

SHIFTING THE COLONIAL NARRATIVE: RE-EXAMINING AND RECLAIMING
INTERNALIZED IDENTITIES WITHIN *MESTIZAJE*

By

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ABSTRACT

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The dehumanization of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) during the colonial period has led to an internalization of colonial beliefs about ourselves informed and reinforced by settler-colonial, nation-states that continue to occupy our lands. This thesis explores how the construction of the mexican¹ identity of *mestizaje* is based on the logic of racial hierarchy embedded within the colonial construct of the state and this has led to an internalized colonial mentality and inferiority complex among mexicans. These internalized racial hierarchies have become a part of mexican society and culture which becomes apparent in the way that we as a community, both in mexico and abroad, continue to devalue our worth as BIPOC people and contribute to the erasure of our people. Exploring the various forms of identities which have been impacted by colonial ideology allows for a reflexive process in helping us as oppressed people undo the internalized mentality forced onto us. I use a re-examination of historical narratives concerning the genesis of *mestizaje* and trace it through its continued progression in our present-day communities using auto-ethnography. The ability to tell our own stories and

¹ I have chosen to not capitalize the names of settler-colonial nation-states throughout this thesis. I do as a form of resistance of the illegal occupation of Indigenous lands.

exploration of our roles within settler-colonial nation-states becomes pertinent in sparking conversations that acknowledge and transcend the colonial narratives and views about ourselves.

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As I write this thesis, I am on the occupied homelands of the Wiyot peoples. I am grateful to live in a beautiful area that continues to be maintained by the efforts of the Wiyot people, the original stewards and inhabitants of the land, as they fight against the continued occupation of their land.

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INTRODUCTION

Opening Thoughts and Reflections

Being part of a colonized world means having all aspects of one's life being dominated by a hegemonic power. It means being trapped within a dominant narrative. Being part of a colonized world means feeling lost within community, family and oneself, if you are not part of the dominant group. Being part of a colonized world means that I sit in front of a computer for hours, days, and weeks trying to figure out what to say. Struggling to write. Struggling to write about myself, my family, my people. My people that have been colonized, my family which has been colonized to the point that we no longer know who we are or who we come from. Who we are connected to. As I try to figure out what to write I keep in mind the following questions: How do I write about an indigeneity and Indigenous stories without romanticizing, tokenizing and further harming Indigenous peoples? How do I write about my experience with Indigeneity within myself without further contributing to the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples around the world? Before I continue, I would like to state that this academic piece does not speak for all Indigenous peoples or a whole ethnic group. This thesis is my response to the internalization of colonial mentality that settler-colonialism has imposed upon me. It is my personal venture and attempt to be part of a larger movement within Indigenous studies to 'decolonize' and transform how we write about ourselves and each other. Drawing from Linda T. Smith (2012), this thesis is how I *rewrite* and *reright* my history and my

ancestor's histories. What started as a standard western academic thesis with traditional research questions transformed into a journey of self-discovery. I was led to grapple with my identity and how settler colonialism has directly impacted me and my loved ones. My hope is that one day each and all of our histories, as colonized peoples, will be regained; and through *rewriting*, *rerighting*, and self-determination, we as a whole, can disrupt and be liberated from the hold settler-colonialism has on us.

Resisting Settler-Colonial Engulfment

Human beings have no other way of knowing we exist, or what we have survived, except through the vehicle of story.

-Deborah A. Miranda, *Bad Indians*

They don't realize that America can't exist without separating them from their identity, because if we had some sense of who we really are, there's no way in hell we'd allow this country to push its genocidal consensus on our homelands. This ignorance exists, but it can be destroyed.

-Immortal Technique, "The Poverty of Philosophy"

Often times my people's story begins with the invasion of the amerikkkas². The invasion of the amerikkka's brought pain and massacre to the land and livelihood of

² In *America, Amerikkka: Elect Nation and Imperial Violence* (2007), Rosemary Ruether traces the historical and ideological patterns of America. American claims of being a righteousness nation-state is based on hypocrisy since it continually exploits, and harms marginalized groups, Ruether labels this America as Amerikkka. I have therefore chosen to refer to America as amerikkka throughout this thesis as it demonstrates the continued oppression of BIPOC people within these occupied lands.

Indigenous peoples. conquistadors³ spread diseases, committed horrific acts of violence to Indigenous peoples, stole the land, the wealth, and attempted to eradicate Indigenous cultures. The invasion of the amerikkkas cost us, as colonized peoples, our connection to the land and to each other, therefore creating a disconnect within ourselves. The invasion of the amerikkkas was an invasion on our ancestors, it is an invasion that is on-going through the generations that have come since then. It has been and continues to be an invasion on our identities. The invasion of the amerikkkas means that my family's story begins with mis bisabuelos paternos. The only official record possessing my abuelos and bisabuelos names is on my father's birth certificate. Our stories and traditions were altered and lost as a result of the genocide, oppression, and attempted erasure of our people. mexican genealogy is scarce. The historical legacies of the spanish conquest, mexican Inquisition, and the complexities of immigration, have resulted in a loss of records and stories for many families. It is common for children from mexican households to know little beyond their great-grand parents' due to the lack of official records and oppression of our histories. Our identities spotty with gaps. My earliest memory of mis abuelos paternos, and earliest memory in general, was during my baptism at the age of three. Both mi abuelita Ninfa Tenorio Zarate (née Zarate Vazquez) y mi abuelito Prisciliano Tenorio Rodriguez were born in a small town in Coatzingo, Puebla, mexico. However, at the time of my baptism both of mis abuelitos had already moved to

³ Just as I have chosen not to capitalize the names of settler-colonial nation-states, I have also chosen to not capitalize the names of conquistadors or any traditionally capitalized terms that have colonial ties (unless they are being directly quoted), this includes but is not limited to the terms: west, western, european, eurocentric, conquistador, columbus.

and had been living in Tijuana, B.C., Mexico for thirteen years. They had come to the United States to visit for a few days in order to see their granddaughter get baptized, and my only memory from that day was when my parents handed me over to my grandparents and I began to cry out. I was confused by what was happening at the time and did not recognize my grandparents. All I wanted was for my parents to take me back and hold me. My father, Silviano Tenorio Zarate, was frustrated, and nothing was going as planned. When my father retells the story of that day, he makes it a point to mention that he did not want to baptize me and did it solely out of being pressured by his parents. As a child my father had Catholicism forced onto him, just as it was forced onto our Indigenous ancestors. His memories of forced indoctrination left him with a corrupt and violent view towards institutionalized religion. His sentiments towards Catholicism are both valid and reflective of colonial legacies. Like most Catholic Mexicans, I had to be indoctrinated in order for my soul to be saved, a belief that is tightly held in many Mexican households as a direct result of the Mexican Inquisition and forced religious conversions of Indigenous peoples.

The legacy of colonialism is still present today in many Mexican households. It is deeply embedded within family dynamics. The inherited systems of oppression stemming from the violence and genocide of Indigenous peoples, has left a nation lost. Internalized colonial mentality has contributed to the identity crisis of the Mexican people. This thesis explores how the construction of the Mexican identity of *mestizaje* is based on the logic of racial hierarchy embedded within the colonial construct of the state which has led to an internalized colonial mentality and inferiority complex among Mexicans. Through the

examination of the *mestizo* identity, my intention is to shed light to the internalization of settler-colonialist ideals, continued dehumanization and erasure of both Indigenous peoples and Black folk, and suppression of nondominant narratives within Mexican culture. I do this by exploring my family's history, through snapshots and remembrance of my own life, stories, and instances of our own internalization of colonial mentality as a family. As Chicana, feminist scholar, Elba Sánchez asserts in her writings, our historical experiences "may be useful as a means to gain understanding about the development of multiple identities and the political-consciousness that is a part of each level of identity development" because, for us, "words and writings have been a way to deal with the powerful emotions that come with injustice" (Sánchez 2003). I am endeavoring to explore through family histories the complexity of colonialism, the ongoing structure that produce violence physically, mentally and emotionally on all colonized peoples. Our identities have been invaded, so in order to explore this invasion I rely on Indigenous, Black and Brown scholars in order to engage with Indigenous and decolonial frameworks on how we write and produce knowledge about ourselves.

The historical and continued characterization of all Indigenous peoples around the world has been one dominated by western narratives. western narratives like the "discovery" of the land re-enforce the false belief that this land was once empty, erasing the truth that Indigenous people have been inhabitants of the land since time immemorial. western narratives erase the complexity and advancement of the culture and polities that were the backbone of what would become "Mexico". The city of Tenochtitlan, which is now known as Mexico City, was a sacred city populated with a vast number of different

Indigenous tribes. Tenochtitlan has been described as a beautiful city, with complex water system built by the Aztecs and natural riches (Galeano 1997; Mundy 2015). Furthermore, in *Spiritual Geographies of Indigenous Sovereignty Connections of Caxcan with Tlachialoyantepec and Chemehuevi with Mamapukaib* (2019), scholar Daisy Ocampo (Caz' Ahmo Nation of zacatecas, Mexico), explores the memories of two sacred sites in Mexico and the United States. Throughout Ocampo's writing, she details the ways in which Native documentation of histories, which vary through forms dance and storytelling, are frequently disregarded and unavailable in traditional historical scholarship (Ocampo 2019). The lands, images, dances, and stories of Tenochtitlan and the Indigenous people who live in Mexico have frequently been overlooked and erased throughout history and dominant narratives.

As a part of the settler-colonial process, Mexico as a nation-state founded on the genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Mexico and enslavement of Black folk, continually erases Indigeneity and Black people, that can be observed within many Mexican family communities, particularly Mexican households within another settler-colonial state like the United States of America. Additionally, the erasure of Black folk from the dominant narrative in Mexico is based on the racialization that occurs within settler-colonialism. This is a reproduction of the "hegemonic process of colonial settlement" (Wolfe 1999: 3). This is demonstrated in the way that Mexicans identify themselves through *mestizaje*. Our identity engulfed in the reproduction of settler-colonialism.

As a first-generation American born child of Mexican parents, I have witnessed the ways in which our culture perpetuates settler-colonial ideals, belittles our Indigenous

ancestors and overlooks Black folx in our community. In order to fully understand the dynamics of control, racial hierarchies, and Indigenous and Black erasure in Mexican households, it is important to understand the history and process of settler colonialism which focus on replacing Indigenous peoples in order to take control of their (home)land. It requires genocide and oppression of the original inhabitants of the land. In *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (1999), Wolfe asserts that colonialism is an ongoing process, which continually represses Indigenous peoples. Settler colonialism as a system, interlocks various forms of oppression, such as patriarchy and capitalism. There is a dispossession of land requiring the forced removal of Indigenous life. It is also accompanied by the disenfranchisement and attempted erasure of the people who have the deepest ties to the land. Andrea Smith describes the second pillar of white supremacy as “the logic of genocide” (A. Smith 2006: 2). With the erasure of Native people, the land is no longer tied or owned by anyone. “Through this logic of genocide, non-Native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was Indigenous – land, resources, Indigenous spirituality, or culture” (A. Smith 2006: 2).

