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Unraveling Education via Tres Cuentos: Centering Liberación and Spiritual Activism in the New University

Jesica Siham Fernández
Alexis A. Figueroa
Santa Clara University

Unraveling Education via Tres Cuentos: Centering *Liberación* and Spiritual Activism in the New University

Jesica Siham Fernández¹

Alexis A. Figueroa

Santa Clara University

Abstract

The purpose of our paper is to offer the *Tres Cuentos* activity as one strategy to resist authoritarian encroachments within education, and specifically within the university, wherein we experience threats to academic freedoms. We offer our *Tres Cuentos* as examples toward producing knowledge that grapples with and blends the political and the personal so as to interrogate “common sense” knowledge, refusing the binary, dichotomous, and disembodied logics of knowing, or knowledge that is characteristic of individualistic, westernized education (Kumashiro, 2024). Threading together theories of the politics of knowledge production, specifically Ignacio Martín-Baró’s notion of liberation and Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism, we reflect on how authoritarian education is challenged, contested and interrupted in service of liberation and liberatory praxes. We organize our three stories as *hilando*, *desilando* and *bordando* to center liberation and spiritual activism. We see us in the New University where humanizing, decolonial learning unfolds far from what we experience as authoritarian education.

Keywords: *Spiritual Activism, Liberation, Education, Knowledge Production*

¹ We have written this manuscript collaboratively and in relationship with one another. We are equal authors, and creators. We list our names in alphabetical order to reflect this equitable process. All correspondence should be addressed to both authors at the following emails: jsfernandez@scu.edu and aalvarezfigueroa@scu.edu. Mail correspondence should be sent to Santa Clara University, 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara, CA 95053.

Introduction

Authoritarian policies in education censure the kinds of curricula and learning that takes place in education, thereby limiting academic freedom, which may include local, community, culturally rooted, and/or Indigenous knowledge. In the United States, as of this writing under the Trump Administration, we witness heightened militarization, surveillance and authoritarianism. Education is not immune to the circulation of oppressive discourses, policies and relations of hegemonic power, but in fact reproduces them (Patel, 2021). The bidirectional exchange between society and education cannot be denied for it manifests in the policies, pedagogies, practices and curricula that shape what is taught, and how. Furthermore, it shapes who has the right to be seen and heard, to express their voice in the context of the classroom, and the consequences, if any, that may follow upon speaking one's truth (Tuck & Yang, 2012). We are witnessing an education system that was always meant to be authoritarian, and assimilable given the U.S.'s imperial colonial context (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). What we are facing and resisting at this moment is the expression of a system founded upon settler-colonialism and the historical subjugation of minoritized communities. The discourse of education to serve the public and a greater common good was only for those presumed wealthy, white men (Gerrard et al., 2022; Stein, 2020).

As defeating and pessimistic as these conditions may appear and feel, and to which we bear witness as faculty and student, we remain radically hopeful and tenacious in our desires to see education transformed beyond what it is now, and toward what it can and must be. We share this desire for a humanizing education with the Editors of this timely special issue on "community resistance and teaching in an authoritarian climate." To anchor our vision in the direction of transforming education toward a path of liberation and spiritual activism, we describe an activity called *Tres Cuentos* (Three Stories) to denaturalize and resist the authoritarian encroachment on higher education and invite radical possibilities to emerge. What do we long for, imagine, and desire for education—now and tomorrow? This serves as the guiding question of this paper.

The question calls us to embrace Anzaldúa's notion of spiritual activism wherein inner work requires engaging in public acts of dissent, refusal, and relationality with all that is, even that which is a source of wounding. Amidst the oppression educational institutions are complicit in, we refuse to be mere bystanders. Instead, we choose to engage creatively in

subverting the policing of our bodies, the silencing of our stories and the trampling upon our dignity, affirming that a better world is possible. The purpose of our paper, therefore, is to offer the *Tres Cuentos* activity as one strategy to resist authoritarian encroachments within education. Specifically, within the university, wherein we experience threats to academic freedoms. Offering the *Tres Cuentos* activity as one strategy or an example toward producing knowledge that grapples with and blends the political and the personal so as to interrogate “common sense” knowledge. We refuse the binary, dichotomous, and disembodied logics of knowing, or knowledge that is characteristic of individualistic, westernized education (Kumashiro, 2024) by introducing this activity. Threading together theories of the politics of knowledge production—from the coloniality of power to liberation and spiritual activism—we reflect on how authoritarian education is challenged, contested and interrupted in service of liberation and liberatory praxes.

