

THE COYOLXAUHQUI PROCESS OF A SCHOLAR UNBECOMING AN ENEMY OF YOUTH: A PERFORMATIVE, EMBODIED, SELF- DECOLONIZING STORY OF TRANSFORMATION AND HOPE

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TRANSFORMATION AND HOPE

A Dissertation Presented

by

CARMEN GLORIA HERNÁNDEZ OJEDA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial
fulfillments of the requirements for the degree of

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Department of Communication

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DEDICATION

A mi padre, Antonio.

A mi madre, Dora.

Por tanto.

Por todo.

Y a ti, Maite, por traerme de nuevo a la vida.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Creating knowledge is a collective endeavor. Not only do I join, as a researcher, an ongoing conversation that crosses oceans and time, mixing my voice and words with other voices and words. I am also able to do it thanks to the material and emotional investment of a large group of people, most of whom I will not be able to name in these pages. Human beings that have taught me, inspired me, challenged me, held me since I was a child. That child that never understood why life was so deeply painful. Why we had to hurt each other. Why communicating was so complicated. Keeping that closeted lesbian child alive was a tribe's effort. Feeding her with reasons to carry on, to try to understand and change that painful world around her. As a student and activist, first; as a teacher and researcher, later. I want to use these pages to thank each of those human beings that have accompanied me through life, that have motivated me to go back and forth the Atlantic Ocean, gathering knowledge, embracing social movements, posing new questions, transforming me, generating love and hope. I am deeply fortunate for having met so many amazing human beings in my four decades breathing on this planet. I am unable to name all of them. I want to mention, however, some of the bodies that have accompanied me during the last five years. People that have, in different ways, supported me in the process of studying my Ph.D. degree, a process that almost took my health and sanity away—not the best moment to be a queer immigrant of color in the United States. Thanks to these people, not only I am about to cross the last ritual of the doctoral process, but I am doing it transformed, renewed, with a clearer vision of what I want to do as a scholar/activist. Among that group of people, I want to thank the faculty and staff at the University of Massachusetts Amherst for the mentorship and knowledge that they have

shared with me. Particularly, my Dissertation Committee members, Dr. Claudio Moreira—thanks to whom I discovered and fell in love with performance studies—and Dr. Kristie Soares. Their wise advice and constant support helped me believe and move forward in this project. Muito obrigada! I am also in debt with Dr. Mari Castañeda, Dr. Leda Cooks, and Dr. Martha Fuentes Bautista for their endless generosity, care, mentorship, and dedication. You have been essential figures in this stage of my life. I also want to thank my cohort peers and the Communication graduate students at UMass for their support and camaraderie. It has been an honor to spend these years with you, learn and grow with you. Particularly, I owe a debt of gratitude to my two writing partners, Victoria Alcazar and Porntip Israsena Twishime. Thanks to their insightful and inspiring feedback and care, I felt encouraged to finish this project. Other central figures in my doctoral process have been my students at UMass. Being in every class with them has been a gift, a priceless reminder of why I want to become a professor: to spend the rest of my life working with youth, learning with them, creating knowledge and changing this world together. In addition to my colleagues and students, there are three people who have, literally, kept me alive during my doctoral process: my therapist, Renee Mendez; my practitioner, Dr. Lisa Lazarz-Ciesla; and my acupuncturist, Jack Radner. Putting my bodymindsoul in their hands made this outcome, surviving a doctoral program, possible. I am also grateful to those working in the entertaining industries, because without their music, shows, and films, I would have not survived the isolating and precarious life of an international doctoral student, going through the endless and rough winters of New England. I cannot conceive a section of acknowledgements without mentioning those human beings that have accompanied me throughout my life, those friends who have

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shaman. I assume my inability to express how deeply grateful I am to her, to all the energy, time, faith, wisdom, patience, care, gently challenge that Professor Pérez has invested in me. It is such an honor to work with a talented scholar like her, but it is a gift to share time, space, conversations and hope with a generous human being and nepantlera like Kimberlee. She taught me to take care of my bodymindsoul as a mindful scholar. She encouraged me to carry on when I was emotionally and physically depleted, to overcome anxiety and fear. She held my hand while I undertook the painful, transformative Coyolxauhqui process that I explain/enable in this dissertation. She made sure that my pieces were able to go back together again after spending years of critical self-reflexivity and transformation. She helped me transition between ontological frameworks and become a performance scholar. Moreover, she showed me that I belong in academia, that I have relevant things to share, that all this effort is worth it. If I am able to conclude this exhausting ritual, the Ph.D., and hopefully become a professor it will be thanks to you, Professor Kimberlee Pérez. I will be forever grateful.

ABSTRACT

THE COYOLXAUHQUI PROCESS OF A SCHOLAR UNBECOMING AN *ENEMY* OF YOUTH: A PERFORMATIVE, EMBODIED, SELF-DECOLONIZING STORY OF TRANSFORMATION AND HOPE

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Scholarly work may be used to foster colonizing processes upon people of color whether scholars are aware of it or not. That is the case of the study of youth bullying in the United States, an old issue that, however, became a central social concern in the United States in the late 1990s. Building upon scholars' framing of youth bullying, a combination of moral panics on youth unfolded, fostering a law-and-order regime in schools that expanded the application of zero-tolerance policies. These policies fed the school-to-prison pipeline that funnels youth into the criminal justice system, a form of internal colonization that polices, incarcerates, and exploits youth of color in the United States. As a researcher on youth bullying, I was oblivious to this harmful outcome. I was becoming an *enemy* of youth of color and I committed to unbecoming one, using this dissertation for that purpose. First, by tracing the genealogy of the study of youth bullying and how academic premises became Gramscian common sense. Second, by reflecting upon and redressing my complicity with (neo)colonialism. I use performance

autoethnography and Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui imperative as methods to unfold a self-decolonizing process as a Canary Islander and queer diasporic nepantlera who is a colonize(d)(r) scholar. The new *conocimiento* that I obtain in this process allows me to look at the study of youth bullying with a different gaze. As a result, I offer an alternative onto-epistemological and methodological approach to the study of youth bullying in the United States. I advocate for a collective decolonizing reframing of youth bullying based upon centering youth's agency, challenging adult researchers' standpoint, suggesting other onto-epistemological and conceptual approaches, as well as promoting other values and tactics in the study of youth peer abuse and violence. This dissertation, in sum, is an onto-epistemo-methodological embodied reflection that offers a methodological contribution on how to study youth bullying in less colonizing ways. Likewise, it contributes to methodological conversations on how to use performance autoethnography to self-decolonize as well as how to decolonize performance autoethnography. Moreover, this text contributes to better understanding diasporic experience and expands the literature on the Canarian diaspora. Fundamentally, this dissertation contributes to decolonizing academia.

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CHAPTER 1

CHA(LLE)NGING THE WORM, ME

You make a commitment, un compromiso, to create meaning. A commitment to add to the field of literature and not just duplicate what's already there. A commitment to explore untrodden caminos-which means turning over all rocks, even those with worms underneath them. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 97)

I welcome you to my dissertation, dear Reader, whilst Gloria Anzaldúa's words reverberate in our bodies. Your body. My body. Imagining a path covered by rocks and grass in front of us. Interpellated by la *maestra* Anzaldúa and her extraordinary ability to explain complex ideas using common language and illuminating metaphors. The quote I chose to open this Chapter, this text, this performance is more than an attention-grabbing device. It is a combination of words and sounds, the outcome of la *maestra* Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* (deep awareness), that helps me understand my role as a researcher, as a teacher, as an activist. Committed always to adding knowledge, not to duplicating it. Moreover, words and sounds that allow me to better comprehend the scope and purpose of this research project and my role in it. Because the problem of committing "to explore untrodden caminos," "turn over all rocks" and examine the "worms underneath them," following Anzaldúa's (2015) call, is that you, unexpectedly, may end up becoming that worm, the subject of your research, the issue to be scrutinized, understood, changed. Even if you never planned such scenario. Even if you were not prepared, trained, to deal with such scenario.

The rock's turner becoming the worm underneath the rock.

The researcher becoming the subject of research.