Settler colonial states, such as the United States and Mexico, participate in the forced removal and historical erasure of native lives in order to achieve control over land and resources. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang note, “The settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each

day of occupation” (Tuck and Yang 2012: 5). Also embedded within settler colonialism is racial oppression, stemming from otherization of non-western groups which has historically been the primary form of disempowering and exploiting Indigenous and marginalized peoples (Tuck and Yang 2012). For the Indigenous peoples of what is currently called Mexico, this created an imbalance to their traditions and relationships to the land. Colonization and settler colonialism have directly impacted the cultural and spiritual relationships to the lands that have aided to the survival of Indigenous peoples. Ocampo (2019), demonstrates the ways in which the Spanish and settler-colonialism “have affected Caxan’s relationship to Tlachialoyantepec and inhibited their ability to access [their sacred] place to fulfill their community obligations. Caxcans believe that if they cannot pray to Tlachialoyantepec then the world will be unbalanced” (12).

Tlachialoyantepec is the creation mountain for the Caxan, or Caz’ Ahmo people, and a sacred site (Ocampo 2019: 70). In 2002, “Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) claimed ownership of Tlachialoyantepec” (Ocampo 2019: 69). While Tlachialoyantepec has been historically a site of spiritual connection, INAH focused its narrative on the site as the place where the Mixton War, took place, a place where the Spanish massacred people of the land during the conquest (Ocampo 2019: 70). Through this telling of the Caz’ Ahmo people and Tlachialoyantepec, we are reminded of the resilience that Indigenous communities possess within settler colonial structures. The forced oppression and otherization in western narratives tie back to settler colonialism and the colonization to the region.

Further permeating false notions of Indigenous peoples, Black folk and the ways in which we view ourselves as Mexican people is the horrific forced assimilation of us by Western culture. Stories centered around Indigenous peoples and Black people are told so with colonial undertones. Our stories are told with a language that belittles our ancestors and further dehumanizes them. I can recall various times while growing up the language used to describe the Indigenous people of Mexico among my family and my community. The words used to describe people who appeared to “look Indian” created a negative image of them. There were instances when *Indio* or *India* would be used as a form of insult and so you never wanted to be called an *Indio/ India*. When I would remind my family that our ancestry is tied back to our Indigenous ancestors there was a feeling of shame that would fill the room. For them, like much of the Mexican community, there is shame in being reminded that we are tied to Indigenous peoples. To them, the Indigenous people were too weak to protect their land, to protect themselves from the Spanish. We as a people have internalized the dominant stories and views being portrayed about our ancestors. My family, my Mexican friends, my community, preferred to ignore anything tied to Indigeneity, and strived to be associated with the colonizer. Because to them, the colonizer was superior. At the same time, there was never any acknowledgement of Black people in our community. Their stories completely removed.

This form of internalized colonial mentality creates a desire to dissociate ourselves from our Indigenous ancestors and produces further erasure of Black folk from our communities. As noted by scholar Cristalís Capielo Rosario (2019), “colonial mentality is a form of internalized oppression resulting from colonization, in

which the colonizer is believed to be superior to the colonized” (398). The historical hegemonic (mis)representation of our people creates a form of self-hate and abhorrence of all things that tie us to Indigeneity. We self-loath and belittle ourselves, continually attempting to embody the colonizer and erase a part of ourselves. Perhaps this is most clearly demonstrated by Chicana, feminist scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa who writes about the marginalization of the mexican-american identity. “As a person I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something ‘wrong’ with us, something fundamentally ‘wrong’” (Anzaldúa 1987: 67). This is what colonization has done to us. We internalize hate and internalize idea that completely erases a group of people who we share a history with. Both Black and Indigenous identities become invaded by colonial systems.

This thesis is about ending the fails beliefs we have internalized and ending generational trauma so that our future generations can begin healing, revitalizing their traditions, and remembering our ancestors with pride. It is about sparking hard, painful conversations which are crucial for restoration and preservation. It begins here, with a story, my story and my family’s story.

“Culture is ultimately lost when we stop telling the stories of who we are, where we have been, how we arrived here, what we once knew, what we wish we knew; when we stop our retelling of the past, our imagining of our future, and the long, long task of inventing an identity every single second of our lives” (Miranda, xiv)

As a child I was always interested in our family's history, but I would always get the same answer from my parents, *ay Vanessa, yo no se*. We don't know. *Tan a penas conozco los nombres de mis abuelos*, my father would say. The story of my family comes in pieces. Due to the lack record of my ancestors, this thesis becomes more than an academic paper. It is a form of record keeping. A way in which I can tell our story and assure that we are not erased from history and that our story and our struggles as colonized people are read. The dominant narrative no longer gets to dictate who we were and who we are.

The story and the research presented throughout this piece is to ensure that non-dominant voices do not become overshadowed by hegemonic narratives. Decolonized writing begins with the writer. Choosing decolonial epistemology and methodological approaches, is essential in ensuring that research and knowledge produced is intersectional and challenges colonial forms of knowledge production. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) highlights in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" how traditional frameworks must be intersectional in order to broaden the analysis on race. Traditional, western academic writing has been used as a tool of colonization and form of oppression. Uneven power relations are the outcome of a system in which the cycle of oppression is frequently reproduced through the production of traditional, colonial academic frameworks. bell hooks argues the traditional productions of knowledge and authority has been dominated by white scholars with eurocentric ideals

(1989). The traditional dynamic between the researcher and researched creates a collective body in which oppression is inherently intertwined. Those who suffer from social and economic oppression are further subjected to abuse in which they are dehumanized in as a result of the narratives created by colonial powers.

Traditional forms of academic writings are usually detached from oneself and this rigidity does not allow for the free flow of ideas, new forms of imagining and critically thinking, as well as new modes of knowledge production. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012), Linda Tuhiwai Smith critiques the multilayers of western ideals deeply embedded in traditional research, which very much perpetuates a colonial gaze towards Indigenous and Black people. The written accounts and gathering of “information” by early western travelers throughout the world sparked a fascination in “the Other” (Said 1994). Throughout these accounts, the Other came to be defined as groups of non-western ancestry. Researchers have historically gathered and recorded data in a similar manner, very much entrenched with a colonial gaze. As a result, we only read about ourselves as other, never through our own voices or lenses. We internalized colonial descriptions of ourselves because we are constantly written about through this colonial gaze. We internalize colonial mentality because we are not given the space to talk about ourselves. We internalize false notions of ourselves due to the fact that are deemed as not being intellectual enough to produce writings about our own lived experiences. About our own knowledge.

Since the invasion of the amerikkkas, priorities have been determined by western hegemonic powers, signifying that preserved archival documents, artifacts and research by the state have been primarily those to which the state has deemed important. In “Relocations upon Relocations: Home, Language, and Native American Women's Writings” (1995), Inés Hernández-Ávila (Nimiipuu/ Nez Perce) points out how “historically we [are] seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we [are] its topic” (Hernández-Ávila 1995: 502). Keeping in mind that many historical Indigenous documents and artifacts were destroyed during the conquest period and thereafter, there can be a limitation to conducting research. “One of the tactics of indoctrination [has been to] ... silenc[e] and den[y] Native voices and Native languages” (Hernández-Ávila 1995: 495). The limitation of finding and accessing Indigenous documents, artifacts and stories in comparison to western documents and stories can lead to incomplete accounts and analysis that can result in creating harmful, and racist, knowledge production. “These personal and collective histories, including our cultural responses to experience, ground our theoretical perspectives and our reinsertions of ourselves” (Hernández-Ávila 1995: 504). As Inés points out, the si(gh)thing of Indigenous voices, and our own voices, creates the possibility to define ourselves and our people’s sovereignty (Hernández-Ávila 1995). Additionally, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) Frantz Fanon explores the ways in which language is frequently used to dehumanize Black people. Throughout the book he examines the various forms in which language from white scholars and white people about Black folk

has led to an internalization of the representations about themselves. It is important for the written accounts of BIPOC people to come from BIPOC people.

Smith's (2012) decolonial methodologies for knowledge production presents ways in which research can contribute to the counter-narrative that has often been suppressed by traditional forms of writing. "Decolonizing methodologies is not a method for revolution in a political sense but provokes some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation" (L. Smith 2012: xii). The researcher must take responsibility as to how knowledge is produced and ensure the research contributes to the counter-narrative that has often been suppressed.

Our stories as academic scholars are pertinent to the production of knowledge because our lived experiences as historically disenfranchised peoples becomes a testament of our presence and resistance to our dehumanization and erasure of colonial hegemony. Deborah Miranda, Elba Sánchez, Gloria Anzaldúa, among many Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) feminist scholars, highlight the importance of connecting our stories to colonized, institutional spaces. Stories have the capacity to rebuild or silence (Miranda 2013: xiv). Our stories, attached to our identities and emotions, reframe traditional discourse into forms of revisioning the way we produce and intake knowledge. Stories are tied to land, place and space.

Oral traditions and histories passed down through the form of storytelling show us the various ways in which knowledge can be passed down and grasped on a deeper

interpersonal level. “Documentación de una historia o experiencia individual por medio de escritos, dibujos, u otra representación cuyos signos y significados son compartidos; amplía la geografía del espacio individual al espacio comunal. The historiography of an experience is chronicled and shaped through the writer’s use of language, metaphor, cultural signifiers, the content of the work, the socio-political, historical, and cultural context in which the work is produced. The instant the cartohistographer’s experience or vision is documented, it creates a physical, material space with its own geography, ecology, and cosmology” (Sánchez 2003: 26). Storytelling gives power to the writer and researcher, in a field that is primarily dominated by white Western scholars, our forms of producing research through storytelling allows for writers to reclaim their power.

For me, growing up in the united states as a first-generation child of two immigrant parents, my story takes places in-between worlds. As most children of immigrant parents, I lived in a home and community interconnected with the land and stories of my family while at the same time growing up in a land that holds its own stories which I was raised in and form my own stories in. We are constructs of our histories, our experiences. Our identity is tied to our stories and to each other. My examination of identity is linked to histories of two settler-colonial nation-states in which I am a part of: mexico and the united states. My stories tied to my experiences living in-between both worlds.

Writings of us, of our peoples, by us and our people, reminds us there is power within us and our stories. We are not who they, traditional western writers, portray us to

be. We are not savages. We are not dirty. We are not stupid. We are not their version of us.

We are resilient. We are powerful. We are beautiful.