An authoritarian education is a “policy and governance project that concentrates power in the hands of the state and the elite;” that narrows or limits how knowledge is produced, who can produce knowledge, and where, when and how it circulates; that reifies ideologies of supremacy along with the “suppression of dissenting pedagogies,” such as those that are oriented toward decoloniality and liberation. An authoritarian education must be unraveled. Thus, we use sewing as a metaphor to describe the *Tres Cuentos* activity. We organize our three stories as *hilando*, *desilando* and *bordando* to center liberation and spiritual activism toward la paperson’s (2017) vision of the *New University*. We see us in the New University where humanizing, decolonial learning unfolds, where education honors Indigenous ways of knowing, and where stewardship for the land, a form of deep care for the environment, are not discourses or metaphors. Instead, these are realities of knowledge co-production *en comunidades libres y tejidas*.

Tejiendos: Theoretical Frameworks

Martín-Baró’s De-ideologization as Liberation

The politics of knowledge production are shaped by the coloniality of power, which describes the hierarchical organization of power over the presumed “others” (Quijano, 2000). Exercised power is systematically reinforced via structures, ideologies and relationships that justify oppression. We contend that the coloniality of power, which forecloses liberatory

possibilities, must be challenged through a decolonial process which disrupts and interrogates the ways things are. In the U.S. context we must acknowledge that it is impossible to artificially separate capitalism from colonialism, including manifestations of white supremacy (Robinson, 1983). The two are dialectically intertwined processes situated at the heart of the nation-state's material formation, which must be studied together to understand the U.S. in its totality as encompassing what the Lebanese Marxist Mahdi Amel called the “colonial mode of production” (1986/2021, p. 48). Education is a necessary site of struggle for dismantling and replacing them. That is, in order for education to be liberatory, we must interrogate the status quo, question what is, and look deeply and reflexively within ourselves, our relations to people and lands, and worlds we transverse (Sonn et al., 2025).

To illustrate this pursuit, in the context of Salvadorean Civil War, and associated grotesque forms of systematized violence and death, Ignacio Martín-Baró, a theologian Jesuit priest and critical social psychologist, wrote extensively about liberation. He was critical of the dominant U.S. psychological model being imported by Latin America, diagnosing its failure to meet the people's needs (Martín-Baró, 1994). Among the common methodological assumptions Martín-Baró observed was the positivism of U.S. psychology; a fixation on the given, over and against the aspirations of people for something different. Because of this dominant conception, he believed the Latin American people suffered from what he called *fatalismo* (fatalism): a belief that their conditions or states of being are unchangeable, and that the best one can do to survive such circumstances is to conform, adapt or assimilate into them. Although Martín-Baró mounts these critiques against psychology, we argue that they can be equally applied to all dominant knowledge production, especially that which characterizes neoliberal authoritarian education.

Refusing to uphold this colonial model, Martín-Baró proposed the need for a new epistemology rooted in the experiences and aspirations of the oppressed. Much of the “common sense” knowledge we accept under neoliberal authoritarian education fails to meet our needs precisely because it has been invented with the needs of colonialism and capitalism in mind. These include notions of an “inherently selfish” human nature, the presumed insurmountability of colonialism, and the teacher as the absolute holder of authoritative knowledge. Consequently, as part of this new epistemology, Martín-Baró offered the concept of de-ideologization as a tool to deconstruct ideologies which naturalize a hierarchical, binary, and

colonial reality as unchangeable. De-ideologization is therefore an essential concept to guide understandings of authoritarianism in education.

De-ideologization is the practice of critically analyzing the way things are and refusing to accept them, necessarily fostering collective action to transform that reality according to a vision of liberatory education. In doing so, one realizes that “the truth of the [oppressed] is not in their present oppression but rather in the tomorrow of their liberty” (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 27). When coloniality is thus challenged, the monopoly of the ruling class on the production of knowledge is destabilized; nothing is taken for granted, as fact or absolute truth (Sonn et al., 2025). *Educación*, beyond just education in the learning sense, should serve a greater purpose, which is liberation; the need for knowledge that recognizes collective suffering and takes easing that suffering as its primary duty. This last part aligns well with Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism.

