, I illustrate how *apapachadas*, tender, soul-deep gestures of care, emerge through labor, learning, and solidarity.

Bearing Witness: Migration, Education, and Spirit Restoration

Through the methodology of *testimonio*, I document my Grandmother's life as both story and theory, an intergenerational archive bridging memory, pedagogy, and survival. Her recollections are not simply memories. They are lessons of resistance lived through care, labor, and the pursuit of dignity.

My Grandmother recalls her first days in the United States as a time of confusion, but also of hope. She and her Mother migrated with their hearts dreaming of opportunity, carrying little more than faith and determination. After arriving, she began working long hours in the fields, a labor that left lasting marks on her body and spirit. She remembers the ache in her joints from bending under the hot sun, the broken toes that still affect how she walks, and the loss of strength in her hands after years of pulling, picking, and lifting. She recalls the indignity of relieving herself between rows of crops, with no access to proper facilities, always working, no matter the risks. One instance changed the trajectory of her story. My Grandmother was deep in the far rows of the orchard, quickly filling her basket with peaches, when she noticed how quiet the fields had become. She looked up, realizing the other workers were gone. As she made her way to the front, *el jefe* stopped her and asked where she'd been. She explained she had been lost in the trees, working all the way in the back. What she did not know was that while she was picking in silence, ICE agents had swept through the orchard, detaining workers and two of her family members. They never reached her hidden row. That day, she was safe, but the fear wove itself into her body. From that moment, each day in the fields felt like a battlefield, filled with anxiety and the constant need to look over her shoulder.

Clarita's survival in the orchard was more than chance. It was an act of *spirit protection*, what Revilla (2022) describes as "the prevention of spirit murder," a term first used by Williams (1991) to describe the systemic destruction of hope through racism and dehumanization. In that moment, her body became both witness and archive, carrying the trauma of displacement and desire for restoration. Her decision to pursue education was not simply an economic choice but a spiritual one, an *apapachada* of self-preservation challenging systemic dehumanization through the pursuit of knowledge.

During our *pláticas*, my grandmother takes me on a journey through her education at Modesto Junior College, where her experience was marked by both encouragement and erasure. Some professors believed in her, affirming her *esperanza* and nurturing her dreams. Others heard her accent, judged her English, and deemed her unworthy of academic success, dismissing the knowledge she carried with her. After earning her associate's degree, she hoped to transfer to California State University, Stanislaus, just sixteen miles away. With her older brother's help, she learned to drive, earned her license, and proudly bought a \$300 1960s Corvair 700 to make that journey possible. But her hopes were cut short. A conversation with

a school counselor and representatives from the nursing department ended with immediate dismissal. They didn't take the time to know her story or see her potential. When she asked about scholarships or financial aid, she was met with a hard no. With no advocate by her side, she took their response as final and was forced to pivot her path.

Although my Grandmother faced ridicule from some professors and peers for her accent and the clothes she wore, she also experienced moments of kindness, *femtorship*, and *spirit restoration* that reminded her she mattered. These encounters gave her the courage to continue her studies and obtain her associate's degree in a system that tried to make her feel out of place. In her accounting class, a young Black woman became a trusted peer and *femtor*, helping her complete assignments on balancing checkbooks, managing finances, and understanding profit margins, skills she uses today. In a speech class she dreaded, where her fear of public speaking clashed with the pressure of being an English-speaking second-language learner, she initially failed her exam. However, instead of letting her struggle define her, her professor offered her a second chance, and a classmate encouraged her to do a "how-to" speech on making a *jarrón*, a clay vase, a craft she had learned in her hometown of Puebla, Mexico. When she shared something rooted in her own cultural knowledge, she passed the course. She also found a mentor in her English professor, who volunteered to meet with her after class. Together they sat in the language lab, where she wore headphones and practiced phrases like "Good morning," "Good afternoon," and "How are you?" repeating each word with intention. These acts of solidarity helped her navigate a system that was not built for her, reminding her that sometimes, *spirit restoration* begins when someone simply chooses to see you.