At the core of this thesis is an exploration and discussion as to how the invasion of the amerikkas and foundation of settler-colonial nations have led to an internalized colonial mentality within mexcian households. I use the stories in my life to create an auto-ethnography in which I argue that our replication of our generational traumas and various forms of identities in traditional mexican households, within mexico and abroad, are directly linked to colonization and have contributed to the larger *colonial continuum* outside of and within our communities. My story and my family's story is one based in trauma. Just as I am sure, all oppressed peoples' stories are as well. Sharing our stories is never easy. Sharing our past and our present forces us to relive our traumas. Many times we avoid sharing our stories out of fear of being ridiculed or belittled for our traumas. Writing this thesis has not come easy. It has forced a reflexive process. A process of undoing, unlearning and re-examining. While I acknowledge my privilege and positionality in writing this thesis, my hope for this thesis is to spark a larger conversation between ourselves, friends, families, and communities. A conversation leading to the reflexive process that will help us undo colonial aspects of us that we have internalized and therefore, unintentionally, replicated. This thesis is in memory of all that we, as colonized peoples, have lost and hope to regain.

Nos borran,
continuamente.

Dicen que es tierra de nadie,

terra nullius.

Nos maltratan,

they want to tame us,

but it is them que son los salvajes.

Con sus guerras,

sus genocidio,

sus envidias y la necesidad de acumular y monopolizar vida.

Cielo y tierra.

Intentan borrarlos

Pero aqui seguimos, aqui estamos.

Here we are.

Existiendo.

Resistiendo.

CREATING THE MEXICAN IDENTITY

Imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world.

-Linda T Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*

Just like the Spanish exterminating Tainos, Raping the Black and Indian women, creating Latinos. Mother fuckers made me out of the self-righteous hatred

-Immortal Technique "Point of No Return"

El Mestizo

They attacked our lands, our peoples, and our blood. Forced rape of Indigenous women across what is now north and south amerikkka led to the birth of mixed children. Children with white and Indigenous blood. Blood that was tainted with violence and pain. Our identity runs deep within us. It is in our livelihoods. conquistadors tainted our blood and their settler descendants used it against us. Blood quantum and the caste system determines who was and is or isn't native. Both blood and the ability to define our own identity taken from us. Strategically turned as another tool of colonization. As a tool of erasure. A form of power that leaves a nation questioning their own identity generations later, feeling lost. As people born out of rape and violence, we fight an internal battle every day in our lives. A fight between the internalized colonial mentality and the truth that runs through our veins.

Our culture, as Mexican people, continually denies and erases our Indigenous ancestors and fails to acknowledge the existence of Black Mexicans. Mexican racial ideology begins with the Spanish invasion and genocide of what is now Mexico, carried out by Hernán Cortés and the Spanish crown. The acquisition of territories alongside the forced assimilation and erasure of various cultures that are a part of the nation-state of Mexico is encompassed in the colonization of the land. The brutal attack on the Aztec Empire and massacre of the Indigenous peoples of the land can be traced back to the early 1500s.

Hernán Cortés first arrived in Veracruz, Mexico after fleeing Cuba in 1518 for disobeying orders. About sixty-six years prior to Hernán Cortés and his conquest of Mexico, Pope Nicholas V in 1452 granted the King of Portugal the power to...

“...invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit – by having secured the said faculty, the said King Alfonso, or, by his authority, the aforesaid infante, justly and lawfully has acquired and possessed, and doth possess, these islands, lands, harbors, and seas, and they do of right belong and pertain to the said King Alfonso and his successors”. (Dum Diversas)

Through the doctrine of discovery, european colonizers justified their “God given right” to colonize what they deemed as the new world and justified the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous people and their lands.

After landing in Mayan lands and fighting the Mayan people, hernán cortés and his men obtained a group of girls as a result of defeating the Mayans. Among the group of Indigenous women was Malinalli Tenepat, a Nahua woman, who became the interpreter for cortés. During this time period, the catholic church had already held a strong presence in what is now modern-day latin america. After being baptized and renamed Doña Maria, Malinalli would serve as the translator between hernán cortés and Moctezuma during the conquest of the Aztec Empire. Malinalli can be regarded as one of the most important figures this time period. She is key in understanding the mexican racial ideology of *mestizaje*.

The story frequently told about Malinalli paints her as a treacherous woman who sold out her people. She is commonly addressed as La Malinche or La Chingada (the fucked one). Malinalli is often blamed for the fall of the Aztec empire, the colonial narrative suggests that she and cortés fell in love and she aided in the downfall of her people. She became his “whore” and bore his child. This narrative glosses over the events leading to the downfall of the empire and places the blame onto an Indigenous woman rather than the colonizers who committed genocide. In reality, Malinalli, and her child, were survivors of the rape and violence brought by the spanish.

The language used in colonial stories about Indigenous peoples is intimately connected with the dehumanization of them as peoples which is heavily embedded within settler-colonialism. The truth of the matter is that Malinalli did not bring down the Aztec Empire nor did she betray her people. The Aztec Empire fell from the treacheries committed by conquistadors.

Into this sheepfold...there came some Spaniards who immediately behaved like ravening beasts... And Spaniards have behaved in no other way during the past forty years down to the present time, for they are still acting like ravening beasts, killing, terrorizing, afflicting, torturing and destroying the native peoples, doing all this with the strangest and most varied new methods of cruelty, never seen or heard of before. (Bartolomé de Las Casas)

Indigenous peoples were slaughtered across the “new world”. Horrors committed by European colonizers, without remorse or any form of mercy, were subsequently wiped out from written histories. Their stories of violence and annihilation were erased from colonial narratives, hiding the truths of their horrors.

Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán was one of those who led armies to the north, torturing or burning at the stake native leaders, such as the Tarascan king, while seizing and destroying enormous native stores of food. Guzman later was followed by Alvar Nuñez de Cabeza de Vaca, by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, by Francisco de Ibarra, and countless other conquerors and murderers. As elsewhere, disease, depredation, enslavement, and outright

massacre combined to extinguish entire Indian cultures in Mexico's northwest. (Stannard 1992: 81)

Lo que los conquistadores trajeron a esta tierra fue la violencia, el genocidio. Con ellos vino la muerte. Nuestros ancestros, tan amables, fueron torturados. Ellos siempre serán los salvajes. Nuestros ancestros Indígenas no eran perfectos, también tenían sus defectos. Pero sus defectos nunca se compararán con los de los colonizadores asesinos.

The romanization of Indigenous peoples and their way of being is also rooted within colonial ideals. Indigenous societies were complex. *Nuestros ancestros Indígenas no eran perfectos*, our Indigenous ancestors weren't perfect. By no means were Indigenous people perfect in the sense that they did not have their own social dynamics amongst themselves. In fact, when it comes to the Aztecs, the established political systems were what led to the complex reactions that Cortés was able to exploit. Within the Aztec world, "the Aztecs emerged as a militaristic state that preyed on neighboring tribes... [as] it took less than three centuries for the Aztec society to change from the balanced duality of their earlier times and from the egalitarian traditions of a wandering tribe to those of a predatory state. The nobility kept the tribute, the commoner got nothing, resulting in a class split... The Tlaxcalans were the Aztecs' bitter enemies and it was they who helped the Spanish defeat the Aztec rulers, who were unpopular with their own common people that they could not even mobilize the populace to defend the city" (Anzaldúa 2012: 54- 56). The destabilization of the region, attributed to the complexities of the Aztec society, was exploited by Cortés.

The conquistador also practiced the arts of treachery and intrigue with refined expertise. They had allied themselves with the Tlaxcalans against Montezuma and effectively exploited the split between the brothers Huáscar and Atahualpa... but they also used other weapons- or, if you prefer- other factors operated objectively for the victory of the invaders. Horses and bacteria, for example. (Galeano 1997: 17)

hernán cortés did not “win” against the Aztec empire because he was a “better” fighter but instead he “defeated” the Aztec empire by pitting the Tlaxcalans and the Aztecs against each other.

Additionally, the primary cause of death of Indigenous peoples across the Americas was due to the diseases brought by European colonizers. Their weapons massacred peoples and their diseases cemented the genocide. “Bacteria and viruses were the most effective allies the Europeans brought with them, like biblical plagues” (Galeano 1997: 18). It is because of narratives like Malinalli’s, that it becomes important to note that colonial narratives primarily come from a place of an established social hierarchy that aims to seize and dictate power of land, resources and the histories which detail how they, the colonizers, obtained hegemonic power. Imperial control is established by the invasion of communities, forced oppression, dispossession and exploitation of both people and the ecosystems they are situated in. Control over populations comes through forms of forced oppression and execution of Indigenous populations.

The bodies of Indigenous peoples were perceived as being inferior to that of the European colonizers. Native women's bodies were treated as sexual objects and it was not unlikely for native women to be raped by European white men. In *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, Sarah Deer explores how rape and the sexual violence of Indigenous women was a part of the colonial project and has continued to impact native communities (2015). In the case of Malinalli, it can be inferred that she was a survivor of rape and colonial violence, the narrative of Malinalli's and Cortés so-called loved story is one that is more than likely false as it is rooted within the dominant Western narrative. Discourse, by European colonizers, of the land and people were frequently sexualized in their writings, "gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise" (McClintock 1995: 7). However, it is through Malinalli's and Cortés so-called loved story that gives way to the idea of *mestizaje*. Malinalli and Cortés's child is considered to be the first *mestizo* in Mexico, born out of Indigenous and Spanish blood. The ideology of *mestizaje*, follows the birth of the *mestizo* and the implementation of the caste system in Mexico, and is later used as a form of nation building.

INTERLUDE 1

A Letter to Malinalli Tenepat:

Malinalli,

You have become a significant person in my life. You have empowered me in many ways. The first time I learned about you and your story was at the age of sixteen. I was reading *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa when I first came across your name. It was the first time I read your story, and I became captivated by your strength. It was during this time when I learned how our community, how I, had wrongly used the label of *La Chingada*, that was forced onto you, as a form of shaming people.

The same shame that became forcibly tied to your name is the same shame that was forcibly passed down to us women of Mexican descent. The shame I grew up with and the shame I feel today can be overwhelming at times. I imagine that it was difficult for you to be shamed by your own people. I imagine that it was hard because you were in fact more than what they labelled you to be.

I carry you with me every day of my life. You have taught me of the strength that is within us. I would like to think that if you were here today that we'd be friends. I imagine

you'd be outraged when you would hear of the atrocities that occur on your land. I know you're a fighter and so I know that you'd live every day of your life advocating for your people in all the ways that you possibly could. You were a translator between Cortés and Moctezuma in an attempt to help your people. I know that the blame and shame placed on you is unjust because you weren't the one at fault.

You weren't the false labels they placed on you. You were an incredibly smart, and powerful Indigenous woman who survived the violence that was brought onto your land. You became shamed for being a bad ass woman.

