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Muxerista Pedagogies and Praxis:

Art, Activism, and Scholarship as Resistance and Restoration

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***In the Midst of Academia: Honoring Our Chola-Muxerista
Matriarchs***

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In the Midst of Academia: Honoring Our *Chola-Muxerista* Matriarchs

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Abstract

This collaborative paper is an exploration of two Chican(a/x) PhD students' *testimonios* honoring their *Chola-Muxerista* femtors, Dr. Marie “Keta” Miranda and Dr. Gloria V. Gonzáles, whose teachings and *Chola-Muxerista* wisdom are rooted in collective self-preservation, sisterhood, and care. We interweave embodied methodologies and pedagogies of critical *chisme* and *pláticas*, grounded in *autohistoria-teoría* and the *cenote* as an inner geography of memory, to creatively and intellectually map our struggles within the extractive conditions of the neoliberal academy.

This paper expands on Revilla's (2004; 2022) and Orozco's (2025) *Muxerista* and *Jotería* principles, which are grounded in our *Chola-Muxerista* praxis that centers self-preservation, reciprocity, consent, and solidarity. Our visual and written *testimonios* are a healing praxis of slowing down and sifting through the painful and joyful memories. We write this as a loving effort to preserve collective memory, archive, and speak from the margins of academic isolation, competition, and exhaustion. By centering embodied knowledge, relational care, and creative survival, we share the lessons, *consejos*, and life-giving affirmations that sustain our friendship and academic *sobrevivencia* while resisting the extractive logics of the neoliberal academy.

Key Words: *Chola-Muxerista* praxis, Matriarchs, Critical *Chisme*, Sisterhood, Mexican American Studies

Introduction

"Even islands come to [National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)] conferences—perhaps they come to find other islands" —(Anzaldúa, 1998, p. 149).

In the *palabras* of our *Jotería Chola-Muxerista* ancestor Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1998), her reflections on coalition building theorize and reimagine the *neonatal* body as both an island and a bridge—a site of relational, transformative, and healing possibility. As working-class Chicana/x doctoral students, we deeply resonate with Anzaldúa's reference to isolation as island positionality (Pitts, 2021). The island is more than a metaphor; it is an embodied knowledge of self and collective preservation that creates pathways to solidarity or isolation.

Our interpretation of the island's nonhierarchical cycles of *conocimiento* (awareness) (Anzaldúa, 2015) teaches us to breathe through burnout and to be present in connection, retreat, reflection, and restoration. The island, like the bridge, aligns with what we call *Chola-Muxerista* praxis, which reminds us of the importance of carving out intentional time and space to remember and honor our living academic matriarchs. We are deeply grateful to our *femtors* for the life-long lessons of reciprocity, rest, and renewal. These are practices we now share in our ecosystem—family, students, friends, and colleagues.

Preparing to leave the island, the bridge teaches us that connection requires taking a risk, a leap of faith into initiating a political friendship. The practice of our sisterhood is rooted in the belief that relationships take time to nourish, require embodied presence, *confianza*, and love to flourish. Our Chicana/x sisterhood ethics are shaped by our mutual longing to survive, to teach resilience, and to weave a sustainable bond amid the suffocating conditions of neoliberal and necropolitical violence (Mbembe, 2019; Puar, 2017). It was in the midst of organizing the 2019 Mexican American Studies Teachers' Academy (MAS.TA) that we crossed paths. When we first met, neither of us expected a car ride together across town would flourish into a life-affirming bond.

Pásale, the Back Door is Abierta

This paper is an invitation to cruise through the back alleys of academia with us. We invite you to be dragged and join us through the back door of the institution. "*Pásale*", enter

with us, we invite you to some *cafecito*, *pan dulce* y un poco de critical *chisme*¹ (Gonzalez et al., 2023; Gonzalez Ybarra & Player, 2024). Please, excuse our *merger* of book bags, piles of books, peer-reviewed articles, y *los* crunchy snacks. We show up with our *panzas* in panic, burned out, disheveled, hungry, and thirsty for a space of authentic connection and sisterhood where we can truly drip in our authenticity.

The institution is not an ideal space for kickin' it, *pero siéntate*, sit down, and let us first discuss some agreements. We need to strive for collective care; *tírale pal otro lado* the individualism, competitiveness, and extractivist values of the neoliberal academy. It's about the collective, self-preservation, and sustainability of our *gente* and all our communities. We need our *Muxeristoria* now more than ever, due to the political climate; consolidation of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies departments; anti-immigration raids; scrubbing of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) language; banning of books; and anti-LGBTQ legislation. This is a space of love, *respeto*, street cred, and solidarity. We draw from Revilla's (2004; 2022) and Orozco's (2025) *Muxerista* and *Jotería* frameworks to further develop *Muxerista* femtoring principles (Garcia et al., 2024), continuing to shape our ever-evolving collective *conocimiento*. These include: 1) sense of belonging, 2) a safe space, 3) *confianza*, 4) acts of resilience, and 5) communal responsibility. Despite coming from completely different universities and geographies, like separate islands shaped by our own storms, as castaways, we miraculously crossed paths, found each other, and community. During the past couple of years, we have had numerous heartfelt *pláticas* (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Solorzano et al., 2024) about the influence of Keta and Gloria's² *Chola-Muxerista femtorship* and grassroots *movidas*.