My Grandmother's story reflects the heart of *Muxerista pedagogy*: a refusal to remain complicit in systems of harm, and a reclamation of life through learning, love, and cultural survival. As the Latina Feminist Group (2001) reminds us, our stories are not just personal. They are part of a collective feminist praxis that bridges generations and geographies. The *testimonios* in *Telling to Live* emphasize the power of remembering and witnessing to reclaim cultural identity and restore self. In this sense, the stories passed from my Grandmother to my Mother to me function as both familial memory and pedagogical survival. Her pivot from the field to the classroom was not an individual decision but an act of *spirit restoration*. That shift marked her refusal to remain disposable within agricultural labor economies. Through

education, she sought to heal the wounds of exploitation and rewrite the future for those who come after her.

These encounters within the community college classroom demonstrate the power of *apapachadas* as collective acts of care. Through mentorship and solidarity, Clarita's learning became a reciprocal exchange. She was both student and teacher, receiving and giving care. These moments of mentorship, patience, and cultural exchange embody Muxerista pedagogy in practice. As Revilla (2022) reminds us, these are moments of *spirit restoration*, ways of reimagining education as an abolitionist space of healing rather than exclusion. Bearing witness to her journey is both a personal and political act of reclamation that ties her resistance to my own, ensuring that her lessons continue to live within and beyond me.

The Practice of Spirit Restoration

In my family, spirit restoration is not a solitary act; rather, it is an inheritance, passed between women like a quiet language, a whispered promise that none of us will be left behind in our healing. Each generation of women in my lineage, from my Grandmother Clarita, my Mother, to me, has moved through cycles of fragmentation and becoming. We have each been dismembered in our own way, by migration, labor, and the silence that so often follows institutional violence. However, across time and distance, we have found ways to gather the scattered parts of ourselves and each other. Following Revilla (2022), I understand *spirit restoration* as a political, emotional, and spiritual intervention against the violence of erasure. Building on Revilla's framework, I understand *apapachadas* as a living methodology within Muxerista pedagogy, an embodied practice where care itself becomes collective resistance. When people show up for each other, listen deeply, share stories, hold pain, mentor, nurture, and protect one another, those acts are not just emotional support. They are epistemological. They generate insight about power, survival, resistance, and healing. Care teaches us how systems harm and how communities persist.

To deepen this framework, I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's (2015) interpretation of Coyolxauhqui, the dismembered moon goddess whose story reminds us that healing is nonlinear but is a continual process of re-membering the self from the fragments of trauma and loss. Anzaldúa teaches that we do not return to a previous wholeness. We reassemble ourselves into new configurations of strength. Her framing resonates with the women in my family, who have long practiced this re-membering not through grand gestures but through

everyday rituals of care. In the face of migration and marginalization, their healing became an act of refusal, to survive, to educate, to love despite systems that sought to erase us.

In my family, *apapachadas* are the most intimate expression of that restoration. They live in my Grandmother's quiet prayers, in my Mother's encouragement, in the tenderness that carries across generations. These soul-healing hugs are not symbolic. They are the language through which we repair what the world fractures. My Grandmother shares her *apapachadas* through her faith and labor; my Mother, through her unwavering belief that I belong in academic spaces; and I offer mine through this very writing, through the act of placing our stories into the archive of theory. In these exchanges, care becomes theory, and love becomes methodology. I extend Revilla's vision by positioning *apapachadas* as both practice and pedagogy, a living methodology that bridges ancestral memory, affective care, and feminist resistance.

As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) reminds us, care work is often invisible, especially when performed by women of color, yet it remains central to disability justice and survival. In our family, care has never been a luxury. It has always been a method of staying alive. Aurora Levins Morales (2019) similarly writes that storytelling itself is medicine. By telling the truth of our lives, raw, unpolished, and tender, we perform a kind of spiritual surgery that both reveals and heals. *Testimonios* become a kind of *vaporu* for the soul to heal through memory, scent, and the stories we share.

