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I Raise My Voice: A Reflection

Idette G. López Franco, Associate Editor

I was a student in the class that collectively conceived this journal and I am one of the authors in Volume 1. Later I became a Teaching Assistant for the same class and now I am one of the Associate Editors for Volume 2. I have had multiple vantage points from which I have engaged with *CouRaGeouS Cuentos: A Journal of Counternarratives*, and it is from this unique position that I write now.

CouRaGeouS Cuentos is a collection of the students' voices heard through our own poems and stories. We decided to share our stories with the world because we knew our voices are valuable and they matter. The ES 107 class focuses on the history of and literature by Chican@/Latin@s. This class created an opportunity for the students to make connections with our Chican@/Latin@ culture. Furthermore, it created a space where we could reflect on our own individual identity and position in the social hierarchy as a whole.

A few of the main themes we focused on were race, gender, sexuality, patriarchy, class, colonialism, oppression, and resistance. Our resistance to our erasure within academia is manifested in the sharing of our stories. As a student of ES 107, I learned about the Chican@/Latin@ history and its relevance to the people we are today. We should have learned the things we learned in ES 107 in elementary school. Sadly our history and our literature are hidden from us to cover up the white supremacist oppression of People of Color in the United States.

After every lecture I left knowing something new. I learned about the colonization of Mexico, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the social construction of the border, the racist political fiction of "illegal aliens" in the interest of U.S. capitalism, the separation of families through multiple moments of mass "repatriation,"

“removal” or “deportations,” and of the introduction of religion that degraded my people’s traditions and culture. These things I learned them all in my Chican@/ Latin@ Lives class.

The class not only created a community but also helped every student understand the history of Chican@/Latin@ Lives and the sociohistorical issues that frame what our community is about. It was a class where we learned about the Chican@/Latin@ history through works of literature by Chican@/Latin@ authors, we critiqued them and ultimately re-claimed them as our own.

As a whole, the experiences and needs of People of Color are definitively neglected or ignored throughout dominant social U.S. discourses. This dynamic is not different within the community of Humboldt State University (HSU). Many students come to HSU because of the natural environment, the great outdoors and to escape the stress and struggles from larger cities. The problem is that the campus is characterized through the University’s marketing department, as a comfortable, welcoming, and accepting community. What they don’t know or don’t publicize are the underlying institutional structures that place People of Color at a disadvantage.

Most Latinx students who choose to enroll in HSU do not realize the way we are used by the University to access funds that are not necessarily spent to improve the quality of education for “Hispanic” students. Latinx students are unaware that there are local and organized hate groups within the community surrounding the university. Many students do not know that their peers of Color are attacked and disrespected by white, typically male youth, because they, as students of Color, are not welcomed here.

Many students who identify as People of Color have a hard time identifying with our professors because they do not look like us or represent our communities. The list of incidents of neglect, erasure, and exclusion is long. Even when we articulate these issues to the university, HSU fails to acknowledge our experiences as serious problems that need to be talked about and addressed. I was lucky that I was able to experience ES 107 from two different perspectives. This experience not only allowed me the opportunity

to shape my own identity, but it also allowed me the chance to aid my peers in their own journey through this educational system. This was truly a humbling experience.

As a student in ES 107 Chican@/Latin@ Lives, I found the class amazing. This class felt safe, and in a way familiar. We (the students) got to read stories about people like us, people that went through experiences that we could relate to. The readings were rewarding but the experience of hearing each other's stories during class fostered a sense of community that became critical in my development as a student. I could connect with my peers after a couple of weeks, I was able to speak up for myself, to read critically, to participate genuinely, to ask the important questions, and to hear each other's voices.

When I was given the opportunity to become a TA, I became more involved in what the students learned or discussed in the course. I was able to read their freewrites, listen to their questions and concerns, and become a source of support and encouragement for students who were now going through the same experience I once did. When I introduced myself to the students, I told them that even though I was their TA I would like to meet them on the same (hierarchical) level in the attempt to find a common ground between us.

Being a TA to me meant so much more than just a course that I would gain academic credit for. I wanted to be accessible to other students like me; I believe that as individuals we are constantly learning from those around us. Our professor told us time and time again that if we ask the students to share what potentially can be a point of vulnerability, that it is only ethical to have the same expectation about ourselves.

As a TA, I was able to read the students' work and learn about them, their history, their personalities, and their aspirations. These students are very brave to be willing to share a part of themselves with others. After reading their stories, I felt empowered by their voices. Their stories were acknowledged and they are valuable. As a Person of Color (POC), we are constantly marginalized by the academic world. This course allowed the students to use their

voices in ways that truly represent who they are. When it came down to selecting the freewrites to be published, it was terribly hard to choose just one from each student. Every student's writing was unique. In the end I made my choices guided by current situations, ideas, and so on.

Sharing our stories, in order to better understand each other, made my experience in ES 107 – as a student, Teaching Assistant, and Associate Editor of *CouRaGeouS Cuentos* – a richer one for all of us and allowed me to create memories I will never forget.