In her dissertation, Veronica Sandoval (2022) re-imagines Chola work and discusses groups that would not have identified as Cholas. Sandoval refers to these groups as material Cholas:

"Akin to Cholas who live in gang neighborhoods and whose socioeconomic conditions continue to be affected by their place in the nation-state, women find dignity within the

¹We use critical *chisme* to name our multiple truths by creating intentional space to speak about our deeply political lives without being dismissed for our intersecting struggles. Critical *chisme* is a relational space where we mutually undrown one another.

² Out of respect and political intimacy, we refer to our *femtors* by their first names as a gesture of nonhierarchical respect and mutuality that disrupts academic norms.

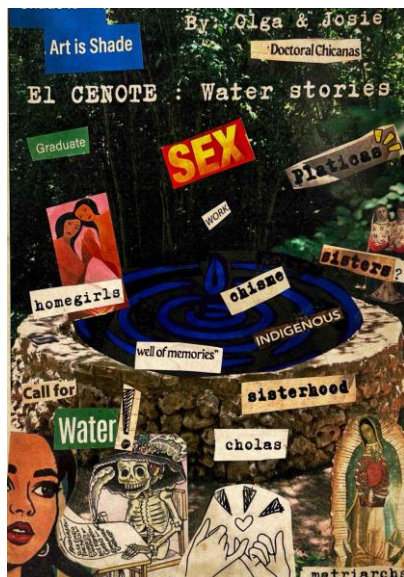
spaces that the material creates. Cholas assert their identity regardless of the discursive practices that criminalize, dismiss, and erase them” (p.52).

Following Sandoval, we understand *Chola–Muxerista* praxis as Chola work rooted in material conditions, survival strategies, and relational labor, while remaining attentive to the distinct histories of gang-affiliated Chola life. Our use of the term does not collapse or sanitize these experiences, but engages Chola as an epistemological and intergenerational lineage shaped by working-class culture, resistance, and collective care. Cholas are shaped by survival, and they are not a monolithic identity to be romanticized.

MAS-TA is a week-long summer program for K-12 teachers. Keta is the co-founder of MAS-TA, which marked its 10th anniversary during the summer of 2025. During the initial years, the teacher training program was hosted in person and served approximately a dozen educators at the former University of Texas at San Antonio’s (UTSA) Institute of Texan Cultures (ITC). Keta retired in 2019, then soon after, the pandemic abruptly disrupted our normalcy. We adapted to a virtual format of Zoom. Being pushed into the digital space meant having to rely on the *rasquache* tech skills of us graduate students. Keta retired and passed the teacher training program to her trusted colleagues, Dr. Lilliana P. Saldaña and her trusted friend, Dr. Gloria V. Gonzáles. Under their new leadership as co-directors, the MAS Teachers’ Academy experienced rapid growth, enabling us to reach more teachers across Texas and beyond. We had the privilege of working alongside these *Muxeres* and witnessing the labor of love they poured into cultivating an engaging learning environment for teachers. The last seven years have been quite a ride.

Figure 1

*El Cenote: Water Stories*³



Chola-Muxerista Framework

We introduce the Chola-Muxerista framework as a conceptual and methodological map that grounds our *cenote* stories as inner geographies of memories and *conocimiento*. This paper structurally flows across five strands: 1.) Lovingly Archiving our *Chola-Muxerista Matriarchs*, 2.) *Chola-Muxerista Praxis*: Putting the ‘Hood’ in Sisterhood, 3.) Wet Archives of Refusal, 4.) Tap Into Your Inner *Cenote*, and 5) Zine-making From the *Cenote*. Together, these strands demonstrate how our framework is living, relational, and will continue to sustain within and against the neoliberal academy.

We continue to build on foundational Chola, Chicana, *jotería*, and feminist principles that emerged from non-hierarchical work with the MAS Teachers’ Academy, other life and institutional struggles. Here we expand on our *Chola-Muxerista* principles, which are our embodied praxis:

- **Authenticity** – Being witnessed and reaffirmed without masking.
- **Reciprocity** – Mutual vulnerability, cross-talk, and energetic exchange.

³ This co-published zine combines paper collage and digital collage as a method of archiving our *Chola-Muxerista femtors*. It includes an adaptation of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *cenote* sketch, which we used to facilitate a mini-zine workshop we co-lead visually. This adaptation invited *Muxeres* to pause intentionally, tap into their inner wells of memory, and engage in reflective and creative storytelling practice.