Muxerista pedagogy, then, becomes a way of life and a way of loving (Orozco & Williams, 2025). It is enacted not only in classrooms but in our kitchen, in encouragements, in the silences between generations where healing still happens. When I *apapacho* my Grandmother's story, gathering its fragments and holding them with tenderness like a newborn baby, I am not only writing for her. I am restoring her spirit in a world that once tried to diminish it. In doing so, I feel her restoring mine.

In many ways, this writing is also a love letter to the women who came before, to those who hold my hand while standing beside us now, and to the ones who will continue our work long after we are gone. Through their hands, healing became legacy; in their care, survival became pedagogy. Spirit restoration is not just an act of looking back, but an ongoing offering to the universe of our making, one that honors the lineage of mujeres who continue to teach us how to rebuild the world with tenderness.

This is the deepest expression of the Coyolxauhqui imperative and of Revilla's call to spirit restoration, not simply to heal from fragmentation, but to transform it into something that radiates. Through *apapachadas*, storytelling, and generational love, we practice a living form of Muxerista pedagogy, one that transforms pain into pedagogy, care into theory, and survival into sacred knowledge.

Healing always finds its way back home. Spirit restoration teaches that repair begins in the everyday in kitchens filled with memory, in stories whispered across generations, in the tenderness that insists on survival.

El Hogar Nos Enseñó a Resistir

In our family, knowledge has always lived beyond the classroom. It has taken root in our kitchen table, in everyday rituals, in bilingual prayers, and in the ways we hold each other through hardship. The home has always been our first site of *spirit restoration*, where *apapachadas* take form through food, stories, laughter, and the language of care. But across three generations, the wisdom we carried from our home into institutional spaces was consistently dismissed, misread, or ridiculed.

My Grandmother Clarita remembers being mocked by white men for wearing a traditional dress with a *crinolina*, common in Latine culture as part of a quinceañera dress. That ridicule was not just about clothing. It was about identity, about shaming her for carrying her homeland on her body. Years later, my Mother had hopes to pursue a career in education after seeing her cousins become *maestras*. When my Mother entered college at the age of 22, she was told by her professor that her pedagogical instincts, her bilingual fluency, and her ability to connect with students through shared cultural experience were not professional or scholarly enough. Her Spanish, instead of being seen as a resource, was framed as a disadvantage. Similarly, I have sat in college classrooms where mostly Anglo professors rejected the stories I brought from home, stories rooted in migration, memory, and resilience, as “not academic.” Each of us, in our own time, was told we did not belong.

We did belong. We just carried a different kind of knowledge, and that took me years to understand. What my Grandmother wore, what my Mother brought to the table, and what I now carry forward as their legacy were all forms of knowing. As Delgado Bernal (2001) writes, *Pedagogies of the Home* refer to the ways Chicana and Latina women develop knowledge and resistance through lived experience, cultural intuition, and familial teachings. These are

pedagogies rooted not in textbooks, but in survival, in caretaking, in intergenerational wisdom passed through *dichos*, food, and feeling. *Pedagogies of the Home* align with *Muxerista pedagogy*, a framework in which knowledge is born through relationships, emotion, and communal care.

These pedagogies are what sustained my Grandmother when she was silenced, what shaped my Mother's teaching within our home, where she passed down lessons of resilience, language, and care, and what grounded me in writing this very piece. They are forms of *spirit restoration* practiced daily, small rebellions that transform domestic space into sacred space. They remind us that even when institutions reject us, the home has already taught us everything we need to know, lessons rooted in what Yosso (2005) identifies as *community cultural wealth*, a living archive of resistance and survival.

The shame we were made to feel was never ours to carry. What we were told was "unprofessional" was, in fact, deeply political, emotional, and pedagogical. Everyday practices, speaking Spanglish in classrooms, remembering recipes while writing theory, or teaching with compassion because we know what it feels like to be othered, are not separate from scholarship; they are its pulse. These practices constitute a distinct epistemology rooted in lived experience. *Pedagogies of the Home* not only name this, but they also validate it. They tell us: You were always teaching. You were always learning. Even when no one called it that, in honoring these teachings, we remember that home is our first abolitionist classroom, a space where love itself becomes a revolutionary act.