That is precisely what happened to me, as a Critical Cultural Studies and Media researcher who decided, seven years ago, to conduct research on youth bullying in the

United States. A researcher that, at one point of her scholarly path, realized that she became a well-intentioned *enemy* of youth of color, because her scholarship fostered internal colonizing practices against youth of color in the U.S., despite a life-long commitment to fighting oppression and discrimination. A researcher that decided to unbecoming¹ an *enemy* of youth. A commitment that took me into a path of radical self-reflexivity, pain, and transformation. Because, in order to unbecoming a well-intentioned *enemy* of youth, I had to focus on the foremost worm that needed to be studied and transformed. Me. As a result, seven years later, here I am, ontologically transformed, as a performance studies scholar. A researcher who has radically changed her approach to youth bullying and that, instead of using her dissertation to launch a new anti-bullying method, as I envisioned years ago, offers an alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying in the United States. In this approach, building upon critical voices, I advocate for a collective decolonizing reframing of youth bullying in which youth become central co-reframing agents and adults cha(lle)nge and decenter their positionality. A decolonizing reframing in which participants examine and redress the harmful outcomes that the study of youth bullying has caused to youth of color in the U.S. as well as recognize and discuss concepts and methods marginalized in the study of youth bullying. In this dissertation, I not only share suggestions on how to unfold this decolonizing reframing, but I also enable, embody several of those suggestions. Particularly, I use the dissertation as a research tool to, first, better understand why the study of youth bullying has become harmful to youth of color by indirectly feeding

¹ In the dissertation, I ignore grammatical rules when I employ the verb “to unbecome.” No matter the sentence, I always use the present participle, unbecoming, to emphasize the ongoing dimension of that process as well as to highlight the impossibility of fully unbecoming an *enemy* of youth due to reasons explained in Chapter 2.

internal colonizing practices against youth of color. In addition to pointing out how the study of youth bullying has hurt youth of color in the U.S., I also invite adult researchers to reflect upon their complicity in that process, change their practices, and repair the harm caused to youth of color. Including me. I am one of those scholars interpellated. That is why, second, I use this dissertation to cha(lle)nge me and transform me, as a researcher who does not want to unfold harmful scholarly practices against youth of color, who needs to change and self-decolonize in order to be better prepared to work with youth in a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying. In order to foster my own transformation, I embrace Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui imperative and performance autoethnography as methods/theories, tearing my selves apart, my identity, my experiences, examining them critically in context, and putting them together again. Borrowing from Aztec mythology, Anzaldúa (2015) envisions the Coyolxauhqui imperative as a constant healing and repairing process. The Coyolxauhqui represents her "symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you're embroiled in differently" as well as her "symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way" (p. 20). Thus, the Coyolxauhqui imperative—turned into a process—, in addition to helping me self-decolonize and transform me, allows me to examine the study of youth bullying differently, with a new, self-decolonizing gaze. The outcome of such analysis is, precisely, the design of an alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying. As you may notice, the outcome and the process of this dissertation are one, it is difficult to address them in a linear way, separate them, and determine cause and effect. This dissertation theorizes an alternative methodological approach to the study of youth

bullying while it simultaneously enables a non-conventional approach to the study of youth bullying. For that reason, reflecting upon the methodology employed in this dissertation is more than a required, expected section: it is the dissertation. The whole dissertation is an onto-epistemo-methodological embodied reflection—using my enfolded experiences in context—that helps generate an alternative methodology to study youth bullying in the U.S. Likewise, this project facilitates my own transformation as a scholar. Thus, reflecting about my process becomes another central feature of this dissertation.

As Pathak (2013) highlights, building upon Gonzalez's ethics of post-colonial ethnography, I need to tell my story and its story, what is behind my story—my agenda, my influences, my pain.² It is my way to hold myself accountable to you, as a reader, and to the multiple communities that I address in my dissertation—academic peers and Canary Islanders, among others. For that purpose, I want to answer Edward Said's questions: "Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances?" (Smith, 2012, p. 86). Thus, before I examine why the study of youth bullying became deleterious to youth of color and why I became an *enemy* of youth of color in Chapter 2; before I further and reflect upon my self-decolonizing process as a scholar in Chapter 3; before I share other key suggestions to enable a collective decolonizing approach to the study of youth bullying in Chapter 4, I want to use Chapter 1 to answer Said's questions as well as further trace and reflect about the methodological design of this onto-epistemo-methodological research project.

² Pathak (2013) argues that in order to create ethical post-colonial autoethnographies, we must be held accountable. In that sense, "There is *the* story and *its* story, and there may be other stories beyond these stories" (p. 603).

How The Rock's Turner Became the Worm Underneath the Rock

Since 2012, I have studied, among other youth-related issues, youth bullying, while I was pursuing a master's and a Ph.D. degree in New England. During that time, I explored a myriad of approaches to youth bullying: the relationship between bullycides³ and communication, the role of communication avoidance in fostering and preventing bullying, the use of communication skills in anti-bullying initiatives, the representation of youth anti-bullying roles (bystanders, mainly) on YouTube, and the presence of gender normativity in antibullying campaigns, among other issues. The more I delved into the literature on youth bullying in the U.S., the more aware I became of essential absences in the study of youth bullying, particularly the intersection of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Paceley & Flynn, 2012; Pritchard, 2013). I think that the Coyolxauhqui process that I examine/embody in this dissertation began at that point, when I slowly started challenging the narratives on youth bullying, visualizing key absences. Yet these absences were not the most concerning problem in the study of youth bullying.

After spending more than six years conducting research on youth bullying, I realized that my work was highly problematic. Among other issues, I was reproducing the same epistemic privilege and adultism omnipresent in the youth bullying literature, in which youth's transformative agency⁴ and knowledge tend to be ignored or not recognized sufficiently by adults (Pascoe, 2013). Adultism is a form of oppression that discriminates youth due to their age (DeJong & Love, 2015). DeJong and Love (2013)

³ In 2001, Marr and Field coined a new term, bullycide, "to describe the number of deaths and attempted suicides of those who preferred death to continued bullying" (Easton & Aberman, 2008, p. 47).

⁴ For Virkkunen (2006), transformative agency entails "breaking away from the given frame of action and taking the initiative to transform it" (p. 49).

define it as “the systematic subordination of younger people as a targeted group, who have relatively little opportunity to exercise social power [...] through restricted access to the goods, services, and privileges of society, and denial of access to participation in the economic and political life of society” (p. 536). In a context dominated by adult supremacy based upon “a set of beliefs, attitudes, policies, and practices that construct adults as developed, mature, intelligent, and experienced, based solely on their age” (DeJong & Love, 2015, p. 490), youth occupy a subordinate position. Adults “control the resources and make the decisions in society” (p. 490), including those that affect youth’s lives without needing youth’s consent. This is precisely what has happened in the study of youth bullying. Pascoe (2013) argues that “we often don’t take young people seriously as actors in their own social worlds [...] The deployment of the word ‘bullying,’ is part of the process of infantilizing and delegitimizing youth as full-fledged social actors” (p. 95). I assumed, without any critical self-reflexivity, that my years of academic training, reading scholarly literature endlessly, made me an expert on youth’s reality. From that self-assumed position of expertise, I ignored that youth are actors of their own reality who analyze, struggle, and resist oppression. Particularly, those bodies systemically marginalized in a patriarchal, neoliberal, and colonized society—i.e., youth of color, queer youth, young undocumented immigrants.⁵ In the U.S., young community organizers, slam poets, musicians, dancers, actors/actresses, or painters organize, protest, and build alternatives to oppression in their everyday life (i.e., Conner & Rosen, 2016;

⁵ In this dissertation, queer refers to individuals whose gender identity and sexual orientation are not normative— i.e., gender non-conforming, transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, intersex. For practical although imperfect reasons, I use the labels of queer youth, youth of color, and youth with disabilities, yet they are not excluding. Youth of color can be cisgender, non-cisgender, queer, straight, abled-bodied, and have disabilities. Same reasoning applies to the other categories. It is essential to be aware that “youth with multiple underrepresented identities may experience exacerbated discipline disparities in school” (Snapp et al., 2015, p. 60).

Jocson, 2011; Parmar et al., 2015). Youth resist “against unjust policies, racism and austerity across the United States” (Tuck & Yang, 2013, p. 22). Youth organize walkouts, boycott state tests, mobilize society (Tuck & Yang, 2013). Yet, for years, I ignored youth’s agency in my research on youth bullying. It would be easy to say that I ignored youth’s voices, agency, and demands because they were mostly present in my academic universe as research participants, not as knowledge co-creators in the journal articles that I read, in the conferences that I attended. Yet youth’s voices and agency were present in academia, co-creating knowledge with adults in different projects, such as youth participatory action research projects like Evans-Winters and Girls for Gender Equity’s (2017) PAR project. As aforementioned, youth’s voices and actions were also present in the street, in the internet. It was me who didn’t see youth as knowledge co-creators inside and outside of academia, due to the normative adultism and epistemic privilege that I inherited and reproduced as a social scientist—what I label as academic performativity, building upon Butler’s notion of performativity.⁶ It was me who didn’t listen to youth unless they were answering adults’ questions. It was me who didn’t see youth resisting in everyday life. As a social scientist, I was trained to treat youth as subjects to study. Period. I was trained to examine their lives and decide what was best for them, based on adults’ expertise. Visualizing youth as co-researchers or peers or sources of knowledge was not a central part of my training. It was not part of the methodological scripts that I

⁶ According to Bryant K. Alexander (2005), “Performativity becomes the social and cultural dynamic that extends and exposes the import of repetitive human activity” (p. 414). Academic performativity, thus, entails the social and cultural dynamics that permeate and enable our labor and identity as scholars. My performance as academic does not happen in a vacuum. I did not invent it. I (re)produce—and rewrite—inherited scripts, in the same way that I (re)produce and challenge gender scripts, borrowing from Judith Butler. By reflecting upon my inherited academic scripts and the way I perform them, I want to highlight the social and cultural influences in doing and being an academic. To better understand why I reproduce adultism and epistemic privilege unawares.

learned. Consequently, as a researcher on youth bullying, I was becoming another *expert* on youth bullying without youth.