In fact, I would like to tell you about how your name has been taken and used as a form of empowerment for many Latinx women. *La Chingada* has transformed to *Chingona*. It has become a slang term that means "bad ass woman". Your name, that was once used as a form of shaming, has been reclaimed. We all want to be *Chingonas*. Women who wear shirts with the word *Chingona*. I've used *Chingona* as a way to describe myself. My friends have used *Chingona* to describe themselves.

Being *Chingona* means you are powerful. Being *Chingona* means you are tough. Being *Chingona* means you have courage. Being *Chingona* means that you are a fighter.

Malinalli, you are a fighter. You are powerful. Your strength and courage has carried on into the lives of many young mexican women who are connect to you through our history as a people.

I would like to thank you for being the strength and resilience that runs through our hearts.

With love and admiration,

Vanessa

SISTEMA DE CASTA

Sometimes children from 'mixed' sexual relationships were considered at least half-way civilized; at other times they were considered worse than civilized.

Linda T Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*

After the fall of the Aztec empire, the Spanish crown quickly set up their colonial government in Mexico. During the Spanish rule of Mexico the Indigenous people who survived the pandemic of diseases, brought by the Europeans, became enslaved. However, because Indigenous peoples were being massacred in large numbers, it resulted in an increase in demand for free labor. The European abduction and enslavement of African people rose in the seventeenth century (Sue 2013: 11). Children born out of the rape of enslaved African women led to the birth of the *mulatto*, a child born with African and Spanish blood. In addition, in order to address any form of mixing between Africans and Indigenous peoples, or *mestizos* and *mulattos*, Spain decided to implement a caste system detailing the societal structure of Mexico. "The phrase '*gente de razon*' (rational beings) was applied to persons adhering to European-based cultures. Spaniards designated non-European-based culture groups, such as Africans and Indigenous Mexicans, '*gente sin razon*,' or irrational beings." (Carroll 2009: 86) Additionally, the Spanish caste system was based on "a hierarchical system of social status was practiced in Spain around the concept of *limpieza de sangre*, or 'purity of blood,' in which the genealogical line of each family was carefully and sometimes legally monitored" (Gutiérrez 2015: 120). The

key difference between Spain's hierarchical system and the Spanish caste system in Mexico, was race. In Spain the societal status was based on the economic and religious status of a person while the caste system became racialized and granted social status based on the various ways races mixed (Gutiérrez 2015: 120). The three main races of the caste system were: European, Indigenous, and African. The caste system in colonial Mexico had listed sixteen distinct racial categories and placed in a hierarchical order, with Spanish blood being highly valued at the top of the hierarchical system and African blood being the least desirable and being placed at the bottom, visually showcasing to the wider population that the darker the individual was, the lesser status (and respect) they held in colonial Mexican society.





Figure 1 Las Castas, eighteenth century, oil on canvas painting. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlan, Mexico. Courtesy of Schalkwijk/Art Resource, NY

El Sistema de casta became essential in establishing spanish (white) supremacy in mexico. The spanish saw the classification of racial identities as a necessity to maintain order and ensure free slave labor and the preservation of wealth they had stolen. “The stability of the Spanish social order rested on the difference between Spaniards and Indians, the maintenance of internal stability within each republic, and the effective restriction of rights and obligations of the Africans and the racially mixed. Policing ethnic boundaries was paramount for the preservation of the Spanish body politic” (Katzew

2004: 40). Maintaining the caste system and the separation of oppressed peoples allowed manageable enforcement of enslavement and exploitation of labor and resources from both Indigenous and African peoples. During the early 1750s, there had been an increase in Indigenous and African communities coming together and coexisting.

Black castas had peacefully integrated into Indigenous villages and families throughout Mexico by the end of the colonial period. Their native neighbors and family members readily accepted them as long as they met the two principle criteria for identification as natives. They had to adopt Indigenous culture, and they had to become members of extended native families. If they married natives, natives defined them as natives. In contrast, living like a native did not make one a native within the Hispanic social order. To Hispanics, physical appearance, principally skin color, weighed most heavily in determining identity... White officials opposed the mix between native and Black because Black and casta incursions into Indigenous communities created the potential for alliances between persons of color that threatened whites' control over all aspects of New Spain's sociopolitical life (Carroll 2009: 81)

The european tactic of Divide and Conquer was employed during the colonial period across the amerikkkas. With an increase of African and Indigenous communities intermixing and speculation of rebellion from both groups, spanish officials prohibited non-Indigenous peoples from residing in Indigenous communities with the exception of crown officials and church clerics (Carroll 2009: 84). With separating communities from one another also came different forms of treatment towards each group. Indigenous

peoples “represented potential converts to Catholicism” and overtime communities began to assimilate to the newly (forcibly) enforced societal order (Carroll 2009).

Establishing a racial order and hierarchy created a desire to be disassociated from Blackness and darker features while placing greater value in whiteness (Sue 2013). During this time period internalized colonial mentality begins to take root in Mexico. “Colonial mentality, a form of internalized oppression in which the colonized culture and society are considered inferior to the culture and society of the colonizer” (Capielo Rosario, et al 2019: 396). Through the established racial-social hierarchy, darker skin folks become subject to rules of inferiority and became dehumanized in the process. After Spain’s colonial rule came to an end the caste system was no longer utilized but the value placed on whiteness remained.

INTERLUDE 2

I remember growing up and asking my father where our family name came from, I remember asking where we were from. I know both my parents were born and raised in Mexico but for some reason I always felt the need to ask this question. From a young age I always wondered who my ancestors were. My father never had a clear answer. Sometimes he would say that we were descendants of Spanish people. On other occasions he would simply say that he did not know. When I would ask my mother, her answer would always be the same: *No se Vanessa*. They never had an answer that would satisfy me. As time went by and I began to learn about Indigenous peoples and colonization, I also began to connect the dots. My parents had no knowledge of our past because we had become subjected to the erasure of Indigenous peoples through colonization. As I grew older, I would attempt to have conversations with my parents about the topic but I always being shut down. There came a day when we visited the Santa Barbara Mission. My brother, Javier Velasquez, was excited to show my father Silviano, my mother Guadalupe Tenorio (nee Velasquez), and my sister Ashley Tenorio the botanical garden located in the mission canyon in Santa Barbara. It was here where my father and I would get into a heated discussion about the horrors of the invasion and on-going colonization of the land. As my parents admired the “beauty” of the mission church, I would remark that it was built on the blood of Indigenous people. I recall begging my mother to understand that this place was a representation of the horrors that has occurred to the original inhabitants of this land. The same horrors our people were subjected to. As the trip came to an end, I

remember staring back at the mission and hoping that one day soon my parents would understand what the missions represent.

LA RAZA CÓSMICA

mexico emerged as an independent nation on September 16, 1810 after a long colonial history with spain. During the colonial period, the economy of mexico had depended on the ethnic hierarchy that was in place leading to a concentration of wealth among the light skinned elites. Much like in mexico, other latin amerikkkan countries also began gaining their independence from the spanish and portuguese crowns in the early 1800s. Entering the nineteenth century, Caudillos, typically large landowners in latin amerikkka who used their wealth to maintain private armies, would become some of the most influential people in government.

Post independent latin amerikkka continued with an export economy that had been established during the colonial period. The leaders of this time were in search of a type governance that would create “order and progress”, this in other words meant they wanted to be more european and amerikkkan. Progress, to the leaders, meant being more european so many of the leaders in latin amerikkka re-designed their cities to have a more european look. Prior to the mexican revolution, the catholic church had been a strong a presence in mexico since the spanish conquest in 1519. The church in mexico being the most powerful in the nation when compared to the rest of latin amerikkkan colonial states. The church owned much of the land in mexico, it had the ability to issues birth, death and marriage certificates. The church also supervised education programs in Mexico, students were being taught what the church saw fit and only what the church permitted them to learn.

At first, primary schools were only offered to children of the *caciques* (leaders of Indigenous groups) and Spaniards. “The first school established was that of San Francisco el Grande in Mexico City, by Brother Pedro de Gante, shortly after his arrival in 1523” (Decorme 1916: 170). The students taught at these schools were boys and a school for girls would not be set up until 1525, however girls were often taught different subjects than the boys. The curriculum for girls often revolved about domestic life. The upper class and clergy received an education, many *mestizos* however did not, and many remained illiterate (Decorme 1916: 170). Under the rule of Porfirio there was an effort to standardize education and reshape the nation.

In 1884 Porfirio Díaz became president of Mexico and it was during this time period when a larger series of Eurocentric social, political, economic and cultural reforms were implemented. “In [Díaz and his technocrats] eyes, Mexico’s mixed and predominately nonwhite population was blocking the country’s progress” (Sue 2013, 13). In an attempt to ‘modernize’ the country, Díaz “emulate[ed] the economic and cultural models of [European] powers became the blueprint for this change” (Bunker 2012: 20). Under Díaz, Indigenous populations, and Black Mexicans, who had been deemed as a hindrance to modernization, had become marginalized. By the time Díaz was forced out of office in 1911, much of the country’s wealth was concentrated in the hands of the elite. During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Indigenous and *mestizo* people became involved in the war and continually advocated for Indigenous peoples’ rights. Most notably, Emiliano Zapata, of Spanish and Nahuatl descent, would press for *terra y libertad*. Post-revolution Mexico would attempt to integrate Indigenous communities into the

larger national community and the “Indigenous population [became] valorized for its historical contribution to Mexican society and as an ancestral root of the mestizo population (Sue 2013: 14). At the same time, the predominately light skinned people that governed the state of Mexico and initiated an attempt to create a new identity for this new nation state. Since the Catholic Church had controlled much of the land and resources prior to the revolution, in 1917, a new Constitution was drafted. One of the most important articles in the constitution being Article 27. Article 27 nationalized all the land and water in Mexico, many of the articles in the constitutions, including this one, placed heavy restrictions on the Catholic Church. Article 3 transferred education over to the federal government and became secular. In the early 1920s, Mexico’s president, Álvaro Obregón, would employ white supremacist and eugenicist José Vasconcelos to serve as the first secretary of public education. José Vasconcelos regarded as a “Mexican philosopher”, would coin the concept of *la raza cósmica*.

The Mexican education system fails to educate its people on the historical events of the caste system and establishment of mestizaje. Both my father and mother, who attended primary school in Mexico were never taught anything on either one of these topics. In fact my parents, when having a conversation with them on the caste system, would point out that the only historical event that was taught to them that stood out was the (false) narrative of Columbus “discovering” America.

In 1925, José Vasconcelos published *La Raza Cósmica* in which he presented the idea of a new identity known as the cosmic race. Vasconcelos believed that European features and lighter skin tones were superior to those of Black and Indigenous peoples.

His idea of *la raza cósmica* would entail racial mixing in an attempt to breed out Black and Indigenous peoples.