- **Collective/Self-Preservation** – Protection from burnout produced by unseen and undervalued labor.
- **Chola Wisdom** – Intergenerational survival knowledge that is lived, shared, and never gatekept, but protected.
- **Convivencia** – Intergenerational dialogue grounded in *pláticas* and critical *chisme*.
- **Making Place** – Intentional space-making in both public and private spheres.
- **Consent** – Explicit boundaries and agency regarding intellectual, creative, and emotional labor.
- **Solidarity** – Sustaining intergenerational and cross-cultural bonds.

Drawing from Anzaldúa's (1987, 2015) work on *autohistoria-teoría*, *nepantla*, and the *cenote* as an ecology of memory, we approach storytelling, visual creation, and *plática* as epistemological methods. We theorize *Chola–Muxerista* praxis as a friendship-based politics of care—an ethical practice emerging from working-class Chicana/x survival, critical *chisme*, *femtorship*, and collective/self-preservation. This piece weaves written and visual storytelling—through collage and zine-making—as interrelated practices of creation-resistance (Rodríguez, 2012, 2021) to document epistemic violence while enacting refusal, remembrance, and relational futurity. These interrelated practices do not adhere to rigid colonial structures of time or healing; instead, they call us back to the reservoir of our hearts. Our buried memories come to the surface and activate our elemental truth-telling. Our hope is to inspire others to share their water stories.

To clarify our methodological approach, we move between critical *chisme*, *pláticas*, and *testimonio* as distinct yet interwoven practices of *conocimiento* production. Critical *chisme* operates as a method of theorizing from embodiment—an informal, relational practice, in which we process institutional violence, name harm, and generate collective insight. *Pláticas*, grounded in Chicana, Latina Feminista (CLF) traditions, function as intentional spaces of reciprocal exchange, where *confianza* and relational accountability allow for deeper sharing and meaning-making (Delgado Bernal et al., 2023; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). *Autohistoria-teoría* in turn serves as a *testimonio* practice of storytelling from lived experience, transforming memory into political and epistemological *conocimiento*.

These practices move relationally rather than linearly. Through *rasquache movidas*, we document our *testimonios* while sustaining *Muxerista* praxis through acts of checking in,

returning to one another, and continuing conversations across time and space. In alignment with Hampton and Mendoza Aviña's (2023) real talk methodology, CLF *pláticas* center students and communities "over the institution," calling us to seek each other out, listen, strategize, and engage in transformative action (p. 2).

Lovingly Archiving our *Chola-Muxerista* Matriarchs

"Matriarchs do not reach their status without a deep understanding of compromise. ...[They know] the systems in place and how to survive them" –Mojica Rodriguez, 2024, p. 19.

We are taking this time to slow down. This deep pause is long overdue. To lovingly archive our most memorable experiences with our *Chola-Muxerista* matriarchs. Through our *pláticas*, we share the wisdom and lessons we have learned, which have replenished our spirits and kept us motivated during our doctoral journeys. We felt called by the words of the late Dr. Roberto "Cintli" Rodriguez in conversation with his wife of 19 years, Dr. Patrisia Gonzales:

"Patrisia and I once wrote that what is missing in our society are elder-honoring ceremonies. I now understand this more than ever: To see their eyes, to feel their hands, and to receive their blessings is beyond any words that I could possibly muster. Perhaps that is why I write; to encourage that we all honor the elders in our midst—parents, grandparents, family, neighbors...to honor their life's journey...to honor their stories and to do so while they can still know and understand that their lives have meant something" (Rodriguez, 2021, p.262).

Our moments of grief and mourning for Chicano activist, journalist, and educator Dr. Rodriguez stirred something in us—the reminder of mortality, the *susto* of loss, and the fear of forgetting. We push back on the demands of the institution in academia's fast-paced grind culture. We slow down to give flowers of gratitude and document our *testimonios* of our beloved *Chola-Muxerista* matriarchs. Our memories will become more fragmented and faded if we wait to share our stories. We worked in tandem, relying on each other to piece together the fragmented memories of the lessons, teachings, and *consejos* of our elders and the "matriarchs in the making" (Mojica Rodriguez, 2024).

Figure 2

Writing as Ceremony⁴



Chola-Muxerista Praxis: Putting the ‘Hood’ in Sisterhood

“Kickin’ it with the homegirls is the active participation of building friendship.” ...“Negotiation of time, then, becomes a primary effort requiring girls to understand each other’s restrictions, to find time when they can talk and build intimacy. While trust is one component of gang solidarity, the idea of intimacy is a greater force uniting the network” –Miranda, 2003, pp. 92-93.

This quote above is from Keta’s ethnographic work, where she disrupts dominant narratives that stereotype Cholas and homegirl culture as deviant, monolithic, or inherently conflict-driven. Instead, Keta reframes Chola sisterhood as rooted in intentional, relational labor—what she describes as the *active participation* in friendship-building. Her work emphasizes that these relationships require time, understanding, and emotional reciprocity. Making time for each other amidst structural violence and personal constraints becomes not only an act of survival but also a political and spiritual practice of life-affirming intimacy.