My inability to listen to non-academic and non-normative academic voices about youth bullying made me miss other relevant and worrisome outcomes of the scholarly work on this issue. In Chapter 2, I examine this complex issue—framings of youth bullying and its consequences—in depth. In this section, I will just point out a couple of central ideas. Ringrose and Renold (2010) emphasize that “the discourse of bullying has become a highly visible, regulative socio-cultural phenomenon circulating well beyond the institutional cultures of schooling [...] with all the makings of a contemporary ‘moral panic’ (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001)” (p. 574). I concur that youth bullying in the U.S., since the late 1990s onward, has become a moral panic. According to Stan Cohen (1972), during a period of moral panic, “A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (p. 9). The object of panic could be new or “something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight” (Cohen, 1972, p. 9), such as certain forms of youth peer violence or the figure of the bully, which are not new phenomena. One of the key factors in making youth bullying a moral panic was the way youth bullying was linked to Columbine High School shootings in 1999 and school shootings in general. This was not the first school shooting taking place in the U.S., yet the high number of young victims (Mears, Moon, & Thielo, 2017) and the massive media coverage of the Columbine shootings (Elsass, Schildkraut, & Stafford, 2016) stunned American society in an unprecedented manner. This reaction changed the collective perception about youth bullying in the U.S. because bullying was used—erroneously—to explain what caused

the Columbine High School shootings. As Mears et al. (2017) argue, “One result, then, of the school shooting [Columbine] was an emerging emphasis nationally on efforts to address bullying based on the belief that doing so would prevent school shootings” (p. 939). This new understanding and social concern around youth bullying was spread by media (Mears et al., 2017), built upon unsupported assumptions (Mears et al., 2017), but also built upon researchers’ work. As *The New York Times* explained in 2001, referring to a nation-wide study on bullying published by Nansel and colleagues (2001),

The study [Nansel et al., 2001] comes at a time of increasing attention to the issue of bullying. Harassment and ridicule have been linked to several incidents of school violence, including the fatal shootings at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colo., in 1999, and at Santana High School in Santee, Calif., last month. And several states, including Georgia and New Hampshire, have passed laws requiring school districts to prohibit bullying (Goode, 2001).

Years later, when the causal relationship between mass shootings and bullying victimization was questioned (Mears et al., 2017), the perception of youth bullying as a major social threat remained. Researchers’ work, once again, was used to promote the idea of youth bullying as a “national youth health crisis” (Bryn, 2011)—even though there is a huge disparity among the scientific community in what is considered bullying and its measurement (i.e., Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009; Mears et al., 2017). For instance, communication scholars, conversely to other researchers, exclude relational aggression from bullying and study it separately (i.e., Sunwolf & Leets, 2004; Willer & Cupach, 2008). Researchers’ work, in sum, ignited and fueled a moral panic on youth bullying in the U.S. In response to social pressure, youth bullying as moral panic triggered state governments to pass anti-bullying legislation, which imposed the application of bullying prevention and intervention measures in schools. These measures supported the implementation of a law-and-order regime in schools, embodied by

repressive, discriminatory, and ineffective zero-tolerance policies, militarization of schools, and constant surveillance of youth (i.e., Giroux, 2004; Walton, 2011). In addition to fostering a climate of violence in schools (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014), another worrying outcome of the law-and-order educative system is the promotion of the school-to-prison pipeline, a “growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via ‘zero tolerance’ policies, and tracking them directly and/or indirectly into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems” (Heitzeg, 2009, p. 1). The school-to-prison pipeline has become one of the most gruesome attacks and a form of internal colonization ⁷ against youth of color in the U.S. I use the notion of internal neocolonialism borrowing from Tejeda and Gutierrez (2006), who distinguish between “the forms of domination, oppression, and exploitation of the internal colonialism of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, and the forms of domination, oppression, and exploitation that have characterized the internal colonialism of the 20th and 21st centuries,” which they label as neocolonial (p. 281). Internal neocolonialism exploits and oppresses certain bodies within the U.S “with the same goals of formal colonialism: the maintenance of wealth, power, and dominion for the colonizers” (Jackson, 2009, pp. 162-163). In the U.S., Black, Indigenous, and Latinx activists and scholars have long framed the oppressive situation experienced by Indigenous, Black and other people of color as a form of domestic or internal neocolonialism (Allen, 2005). As Tejeda and Gutierrez (2006) posit,

It is clear that many of the processes and practices of early colonial domination and capitalist exploitation have been altered, abandoned, or legally terminated,

⁷ Tuck and Yang (2012), drawing from coloniality and postcolonial theories, define internal colonialism as “the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the ‘domestic’ borders of the imperial nation. This involves the use of particularized modes of control - prisons, ghettos, minoritizing, schooling, policing - to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its white elite” (pp. 4-5).

but essential features of that domination and exploitation continue to structure the economic, social, political, and cultural relations between differing groups in contemporary “American” society. What’s more, the corporal genocide and cultural annihilation of indigenous and nonwhite peoples is far from over. (p. 277)

Indigenous scholars, however, emphasize that their experience differs from the internal colonialism suffered by other oppressed groups, as they still experience settler colonialism due to the U.S. Government’s occupation of Native land (Churchill, 1984; Tuck & Yang, 2012).⁸ Whether internal neocolonialism or settler colonialism in the U.S.—two different realities that I comprise into the expression (neo)colonialism—, both affect severely youth of color. In 1975, Staples posited that “[to] be young and black in the internal colonies of the United States is to be subjected to all the harshest elements of oppression” (p. 2). Forty years later, the situation has not changed. The conflation of (neo)colonialism and neoliberalism generates a harsh scenario for colonized youth in the U.S. As Evans-Winters (2017) points out, “Blauner’s (1969) conclusion that Blacks in America are colonized people can be applied to the social and political conditions of Black people today” (p. 21). Youth of color, particularly, are subjected to police brutality, defunded public education, difficult access to healthcare and healthy food, criminalization of everyday behavior (i.e., turning dressing as a criminal offence; Giroux, 2014), and disproportioned incarceration, among other factors. In that sense, the school-to-prison pipeline has become another tool of internal colonization that polices, incarcerates, and exploits youth of color. Because youth of color and “other marginalized youth”—, youth living with disabilities, noncitizens, underprivileged, and queer youth—

⁸ Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that what makes settler colonialism distinct is that settlers “come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain [...] Land is what is most valuable, contested, required” (p. 5). The notion of land encompasses “land/water/air/subterranean earth” (p. 5).

suffer the school-to-prison phenomenon more severely (Nocella, Parmar, & Stovall, 2014, p. 3), especially when these identities intersect (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015).⁹

The relationship between anti-bullying discourses and the development of the school-to-prison pipeline is a concerning reality that, however, was and remains mostly invisible in the dominant literature on youth bullying—the one which primarily influences policy making. Yet it is not the only issue that needs to be addressed, as I posit in Chapter 2. The conceptual discrepancies around the notion of bullying are not secondary. Walton (2005a) conceptualizes bullying as “a discursive practice” articulated by researchers, journalists, and policy makers (p. 60). For Walton (2011), “the very way that bullying is considered and defined is part of the very problem that policies are designed to address” (p. 142). For instance, definitions of bullying that ignore or decontextualize the role of power in interpersonal relationships, erasing the influence of systemic forms of oppression in quotidian interactions, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or ableism (i.e., Ringrose & Renold, 2010). In this sense, the study of youth bullying became a problem to be examined, and an increasing number of researchers are devoted to that epistemological, methodological and, in some cases, ontological task. In addition to Walton, other critical voices have denounced the harm that the discourse on youth bullying generates against youth of color and queer youth (i.e., Gender JUST, 2013; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014; Meyer, 2016; Pascoe, 2013; Payne

⁹ Even though the school-to-prison pipeline affects a diverse pool of marginalized youth, youth of color are the primary target of this phenomenon. That is why I primarily interpellate youth of color in this dissertation. Yet I also see myself as a well-intentioned *enemy* of any human being that suffers the war on youth.

& Smith, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2010).¹⁰ In my case, it took me years to find these critical voices who deviated from and challenged the dominant approach to the study of youth bullying. I was just reproducing the dominant narrative in the study of youth bullying, even though I was not fully comfortable with it, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Encountering these critical voices helped me identify and articulate my own critiques to the study of youth bullying. Furthermore, this encounter transformed the way I understand my discipline, communication. Academia. My own scholarship. Myself.