Anzaldúa’s *Conocimiento* for Spiritual Activism

As a scholar-activist, Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1981, 1987, 2022) utilized words as weapons to wield power to challenge oppressions. Anzaldúa’s work exemplifies the complexities of identity, subjectivity and personhood as evidenced in the evolution of her thinking on *mestizaje*, queerness, borderlands, oppression, love and spirituality. Although most of her writings underscore the centrality of hybridity, the borderlands, identity and consciousness, particularly in regard to Indigeneity, colonialism, and Spanish colonization, her scholar-activism was constantly evolving. The seven stages of *conocimiento*, with the culminating stage of spiritual activism toward she named as *El Mundo Zurdo* (the left-handed world), demonstrate her praxis. Specifically, her attempts to go beyond *borderland* and *mestizaje* toward a radical relationality, that is a militant solidarity that unsettles colonialism, white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy and their intersections.

Conocimiento is a cosmovision of introspective, reflexive, sensory and relational awareness that invites transformation, connection with all things being, and healing from oppressions (Fernández & Gamero, 2018). Anzaldúa’s path toward *conocimiento*, characterized by seven threaded interconnected stages, ends with spiritual activism. Reaching the final stage of spiritual activism does not imply that the journey of *conocimiento* has ended. Instead, as evidenced in Anzaldúa’s life, it means there is an expressed, embodied and enacted commitment to sustained deep reflection of the interlacing of oppression. *Conocimiento* is having a

consciousness of the machination of power. To be guided by imagination, intuition, and inward/outward reflexivity is to have the *conocimiento* to resist reproducing oppressive power that shackles us away from liberation.

The journey through *conocimiento* begins with *el arretrato*, characterized by the clashing of subjectivities that produce discomfort. The unsettling experience of tension is necessary to move toward the second stage: *Nepantla*. In *Nepantla* there are contradictions; perceptions that are juxtaposed, opposites that are merged into hybrids. The clashing creates an in-betweenness, which serves as a contact zone for new or alternative beginnings, for the crossing-over to a re-awakening where liberation is possible. The creation of what is possible necessitates the third stage, *Coatlicue*. That is, of letting go, challenging, and refusing to acquiesce to the status quo, or society's colonial norms. The undoing work of *Coatlicue* is not done alone; rather it is relational in community with others, where transformation begins and leads to the fourth stage: the call. Unlike the previous stages, the call is an aperture to co-build with, and in the company of others, liberatory conditions to uphold dignity and freedom. Threaded stories, and experiences are brought together for the fifth stage of *Coyolxauhqui*. Through welding, the sixth stage of *conocimiento* known as the blow-up, emerges to offer an alternative, a new reality away from the ways things are, and toward what they can and must be. Spiritual activism, the final stage, emphasizes the value of relationality across differences. The centrality of personal development as self-work is described in Anzaldúa's spiritual activism, noting it is a: "critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and differences within self and between others ... finding common ground by forming holistic alliances ... enacting spiritual activism" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 545). As a profoundly relational process, spiritual activism cultivates meaningful understandings among disparate experiences, realities, and individual and societal conditions. It bridges across axes of power and oppression; all paths of life are merged to a deep, relational liberatory understanding.

To resist the entrapments of authoritarianism in U.S. education, and its institutions, such as the university, we have offered two frameworks. First, Martín-Baró's orientation toward liberation as de-ideologization. Second, Anzaldúa's spiritual activism as a process of *conocimiento*. We use both as guides or antidotes to resist colonial forms of knowledge production and authoritarianism. We cannot discuss the politics of knowledge production

without a recognition of the colonial roots that seeded our understanding of modernity, or how we experience the colonized world. What we know stems from coloniality and colonialism, our acknowledgement of this is fundamental for their undoing and the sharpening of our liberatory standpoint.