⁴ This visual *testimonio* honors the late Dr. Rodríguez. His writing deepened our understanding of the political importance of storytelling. A *colega* and friend of Dr. Rodríguez, Tania Pacheco, referred to him as a word healer, as he spent most of his life writing, including co-authoring a nationally syndicated column, “Column of the Americas” with Dr. Patrisia Gonzales. Their column focused on human rights.

We take up *Chola-Muxerista* praxis as a lived extension of these principles—one that moves from theory into everyday practices of relational care and collective survival. Our friendship mirrors the collective ethics taught by our *femtors*—Gloria, Keta, and others — rooted in mutual care, resilience, and co-creation.

Under the Chicano nationalist gaze, Cholas are positioned as a threat because they are perceived as nonconforming; they transgress and push against the boundaries of masculine and feminine respectability politics. Historically, Cholas have been cast as hot-tempered troublemakers—read as masculine, hypersexualized, or marked as queer for refusing heteropatriarchal norms (Parra, 2025). These narratives discipline Chola bodies and pathologize their resistance. Drawing on Black, Chicana, and queer of color critique, we understand creation, resistance, and embodiment as a form of fugitivity that moves within and against institutional containment (Chávez, 2017; Harney & Moten, 2013). *Chola-Muxerista* praxis sustains because it is an ongoing refusal of neo-liberal confinement of respectability, institutional discipline, and normative belonging.

Chola sisterhood is similarly misrepresented as lacking solidarity or existing in a constant state of *pleito*. While we refuse to romanticize sisterhood or deny its tensions, we also reject the myth that *Chola-Muxerista* relationships are inherently fractured. Many of us have had to unlearn the internalized colonization of heteronormative, nationalist, and colonial discourses that dismiss *Chola-Muxerista* praxis as excessive, unprofessional, or emotional. Yet it is precisely this working-class, *rasquache* consciousness (Sandoval, 2019, 2022; Ybarra-Frausto, 2019)—rooted in vulnerability, relational accountability, and shared struggle—that allows *Chola-Muxeristas* to co-create spaces of care, healing, and survival.

Drawing on Emma Pérez's (1999, 2022) theorization of third space as a decolonial site, we understand *Chola-Muxerista* praxis as the intentional creation of *sitio y lenguas*—sanctuary spaces where we can exist in our uncertainty, imperfection, and woundedness. These spaces are private and public, relational and political. Through our praxis, we check in on one another, share stories we have been taught to keep hidden, and cultivate pathways toward spiritual restoration. When *Chola-Muxerista* principles are broken or violated, the resulting grief signals not weakness but the depth of intimacy and care that sustain and nurture these relationships.

As academic *callejeras*, we engage critical *chisme* to interrogate systems of oppression while simultaneously tending to our nervous systems and collective well-being. Gonzalez Ybarra

and Player (2024) affirm *chisme* as a woman- and queer-of-color literacy practice that builds *confianza*, intimacy, and intergenerational solidarity. Within *Chola-Muxerista* praxis, *chisme* becomes a ritualized form of knowledge-sharing and making—one that restores *ánimo*, channels collective *coraje*, and resists academic pushout.

Chola-Muxerista praxis also takes shape through working-class forms of self-expression. Our dress, bandanas, and public displays of pride function as refusals of assimilation, challenges cultural hegemony, extractivism, and detached scholarship. These practices are not aesthetic; they are embodied declarations of survival. Our *Chola-Muxerista pláticas* are rooted in love, trust, reciprocity, all-nighters, ritual, and sisterhood solidarity—ways of staying alive and connected in institutions that were never designed to hold us.

We materialize these practices through creative forms of archiving and *concimiento*-making. The process of zine-making is an ecological memory-grounding ritual that moves from within the inner *cenote* into tangible forms.

Wet Archives of Refusal

“The Maya in Chichén Itzá, dedicated el cenote to el dios de la lluvia. Into their sacred well they threw their most precious possessions: turquoise, clay pottery, copal, virgins, and their children. Those who didn’t die were supposed to bring back the rain gods’ promise for a good or bad year. Gloria E. Anzaldúa 2015, p. 98.

Figure 3

*Refusal is Wet*⁵



In the midst of rewriting multiple drafts of this piece, we created a digital collage as we began to recollect our story. Specifically, after hearing about the demolition of the Institute of Texan Cultures (ITC) in April of 2025, we first met at the MAS academy through our *Chola–Muxerista femtors*. This digital collage above is an example of how our fragmented memory, *cultural*, and ancestral knowledge are recovered and reclaimed. As academic *callejeras*, we navigate graduate education, which demands our fast-paced, ongoing productivity while devaluing relational, intellectual, and creative labor. We work full-time, care for families and elders, and carry our scholarship across classrooms, kitchens, cars, and conference halls—often only to be judged for “not writing enough.” What remains unseen are the drafts, rewrites, spirals, and collective labor that sustain us.