For years, I was unable to recognize my own axiological incoherence. I was an activist who was trying to develop a career as a critical engaged scholar, so convinced of the usefulness of my work. How wouldn't I, after spending most of my adult life actively advocating for social change? First, in the feminist and LGBT movements in Spain; later, as a researcher, tackling discrimination and youth bullying. It didn't occur to me that my research could be harmful. Yet it was, it is. My scholarship on youth bullying was obviously fostering oppression and internal neocolonialism against youth of color and other marginalized groups in the U.S. Creating knowledge that, indirectly, would enable youth of color's incarceration and exploitation. Commodifying youth's pain to build my career. I was feeding what Henry Giroux (2000) and Larry Grossberg (2001) label as a neoliberal war on youth.¹¹ I felt devastated.

¹⁰ For those interested in examining critical approaches to the study of youth bullying, the inaugural issue of *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* published in 2013 is a basic reading. The issue featured critical approaches to the study of youth bullying.

¹¹ According to Giroux and Grossberg, "a number of forces [...] have come together to situate youth in a way in which they are no longer seen as a social investment but are seen as a liability" (Pollard, 2014, p. 180). On the one hand, youth are commodified and exploited—what Giroux (2014) calls the soft war. On the other hand, in the case of poor or disposable youth (based on their ethnicity, class, or race), young individuals are subjected to a repressive regime of surveillance, control, and punishment—the hard war (Giroux, 2014, p. 76).

For that reason, I envisioned my major research project so far, my dissertation, as a vessel, as a tool to question my researcher's role and to change my oppressive and colonizing relationship with youth—in particular, youth of color, as the primary targets of the school-to-prison pipeline and the war on youth. As aforementioned, this project has primarily become an onto-epistemo-methodological embodied reflection on how to study youth bullying. Thus, reflecting upon the different stages of this research project—until the final version of the dissertation that you are reading right now—becomes part of the scope of this chapter.

When I first started working on my dissertation, I was convinced that my main effort was to address the deleterious consequences of bullying research, building upon previous critical voices (i.e., Gender JUST, 2013; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014; Meyer, 2016; Pascoe, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Walton, 2005a). I aimed to persuade normative youth bullying scholars, who reproduce dominant conceptualizations of youth bullying, to question their standpoint and assume responsibility for the harm caused to youth of color and queer youth. Likewise, in this initial stage of the dissertation, I emphasized the idea of centering youth in the research of youth bullying as an essential effort to change bullying as discourse, building upon Walton's conceptualization; youth needed to be at the center of youth-related decision-making processes. That was my standpoint until I realized that the core issue was not about centering youth but decentering adult researchers' roles in their research. Youth had been always resisting, reproducing, and challenging inherited scripts; it was adults who ignored youth's agency and agenda and thus, adults were the ones who needed to question and change their epistemic privilege, adultism, and oppressive standpoint. This

evolution in my reasoning was highly satisfactory, yet, at the same time, I felt that something was still missing in my analysis. I kept reading and thinking, and, influenced by decolonizing methodologies, I concluded that the main problem lay beyond researchers' definition of youth peer bullying—building upon Walton's (2005a) thesis. Many adults had framed youth peer abuse, conceptualizing the problem and providing solutions, without counting with youth. I cannot generalize the reasons why this has happened. Maybe they followed, as I did, a normative ontological approach based upon epistemic privilege and adultism that educate researchers to visualize youth as research subjects or participants, not co-producers of knowledge and political agendas. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) posits that the framing “of an issue is about making decisions about its parameters, about what is in the foreground, what is in the background, and what shadings or complexities exist within the frame” (p. 255). Thus, in this new stage of the dissertation, I recommended to reframe youth bullying, following an Indigenous understanding of reframing (Smith). A decolonizing reframing in which youth and adults collectively reflected upon the definition and causes of peer abuse and decided how to address the issue—as Smith (2012) suggests in the context of Indigenous communities. The main goal of this reframing was preventing adults from taking control, once again, on how to theorize and act upon youth peer abuse as they/we have done under the dominant bullying discourse framework. Likewise, in this stage, I recommended a decolonizing reframing that addressed what is behind bullying as discourse—including its premises and consequences—and tried to transform it. In addition to reflecting upon this decolonizing reframing of youth bullying, I intended to embody it in the dissertation,

engaging with youth of color and queer youth by audiencing their performances posted on YouTube.

At that point, I thought that my conceptual articulation was getting more and more nuanced in the dissertation. Still, I could feel that something fundamental remained missing in my work. It was an intuitive, sharp, uneasy feeling, the same that accompanied me when I began questioning the dominant discourse on youth bullying. My body always knows first when something is wrong. It is the “intuitive knowing, unmediated by mental constructs—what inner eye, heart, and gut tell you” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 120) that Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Lorde taught me to identify and value. Because, as a social scientist, I was trained to diminish any knowledge that was created by my body. As Lorde (2017) argues, “The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free” (pp. 9-10). Precisely, I need to embrace my sensorial abilities to develop *la facultad*, a key Anzaldúan notion that, as Keating clarifies, represents “an intuitive form of knowledge that includes but goes beyond logical thought and empirical analysis” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 244). *La facultad* allows me “to see the deep structure below the surface” (p. 244), visualize things differently. It begins with perceptions, feelings, and sensations. Like the ones that I experienced about my dissertation. I felt that something was wrong, yet I wasn’t ready to understand and articulate what I was feeling. I kept re-reading the chapters of the dissertation that I had already written, discussed them with my advisor and peers, trying to build a more sophisticated theoretical articulation. Then, I got sick and I had to stop working on my research projects for a while.

Time passed, and when I felt better, I returned to the dissertation—did I ever left it? I read, with fresh eyes, what I had previously written. Until that moment, I was convinced that I had turned “over all rocks” in my dissertation draft. Yet I had not. Something didn’t make sense in my words. The pieces of the puzzle didn’t match. At all. After reading my old dissertation chapters, I realized that I was getting lost in the project, that my purpose and what I had written didn’t fully match, that the old chapters didn’t reflect my own growth and research standpoint. I had written an asphyxiating draft full of data... and anger and hopelessness. An endless explanation of what was wrong about the study of youth bullying. Mistakes. Victimization. Oppression. In that draft, I didn’t include space for healing, compassion, transformation, resistance, repairing the harm caused by scholars, or hope, which are ontological cornerstones for me and this project. Likewise, and even more worrisomely, I kept catching more incoherence in my words and actions. I was trying to frame a method—performance audiencing—as dialogical when my research conditions did not enable dialogue: I was presenting youth as co-participants in my dissertation, when they were not. I was only audiencing their performances through mediated channels. No room for their feedback. Or even their consent to participate in a dialogue with me, in a reframing process with me. A reframing of youth bullying, if wanted to be horizontal and non-oppressive, should not be conducted by scholars alone: it should incorporate a dialogical process involving youth and other adult agents as partners or having youth leading the process—using youth participatory action research, for instance.¹² Not only because “adults cannot lead the

¹² Youth Participatory Action Research is “is an approach to research in which those most impacted by a problem—the youth—co-research it and take action in partnership with adults” (Bertrand, Duran & Gonzalez, 2017, p. 142). According to Stoecker and Bonacich, participatory research follows two main

work of ending oppression alone,” or because “adults can become more effective at challenging youth oppression in partnership with young people” (DeJong & Love, 2015). La facultad kicked in again, “an instant ‘sensing’, a quick perception” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 244), the body facilitating the reasoning, the creative process. I realized that, once again, I excluded youth from the reframing process. Even worse, I was creating a reframing process alone and, somehow, I convinced myself that I was not, that my project was dialogical. This last point, in fact, alarmed me, furthering la facultad, my ability to see deeper meanings. Despite all the self-reflexive work that I was undertaking, I hadn’t caught this fundamental incoherence.¹³ Calmly, I stopped, breathed, and deeply reflected about what was happening in the process of writing the dissertation, repeating Smith’s (2012) wise words out loud, “It is not enough to hope or desire change” (p. 25). I accepted this experience—reproducing what I was denouncing—as part of the writing and research process, using it to keep self-challenging, self-reflecting, and growing. Because, as Anzaldúa (2015) would say, “this detour is part of the path” (p. 20).

In fact, something highly relevant was taking place during that time of awareness: I was undertaking another pivotal phase of the Coyolxauhqui process, furthering my fragmentation process, cha(lle)nging my selves even more. Now I realize that getting sick while working on my dissertation was not secondary, a coincidence, albeit the contrary. It was part of the Coyolxauhqui process, of my research method. External issues affected

premises. On the one hand, it fosters participation in the research process to those who were relegated as “research subjects” as well as it recognizes forms of knowledge that have been ignored or delegitimized (as cited in Stoecker, 1999, p. 841).