Process: *Tres Cuentos* Activity

We resist an authoritarian education by bringing all of ourselves into the structure of education, into what we learn, how and why it is taught as it is. By recognizing the lineage and genealogies of our knowledge, we trace the long, enduring and ever evolving struggle of liberating ourselves through an education oriented toward liberation. We understand and posit that knowledge is and must be produced beyond the interests of the self, and serve to recenter histories of the past, whilst renewing our visions for future generations— and always in community with others and the planet. We may not see it in our lifetime, yet we offer our voices as testimonios in written form, to the chorus of voices past and yet to be who call for liberatory education. *Tres Cuentos* can serve as an exercise for practicing radical hope, freedom dreaming, and decoloniality as knowledge production. We begin by describing our process, or methodology, before proceeding onto the product, which are our respective *Tres Cuentos* of how we are confronted by and refusing to submit to authoritarianism in education.

We draw inspiration from Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento*, and Joanna Macy's (1991) Buddhist teachings, specifically "The Three Stories" exercise. In this exercise Macy asks us to reflect and engage with three distinct versions or realities of our current times. These include: Business as Usual; The Great Unraveling; and The Great Turning. In the first story power and privilege are left unchallenged or unquestioned for it is assumed that society will adapt to these pressing conditions, characterized by a mode of survival. In the second story the fullest expression of catastrophe, or worst case scenario, is imagined and described: hyper-militarization, surveillance, authoritarianism, ecoclimatic disasters and widening economic disparities tear at the fabric of society. Lastly, in the third story we imagine the opposite of "unraveling" and instead bring forward a vision of renewal, transformation, and relationality with all that is. The last story emphasizes interdependent co-existence through the honoring of lands and environment. Building from these three themes or elements of Macy's The Three Stories, we adapted ours to describe our own subjective experiences as we encounter them within the

academy and the university. Writing from our unique positionalities as a student and faculty we responded to the following prompts, each one corresponding to our version of the *Tres Cuentos*. Acknowledging the limitations of our narrow positionalities, we offer these to invite educators from all communities to adjust and modify them as appropriate and beneficial to their unique community of learners, as well as in alignment with their teaching or pedagogical approach.

- *Hilando, First Story: How are you experiencing the university? What is abnormal that is starting to feel or become “normalized”?*
- *Desilando, Second Story: What is the worst vision of the university? Imagine the university of oppression. How similar or dissimilar is it from what is now?*
- *Bordando, Third Story: What does a humanizing education look and feel like? What would a New University be—one where liberation and decoloniality are actualized in material, concrete ways?*

Product: Our *Tres Cuentos*

We write each of these three stories as testimonios—perhaps as letters to each other, in which we build a relational dialogue that affirms and validates experiences as differentially positioned knowledge produced within the university, academy, and structure of education. Our unconventional methodology and writing approach is another way we challenge authoritarianism as it uplifts the work of LatCrit and women of color feminist scholars who have used testimonios to build movements, foster solidarity and embody pedagogies that render the body as a site of knowledge production (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Spinning—*Hilando*

The focus of this story is on documenting the spinning continuation of everyday living under global capitalism. Adapting our first story from Macy’s (1991) concept of writing about the “business as usual,” this *cuento* centers on the “marching orders” of working under a capitalist system that exploits labor, prioritizes profit and overlooks individual, societal and environmental wellbeing. Reflecting upon aspects of Anzaldúa’s state of *Nepantla*, where tensions arise and hybridity emerges, this story reflects the process of reconciling the loose

ends of what is contradictory, at odds with how things can be. Manifestations of this are in alignment with authoritarian education, as they include surveillance technologies, hyper-militarization, and dehumanizing tough-on-crime policies that seep into our everyday lives.

Jesica's Primer Cuento. Every day there is some catastrophe unfolding near and far. The Palestinians' struggle to be free, Venezuela under siege, threats of nuclear conflict with Iran, economic tensions with China, and México's *narco-gobierno*. In the U.S. law enforcement, I.C.E., and the military collude to terrorize communities, separate families, and sever any sense of normalcy, turning winters all the more chilling and jarring to the heart and soul. As conditions continue to reify themselves through policies, and public discourse in news and social media, I notice that for some people life continues as usual. Some people go about their day unconcerned, comfortably as if nothing was happening—or perhaps they know something is happening but the thought of facing it, acknowledging what is, feels too much of a weight to carry. The students move about their day from class to class with their faces fixed to their phones. Faculty appear overwhelmed, tired, and taxed by the political climate that censors, surveils and polices what we can and cannot say, what we do and how we do it. I wait for the university to release a statement in response to all that has been unfolding; the occupation of Minnesota by I.C.E., the grotesque sweeping of people on the presumption of being undocumented, and families fearing for their lives, sheltering at home or in community spaces, yet unable to escape the I.C.E.'s tear gas that as seeped through the cracks of doors, windows and walls. Nothing of this is “business as usual” yet society appears to be moving along; the university is one structure that participates in the charade that all is well. Students are more stressed about their midterms and papers, their internships and career prospects, as well as the upcoming Greek Life events, parties and social scene. The Super Bowl is around the corner. There are concerns of I.C.E. presence. Unfathomed by it, there are university announcements of campus closure, traffic, and security protocols. I am wondering if these protocols are to protect the university or the students and communities that might be threatened by the rumors that I.C.E. will be roaming around the streets of San José. No amount of technology can protect us from the violence. On the contrary it colludes and reinforces such that our bodies and identities are policed. The classroom, what was once a safe and brave space, has become a place of confinement where we are expected to teach without polarizing issues, and present