Tap Into Your Inner Cenote

“Via nepantla you tap el cenote, the archetypal inner stream of consciousness, dream pool or reservoir of unconscious images and feelings stored as iconic imagery.” —Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 98

Following Anzaldúa (2015), we understand these relationships as rooted in inner ecologies—cenotes of memory and *conocimiento* that travel with us across borders. These

⁵ Figure 3 holds both the labor and the joy of political friendship. This collage is part of our *cenote* story, the memories and images that resurface after demolition and collapse through reflections on *Chola–Muxerista femtorship*, relational labor, and collective survival within and against neoliberal and necropolitical conditions.

cenotes hold what institutions cannot—our embodied knowledge, emotional labor, and collective survival. As Pitts (2021) argues, bodies take place, allowing intimacy, care, and solidarity to persist even when we are separated by distance and uneven academic terrains. When such relational spaces are denied, we experience what Williams (1991) names *spirit murder*, an institutional violence that Revilla (2022) argues is actively resisted through *Muxerista* and *Jotería femtorship* practices that restore spirit and protect *ánimo*.

In the *testimonios* that follow, we offer droplets of *conocimiento* of how we were watered and nourished by Keta's and Gloria's *Chola-Muxerista* praxis. They became our *cenotes*—wells of memory, story, and survival *conocimiento*. Their teachings replenished our spirits as the dry academic structures attempted to erode them.

Through this praxis, we learned that healing is slow, intergenerational, cyclical, and cannot be done alone. Even as we move *en chingas*—fragmented and spiraling—our friendship remains sacred. Though our time together is often limited as we juggle jobs, caregiving, and graduate school, we always find ways to experience joy and stay rooted. Time together often looks like brief crossings in the academic *calles*: conferences, birthday dinners, and collaborative writing projects. These moments, however fleeting, matter. They remind us that *femtorship* does not require constant presence; it requires intentionality, reciprocity, and the willingness to hold each other through shit storms.

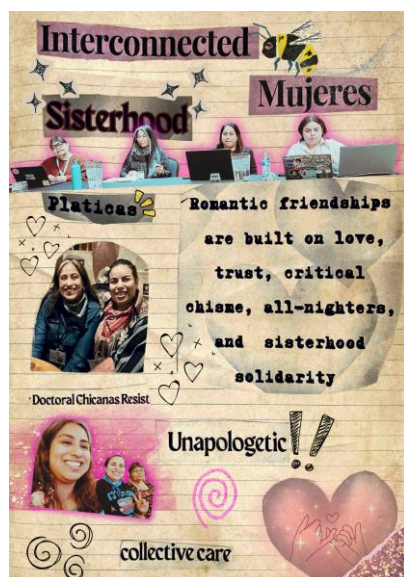
Therefore, critical *chisme* becomes a method and ritual—a site where we spit out theory that emerges from the body. We also understand archiving as an ethical practice: it matters how our stories are held and how we remember our *femtors*, rather than allowing the extractive academy to exploit and appropriate our working-class Chicana/x consciousness. This approach aligns with Revilla's (2022) reflections on *Muxerista* and *Jotería femtorship*, particularly her insistence on refusing rigid hierarchical boundaries while still honoring ethical limits. As she explains, she and her collaborators “have tried not to practice hierarchical boundaries...but we do have boundaries” (p. 199). Similarly, our zine-making praxis is grounded in relational accountability. The work of art-making and self-writing calls us to center the body in relation to place, memory, and environment. *Autohistoria-teoría* requires processes of self-recovery and deep introspection; honest creation asks for depth, vulnerability, intimacy, consent, and reciprocity. *Chola-Muxerista* praxis becomes a healing ritual for engaging care ethically, without reproducing extractive, unbounded, or dispossessing forms of relations.

Accepting the invitation to apply to La Chola Conference in 2025 brought us together to begin stitching our fragmented memories of Keta and Gloria. Sometimes we talked over Zoom and digitally collaged in Canva as our minds slowly recalled specific events. Most of the time, we met in person and worked with what we already carried in our multiple bags: printed articles, photographs, drafts of collaborative writing, magazines, conference materials, and even newspaper clippings. This slow process of building our zine across creative modalities grounded our emerging pedagogies and friendship-based politics of care. Rather than overwhelming us, the process honored where we were in our respective journeys.

Presenting at our first La Chola Conference through a workshop on honoring our *Chola–Muxerista* living ancestors was especially powerful. It was moving to witness intergenerational Cholas engage our work as a practice of remembrance—honoring Keta, a Chola matriarch who supported and *mentored* us.