Los vástagos recesivos ya no se unirían entre sí, sino a su vez irían en busca de mejoramiento rápido o extinguirían voluntariamente todo deseo de reproducción física. La conciencia misma de la especie irá desarrollando un mendelismo astuto así que se vea libre del apremio físico, de la ignorancia y la miseria, y, de esta suerte, en muy poco generaciones desaparecerán las monstruosidades; lo que hoy es normal llegará a parecer abominable. Los tipos bajos de la especial serán absorbidos por el tipo superior. De esa suerte podría redimirse, por ejemplo, el negro, y poco a poco, por extinción voluntaria, las estirpes más feas irán cediendo el paso a la más hermonsas. (Vasconcelos 1997: 72)

Recessive offspring would no longer unite among themselves, but in turn would go in search of quick improvement or would voluntarily extinguish all desire of physical reproduction. The awareness of the species itself would gradually develop an astute Mendelianism, as soon as it sees itself free from physical pressure, ignorance and misery. In this way, in a very few generations, monstrosities will disappear; what today is normal will come to seem abominable. The lower types of the species will be absorbed by the superior type. In this manner, for example, the Black could be redeemed, and step by step, by voluntary extinction, the uglier stocks will give way to the more handsome. (Vasconcelos 1997: 32)

Jose Vasconcelos believed that the superior genes, from white european descendants, would mix with Black and Indigenous peoples in order to whiten the mexican population. Future generations of mexican people would (in theory) strive to mix with those who had superior genes and create a new race, a fifth race, a *mestizo* that was of primarily white european descent mixed with Black and Indigenous blood.

The issue with Jose Vasconcelos's cosmic race, was that it not only perpetuated the caste system, but it also reenforced the colonial narrative and perceptions of Black and Indigenous peoples as being inferior in comparison to their oppressors. The notion of *la raza cósmica* also become a form of ethnocide, strategically aimed at extinguishing Black and Indigenous peoples.

The creation of a new mexican identity reproduced the same racism that had been established during spain's colonial rule. Christina Sue (2013) identifies the three pillars of post-revolutionary ideology in mexico that were employed during the construction of the mexican identity.

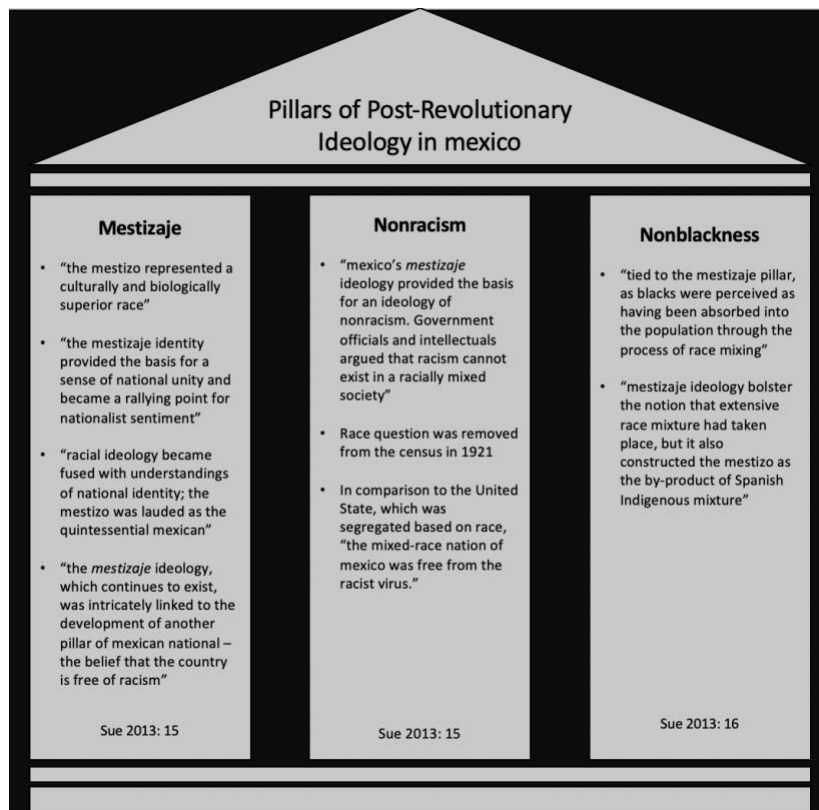


Figure 2 Pillars of Post-Revolutionary Ideology in Mexico. Sue, Christina A. *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico*. Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2013. Print.

Racial stereotypes persisted following Vasconcelos and government official’s reform on national identity. However, their approach to the new national identity also completely erased Black Mexicans from the national population (Vinson 2009: 4). The national identity of Mexico also attempted to erase Indigenous peoples by valuing the Spanish colonizer side of the *mestizo* to a greater extent. The racialization of identity, while simultaneously ignoring race, further subjected Indigenous peoples and Black folks to the ethnocide that was occurring, and continues to occur, in Mexico and Mexican households both within the nation and in the United States.

By creating a national identity, peoples' cultures and traditions become overshadowed and erased from the hegemonic identity. National identities do not allow for anything else and as a result the creation of a majority leads to the marginalization and oppression of those outside of the dominant group.

Nationalism's obsession with temporality (confused as historicity) is related more to establishing a collective memory for itself and its subjects than to inscribing itself in history (which is secondary import). The importance of this collective memory is crucial to the project of interpellating people as identical. To conjure up identity among people is to suppose it not to be self-evident; it is to counter an apparent *difference*, which nationalism does by "revealing" identity as the organizing principle of "the people" who until recently had thought of themselves unconnected, non-identical- in short, different. (Massad 2001: 25)

Mexico's long colonial history of violence, dehumanization and erasure of our ancestors created a disconnect to our traditional ways of being. The internalization of the colonial violence inflicted onto us shapes the ways in which we interact with one another and the world.

INTERLUDE 3

Sullen soul. Stolen spirit. Stolen joy.

Everyday there is *colonial pain* within me, within many of us. Often it goes unrecognized. We distract ourselves, unknowing, just to feel. To fulfill an emotion that we cannot describe because we cannot recognize it. A feeling that was taken from us. Our *Indigenous love*. We are isolated within ourselves. An unconscious pain. All feelings distorted, darkness lingering. The violence that we and those before us have had to endure requires us to be cold, defensive and intense in order to survive. In the world of the colonizer, it's about survival of the fittest, right? It's what we've been taught. What's been ingrained into our way of being. So we adapt. We adopt their colonial way of feeling. Most of the time its without choice. Because we are born and raised already in it. As I grew, as we all grow, we take on distractions, in order to deal with our *colonial pain* not comprehending that the pain will never truly leave us unless we undo what is inflicting that pain unto us. Grasping that truth will also cause pain. It's excruciating. But how can it not be? It's over 500 years of torment that runs in our blood. Over eighty percent of the world is colonized. I am in distress; we as colonized peoples are always in distress. Not only do we share our *colonial pain*, but we also share the capacity to regain *Indigenous love*. So, how do we begin this journey?

THE PROCESS OF INTERNALIZATION

Internalizing Colonial Mentality

From where Blacks, Indigenous peoples and Asians were once slaves of the Caucasians and it's amazing how they trained them, to be racist against themselves in a place they were raised in and you kept us caged in, Destroyed our culture and said that you civilized us.

-Immortal Technique, "The 3rd World"

*Inferiorization is the native correlative to the European's feeling of superiority... **It is the racist who creates the inferiorized.***

-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*

As Mexico's national identity became established on the principles of *mestizaje* and centering of whiteness, the colonized body was followed by the next phase of colonization. Cultural hegemony and internalization of the inferiority complex would take root in Mexican society, families and individuals, particularly in those who'd exhibit European features. The "primary targets and intended consumers of Mexican national ideology" is the *mestizo*" (Sue 2013: 6). The *mestizo* of fairer skin complexion and Spanish features became the national image of what a Mexican should look like. The Mexican government then "exalted Mexico's *mestizo* (mixed-race) population, declared Mexico free from racism, and erased Blackness from the image of the Mexican nation. One century later, these aspects of Mexican racial ideology endure" (Sue 2013:1).

mexican racial ideology can be observed through daily interactions with other mexicans, representation from mexican media outlets, and through how the individual mexican views themselves.

Growing up in a mexican household it was normal to hear family members say *no estes mucho tiempo en el sol, te vas a poner morena o mira esa parece India*. Constantly trying to avoid anything and everything that would make us look not white. *Cuando mi padre era niño él trabajaba en los campos, mi abuelito le decía 'punte un sombrero porque te vas a poner como carbónsito'*. The need and desire to be white stemming from the colonial mentality and inferiority complex became internalized during the process of colonization. “Colonial mentality is a form of internalized oppression resulting from colonization, in which the colonizer is believed to be superior to the colonized... colonial mentality is believed to affect all who have experienced colonization” (Capielo et al. 2019: 398). Colonial mentality has been passed down from generations since the colonial period, over time the narratives and stereotypes constructed of us by hegemonic powers become internalized, therefore establishing an inferiority complex. Thus, to combat the feelings of inferiority, the oppressed continuously strives to assimilate in order to compensate for their lack of whiteness. “If he is overcome to such a degree by a desire to be white, it’s because he lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex possible, in a society that draws its strength by maintaining his complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race over another; it is to the extent that society creates difficulties for him that he finds himself positioned in a neurotic situation” (Fanon 2008: 80). Internalized colonial mentality and inferiority complex combined, constructs the

oppressed as being the “other” and dehumanizes them. Their identities and bodies always racialized and represented against the white european body.

Es morenita pero esta bonita. Es pretita. Salte del sol que te vas a puner como India.

Going to school in East Los Angeles and being surrounded by a primarily latinx community, the colorism and internalized colonial mentality within the community was prevalent. The phrase *No seas naco* o *Es un(a) naco(a)*, were common at school and in the community. Typically the phrase would be used to describe someone who did not fully (attempt to) assimilate in amerikkkan culture, many times it was directed towards individuals who still held onto much of their mexican way of being. *Naco* was used more often on darker skinned people than the lighter skinned individuals. For most people in the community, *naco* meant and represented someone who was of lower-class status and trashy. *Pero en realidad la pablabra naco es un insulto para personas indígenas. Naco* was used to describe Indigenous peoples who were seen as vulgar and of lower social status.

While at the same time, *mestizaje* ideology romanticizes the mix between Indigenous and european, the mexican nationalist discourse that has been internalized within mexican communities continues to devalue Indigeneity.