Abolitionist Work as Inheritance

In many ways, the women in my family practiced abolition long before we had the language for it. Their lives were grounded in a refusal, not only of institutions that devalued their knowledge, but of a world that asked them to erase who they were to survive within it. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us, "abolition is about presence, not absence. It is about building life-affirming institutions" (Highline College Library, n.d.). The stories I have shared here of labor, healing, language, and spirit are not only stories of survival but blueprints for creating life-affirming worlds.

When my Grandmother chose care over bitterness, when my Mother insisted her family deserved to be seen, and when I write our names into theory, we are enacting what Gilmore calls "life in rehearsal." These are the everyday rehearsals of abolition, where we cultivate love, kinship, and healing in ways that reject disposability. Our care work, like our

storytelling, is an abolitionist act. It dismantles the logic of punishment and replaces it with the labor of restoration.

This is not just memory work; it is futurism. It is the ongoing practice of imagining otherwise, of dreaming a world where our survival is not shaped by suffering. As Mariame Kaba teaches us, hope is a discipline, something we return to again and again, even when conditions do not yet allow us to live freely (Sonenstein & Wilson, 2020). My Grandmother's life, her refusal to remain at the base of the systems that tried to keep her down, is a testament to that discipline. In a recent conversation, she shared these words with me, words I now carry forward as both guidance and prayer:

"Estamos en la cima; no más necesitas llegar. El camino es como una montaña: vas de un lugar a otro y subes más. Pero tú quieres subir hasta arriba. Entonces, yo quiero que llegues a la cima y que prosperes."

"We are at the peak—you just need to get there. The journey is like a mountain: you go from one place to another, and you climb more. But you want to reach the very top. And so, I want you to reach that peak and prosper."

Her words are not just encouragement; they are a vision, a roadmap. In them, I hear the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative, the call to become more radiant through our fragmentation. I hear the echo of Muxerista pedagogy, spirit restoration, and Pedagogies of the Home. I hear a directive to imagine otherwise, to build something more whole, more honest, more ours.

We practice abolition through teaching, caregiving, and refusing despair. It is how we live. It is in our teaching, our caregiving, our refusal to let despair take root. The women in my lineage have taught me that abolition is a practice of presence, a commitment to choosing love when the world offers indifference, to building wholeness where there was once harm.

As the future of Latinas moves forward, we are not only capable of surviving the world we were given, but we are meant to remake it. Therefore, this story, this offering, is not just mine. It belongs to all those who mother, teach, heal, and imagine us into being. It is a love letter to the past, a blueprint for the present, and an invitation for those who will continue the work of remaking the world with tenderness and truth. If life grants me the gift of nurturing a new generation of my own, I will devote myself to continuing this work, to planting the lessons of my Grandmother and Mother in the hearts of those still learning how to bloom.

We Heal As We Become

This work is not a reflection of the past. It is a continuation of the futures my Grandmother and Mother dreamed into being. Through their stories, I trace a genealogy of spirit restoration rooted in Muxerista pedagogy, testimonios, and abolitionist imagination. These are not simply theoretical frameworks. They are lifelines, born of love, labor, and refusal. Across generations, we have resisted erasure by nurturing one another through *apapachadas*, by turning home knowledge into scholarly intervention, and by refusing to let institutions define the limits of our worth.

As I walk forward, I carry the dreams reimagined by the women who came before me. They are my spirit restorers and spirit protectors. Their wisdom echoes through my bones, their stories shape my theory, and their care restores my *alma*. Through them, I have learned that becoming is not the end of heartbreak but the act of reassembling ourselves through love, faith, and imagination. This is what it means to heal, to transform pain into practice, memory into movement, and loss into language.

Muxerista pedagogy lives through us. It teaches that healing and theorizing are not separate acts but shared rituals of restoration. The women in my lineage have shown me that education, care, and imagination are abolitionist labors. Each *apapachada*, each story, each refusal to be silenced is a lesson in how to build a freer world. As we move together toward that world, I carry forward this truth: we heal as we become. Not alone, but alongside one another. In our becoming, we write new maps of liberation, and with every act of tenderness, we restore the world to itself.

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