¹³ In addition to the powerful and transformative feedback provided by my advisor-nepantlera, Dr. Kimberlee Pérez, I want to acknowledge Brendan McCauley’s and Aurora Santiago Ortiz’s insightful and critical observations on my dissertation project shared during our participation at the Fourteenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on May 2018. Our conversations impacted me profoundly and helped me identify what was failing in my previous dissertation draft.

my immune system—i.e., dealing with a respiratory virus, a neighbor that disrupted my sleep often, tensions in my work environment, increased xenophobic rhetoric in the U.S. that made me constantly anxious. Yet part of the sickness developed from the inside out. It was a combination of exhaustion, discomfort, disorientation, feeling lost, and feeling unable to articulate the clash of ideas that were taking place in my bodymindsoul.¹⁴ I experienced what Anzaldúa calls a nepantla state; the Coyolxauhqui process facilitated it. AnaLouise Keating (2006) describes it this way:

During nepantla, our worldviews and self-identities are shattered. Nepantla is painful, messy, confusing, and chaotic; it signals unexpected, uncontrollable shifts, transitions, and changes. Nepantla hurts!!!! But nepantla is also a time of self-reflection, choice, and potential growth—what Anzaldúa describes as opportunities to “see through” restrictive cultural and personal scripts. As I understand the term, then, nepantla includes both radical dis-identification and transformation. We dis-identify with existing beliefs, social structures, and models of identity; by so doing, we are able to transform these existing conditions. (p.9)

With every moment of tearing myself apart, I faced painful facts about my identity and quotidian practices. About my complicity in the war on youth, in colonizing process against youth of color. I embodied that stress, that discomfort and shame, that “dislocation, disorientation” that nepantleras¹⁵ experience (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 81), affecting my breathing, my strength. At the same time, navigating physical and emotional pain, sickness, exhaustion and confusion helped me see things differently. As Andrade (2019) points out, “Pain is a way to theorize from our bodies to help our communities”

¹⁴ Anzaldúa (2015) uses this term to convey the unity of body, mind, and soul: “Spirit and mind, soul and body, are one” (p. 24).

¹⁵ For Anzaldúa (2015), nepantleras are individuals, mestizas, who live in-between cultures and spaces, who reject rigid binaries and instead embrace fluidity. Individuals who “negotiate the cracks between worlds, to accommodate contradictory identity positions and mutually exclusive, inconsistent worlds” (p. 82). Navigating those cracks help nepantleras develop new perspectives, “alternative roads” (p. 82). At the same time, nepantleras are “stuck between the cracks of home and other cultures,” which makes them feel “dislocation, disorientation” (p. 81). Nepantla is a Nahuatl word that means “in-between space” (p. 245). Nepantleras are in-betweeners.

(p. 88), because, Anzaldúa (2015) emphasizes, we can use pain, sickness, and wounds to connect among each other, to use them as bridges. Enduring this nepantla stage of my Coyolxauhqui process helped me face my own incoherence, fostering a deeper and more powerful and painful exercise of self-reflexivity and transformation. Re-reading those old chapters in the dissertation helped me realize that the most concerning worm in my research process, following Anzaldúa's analogy, was me, is still me, the rocks' turner who became the worm under the rock. The researcher who became the subject of her own research. Who needed to continue her fragmentation process, going deeper, and deeper. Realizing, in the process, that I was a colonizer colonized researcher who continued—and will continue—oppressing and fostering colonization against youth of color unawarely, despite all the self-reflective work that I have done. Realizing that this painful self-reflective process was, in fact, central to the methodology that I was unfolding in the dissertation. Realizing, moreover, that sharing and reflecting upon such methodology was the main outcome of the dissertation. While I was sick, away from the text, I never stopped working in the dissertation. Everything was part of the research process. Every conversation, every reflection, every moment of pain and confusion. Every instance of (self)transformation.

At this stage of the research process, I realized that I had to further examine why it was so difficult for me to see, detect my colonizing practices as a scholar. I realized that I needed to reflect upon my own role as colonized and colonizer subject, something that I had only done superficially—a process that I describe in Chapter 3. Furthermore, I realized that I needed to self-decolonize in order to unbecoming an *enemy* of youth, and

that the dissertation in general, and Chapter 3 in particular, would allow me to foster such a self-decolonizing process.

(Self)Decolonizing the Worm

I am a native from a colonized and oppressed land, the Canary Islands, a small Archipelago that belongs to the Spanish Kingdom, and thus, it is politically considered a territory of the European Union. When I was 18 years old, I left the islands and moved to mainland Spain, to study my bachelor's degree. I never returned to live in the Archipelago, only to visit my family and friends. I have often dreamt with the possibility of returning, and seeing the blue horizon every day, smelling *el salitre*, hearing the ocean as a quotidian soundtrack, and enjoying the warmth of Canarian islanders. Yet, as a relative advised me when he drove me to the airport last time I visited the Islands, in 2013,¹⁶

—"If you are planning to come back to live here, don't do it"—he said. "There is no future for you in this land."

I can still hear his voice and feel the pain of knowing that he was right. Especially if I want to become a tenured professor and researcher, I can't live in the Islands (most likely, not even in Spain).¹⁷ I am one of those "canarias y canarios, muchos con una elevada cualificación, que con el modelo actual no tienen más horizonte que la emigración o el desempleo" [one of many highly qualified Canary Islanders that, due to

¹⁶ After writing this Chapter, I visited the Islands in the summer of 2019.

¹⁷ In the Canary Islands, there are only two public and three small private universities. Academic job openings are limited and very competitive. Outside of these institutions, there are few chances to find research positions. The Canarian economy relies heavily on services, particularly tourism ("Labour," 2018). According to the European Commission ("Labour," 2018), the unemployment rate in 2017 was almost 22% of the active population in the Islands, making the Canary Islands the third Spanish Autonomous Community with the highest unemployment rate, despite being the second top touristic destination in Spain and receiving more than 10 million tourists per year.

the current [economic] model [in the Islands], don't have other option than emigrating or facing unemployment] (González Hernández, 2018, p. 19). Unless I choose a job related to tourism and I escape the high rate of unemployment endemic in the Islands, there is hardly room for me there. I can only be a visitor. A visitor that cries every time she glimpses the mountains of Gran Canaria, my island, from the plane. A visitor that still cries when it's time to leave the Island and the plane takes off. I have lived my entire adult existence out of the Canary Islands, carrying my life in suitcases between mainland Spain and the United States. Constantly longing for the Atlantic Ocean. Starting over so many times that I refuse to buy books or any items anymore—I am tired of keeping parts of my life in storages at both sides of the Ocean.

In that sense, I followed the same path taken by many of my ancestors during the last five hundred years: I left the Islands and became another member of the old Canary diaspora, spread out across the planet. The Canary diaspora encompasses a complex history of diasporic subjects who left their homeland due to different factors. Part of them were pushed to leave the Archipelago by the Spanish monarchy, which has always used the Canary Islands and their inhabitants for geopolitical reasons (i.e., to help colonize the Islands and other territories). Initially, part of the Islanders were forced to leave as slaves. It is the case of Indigenous people who inhabited the Canary Islands for hundreds of years before European conquerors, in the XV century, took Indigenous' land and freedom and made the Islands part of the Spanish Kingdom. Once the original inhabitants were enslaved, killed, or mixed with European settlers and other European settlers also populated the islands, the diaspora operated in a different way. Most diasporic subjects from the Canary Islands left the Islands due to recurrent economic crisis, social

inequalities, and other factors (i.e., religious, political) (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014). Subjects like me. I left the Islands too, albeit in different conditions compared to most of my diasporic ancestors, especially those who had to migrate illegally:¹⁸ I am a highly educated, privileged subject who flies instead of sailing the Atlantic on tiny unsafe boats, as many Canary Islanders had to do in the past. What unifies our diasporic experiences as Canary Islanders is that most of us experienced, in different ways, the outcomes of centuries of settler, external, and internal.¹⁹ European colonialism in the Canary Islands, which pushed Canary emigrants out of our homeland.²⁰

I have lived in the U.S. twice. In both occasions, I came to study a graduate degree and work as a graduate instructor. In the U.S., I am a colonized diasporic subject who faces discrimination due to her gender, sexual orientation, migratory status, and ethnicity. Since 2012, I have lived as a privileged yet precarious immigrant with a student visa. When I cross the border into the U.S., when I work on campus, when I visit stores in the U.S., I am reminded that my body, my name, my culture, my accent, my values, my desire are problematic anomalies more or less tolerated or welcomed according to the context. For example, every time that my body is, once again, “randomly” selected to be subjected to security checks when I fly into or inside the U.S. Or when I notice angry, disapproving gazes staring at me when I speak Spanish in public with other people or

¹⁸ Canary emigration was controlled by the Spanish Empire or Government until the twentieth century, allowing or forbidding it based on geostrategic needs, i.e., to guarantee enough population in the Canary Islands (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014).

¹⁹ Tuck and Yang (2012) stress that external colonialism “(also called exogenous or exploitation colonization) denotes the expropriation of fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings, extracting them in order to transport them to - and build the wealth, the privilege, or feed the appetites of - the colonizers, who get marked as the first world” (p. 4).

²⁰ In Chapter 3, I provide details on how these forms of colonialism have been embodied in the Canary Islands.

over the phone. Yet, as a researcher who lives, studies, and conduct research in the U.S., I am simultaneously complicit with settler colonialism on Native land and internal neocolonialism against youth of color in the U.S. Acknowledging my complicity with colonialism is a starting point in my (self)decolonizing process.

Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) ask critical scholars not to use decolonization as a metaphor, a synonym of social justice or human rights. Thanks to Tuck and Yang, I was able to visualize differences between social justice and decolonization. The lack of awareness of my complicity to colonization didn't allow me to realize that while I was advocating for social justice in my anti-bullying scholarship, I was supporting internal colonizing practices against youth of color in the U.S. (by enabling the school-to-prison pipeline). Even though my reflection was triggered by Tuck and Yang's ideas, it doesn't match their understanding of decolonization. According to Tuck and Yang (2012), for Indigenous communities who claim stolen land, getting back those lands is essential to decolonize. In fact, there cannot be a decolonizing process without making land a priority: "decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 21). Yet there are multiple ways to frame and embrace decolonization, based on our own contextualized experiences with colonizing processes. For individuals who embody the complexity of centuries of forced and voluntary mestizaje, diasporas, and migration, land can be one of the dimensions of the decolonizing process—but not the main one (Diversi & Moreira, 2016). According to that standpoint, decolonizing body, mind, and everyday practices become as essential as claiming stolen land. In fact, for many individuals, there could not be land to claim back, as Diversi and Moreira (2016) indicate, because "[m]ost

of us live, more and more, in Homi Bhabha's third space, in transnational identities, in a postcolonial juxtaposition of mess, chaos, hybridity, and in-betweenness" (p. 584).

Supporting Natives' claims is essential, and at the same time Indigenous peoples are not the only human beings subjected by (neo)colonialism and oppression. A myriad of human beings who don't self-identify as Indigenous has suffered centuries of external, internal, and settler colonialism across the planet. In the same way that non-Indigenous people should not determine Indigenous agendas, the latter should not determine how or whether other colonized subjects should decolonize. Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest that we must contextualize our definition of colonization.²¹ For me, it depends on the context examined. In the case of the U.S., as discussed before, three approaches coexist: settler colonialism that affects Native Americans; internal neocolonialism that targets non-Indigenous people of color; and external neocolonialism in the form of extractive and colonizing practices inflicted by the U.S. in other countries. In the case of the Canarian experience, the approach to colonialism differs. Conversely to other territories likewise colonized by the Spanish Empire, the Islands were not able to obtain their independence, as most colonized territories in America, Africa, and Asia did. Thus, I use the notion of internal colonialism to elucidate the relationship of the Islands with the Spanish State, and external colonialism to categorize the extractive practices developed by other countries on the Canary Islands. I purposely reject the prefix "neo" to indicate the continuity of internal/external colonizing practices on Canarian land that have taken place

²¹ Tuck and Yang (2012) point out that "What is colonization?" must be answered specifically, with attention to the colonial apparatus that is assembled to order the relationships between particular peoples, lands, the 'natural world', and 'civilization'. Colonialism is marked by its specializations. In North America and other settings, settler sovereignty imposes sexuality, legality, raciality, language, religion and property in specific ways. Decolonization likewise must be thought through in these particularities" (p. 21).

for centuries. Following Tuck and Yang's (2012) claim, we should also contextualize our understanding of decolonization and accept that our different experiences will create different approaches to decolonization. We can diminish each other's framing, or we can acknowledge our standpoints and find ways to listen to each other, self-reflect, and work—or not—together (in long-term alliances or just temporarily). For a colonized, mestiza, and diasporic subject like me, Strobel's (1997) definition of decolonization best expresses my own process:

Decolonization is a psychological and physical process that enables the colonized to understand and overcome the depths of alienation and marginalization caused by colonization. By transforming consciousness through the reclamation of one's cultural self and the recovery and healing of traumatic memory, the colonized can become agents of their own destiny. (p. 63)

In my case, although my approach to decolonialization is different to Tuck and Yang's (2012), I listen carefully to them when they stress that there are three positionalities in the colonization process in the US: Native, settler, or slave. If you are not a Native or slave, whether you are a billionaire or an undocumented farm worker, you are a settler occupying stolen land. Thus, as an immigrant scholar in the U.S., I fall under the settler category.²²

Even though I see these categories—Native, settler, or slave—too limited and rigid (Diversi & Moreira, 2016), I agree that I am an accomplice of settler colonialism in the U.S. I study and work on stolen land. Alike my Canary ancestors, I became a colonized subject—influenced by economic and social circumstances—who contributes

²² Tuck and Yang (2012) highlight that in the United States, “colonial subjects who are displaced by external colonialism, as well as racialized and minoritized by internal colonialism, still occupy and settle stolen Indigenous land. Settlers are diverse, not just of white European descent, and include people of color, even from other colonial contexts. This tightly wound set of conditions and racialized, globalized relations exponentially complicates what is meant by decolonization, and by solidarity, against settler colonial forces” (p. 7).

to processes of external and internal colonialism in other territories, as I further discuss in Chapter 3. Including settler colonialism upon communities who claim their stolen land. I am an accomplice of settler colonialism in the U.S and never acknowledged it publicly before. First, out of ignorance; then, when I became aware of the situation, out of fear. In order to resist and challenge an invigorated white supremacy, I have tried to remain as invisible as possible. That included not challenging white supremacy and its internal neocolonial imperialism too loud—as you can see by reading this text, those days of fear are gone. As an activist and engaged scholar, I reject my own submissive performance, yet I have embodied tactics of resistance in difficult neoliberal times. Whether I possess an elevated cultural capital, I am foremost an immigrant in her early forties who left her country four years after the disastrous financial crash in 2008. I can feel the razor of neoliberal disposability approaching my middle-age neck. Yet, my diasporic and migratory circumstances are not an excuse to ignore Natives' decolonizing claims. Likewise, addressing my responsibility and connivance with settler colonialism does not free me from that colonizing role. Part of the transformative endeavor I am undertaking is to figure out what can I do to support Indigenous demands, while dealing with the complexities of surviving a monstrous neoliberal and globalized economy. Realizing how invisible settler colonialism has been in my agenda as a critical scholar is the first step. Remaining vigilant and self-aware of how I use Indigenous knowledge is the second.

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and other Indigenous scholars denounce, Western academia has historically appropriated Indigenous knowledge. In my case, I don't self-identify as an Indigenous person and I don't conduct research on Indigenous experiences and communities. However, I draw upon Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and

axiology—as I draw upon Third World feminists’ work—to contribute to scholarly alternatives to Western models of knowledge production. To decolonize. To embrace and develop an ontology where embodiment, healing, hope, wholeness, and *reparar el daño causado* are essential. To what extent am I coopting, appropriating Indigenous knowledge? To what extent am I participating in a collective effort that tries to decolonize—minds, bodies, lands—and stop human destruction of Earth? Such a reading will depend of our own approach to colonization and identities. How we read ourselves and others. I don’t have control upon that. Certainly, I can’t ignore the impact of Linda Tuhiwai Smith on my own intellectual and activist path. I cannot undo the way her words have cha(lle)nged me. I can, however, acknowledge the source of my ideas and remain vigilant on how I use Indigenous knowledge—making sure that I cite Smith and other Indigenous scholars, instead of citing a white scholar who read Indigenous’ work (which I did at one point).

In addition to becoming an accomplice of settler colonialism in the U.S., I contribute to other forms of (neo)colonialism. As a scholar, I am part of an institution—academia—that has historically supported or enabled colonialism, particularly through research. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) powerfully emphasizes that “‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 30). Centuries of Western research has been used by Western countries to justify and enable colonial practices—appropriating lands, extracting resources and labor, oppressing people (Smith, 2012). Likewise, universities created in colonized territories “were established as an essential part of the colonizing process” (Smith, 2012, p. 128).

Academia's complicity with colonialism has not only affected societies from the Global South, but from the Global North as well due to the implementation of internal neocolonialism. It is imperative to question whether academia remains an accomplice of internal neocolonialism and settler colonialism. In that sense, the relationship between the dominant framing of youth bullying and the school-to-prison pipeline helps us uncover academia's role in perpetuating internal neocolonialism in the U.S. By generating a decontextualized moral panic on youth and its subsequent consequences (militarization of schools, zero-tolerance policies, and incarceration), the mainstream scholarship on youth bullying has indirectly contributed to systemic oppression and incarceration against youth of color, queer youth, and youth with disabilities—the three categories most affected by the school-to-prison pipeline (“Dropout,” n.d.). Even though more voices are calling attention on the negative outcomes of anti-bullying policies (i.e., GLSEN),²³ it does not seem that the dominant anti-bullying narrative is addressing this issue as a major concern. Critical self-reflexivity and (self)decolonization are not top priorities for many scholars, or at least it is not reflected in their work. That is why scrutinizing our academic performativity is essential if we don't want to reproduce colonizing practices unawarely, a scrutinizing process that includes examining our methodological and epistemological standpoints. Following Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) advice, it is essential to be aware that “the methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied. In other words, they need to be ‘decolonized’” (p. 89). Decolonizing academia is a way to change

²³ GLSEN denounces that “some policies intended to reduce bullying have had the adverse effect of pushing students into the school-to-prison pipeline” (“Dropout,” n.d.).

its submission to colonialism—and my submission, as a scholar, to it. Yet, epistemological and methodological challenges are not enough to decolonize academia. They are pivotal changes, albeit without guarantees. We can't decolonize academia if scholars don't decolonize as well. Tintiangco-Cubales and colleagues (2015) highlight that the “process of decolonization should not be mistaken as only an academic exercise; the aim of decolonization is to move toward self-determination, claiming of an intellectual identity, and active participation in the transformation of material conditions” (pp. 111-112). Challenging colonialism discursively neither automatically changes their/our everyday practices as scholars nor exempts scholars from being part of and reproducing a colonizing structure—and benefitting from it. At least for me, my commitment towards self-determination and transformation of material conditions needs to be embodied. Because, borrowing Mohanty's (2003) words, “decolonization involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures” (p. 7). I need to show my transformative process, self-decolonize while/by sharing my self-reflexivity in context. Even a self-decolonizing process does not guarantee that I will not continue feeding colonization. As long as I remain working in a neoliberal colonizing institution and occupied land, I'll contribute to the oppression of colonized subjects (included myself). I'll remain benefitting from youth of color's exploitation. Yet, at least, if I am able to identify my embodied connivance with colonization and oppression—through critical, transformative self-reflexivity—, I'll have more opportunities to change my practices, change me, help change the system. Because, how can I change what I ignore?