“the rise of Chicano nationalism [in ties to the *mestizo*]- dwells at length on the devaluation of his Indigenous identity. [In Oscar “Zeta” Acosta’s *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*] [r]eminiscing about his childhood in the San Joaquin Valley, Acosta

argues for the importance of race within his community: 'Everyone in the Valley considers skin color to be of ultimate importance. The tone of one's pigmentation is the fastest and surest way of determining exactly who one is' He goes on to illustrate his point: *My mother, for example, always referred to my father as indio when he'd get drunk... if our neighbors got drunk at the baptismal parties and danced all night to norteno music, they were 'acting just like Indians.'* Once I stuck my tongue in my sister's Annie's mouth- I was practicing how to French kiss- and my ma wouldn't let me back in the house until I learned to 'quit behaving like an Indian'" (Pérez-Torres 1998)

The layers of internalized colonial mentality and inferiority complex are linked and interconnected with the historical legacies of colonization. Even within an identity attempting to preserve Indigeneity, the *mestizaje* ideology fails as it is based on the logic of racial hierarchy embedded within the colonial construct of the state. "Color has become salient precisely because racial ancestry is assumed to be relatively constant. In other words, a perceived similarity in *racial* makeup has heightened the importance of color as a distinction-making marker, color, therefore, has become a proxy for the degree to which an individual represents *racial* poles" (Sue 2013: 7). Racial ideologies embedded within *mestizaje*, originally intended to whiten the Mexican population, continues to breed out Indigenous peoples and Black folk while asserting Eurocentric ideologies on historically disenfranchised populations. The image of the *mestizo* determines what it means to be Mexican while simultaneously admiring the colonizer and striving to assimilate to their world. Colonial mentality "also depicting the indebtedness

the colonized feels towards the colonizer, the desire to disconnect from other members of the group, and the aspiration to have the physical, cultural, and social traits of the colonizer” (Capielo et al. 2019: 398). Through the romanticization of the Indigenous identity and Spanish blood, the wider Mexican population removes itself from having and perpetuating racist tendencies. Conflating *mestizaje* with Indigeneity erases the Black experience in Mexico and reinforces colonial perceptions of Indigenous peoples.

Further perpetuating colonial notions of the Indigenous peoples and Black folk in Mexico and Mexican communities is attributed to the false representation of them. In a 1948 film, “Angelitos Negros”, featuring Mexican idol Pedro Infante, the issues of race are explored throughout the plot. Infante’s character, Jose Carlos, is a Brown Mexican singer who performs with *mulatto* artists. He falls in love with and marries a light-skinned Mexican woman, Ana Luisa, who holds racist views towards Black people. Ana gives birth to a baby girl, Belen, who is born with dark skin. Ana struggles with having a Black daughter and at one point she cries out *¿Por qué Dios no me dio una hija blanca y rubia, como la de Malú? ¿La hubiera yo querido tanto!* Ana believes that she cannot love her daughter because she is Black and wishes for a white, blond-haired baby. This is one of the more powerful scenes in the film as Belen becomes othered by her own mother and is shown that she is unworthy of her mother’s love because she lacks white European features. Belen, internalizing her mother’s sentiments, is led to believe that she can only be loved if she is white and proceeds to paint her face white in order to receive her mother’s love. However, Ana feels as though she cannot accept Belen as her daughter and holds resentment towards Jose for giving her a Black baby. It is not until the end of

the film that Ana learns of her own ancestry, with African lineage, and begins to accept Belen as her baby girl.

Due to the racial mixing during the colonial period in Mexico, many Mexicans are racially diverse but most are unaware of their ancestral ties as a result of the continuous erasure of non-*mestizo* populations. The inferiority complex paired with colonial mentality is inherently tied to colonization. “[C]olonization, therefore, comprises not only the intersection of historical and objective conditions but also man’s attitude toward these conditions” (Fanon 2008: 65). Embodiment of stereotypes and dehumanization of a colonized body comes about from the treatment and false notions of insignificance that has been instilled onto the colonized body by the colonizer (Felipe 2016: 29). Thus, Ana’s sentiments towards her daughter are that rooted in colonial ideologies that push for a cleansing of race and shaming of one’s own histories and ancestral ties.

The colonial mentality that becomes instilled by Mexicans born and raised in Mexico is the basis of the internalized racial project. A study conducted in Puerto Rico found that “intergenerational communication of colonial mentality also seems to take place among mainland Puerto Ricans born in the United States” (Capielo et al. 2019: 398). This can be attributed to through the social interactions occurring between children and parents and the larger Puerto Rican community both on the island and on mainland (Capielo et al. 2019). Likewise, the internalized colonial mentality that occurs among Mexicans born in Mexico is transferred over to their United States born children after parents have immigrated over to the states. The children born in the United States, from Mexican parents also internalize the racism from another settler-colonial nation-state.

Therefore, u.s. born mexican children undergo the internalized racial project twice, through intergenerational communication and their lived experience in a settler-colonial nation-state.

Not only was I never amerikkkan enough, but I was also never mexican enough. I will always remember the day I was visiting my cousins in Tijuana, and I was explaining to them the racism that occurs in the united states. I attempted to explain how it was hard to be mexican in the united states but before I could finish my cousin interrupted and said 'but you're not mexican, you're amerikkkan. You even have lighter skin than we do'. My parents, and my family in mexico did not understand the racism that I had experienced because to them I was amerikkkan. In their minds, they did not understand how someone born in amerikkka could experience racism.

Internalizing Shame

So yes, though 'home' permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home. Though I'll defend my race and culture when they are attacked by non-mexicanos, conozcos el malestar de mi cultura. I abhor some of my culture's ways, how it cripples, its women, como borras, our strengths used against us, lowly burras bearing humility with dignity.

-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Day after day our voices being shut down. By the time most girls become adolescents, they are too timid to speak out. For those who dare speak their mind, they become labelled as *bocona*. *No le pongas atención, es una bocona*. She doesn't know

what she is talking about. Voices reduced to background noise. No acknowledgement of women, the process of dehumanizing the female mind, body and presence. Our roles as women in a mexican household reduced to becoming caregivers to the males in the family. Our sense of worth becoming tied to a male. We are told that we cannot survive without male protectors. Without them we are nothing, without them we cannot succeed.

The settler-colonial state is founded on the principle of white supremacy and patriarchy, creating a hierarchy in which Black women and Women of Color are at the bottom of the pyramid. Within latinx culture, machismo has taken root since the conquest of the amerikkkas. Prior to the invasion of the amerikkkas, Indigenous peoples in mexico acknowledged the differences between men and women but both were seen as equals.

Women were able to own property and obtain wealth. This form of *gender complementary* recognizes that women and men are interdependent, both male and female input is equally valued and crucial in cultivating community (Pennock 2011).

mexican culture, riddled with masculinity, with its overt and subtle forms of dominations grasping women by the throats and forcing us into silence. Silence that is meet with violence and various forms of abuse when broken. *No opines, tu no tienes opinión*. A common proclamation in mexican households, stemming from 500 years of internalization. Words repeated countless times throughout childhood.

Violence towards women is prevalent in settler-colonial societies, mexican households are no exception to that. Violence towards the female body begins at a young age. The use of *la chancla* has been normalized in our communities. We make jokes and share memes about the pain that was inflicted onto us as children with *la chancla*. What

la chancla teaches us is that we deserve violence, we must be disciplined with violence and we can only learn through pain. It teaches us that children deserve to be punished and not talked to or treated as human beings. *El cinto*, the belt, is another form of violence used to “discipline” children. Both *la chancla y el cinto* stem from the intergenerational trauma that is tied to the colonial period of the amerikkkas. Our approaches to discipline in our communities and societies are interconnected to the violence and harm inflicted onto Indigenous peoples and Black folx during colonization. In *Bad Indians* (2013), Deborah Miranda clearly demonstrates the connections between spanish colonial rule, the introduction of violence, and what happens in our families today. Within Miranda’s own work, she recounts her experience with family violence while working in the documented instructions of spanish, Mission padres in order to showcase the genealogy of violence in our communities.

Flogging. Whipping. Belt. Whatever you call it, this beating, this punishment, is as much a part of our inheritance, our legacy, our culture, as any bowl of acorn mush, any salmon millet, *pilillis* fried and dipped in cinnamon and sugar, cactus fruit in a basket. More than anything else we brought with us out of the missions, we carry the violence we were given along with baptism, confession, last rites. More than our Black hair, brown eyes, various hues of brown skin flecked with Black beauty marks, our short stubby fingers, our wide feet and palms, our sweet voices and tendency to sign, to dance, to make music and tell stories.

In this trailer in the woods, just outside a small town called Kent in Washington State, hundreds of miles from California, where the three of us were each born, my father's arms rises and falls in an old, savage rhythm learned from strangers who came with whips and attack dogs, taught us how to raise our children. (Miranda 2013: 34-35)

*I internalized everything. The feeling of unworthiness, the feeling of being a burden onto others, the feeling of taking up too much space. I internalize every action and word used against me. I began internalizing the shame from a young age. Feelings of being unfit and underserving of love or care. Every day I have to recognize the process of internalization that is occurring, **as it is occurring**. Recognize it before I begin to believe the feelings of shame. Every day I have to undo all that I have internalized while also undoing what I am currently internalizing. It is exhausting. I find myself being constantly overwhelmed. At times it feels easier to just give up and give in. To become silenced. I begin to believe that if I submit to it then I can get by in life and perhaps life will be easier. But as these thoughts begin to set in, I get enraged and disappointed with myself. I can't. I can't allow myself to fall into the shame that will always hold me back. That will always limit me. So I force myself to fight against it. And in that moment, I win, only to have to do it again tomorrow.*

Unlearning colonial practices of parenting is the first step in beginning to recognize our own trauma.

Disciplining woman is a part of machista culture. You force obedience and create shame that women must carry with them their whole lives. Shame is a powerful tool used

by the oppressor. Shame creates a negative view of oneself, creates the inability to see our worth. It leads us accept abuse as a form of love. Shame isolates us within ourselves and produces feelings of unworthiness and the fear being shamed again. “Shaming is one of the deepest tools of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy because shame produces trauma and trauma often produces paralysis” (bell hooks 2013). Shame as a social behavior prevents us from questioning and forces us into detrimental forms of social conditioning.

The shaming of Brown woman in Mexico begins with Malinalli. Malinalli’s story of being a treacherous woman becomes a form of othering and dehumanizing woman. Malinalli’s name becomes used as a form of insult and utilized to shame other women. Malinalli’s story becomes sexualized and manipulated, she is blamed for the fall of the Aztec Empire because of her affairs with Cortés and she becomes of a symbol of shame. Forced to be known as *La Chingada*, her name “become[s] the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos” (Anzaldúa 2012: 44). Language, used as a tool of domination by the colonizer, creates her shaming into our shame. The shame that we feel as BIPOC women comes from the legacies of colonialism. Our shame is connected to one another. We, as BIPOC women, are forced to hold shame in every aspect of our lives. In our appearance, in our sexuality, in our mannerism. Malinalli’s shame is our shame. Our shame is shared. But Malinalli’s strength and resilience is also our strength and resilience. Just like Malinalli, we share the ability to overcome our shame.