both sides; issues or topics are to be considered neutral. Violence is not neutral, there are no two sides to it. Dare we resist to see violence as usual. It is not, it never was and never will be.

Alexis's Primer Cuento. If I were to describe in a simple image the world that I see before me today, it would be as such: college frat parties on top of the mass graves of over 5,000 murdered Muwekma Ohlone people. “If Kamala were president, we’d be at brunch,” says one placard at a No Kings protest. How nice, no? To be able to turn away and immerse oneself in “business as usual,” so long as it all does not affect one personally. I suppose it is but a sign of an education system in service of capitalism and colonialism to socialize a self-serving, uncritical population. The student of history will be familiar with the savagery this country was born upon, and which unfolds before us as this rotten empire reaches its 250th birthday: its continued support of Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians; its continued attacks on Iran and all of West Asia; its continued threats against Latin America for daring to pry the boot off their necks—Venezuela, Cuba, México, Colombia; its continued incarceration and brutalization of Black people, and kidnapping of immigrants and citizens alike in the name of an Anglo national mythology; its continued erasure and theft of Indigenous peoples; its continued patriarchal exaltation of rapists and pedophiles to its highest offices; all while it continues to bludgeon, survey, and persecute any dissenter who threatens to send this bloody order crashing down. I am daily afflicted with horror and nausea at the site of the putrid opulence, the decadence, the meaningless consumerism of this society—the animals it turns us into—and the genocide, the rape, the historical subjugation it is all built upon. The sheer comfort the west gorges itself upon, the benumbed idiocy and apathy it inflicts on millions who ignore the genocidal crimes of their government, so long as their consumption remains uninterrupted. I see a profoundly sick society. A population of isolated egos clinging, with terror, at the prospect of annihilation, yet who see the community as a threat to their authenticity. And what authenticity! The “authenticity,” the “freedom,” to behave like animals, to binge Netflix shows, order Doordash, spend their entire check on designer clothing, and tune into more banal celebrity gossip... and the Super Bowl! All while *spitting* on the poor, the oppressed, the exploited in the Global South. Has this empire not reduced us to spiritually sick and dehumanized oppressors? Compliant, complicit beneficiaries, robbed of our humanity? Of our capacity to see that none of this is normal?

Unraveling—*Desilando*

The focus of the next story is on recognizing the "shock" of systemic violence. Similar to what Anzaldúa (2002) names as an *arrebato*—the unsettling of consciousness by rupture and contradiction—Macy (1991) describes this as “the ongoing collapse of all life forms and human structures” (prologue). That is, where ecological, biological, and social systems are commodified by an industrial growth society or “business as usual.” In naming this second story as a process of unraveling we signal that systems do not fall over by their own, on the contrary, resistance is needed. Oppressive systems do not fall linearly overnight, but dialectically through iterations of collective action, education and transformation. Ceasing to serve us psychically, as well as spiritually and physically, these oppressive systems must eventually unravel. Constant resistance, revolution and world-making via a liberatory education are essential components of this unraveling.