In that sense, catching myself coopting youth's voices in the previous stages of my dissertation, while I was advocating against it, helped me realize that I was not ready

to work with youth of color, to be part of a collective reframing process on youth bullying. Not yet. My standpoint as a colonized colonizer researcher remains the primary obstacle I must address in my scholarship if I want to work, more ethically, with youth of color. As Tintiangco-Cubales and colleagues (2015) argue, in the case of Ethnic Studies instructors, their effectiveness working with youth of color rely “on their continuous reflection about their own cultural identities, their relationships with the focal ethnic communities, and the impact of a Eurocentric system on their perspectives and sense of self” (p. 111). Thus, I need to embrace deep, constant self-reflexivity and self-transformation. Just applying a participatory research methodology or including youth’s voices and experiences in my writing do not guarantee that I will be able to identify when I am oppressing youth, using them, coopting them. Colonization runs so deep in my bodymindsoul that it is not easy to identify and stop its impact on me, challenge it, challenge me, change me. Therefore, I need to further self-decolonize, which is not an easy task.

Njoki Nathani Wane (2008) points out that “[d]ecolonizing oneself is the most difficult process” (p. 187) because colonialism permeates our colonized minds, through Western education, and it is not easy to identify and get rid of colonial values and expectations. I know it first-hand. As I mentioned earlier, I am a native from the Canary Islands, an Archipelago that has been under European control for five hundred years—from Spanish kings to NATO and German and British tourist resort owners. I am a cisgender, lesbian woman who was born in African land yet never self-identified as African; a bastard daughter of European colonialism who struggles to explain to others why her supposedly European heart speaks and feels life like a Caribbean Islander. An

eternal nepantlera holding a European Union passport who does not have future in her own native land. A body and accent often read as Latina by white Americans in her everyday life in the U.S. while she is often framed as the representative of Spanish colonialism by Latinxs in the U.S., as soon as they know of her Spanish citizenship status—an incomplete reading that misses a complex history of resistance and compliance to colonialism experienced by Canarian Islanders. I am a member of the Canary diaspora, a floating island that doesn't fit anywhere. A perfectly colonized subject who simultaneously helps colonize others in the U.S. A subject who oppresses others, including youth of color.

In sum, in order to work with youth in a less oppressive and colonizing manner, and join them in reframing youth bullying, I first need to undertake a deeper self-decolonizing, transformative process. I decided to use my dissertation to work on my self-decolonizing process, publicly and visibly—not only in one chapter, as I had envisioned previously, but using the dissertation process entirely. By investing the whole text of the dissertation, I show the centrality of self-decolonizing as an ongoing process in my academic endeavor as well as my commitment to the decolonization of academia. I hope that my process sparks reflection among others, without pretending to generalize, “to provide a recipe or even a road map” (Dolan, 2005, p. 5). That is precisely why showing my process, reflecting upon it and sharing those reflections is essential in this project. That is why, in this dissertation, I describe and embody my self-decolonizing process, paying great attention to its context and inventory. Because sharing my story as a

researcher on youth bullying, building upon Strobel (1997), aims to inspire others to share theirs and fosters, hopefully, decolonization.²⁴

Performance Autoethnography as a (Self)Decolonizing Tool

In order to examine, share, and transform/self-decolonize me as a researcher of youth bullying, following a Coyolxauhqui process, in this dissertation, I use performance autoethnography. While conducting research, researchers employ a myriad of methods—they interview people, analyze videos, observe groups, study organizations. In my case, as a performance autoethnographer, I use my own experience as locus of study. I examine my own process of resistance and complicity with dominant cultural scripts to better understand and change social processes. For that purpose, I employ an embodied methodological approach, performance autoethnography—"a body-centered method of knowing" (M. Alexander, 2005, p. 411). This embodied method allows me to highlight "a theory in the flesh" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015),²⁵ to point out how my racialized, gendered, and sexualized body, my intersected identities affect and are affected by knowledge production (Ellingson, 2017). Performance autoethnography "is a reflexive accounting, one that asks us to slow down, to subject our experiences to critical examination, to expose life's mundane qualities for how they illustrate our participation in power" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 89). It is a methodological tool that helps me self-observe—in context—and self-transform; going further by narrowing down the focus, by observing the interstices of social life, those supposedly insignificant mundane events

²⁴ Strobel (1997) points out that "to decolonize is to tell and write one's story, that in the telling and writing, others may be encouraged to tell their own" (p. 66).

²⁵ For Anzaldúa and Moraga (2015), "A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions of our experience" (p. 19).

that grand narratives tend to ignore. In that sense, performance autoethnography helps me explore how “power works around/through/in our bodies” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 115), while reproducing it, resisting it, transforming it, providing alternative scripts and hope, imagining “alternate, possible futures” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 115).

Furthermore, performance autoethnography—or just autoethnography—has the potential of being an effective methodological tool to foster and embody decolonization, when it is built upon postcolonial or decolonizing principles (Chawla & Atay, 2018; Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Pathak, 2013). As an embodied method, it helps challenge Western positivist imperatives regarding knowledge production, particularly in terms of representation and articulation. Using autoethnography as inbetweeners or nepantleras is not unusual or new. Colonized subjects have used it for centuries. As Pratt (2008) argues, “I believe autoethnographic expression is a widespread phenomenon of the contact zone,” a space where different cultures and languages interact and collide, and power dynamics are negotiated. Autoethnography, Pratt (2008) continues, “will become important in unraveling the histories of imperial subjugation and resistance as seen from the side of their occurrence” (p. 9). Pratt (2008) shares the example of Guaman Poma, a Quechuan nobleman who wrote an autoethnographic text, *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*, in 1613. Researchers’ bodies and frames of reference, whether we are willing to admit it or not, are present in our research. Anti/post/decolonial autoethnographers visibilize researchers’ bodies and standpoints. We tear down the *fourth wall* of (post)positivism, visibilizing and scrutinizing the role of researchers who, following normative training, hide their bodies from their methodologies and texts. By visibilizing and examining our role as researchers, anti/post/decolonial autoethnographers

question the inevitability and natural dimension of Western's gaze and methodologies. Likewise, by choosing non-(post)positivist forms of writing—using aesthetics and the performative I (Pollock, 2007) to build our texts—we highlight that the articulation of knowledge is not innocent. Because it is far from it. Academic writing can foster or hinder colonization: The language we use or don't use, the bodies we visibilize or ignore in our texts, the acceptance or rejection of positivist writing norms to prove scholarly legitimacy. Reflecting upon our writing is another step to (self)decolonize. As Chawla and Rodriguez (2008) posit, "if there is no disruption in how we articulate knowledge, then there is no disruption in how we understand knowledge, and therefore no disruption in how we relate to knowledge" (p. 17). Writing, for me, is performative, heuristic, kinesthetic, and healing. I analyze my own experiences in context by/while writing in an aesthetic,²⁶ embodied, and radical way. My writing allows me to identify, map, and self-reflect upon my embodied experiences in context—because "culture is done in the body" (Holman Jones, 2011, p. 770). In the same way that a cultural studies researcher examines a television show or a song to trace and understand culture, I use my writing to map my embodied experiences and understand—drawing from Third World feminism and decolonizing methodologies—how a given context influences them and how I comply with inherited scripts as well as create tactics (de Certeau, 1984) of resistance. Yet my writing doesn't create a rigid text to simply be read. In my dissertation, I am not only telling a story; I am not just narrating events and interpreting them. This text is alive, making "writing perform" (Pollock, 1998, p. 79). This text transforms itself—even

²⁶ I take responsibility "for naming an aesthetic intent, quality or effect" (Pelias & VanOosting, 1987, p. 221) in this text. Thus, according to Pelias and VanOosting (1987), my text is aesthetic "[r]egardless of the innate qualities of the performance text or context, regardless of the response of an audience" (p. 221).

pushing me to rewrite it when I already had more than 80 pages written; it transforms me as a scholar and human being, and—I hope—it helps transform academia. This text allows me to promote alternative academic scripts from within academia by scrutinizing the academic gaze and its relationship with knowledge production and validation; by highlighting academic complicity with (neo)colonialism; and by embracing healing and repairing as ontological premises. This text and its ontological standpoint embody epistemic disobedience—which, for Mignolo (2009), is the foundational step to decolonize—by challenging Western postpositivist methodological imperatives.²⁷ This text is my way to “turn the *terms* of the conversation” (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4),²⁸ by focusing on my role as scholar, acknowledging my complicity in promoting colonization; by embodying methodological alternatives, including performative writing; and by embodying and promoting (self) change. Borrowing Denzin’s (2003a) words, “Writing creates the worlds we inhabit” (p. xii), and I use and perform my words to co-create an academia committed to decolonization. A commitment that begins in/with my body.