Figure 4

*Interconnected Mujeres*⁶



Zine-Making From The Cenote

Through reciprocal *pláticas* and ritualized critical *chisme*, we created safe storytelling containers for checking in, sharing lived experiences, and reflecting on our evolving principles. This process unfolded as a slow grind—one that allowed us to move through heavy emotions

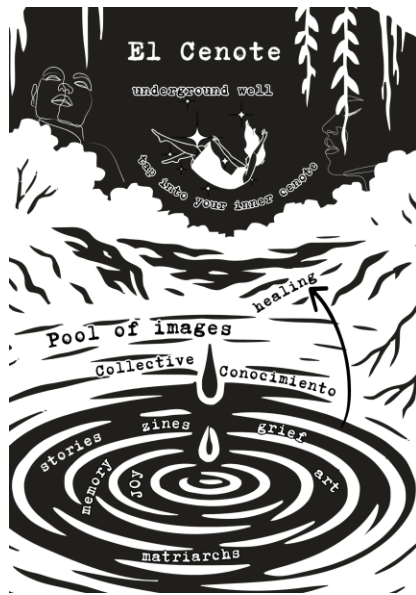
⁶ This collage visualizes *Chola–Muxerista femtorship* as collective care. It documents how love, *confianza*, and critical *chisme* creates sustainable pathways to surviving academia.

while remembering the care we co-created in moments of uncertainty. Together, we shared survival strategies and engaged in intergenerational wisdom.

This praxis took material form through our zine-making workshops. As part of this process, we developed prompts to guide participants in tapping into their inner *cenote*. Below are the water-grounding questions serving as an entry point into storytelling as a healing and knowledge-producing practice.

Figure 5

*El Cenote: Droplets of Conocimiento*⁷



Water-Grounding Questions

Tap into your inner *cenote*:

- Your zine is a sacred offering to the *cenote*—what would you throw in?
- Who are the matriarchs, Queer Chican(a/x)s, *femtors*, Cholas, and homegirls that live in your water memory?
- What images, colors, *palabras*, and memorias emerge to the surface?

Sweet Tear Drops of Conocimiento

Through our island positionalities, we bridge our writing together. In the same way we invited participants into our workshops to take risks, be vulnerable, and listen inward to their

⁷ Drawing from Anzaldúa's (2015) theorization of *nepantla* and the *cenote*, the image frames healing as a relational and cyclical process sustained through matriarchal *conocimiento*, collective storytelling, and wet archives of refusal.

own inner *cenote*, we hold ourselves accountable to that same practice here. These *testimonios* are our droplets of *conocimiento*. They are our sacred offerings, shaped by our willingness to sit with what surfaces and to write from it.

Our *testimonios* move like a sacred *cenote*—holding multiple depths, contradictions, and currents at once. We approach these stories with care, refusing to judge the survival strategies that emerge within them. In doing so, we affirm that vulnerability is not a demand we place on others, but a practice we commit to ourselves.

Olga's Wetty Testimonio

I came thirsty and hungry for a fresh perspective, feeling dried out in predominantly white queer spaces. Attending my first NACCS conference in San Antonio in 2013, as a queer Chicana/x undergraduate student from Colorado State University, stirred something in me. This is where I first encountered Dr. Marie “Keta” Miranda. I remember her protest signs calling urgently for the inclusion of Mexican American Studies in Texas, and her insistence that we challenge censorship and the restrictions on what universities were allowed to teach.

I still carry the black Moleskine journal I brought with me that day. I had lost my pen, and the only thing I had was a yellow highlighter. Too shy to ask for another, I filled the pages with fluorescent ink marks only visible under black light. I was a ghostly presence in those conference rooms, quiet and observant, already dripping in *Jotería* and *putería conocimiento*. I did not yet have the language to name and come into my queer skin.

That journal has traveled with me since undergrad, accumulating notes, reflections, and fragments of thought. When I reached its final pages years later, Josie and I transformed it through collage and zine-making, turning that fluorescent memory into something that could be archived, shared, and mobilized as pedagogy. We later facilitated zine-making workshops at the 2025 La Chola Conference and the El Mundo Zurdo conference, inviting participants to tap into their inner cenotes and offer droplets of memory in honor of their living Chola, *Jotería*, and *Muxerista femtors*.

Keta's *femtorship* flourished in the in-between moments, during smoke breaks, collaborative planning, and shared labor. I remember helping her set up apps on her iPad while she cooked frijoles with queso fresco and roasted green chiles. Inviting me to her home was a way for her to pay forward the labor I put into the Academy as her underpaid graduate assistant. When I was helping her move off campus, in the middle of our workday, she casually

lit a cigarette in her office. When I laughed and told her we couldn't smoke inside, she shrugged, put it out in her keychain ashtray, and kept going. That moment held humor, care, and the slow grind of relational work that never felt hierarchical or extractive.

I appreciate her telling me the day of the summer academy, "I apologize in advance, but I might start barking orders at you". Now looking back, I appreciate her self-awareness of her emotional capacity. She was forecasting, but of course, the stress was not as much then because we only had approximately 10 teachers show up that year. This was okay with Keta because there was no budget to feed more than a small cohort of teachers. I remember making sandwiches and eating tacos. Through Keta, I learned that *the Chola-Muxerista sisterhood is sustained by slow trust-building, reciprocity, and love that restore ánimo*. With her and with other Muxeres, she introduced me to Gloria and Josie. I felt submerged but breathing underwater, held by a sacred *cenote* of memory, care, and collective survival.