Jesica’s Segundo Cuento. I feel privileged to be on sabbatical during this very difficult and tumultuous time. I cannot imagine what it must be like to be in the classroom as violence continues with no stopping in sight. Enough is enough, is what most are clamoring, and I see it on my way home over freeway drives, and pedestrian bridges where students, youth and families are gathering. “There is no freedom in a state of violence” reads the banner above highway 85 south. Society is unraveling, and I can see people suffering at what they experience and witness, at what they long to do yet are unsure about how to. Nevertheless, they hold one to each other’s pain and hurting because it seems that is all they can do. Some listen, others talk about what is happening, but the why remains unspoken. The why is the key; it is the root to our understanding of the causes of these systemic, interconnected, interwoven structural, relational and interpersonal violence. The university cannot longer hold its silence as students, faculty and students demand an acknowledgement of the events of I.C.E. violence. Students are starting to miss classes, some have returned home to make sure they are there to protect, advocate and shield in some way or form their families. My home has been offered as a place of shelter and comfort. This is the least I can do. After all, I am on sabbatical, and I am advised to not be on campus to protect myself from service requests, and other demands. I cannot detach myself from the relationships of collectivized care, relational solidarity and *acompañamiento* that are characteristic of what I imagine as the New University. I reach out to a few students whose contacts I have on my personal phone, and I offer what I can; words of affirmation, *animo* and

an open door to my home. The unraveling places me at a crossroads of what is ethical, moral and “right,” as well as what may be construed by the university as violation of my responsibilities and duties as an educator. Am I wrong to offer my home to students who feel unsafe? Am I violating the FERPA agreement when I am told by a student to contact their family if they go “underground” while the fear and transitions of what's unfolding in the area are silenced? Perhaps after the Super Bowl things will quiet down a bit more. In the Youth for Justice Project afterschool program the middle schoolers are talking about the fear they feel, their concerns for their future, and their anger at seeing families and children their age separated by I.C.E. and local law enforcement. Bad Bunny sets the context for the Super Bowl, and they are inspired by what we stated at the Grammy's: “*¡Fuera ICE! No somos salvajes. No somos animales. No somos aliens. Somos humanos. Y somos Americanos*” (“I.C.E. out! We're not savages, we're not animals, we're not aliens. We are humans, and we are Americans”). Society is unraveling with deep pain. I bear witness, and feel the wound. Let us heal together.

Alexis's Segundo Cuento. What sound does an empire make as it dies? I think they thrash about, violently and unpredictably; they are dragged, kicking and screaming, into the records of history. For all its bold proclamations and violent spectacles, the US empire is frail. But how much suffering will the world have to endure before the sun sets on this empire? How much longer will the university continue to lend its money and labor to weapon-making and imperialist ideology? How much longer will the humanities and social sciences, mired in fatalistic and ineffectual specialization for the sake of high publications and careerism, fail to answer to the needs of the oppressed? I am frequently demoralized by the endless suffering the university silently builds itself upon, and the “moral apathy,” the “death of the heart,” as James Baldwin once put it. As we write, it is also the Lenten season. Though not particularly religious, I align deeply with the Lenten ethos of relational spirituality, discipline, reflection, and transformation. It is a time to slow down, and think. This system, as it does to so many others, wears me down; I am always on the go these days, ever low on sleep; academics, work, community organizing; I often skip meals because I am too busy to prepare them. What a dogged life we are subjected to; and yet I revel in the struggle, because what is there to sacrifice for which is more meaningful than collective liberation? Still, a pause is warranted, from time to time. So I reflect on how I got here, to where I am now. What do I have to offer at this moment? Amidst the suffering around me, where can I find growth? How can I support others in their growth? What

must I sacrifice? Revolution requires death and rebirth; of this I am convinced. It requires that I strangle those parts of myself—the capitalist, the colonizer—which this system has deposited within me like parasites. Let this turmoil enable me, then, to find deeper connection with and commitment to easing the suffering of my oppressed brothers and sisters around the globe. May I take on their suffering as my own, and find growth in the rupture. The drape of Catholic guilt so ingrained in Mexican culture weighs heavily on my body—but it is somehow beautiful, and moves me to action, too. Now is the time to rid myself of the fear of death, and adopt a deeper love of life. Not egoic, infantile existence—but life.