Our identities as women in Mexican households is centered around the creation, shaming and disciplining of the female body and mind. The female body, set within settler-colonial states, have historically been dominated by male figures- such as a female's father, brother, uncle, and husband (Perry 2018). The gender role ideals designated by patriarchal structures create a regulatory system on women's bodies and sexuality. As a result, "women and men who are failed patriarchs have been marked as inferior to patriarchs by virtue of being associated with nonrational knowledge" (Perry 2018: 209). The sexuality and identity of females becomes dictated by dominant, oppressive societal norms, constantly controlling women's bodies and simultaneously othering those who do not adhere to patriarchal ideals. "In such a construction, women of color are subject to degradation and dehumanization, victims of 'double jeopardy' because of their ethnic/racial and gender statuses" (Felipe 2016: 25). Sexism occurs on three levels: institutionalized sexism, interpersonal sexism and internalized sexism (Hipolito-Delgado 2014: 218). Within disenfranchised groups, women continuously become further subjected to the multiplicity of layers of domination inflicted by settler-colonial structures. Oppression can come from within one's own communities due to hierarchical power structures. Representation, domination, security, landscape and gender have been normalized by patriarchal systems. The female body becomes removed from any form of personhood, commodified and displayed on a global scale (Perry 2018).

On Race and Gender

Our internalization of our gender identities as Black, Indigenous and Women of Color can be seen by the sexualization and dehumanization that occurs both in our communities and on the national level. At home we are subjected to violence from our own people, in society we are subjected to violence from the state.

Within the united states, mexican communities exhibit inferiority complex both from outside communities and their own communities. The mexican-american identity has been widely explored by prominent chicano writers, artists, and activists. The overarching theme within chicano studies is that we, as u.s. born mexican children, represent the duality of our *mestizaje* and represent a resistance to the assimilation of a settler colonial nation, the united states. However, Chicano studies also relies on the pride of having Indigenous ancestral ties and pulls from *mestizaje* ideology. “In the famous ‘Plan Espiritual de Aztlán’: ‘We Declare the independence of our Mestizo Nation. We are a Bronze People with a Bronze Culture.’ Within an essentializing nationalist discourse, Chicanismo is measured by skin color and details of physiognomy... Chicano ethnic identity becomes essentialized, premised on meeting specific physical or social criteria” (Pérez-Torres 1998: 155). Because our mexican identities tie back to *mestizaje* both in mexico and abroad, our identities become rooted within colonial constructs.

It is interesting to see how mexican nationalism uses *mestizaje* to emphasize the Indigenous blood in us. While it is done so in a way that still perpetuates racism towards Indigenous peoples, it differs from how the united states addresses Indigeneity. The

united states uses blood quantum to erase Indigeneity. Both are based on the displacement and erasure of Indigenous peoples, but it is done so in ways which are opposite of one another. On the other side of things, mexico erases Black people from its society through *mestizaje* racial ideology while in the united states Black bodies in are hyper-visualized. There is a denial of Afro-latinx in mexico while the united states constantly targets and polices Black bodies. Since the colonial period, Indigenous and Black bodies have faced colonial and state violence. Both the erasure and hyper-visibility of the racialized other are dehumanized.

INTERLUDE 4

Today is September 16, 2020. Today is known as Mexico's Independence Day. Today the Mexican people celebrate the liberation of Spain. Today I wake up to the news that Mexican and Latinx women in ICE detention camps are being forced to hysterectomies. My heart begins to race. I have no clue as to how I should react. I do not personally know these women, but these women are my people. We share similar histories. We share similar cultures. We are connected through colonization and its oppression of us. We are connected in our resilience. As I begin to panic, as I begin to feel grief and despair for my people, I catch myself in my emotions. I stop myself from feeling. I get up and make a cup of coffee. I try to ignore all the thoughts running through my head in an attempt to escape the intense emotions I know will eat away at me. As I attempt to go through my day my friend and roommate, Megan, asks me if I'm okay. In an attempt to avoid everything, I shrug my shoulders and say "yeah, I'm okay". But she's like my sister, she knows me well, she's able to read me. As the day goes on Megan becomes concerned because of my distracted attitude. As the sun begins to set, I become more consumed by my thoughts and emotions. Megan catches on and asks again, "are you okay?" In that moment I break.

I am so tired and fed up with all this. They don't make it easy. I hate this. I just want to escape. This is devastating and overwhelming. I hate it all. I am in constant fear for my

people, and all oppressed peoples. White supremacy continually forcing its horrors and torment onto us. All white people are complicit. Every single one.

In that moment I am consumed by my rage. In an attempt to help me process, Megan and I talk about the historical state violence that is constantly inflicted on BIPOC women. She suggests I write. Writing has always been a helpful way to process my emotions as it forces my mind to slow down enough for me to write. And so, as I sit in front of this computer once again the emotions within me are too much. There are so many thoughts running through my head and I have no idea what to do with it all. I am also annoyed by all the noise currently going on in my mind. Both externally and internally. This is too much right now. Is this trauma? There's too much going on right now. I can't. I want these emotions to leave. I want to breathe. There's so much going on. I wish I didn't have to feel any of this. I'm so tired of it all.

It is 2020 and we're still doing this shit. We are still doing this. The forced sterilization of Women of Color. Of latinx folx. Did we not learn from planned parenthood? Did we not learn from the historical events of the invasion of turtle island? Do we still not understand genocide? Do we not care about the horrors and trauma it causes? Women have had to constantly feel ashamed and scared of their sexuality and sexual reproduction. The United Nations' declaration on human rights has addressed sterilization as a form of genocide. This is genocide!

INTERNALIZED MENTALITIES IN OUR COMMUNITIES TODAY

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man, was suffocated to death by a white Minneapolis police officer who knelt on Floyd's neck for an extended period of time. Suffocated to death in the same way that Eric Garner was, both men fighting until their last breath, expressing "I can't breathe." Suffocated by the system that deems Black bodies as unworthy of life. Suffocated by the system of colonialism, a system built on the stolen land and genocide of Indigenous people and built on the backs of enslaved Africans, who were stolen from their own homelands. Colonialism is a slow death, slowly suffocating oppressed people physically, mentally, and spiritually. The death of George Floyd sparked outrage across the united states leading to a series of protests led by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

During this time period, all communities, who previously turned a blind eye to racism, were forced to confront the racism within the united states and the roles they themselves played in the perpetuating racism. The mexican community within the united states began to call each other out on their internalized racist ideologies. In addition to this, a wider range of the latinx populations began demonstrating the anti-Blackness that occurs in all our communities. Afro-latinx folx constantly being erased from the narrative of colonialization and racial hierarchical projects in all settler-colonial nation-states.

NBC News, and multiple media outlets, published articles addressing the anti-Blackness occurring in latinx communities. The article by Nicole Acevedo, "Latinos must confront 'ingrained' anti-Black racism amid George Floyd protests, some urge",

reports on the accounts of Black latinx who have experienced racism within their own communities (2020). “Jasmine Haywood, an Afro-Latina who has researched anti-Black Latino racism, told NBC News that millennial Latinos like [Ana] Sanz are looking to break cycles of internalized racism and the ways Latinos perpetuate and uphold white supremacy” (Acevedo 2020).

During the initial protests of George Floyd’s murder I was in Humboldt County. I called my sister, Ashley, to ask how she was doing and what the protests were like in Los Angeles. I asked how what she thought about the murder of George Floyd and I remember her response surprised me. Ashley is fifteen and so when I called her I had expected her to not be concerned with what was occurring outside of her interpersonal life, but to my surprise she was passionate about what was occurring. She shared her thoughts and concerns. It was in that moment when I realized that the what had happened to George Floyd went beyond a single community or group of people. Up until that point, the only people I had known to be care for the BLM movement were those involved in politics or activism. George Floyd’s murder sparked a national conversation.

Anti-Blackness in latinx communities is tied back to the erasure of identity. Therefore, the construction of a new (inter)national identity is structured and cemented through the erasure of both Blackness and Indigenous people from mexico, and in this case, most of latin amerikkka. For example, the term latino(a), took root during this time period of French intervention in the amerikkkas during the 1800s as “Latin America” became a term that was strongly supported by Napoleon III during the invasion. The term “Latin American”, once again, ignored the native culture of the Indigenous peoples

across the lands and the presence of Black folx. The term latinx has since become peoples all across latin amerikkka as a form of identity. latinx racial ideology perpetuates the same harms as *mestizaje* racial ideology in that it creates a single uniform image of what a latinx person is and looks like. Yvonne Rodriguez, an Afro-Cuban, points out the “history of dismissing Afro-latinos” in the larger latinx community (Grinspan 2020) during the protests.

The mexican communities, which will at times also identifies as latinx, was forced to acknowledge the racism that occurs within our own community. On social media accounts, such as Instagram and Tik Tok, a number of mexican identifying people began posting in opposition to the George Floyd protests. Many were upset about there being of lack of support from other communities when racial injustices occurred to mexicans such as the increase in deportation of mexicans and children being caged during Trump’s presidency. The wider latinx communities also brought up the racism they faced in the united states and the lack of media attention they receive. As a result people from both inside and outside the mexican community responded to the racism that was occurring. In Miami, protesters holding signs reading “‘And to all the racist Latinos: *eso no se hace, eso no se hace, y yo no me voy a quedar callado.*’ (‘And to all the racist Latinos: that’s not OK, that’s not OK, and I won’t stay quiet’)” (Grinspan 2020).



Replied to @joexelyn

It was a black woman who climbed the Statue of Liberty to protest about the kids in cages at the border. Any one saying "who rioted for us" is a fool. There have been many instances when black ppl stood up for us. We should jump at the chance to stand w them in solidarity.



Figure 3: Social media post (1)



Figure 4 Social media post (2)

Black mexicans, Afro-latinx, Indigenous peoples and latinx individuals working towards anti-racism within the community, sparked the dialogue on social media to address anti-Blackness within the larger context of latin amerikkka.

In order to build solidarity between communities, BLM activists called for justice for both Vanessa Guillén and Breonna Taylor.



Figure 5 Vanessa Guillen and Breonna Taylor “They Deserve Justice”

Vanessa Guillén was the mexican daughter of two immigrant parents. She was an enlisted soldier who had gone missing on April 22, 2020 and was found dead on along a river on June 30, 2020. Vanessa had previously reported to her family that she had been sexually harassed at the u.s. army base, fort hood. Vanessa was not only a victim of state violence but also gender violence.

Breonna Taylor was a Black woman who was shot in her home on March 13, 2020 by officers from the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD). The officers were investigating a drug dealing operation when they forced entry inside Breonna's home. Breonna was shot to death inside her own home with no indication or evidence that she was guilty of any crimes. Breonna Taylor's death was a result of state violence, police brutality, and racism.

Both Breonna and Vanessa demonstrate the violence against women, particularly Black and women of color, face. As of November 12, 2020 neither woman has received the justice they deserve. Black, Indigenous and Brown people around the United States continue to face racial injustices with no justice.