Deep Pause for Gratitude

Before Josie's *testimonio*, I want to pause and name her as my comrade and co-conspirator, someone I continue to find deep pleasure in collaborating with. She is the Wilson to my castaway. Our friendship has been healing in ways I did not anticipate. I often say that "ride-or-die" Chicanas can reproduce toxic forms of loyalty and silence, but with Josie, it has been nothing but genuine love, accountability, and support.

The past few years have felt like piles of grief stacked on grief as we, pandemic graduate students, navigated institutions that tried to kill our spirits. Her friendship has been a life raft I did not know I needed, and because of her, I continue to give sisterhood a try. Although our working-class, dissertating lives as students, educators, and friends spread across different geographies make communication challenging, her presence is always felt. She gives me wet hope. She reminds me that we are all working from places of burnout and that we must not compare our struggles but honor each other's capacities and hold space for each other's pace.

In that spirit, I want to thank her for all the moments she has shown up for me: my dissertation defense, my grandmother's funeral, birthday parties, late nights on Zoom, writing retreats, conferences, and the everyday chaos of my queer personal and academic life. Thank you for the gas money, the snacks, the laughs, and for trusting me with your son, even if I did teach him how to twerk. In all of this, you remind me that *Chola-Muxerista* wisdom is needed

more than ever and that our stories root us in struggle while affirming the necessity of making intentional, warm spaces that honor our truths and sustain our communities.

Josie's Testimonio: Vamos a NACCS for Genuine Connections and Life-long Relationships

I first met Gloria in 2018 in Minneapolis, MN, at the NACCS conference. We sat next to each other on a shuttle from the airport to the conference hotel. The conversation flowed as we chatted about the frigid 30-degree weather, our doctoral journeys, and research interests. At a national conference, it seemed unthinkable to learn that we're both connected to our home city, San Antonio, Texas. Gloria and I even realized we have a mutual friend, Jesus Jaime-Diaz. Jesus had transferred to a doctoral program at the University of Arizona (UA), and I met him at orientation, just days after arriving. We were both very fond of Jesus. Even after he had moved, Gloria maintained contact with him. As we exited the shuttle, she mentioned she would be part of a roundtable session with colleagues and invited me to attend. Because talking with her was like catching up with a dear friend or *comadre*, it was important to follow through with my promise.

I had arrived a few minutes early to the roundtable session, and I recall entering the room as Gloria and her colleagues were setting up. They consulted with each other and agreed to add more chairs and expand the circle formation. As I sat and skimmed the room, I was pleasantly surprised to see her approaching me. She thanked me for being at the roundtable. Her greeting seemed like a simple gesture. For me, it was memorable because she acknowledged my presence and expressed her gratitude at that moment. Her act of kindness counters conferencing norms. These initial impressions of Gloria were memorable because they felt like authentic care.

Outside of NACCS, I attended conferencing spaces that were exclusive, elite, and *pues*, well, an atmosphere of *puro* arrogance. Attending or presenting at these conferences can be performative, provoke self-doubt, and, overall, be emotionally exhausting. They can also be transactional or superficial—to scan as many business cards as possible or remain “connected” on social media. The invisible junior scholars are chasing and vying for their scholar crushes' attention. There are even massive-sized conferences, where you get lost in the sea of attendees. *Buena suerte* staying in touch. Thanks to the Creator, when Gloria and I crossed paths, it was truly a genuine connection.

This *memoria* continues at the 2018 NACCS. As I was thinking about getting to the next conference session, I saw Gloria in the hallway. She stopped me and asked which session I was headed to next. She then mischievously asked me if I wanted to step away from the conference to make a quick trip to the Mall of America. Without hesitation, I agreed to join her on what we would later call our first ‘adventure.’ I recall being entertained by the indoor amusement park and hearing people’s excitement on the rides. Like old friends, we pointed at what caught our attention and had a long conversation over lunch. I was smiling ear-to-ear in our selfie. Outside, walking to the shuttle stop, it was windy, and the cold air felt like it was jabbing and taunting our faces. We were not too concerned, though, as the shuttle would be making its way at any moment. We joked about how two *Tejanas* couldn’t hang in Minnesota’s winters. As 10 minutes turned into nearly 45 minutes, we wondered where the shuttle had gone. Gloria then asked me, “Hey, are you ok?” She said my face was turning red and looked flushed. I shrugged off the burning sensation I felt on my face to thwart any panic. We had decided to review the paper shuttle schedule that one of us had stuffed in our bags. We were devastated. We had missed the last shuttle for the day! We laughed and hurried back into the mall to defrost and wait for our Uber. That is Gloria, she’s patient and goes with the flow.

That summer of 2018 would mark another first—attending the MAS Teachers’ Academy in San Antonio. Just a few weeks before it, I received an email about the upcoming teacher professional development. I emailed Keta expressing my interest and mentioned that I had met Gloria recently at NACCS. Keta replied to me the same day and asked me to call her to discuss how I could participate in the upcoming MAS Teachers’ Academy.