Embroidering—Bordando

Lastly, the third story involves re-stitching fragmented experiences into re-imagining knowledge production for collective human flourishing. This process of re-stitching aligns well with Anzaldúa's stage of *Coyolxauhqui*, the mending that strives to merge and bring possibilities together. In resonance with Anzaldúa's spiritual activism, Macy (1991) notes that this story has been given a range of names by contemporary social thinkers, such as the "ecological revolution" or "sustainability revolution." Naming it as the Great Turning, Macy (1991) writes: "The third story is the central adventure of our time: the transition to a life-sustaining society. This transition, which is well underway when we know where to look (prologue)." Our aim with naming and recognizing what is happening is to survive the first two stories and bring more people and leverage resources to the third story: the creation of a life-sustaining society. In envisioning what could be, one sharpens their perception of the actual, concrete ways we, as students and educators, must engage in the project transforming education. The third story serves as both a needle and thread, the compass and the lens to sharpen our vision.

Jesica's Tercer Cuento. We held class along the seaside shores of Natural Bridges where Anzaldúa would chase the waves, teasing the force of the waters, feeling both the coldness and the warmth of the sun as it peeked: the Golden Hour. We gathered around in a circle reading poetry as theory, reflecting on the journey to this moment where learning is communal, deeply collective, relational and embodied. Our learning is not divorced from our environment. Our activism guides us in our inquiry, insight and innovation to question the questions, and remain curious and open to learn. Thus, we expand the repertoire of knowledge. We listen mindfully. We breathe at the pace of the winds, to the sound of the

water and birds; ebbs and flows. Who would have imagined that we'd be holding class this way—outside and in the open. Nature is a teacher, so generous and boundless without limits or conditions. We are accompanied by one of the Amah Mutsun Elders that has cared for the lands and the preservation of the region's Indigenous heritage. We are privileged as well to have the presence of a collective of activist scholars, community organizers, artists and creatives who have joined forces to stop the building of an immigrant detention facility in the Central Coast of California, a region ripe with agriculture. Abolition is the topic of today's open class; one that is never easy to comprehend as it is often understood as the elimination of prisons and policing, the defunding of law enforcement, and the emancipation of slavery. Yet abolition is more than demands and discourses. It is the elimination of violence in all its forms and manifestations. When life is supported, sustained and cared for, when lives are protected, honored, and treated with dignity and respect, that is abolition. We move beyond the horizon of *freedom from* toward *freedom to be*. True liberation. We explore these topics through a historical lens, charting the trajectories of coloniality, enslavement and capitalism to the fall of the structures and systems that once conditioned us and generations before us. Even the regime of techno-capitalism failed and fell apart because people could no longer tolerate the suffering of being disconnected from the organic natural elements of life. Today, in this life, we learn through interbeing, interdependence, collaboration and creative connective action with each other, with the environment and with the histories that help us learn and grow to be in the right relationship to all. Education is no longer relegated to the physical space of a school or university. We learn through intergenerational dialogues, we invite and welcome those in our communities to share their expertise and experiences. Each one teaches the other, and we find comfort and ease in the capacity to express ourselves without censorship. We bring ourselves whole, and we breathe with ease. Mindfully bridging our body and mind, we open up the space for *conocimiento*—that wisdom or *sabiduria*—toward an education that Anzaldúa described as a spiritual activism, and Martín-Baró as liberation.

Alexis's Tercer Cuento. I am under no illusion that I will live to see the day of liberation. I am certain, however, that it will come. Even in my limited historical being, I envision what the future holds, and I am reminded of the words I once saw on an art piece: "Rivers will flow through the carcasses of settler-colonies." And isn't that precisely what will happen? Rivers of life, of solidarity, of creativity, bringing every living creature together? A community, at last,

of *liberated* beings, free from the shackles of subjugation. Money, capital, private property, war; these are things of the past. The air smells so clean, and it's full of birds and insects. The children gather around in a circle, in a vast garden full of plants native to the region, tended to by themselves in common, learning from and embodying the practices of Indigenous stewardship. There is scarcely a flat lawn in sight. There are no billboards, no advertisements, in the sky. From the circle, they read about such epochs—of colonialism and capitalism—and it all sounds so bizarre to them. It all seems so dysfunctional, irrational even. And yet they look back upon those who came before them, and who struggled, sacrificed, and even gave up their lives to build the world they now inhabit. They create altars for the fallen, write poetry for their ancestors, and sing ballads for the triumphant. These children— these students— do not see themselves as isolated beings, but as deeply interconnected. They carry forward the same project as their ancestors: to build a better world, to live in harmony with the planet, to meet one another's needs. The New University is not the property of an individual, or of a few, but instead belongs to everyone. Tuition is an antiquity, and students, their needs met by the community, do not have to worry about alienating work, rent, healthcare bills, taking care of family, and so forth. In a word, they are free to devote their entire being to study, to discovery, to creative labor, to art, to poetry, to music, to love ... in a word, to life. No longer are technology and entertainment isolating and dehumanizing escapes; they are products of the fully expressed human spirit. Each student brings to the table their passion for life; all learn and labor in community; all offer their gifts to one another, and humanity, for the first time, sees innovation, inquiry, and the pursuit of knowledge in the name of collective flourishing, and not war, domination, or accumulation. Indeed, rivers are flowing; flowers are blooming; and renewed life is emerging, amidst the ruins of settler-colonies.