BLM, Indigenous and Brown communities came together to help build solidarity in achieving the same goal; justice and liberation of all oppressed peoples. Solidarity building is crucial in undoing colonial mentality and helping us process and deal with our *colonial pain*. Interpersonal relationships can cultivate spaces and form communities within the colonial structures to aid in the dismantling of colonialism and white supremacy. The United States, which can be regarded as an *Empire*, *empire* being defined as "organized destruction under which we live in", encompasses all settler-colonial structures as well as corporate actors (Montgomery and Bergman 2017: 25). While *Empire* has a far-reaching hand on all aspects of life, environmental and social, there are cracks within the system where people can develop and deepen connectivity between them and actualize lives and spaces independent from *Empire*. At the same time, while people begin to come together, they also begin to undo the norms and standards that *Empire* has created and inflicted onto

human society. “Undoing the *Empire* means undoing oneself” (Montgomery and Bergman 2017: 25). The process of undoing oneself requires the individual to participate in a self-reflective process and confronting the ways in which we’ve internalized settler-colonial norms. Undoing oneself is the first step of the process, however, building kinships, coming together and forging unity is ultimately at the center of resistance against settler-colonialism.

The oppression and violence inflicted by the settler-colonial states is made to feel isolating and so it is able to maintain power through the individualization of humans. Combating this entails fostering a sense of community, compassion and understanding which can lead to revolutionary ways of interacting. Community oriented ways of being can create a “web of connectivity that enables people to think and act differently” (Montgomery and Bergman 2017: 119). It is important to note that this type of interaction and community has been prevalent for millennia within Indigenous communities. It is possible to live a life outside *Empire*, outside of the confines of settler-colonialism. It requires the ability to make space for others and create a space of separation between us and the *Empire*. Solidarity building is the first step in bridging communities together and initiating a shared journey in healing from *colonial pain*.

George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Vanessa Guillén were just the three out of countless more, who sparked the conversations around race, white supremacy and state violence. At home, most families were forced to have conversations around race as it became impossible to avoid what was occurring. Media outlets were flooded with news reports on the protests, everyone was posting on social media, and the streets were filled

with people demanding justice for George Floyd, an end to police brutality and defunding of the police.

Ashley and I had a few conversations in regard to what was occurring, but in the end we both knew that the conversations we were having between ourselves needed happen with our parents as well. The hardest conversation for us would be the ones we each individually had with our father. My father, who has always had differing political opinions than me, was forced to have a hard conversation on the subject of his internalized ideologies.

INTERLUDE 5

A letter to my father/ Una carta a mi padre:

Papá,

Nuestra gente ha sido discriminada desde la colonización de nuestras tierras. México y los Estados Unidos se basan en el genocidio de los pueblos indígenas y la esclavitud de los cuerpos tanto indígenas como negros. Obligado a construir naciones basadas en la supremacía blanca que continuamente los oprime y los trata como animales. El colorismo y anti-negritud que se da en nuestras comunidades están directamente ligados al imperialismo y racismo sistémico que se estableció en estas tierras. La gente de piel oscura e personas indígenas han sido marginados

Somos supervivientes de un genocidio sistemático; nos quedamos con un trauma intergeneracional. Nos vimos obligados a internalizar la idea de que somos inferiores al hombre blanco. Mis abuelos, tus padres, estaban marcados por los prejuicios y el racismo dirigidos a ellos, y su interiorización de eso se les impuso a ti y a tus hermanos. La violencia que ha sufrido de niño y de adulto es el resultado directo de la colonización y la violencia racial basada en la supremacía blanca.

Te marchaste de México para tener una vida mejor, para darles a tus hijos una vida mejor. Sacrificaste lo poco que tenías para darnos las oportunidades que nunca tuviste. Para asegurar nuestra supervivencia, para que no tuviéramos que pasar por lo que tú pasaste. Así que no teníamos que saber lo que se sentía pasar hambre o trabajar en el campo durante nuestra infancia. Estoy agradecido por eso. Estoy agradecido por ti.

Hiciste todo lo que pudiste por nosotros, y eso te llevó a creer que este país era grandioso, porque pudiste hacer eso aquí a diferencia de México. Pero la razón por la que mis hermanos y yo somos como somos y hemos sobrevivido hasta aquí ha sido por los sacrificios que tú y mi madre habéis hecho.

Desde que tengo memoria, has trabajado todos los días de mi vida. Todos los días de la semana te despertabas a las cuatro de la mañana para prepararte para el trabajo y no te veía hasta más tarde en la noche alrededor de las 7 de la tarde. Siempre llegabas a casa exhausto y hambriento. Mi madre, que también trabajaba a tiempo completo, corría a la cocina después del trabajo para alimentarnos a todos. A veces los dos estaban tan cansados que empezarían a quedarse dormidos después de cenar frente al televisor. Recuerdo haber pensado que habías trabajado mucho y sé que a veces te sentías mal por trabajar y sentías que te perderías el tiempo que pasaban juntos. Pero siempre entendí por qué trabajabas tanto. Solo tenemos que apreciar los momentos que tenemos juntos y el venir. Tus sacrificios son lo que me ha permitido ser quien quiero ser y me ha dado la libertad de explorar una vida propia. Creo que no importa a dónde fueras o si te hubieras

quedado en México, mis hermanos y yo habríamos salido bien porque al final del día todavía lo habrías sacrificado todo por nosotros. No le doy crédito a este país por lo que tengo. Todo el mérito es para ti y mi mamá.

Crees que este país es el mejor por lo que hizo por mi abuela. Cuando se enfermó, pudiste traerla aquí y buscar atención médica para ella. Ayuda médica que necesitaba desesperadamente pero que no pudo obtener en México. Con ese tratamiento médico pudimos disfrutar de su presencia en este mundo por unos años más. Años llenos de recuerdos y tiempo que pasó con mi abuelo, sus hijos, nietos y todos sus seres queridos. Pudo vernos crecer a todos. También estoy agradecido de que lo hayamos conseguido para tener todo eso con ella. Odio decirlo, pero también es por la razón por la que México fue colonizado que mi abuela no pudo obtener la atención médica que necesitaba. La concentración de la riqueza y la mala distribución de los recursos en México está ligada a las estructuras sociales construidas durante la colonización. Y este país tiene los recursos médicos que tiene debido a la explotación de otros y, a medida que avanzamos en el tiempo, este país comienza a negar servicios de salud a sus poblaciones más vulnerables. Se volvió más fácil de ver una vez que llegó COVID.

Miras a este país, pero papá, este país apesta. Lo que tenemos en esta vida es gracias a ti.

Este país está lleno de racismo, racismo que ha experimentado pero que ha elegido ignorar o justificar. Crees que si asimilamos todo estará bien, pero no es así como

funciona. No importa cuánto tratemos de ser blancos o estadounidenses, siempre seremos discriminados. El racismo no desaparecerá si nos asimilamos. De hecho, creo que solo reforzará el racismo entre todos los pueblos oprimidos. Al asimilarse asumimos el mismo comportamiento que aquellos que nos marginan y oprimen.

Es importante que reconozcamos que los pueblos Indígenas fueron masacrados y que no perdieron la tierra simplemente porque no pudieron defenderla. debemos reconocer que los negros continúan siendo esclavizados a través del encarcelamiento masivo debido al racismo que enfrentan. Debemos reconocer que el racismo existe entre nuestras comunidades. Debemos reconocer que personas como usted y yo enfrentamos el racismo, pero siempre lo replicamos cuando ignoramos y justificamos la violencia que este país inflige a los negros, morenos e indígenas. Debemos apoyar a las personas que, como usted, como nosotros, se han enfrentado al racismo y la violencia racial. La solidaridad entre todas las personas oprimidas es importante para nuestra liberación de estas estructuras raciales.

Te agradezco a ti ya mi madre todo lo que has hecho por mí y todo lo que me has enseñado. Espero que podamos seguir creciendo y aprendiendo sobre nuestras historias juntos.

Te quiero.

Tu hija, Vanessa.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the process of exploring identity and examining the various ways in which historical legacies impact our identities, we learn that our identities are not separate from each other. Acts of violence and terror against Indigenous populations are not only a part of this lands' history, but are also current, with the horrors of settler-colonialism still prevalent today. The same system that genocides Indigenous peoples continues to violently harm Black and Brown bodies. By acknowledging our wounds and pinpointing the ways in which we've internalized oppressive mentalities, we can begin healing from our own cycles of internalized oppression and keep expanding our forms of resilience within this colonized world.

Furthermore, a deeper knowing of our identities and ties to one another can lead to internal and external healing of violence passed through our linages. In doing so, not only do we heal as oppressed peoples, but we also reclaim the identities we were stripped of. It creates that ability for our own communities to regain all that has been disenfranchised from us.

No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than a starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental.

Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things... (Said 1993: 336)

For me, my own experiences as a woman of color has taught me the ways in which our communities suffer through the silencing of our voices and the perpetuating oppression that occurs between us. Conversations around our own internalized mentalities breaks this cycle.

Our strength as people comes through our collective power. Our stories and relations to one another centers our power in the face of systemic oppression. The stories of Black, Indigenous and People of Color reminds us of the resilience and beauty that exist within us.

Closing Thoughts & Reflections

Throughout my time in the Environment & Community Program (E&C) at Humboldt State University there have been various instances where BIPOC students have been forced to endure the violence and racism that occurs within institutional spaces. BIPOC students were frequently subjected into spaces that resulted in racist acts of aggression by white student peers and white professors. Additionally, the curriculum offered throughout the majority of our courses were centered around work that continues

to perpetuate colonial beliefs about Black and Indigenous Peoples. There was a constant erasure of Indigenous voices, and Indigenous people have been repeatedly pushed out.

During my first two years in the E&C program, a white male student would frequently raise his voice in class, shut down and threatened two other women of color in the program and myself. There were many occurrences of microaggressions that were ignored by faculty. The dehumanization that occurred to the three of us contributed to mental health issues, feelings of isolation and complete shutting down of our voices. Women of color have historically been silenced and once again the voices of Brown and Indigenous women were being forced into silence.

The two woman of color and myself decided to take action by going to the Dean of Students to address the what was occurring. However, when the student found out we had contacted the Dean he retaliated by filing a no-contact order against us. The university protected the white male who had been harassing us, the institution that is built on top of the violence and genocide of the Wiyot People, continues to reproduce the same violence onto the BIPOC students who attend HSU.

The violence has not stopped. The department and the new graduate cohorts continue to deal with the racism that is embedded within the institution. This violence is embedded within *every* institution and structure of the settler-colonial state. Writing this thesis during a global pandemic and having lived through the violence that the institution has inflicted on us, has motivated me to center every moment in this thesis to empower the voices of BIPOC people. I hope that I am able to encourage and remind BIPOC readers that our voices are meaningful and necessary, and resilience is our blood.

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