After the summer of 2018, Gloria and I remained connected. There would be several more NACCS conferences that I would attend with her. In fact, Olga, Gloria, and I would later attend, co-create, and present at future NACCS conferences. In addition to supporting me throughout the doctoral journey, she and I have swapped stories about our families, planned our next adventures over lunch, and she’s been present at my celebrations and comforted me during my grief after my grandfather passed away. She always asks about my son and always seems to have a present on hand for him whenever she sees him. I get emotional thinking about Gloria’s *femtorship* and how I want to *femtor* others as she has done with me.

Chola-Matriarch in the Making: ‘She has Our Backs’

While we have discussed our *Chola mentorships* with Keta and Gloria, there is a special matriarch in the making that we must give flowers to—Dr. Lilliana Patricia Saldaña. Alongside Gloria, Lillie has been the co-director of the MAS Teachers’ Academy for the past six years. Prior to her role as co-director, Lillie had participated in the teacher training program since 2018. She has been involved with several social justice organizations, such as Somos MAS, and serves on the board of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. Although Lillie would not call herself a Chola, she embodies *Chola-Muxerista* principles and praxis. Before Keta retired, she was strategic about who could step up to continue her legacy and vision for the MAS Teachers’ Academy. Lillie and Gloria were entrusted for several reasons—they’re *Chingonas* with the *ganas*, street cred, and reliability to lead. Similar to Keta, both Lillie and Gloria have invested numerous unpaid hours in applying for grants and organizing the various logistics required for planning the MAS Teachers’ Academy. As it grows larger, more support will be needed to continue the momentum of building MAS in Texas schools statewide. There are so many ways that Lillie is precisely a matriarch in the making. We provide some examples:

- She is fierce!
- She shows up at pop-ups, conferences, and graduate student events.
- She is willing to meet us at coffee shops and co-write together (definitely an academic *callejera*).
- She cusses. (That’s cool and that’s real)
- She has been on multiple NACCS panels with us.
- She replies to texts. (She always does!!)
- She’s a damn good cook!
- She is a storyteller who is not afraid to share her cautionary tales and her doctoral journey.
- She validates our grief and has shown up to family funerals.
- She always has our backs!
- She will ALWAYS greet you with a hug.
- She may be faculty, but she will kick it with undergraduates and graduates.
- She makes you feel so special, affirmed, and brilliant!

The Up-and-Coming of Keta's Cholas

"That overabundance of love has to flow back to yourself. Take care of yourself. We deserve to have you with us for as long as humanly possible, but we cannot have you with us if you are not taking care of your own needs. And you need to do more. Learn to say "necesito ayuda." You are the standard, and teaching us how to live long lives is good for everyone involved. We cannot live up to your impossible standard."—Mojica Rodriguez, 2024, p.26.

Now that we have shared our *pan dulce y cafecito*, we have to wrap up the critical *chisme*. *Lástima*, it's time to go. *Muchas gracias* for holding space to hear our *memorias*, the complex-*susto* makes us forget. It is important to return and critique the *choque* of cruising through the neoliberal institution as we try to recover and reclaim the pieces of our fragmented selves, as an act of repairing the *daño* and also remembering what continues to be healing about having *Chola-Muxeristas* that could replenish our *ánimo* and spirits. As first-generation working-class Chicana/x doctoral students, we both had a romanticized view of the process of earning a doctoral degree. If it weren't for our *Chola-Muxerista femtors*, we would still be wandering the back alleys of academia. The *Chola-Muxerista* wisdom of our academic matriarchs saved us from burnout, emotional fatigue, and losing the stamina to continue the labor of love of nurturing spaces for students, educators, and the community to learn about Chicana/x Studies.

Chola-Muxeristas are anyone who has been *femtor*ed by someone like Keta, Gloria, Lillie, or a Chola who is passionate about MAS, *Jotería*, and *Muxerista* studies. We endearingly refer to a select group of individuals as "Keta's Cholas." Of course, we do not know if they will be at capacity when Gloria and Lillie finally retire.

To the future generations of *Chola-Muxeristas* matriarchs in the making, stay true to the principles, stay true to yourself, stay true to your word—*Tú palabra es oro*. In many ways, this is a call for Keta's *Cholas* to pull up! You will find yourself as *callejeras* in the back alleys of academia, feeling alone. Remember, our ancestors and we got your back!

Ponte dura: keep writing, making art, and telling stories. You never know when your sacred *palabra* will be medicine to comfort and heal those around you. *Ponte MAS trucha*, make faces if you have to, because advocating and fighting for Chicana/x/o studies to stay in our schools and to continue to build MAS educator confidence is hard work.

Keep being *sucia*, *necia*, if nobody told you today, *valórate*. Tap into that inner *cenote*. You do not always have to live in self-deprecation or be self-sacrificing; you just need to take a step back before you spiral out and crash. Find your *Chola-Muxerista colegas*, and cherish each tender moment with them.

Figure 6

Who will water her?⁸



⁸ This image serves as a closing offering reflecting the ongoing labor of love that it will take to continue to sustain *Chola-Muxerista conocimineto* and community.

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