Conclusion

Authoritarianism in education has caused some of us, as educators and students alike, to adjust our teaching and learning. Pedagogies have been shape-shifted to avoid the scrutiny of risking our careers or professions under the heavy surveillance of what is taught, along with threats to academic freedom, and student evaluations that carry a weight to our standing within the university, and beyond the academy. We refuse to operate under the education of an authoritarian colonial capitalist gaze.

A refusal of the status quo, and the fostering of collective action through everyday acts of resistance, characterizes aspects of de-ideologization and spiritual activism. In relation to knowledge production, de-ideologization interrogates oppressive conditions and cultivates a vision of liberatory education, while spiritual activism offers practices, such as relationality, reflection and holding complexities or tensions to bring about the emergence of new insight, or *conocimiento*. In this paper we have described the *Tres Cuentos* activity to help us resist the authoritarianism of education, and to move us toward the cultivation of liberation and a spiritual activism in dire times.

The *Tres Cuentos* can help educators, students, and the general public as well, imagine, act, relate, reflect and dialogue toward ways to move in the direction of freedom, justice and equity, including *beyond* the traditional “classroom.” Whether it is in an urban youth program, a recovery circle, a mothers’ club, a rural community center, or a worker-owned cafe, the *Tres Cuentos* belong to everyone. There is enough thread to pull through a needle, however narrow or wide it may be, we can all come together to stitch a tapestry of liberation. Conditions that can support us through this process include engaging in ethical critical reflexivity about one’s positionalities, developing collective community agreements to be followed by all who participate in the activity, as well as fostering trust and rapport through active listening, being present, and ensuring confidentiality of what is shared. We encourage all who wish to take on this activity to foster a critically compassionate space, one that is both brave and safe—yet always compassionate, for where there is compassion there is a humanizing relationality.

Acknowledging the limitations of our activity as it was conducted by one student and one faculty, we invite readers from all walks of life and society to generate tools and resources toward supporting themselves, individually and relationally, as well as collectively in reimagining otherwise. We must armor ourselves with—and democratize the production of— tools or strategies that can move us toward liberation and enacting spiritual activism. As educators, we must foster culturally sustaining teaching practices that can uplift and center student voices and subjectivities. As students, we must seize opportunities in the classroom and beyond to occupy the space with the vision of education that oppressed peoples demand— and have been demanding since the formation of the Third World Liberation Front (la paperson, 2017). The *Tres Cuentos* can help us embrace learning and teaching as embodied, relational and affective, as rooted in the interconnectedness of struggle and suffering alongside love and joy, which are

infused with radical hope that powers the spiritual activism necessary to build a pluriversal world. Fused together this demonstrates how stories that call us toward being and doing differently can animate pluriversality as the freedom to be—spiritual activism as liberatory, and liberation as awakening spirit.

We call into being an education that prioritizes humanizing relationships, relational knowledge and pluriversality over imperialist nation-state interests (Kumashiro, 2024). We desire an education where we remain open and receptive to grappling with discomforts to move through them, address their root cause, and work toward transformation, and hence liberation in a relational, reciprocal and mutually accountable way. We make the case for embracing contradictions, dialectical knowing, and even suffering as sites of potential awakening, re-imagining and enacting solidarity rather than as a problem or threat. Moreover, we see ourselves as students, teachers and learners making space for and putting into practice Anzaldúa's kindred spirit and activism: embracing pluriversality in ways of learning and knowing, and creating space for ways of teaching and learning that can hold nuances and complexities, whilst resisting authoritarian education.

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