In order to question my complicity in this neoliberal lethal disorder that is killing all forms of life

In order to change

In order to repair the *daño causado*

In order to heal

In order to work with youth

²⁷ Mignolo (2009) points out that “the task of de-colonial thinking and the enactment of the de-colonial option in the 21st century starts from epistemic de-linking: from acts of epistemic disobedience” (p. 15).

²⁸ For Mignolo (2009), “Changing the terms of the conversation implies going beyond disciplinary or interdisciplinary controversies and the conflict of interpretations. As far as controversies and interpretations remain within the same rules of the game (terms of the conversation), the control of knowledge is not called into question. And in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower rather than on the known” (p. 4).

I need to fully embrace, embody free fall, my self-decolonizing process.

Placing my body at the center of the endeavor, because my “bodymindsoul is the hermetic vessel where transformation takes place” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 133).

Tearing my selves apart. In front of you. With you.

Not an easy task.

I read Wane’s (2008) words again. “Decolonizing oneself is the most difficult process” (p. 187). I pause. Breathe. Say her words out loud. And nod, experiencing a mixed sensation of comfort and uneasiness. Because her words help me understand why writing my dissertation has become a strenuous, challenging, asphyxiating at times, endeavor. I lost track of how many times I have ended up crying at my dissertation Chair’s office when discussing my research. Or at home, facing my laptop. Self-decolonizing while/by using performance autoethnography and performative writing is painful, because it’s my body, my identity, my incoherence, my fears which are exposed to foreign eyes and/or ears. And mine. Every time I collect the pieces of the broken mirror where I scrutinize how cultural scripts and systemic oppression materialize on my body, I end up cutting myself, bleeding, crying. I feel anger, despair, shame, guilt, when I reflect upon the damage caused by me or to me. As Strobel (1997) explain, “decolonization is an emotional process. It stirs feelings of anger, betrayal, confusion, doubt, and anxiety” (p. 66). I cannot simply close my laptop and move on to another topic. My research projects eat with me, sleep with me, infuse my interpersonal relations. They accompany me 24/7. They change me—as a teacher, as a researcher, as a human being—and I hope I change them. That’s the goal. Whoever claims that performance autoethnography is easy has unlikely employed it, or at least a critical, radical, and honest

version of it. When I write/perform a performance autoethnography, I take reflexivity to another dimension, feeling painfully vulnerable, crying while doing research, feeling nauseous after performing it. As a performance autoethnographer, I cut my own skin, insert my hand inside of my own body, grab my organs, and examine them before/with other people, in context, so we can all learn together. Tearing myself apart hurts, but showing my broken pieces feels like throwing salt into an open, bleeding wound. I feel vulnerable, exposed. Yet, as discussed before, pain can enable *la facultad*, enhance my ability to see issues differently, to foster collective and individual transformation.

Navigating pain is part of the method that I embrace in my research, in this dissertation.

In this process, nonetheless, I not only deal with pain. When you commit to undertake a self-decolonizing process, you cannot remain the same—your colonized body and mind may have shifted. As well as your values, your expectations. You are a new person (Mohanty, 2003). Following Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui imperative, I tear my selves apart before I put the pieces back again. Yet when I put those pieces back, I am not the same anymore. Things have changed: My gaze, my writing, my standpoint. Even my identity, my relationship with my homeland. It is hard to look back and feel satisfied with my previous words, my actions. It is hard to smell the scent of complicity in my hands, and realize, once more, that no matter how hard I try to change—me, the system—I remain part of the cog that is pressed while presses others. In other words, I can try to self-decolonize, but most likely I will never be a decolonized subject—how can I fully escape a neoliberal and imperialist world (dis)order? A saddening feeling, a heavy burden, invades me, over and over, when I remember that there are no easy solutions when you reject a simple dichotomist reading of the world—a reading wherein people are

either good or bad. Colonized or colonizer. Oppressed or oppressor. I encompass all—good, bad, colonized, colonized, oppressed, oppressor. Complying, resisting, trying to change inherited cultural scripts. All at the same time. Permanently self-decolonizing, unable to fully self-decolonize. Embracing a fluid mode of differential resistance (Sandoval, 1991),²⁹ full of tactical contradictions and incoherence, as well as constant negotiating as *nepantlera* (Anzaldúa, 2015) place a heavy burden on my shoulders too. Resistance and survival don't smell like roses, but a rancid scent made of sweat, tears, and blood. Sadness and shame. Saying a tactical “Yes, Sir” when you would love to yell “Hell, no!” At the border, on campus. So, I can cross the border, become a professor, transform academia. *Neplanta, mi nepantla, apesta.*³⁰ It stinks. And as long as I am part of the neoliberal cog, it will always stink. My work is not about ignoring or dissimulating the smell. Pretending I'm not part of the problem. My work does not aim to just make you or me feel better, but to understand better, resist, survive, heal, change, create hope. Breathe. In sum, to foster Tintiangco-Cubales' notion of pedagogies of resistance which “are ultimately about imagining and building new possibilities for postimperial life that promotes radical healing and hope” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Curammeng, 2018, p. 237).

Not a simple process, no. Self-decolonizing, or attempting your best to do it, is a painful, uncertain, and scary process. Uncertain, because I don't have any guarantees that I'm truly self-decolonizing right now. That I'm not just washing my conscience, my guilt,

²⁹ According to Sandoval (1991), “The differential mode of oppositional consciousness requires a flexible and mobile form of subjectivity in order to function, one capable of reading the current situation of power and of self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological form best suited to push against its configurations... a form of consciousness well known to oppressed peoples” (p. 4).

³⁰ In Anzaldúa's (2015) imaginary, *nepantla* is a “psychological, liminal space between the way things had been and an unknown future” (p. 17). A space “in-between, the locus and sign of transition” where “realities clash” (p. 17), where “cultural and personal codes clash” (p. 2). A space that facilitate healing and transformation.

pretending I'm changing. Posing while denouncing posing. Yes, this is an uncertain process and scary as well. I am not only trying to decolonize my bodymind/soul using a transformative, healing, performative writing process. I chose to use the ritual that would grant me access to an academic life, a dissertation, to embody and share such transformative process. My dissertation. A text that will be scrutinized by different institutions, by other scholars who have the power to invest me with the gown of legitimacy and open the magic doors to academia. Or to slam the door in my face and say goodbye to my scholarly career. Yet, why should I be worried? As Smith (2012) points out, challenging "racism, colonialism and oppression is a risky business" for scholars (p. 316), and that is precisely my main purpose as a researcher and teacher. Likewise, I embrace an ontological standpoint that still faces discrimination (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). Conquergood (1991) pointed out almost thirty years ago that moving "performance from hermeneutics to a form of scholarly representation" (p. 191) was and remains too daring, too uncomfortable for some factions of the scholarly status quo. Thirty years later, the "gold standard of positivism [the cornerstone of Western thought] remains intact," coopted by the neoliberal order, "yet challenged from all sides" (Denzin & Giardina, 2016, p. 10). If my experiences and my body, as researcher, disappeared from the text, if I didn't embrace aesthetic writing, my work could be safer, less daring, less uncomfortable for other peers who adhere to a more normative ontological standpoint. Yet, I don't choose safe in my commitment to self-decolonize and foster social justice. As a scholar, I join others bringing/embodying hope, creating a new world with our words and actions. For that purpose, I embrace a style of writing that is unapologetically performative, transformative, political, and aesthetic. I embrace a

methodology that visibilizes and explores my identity, my body, my experiences.

Following Kovach and colleagues' (2013) Indigenous standpoint, it is essential to self-locating and sharing our stories. As they emphasize, "From an Indigenous approach, research begins with our own story, our own vulnerability" (p. 492). "Research is story." I listen to their words, carefully, and incorporate them into my own practice as a teacher and researcher. My research, this dissertation, begins with my own story. For a body like mine, for a hybrid mestiza like me, Indigenous and Third World feminist, embodied and contextualized approaches make sense. Because their standpoint recognizes me, it gives me space to exist, it validates my experiences. My intention is not to eliminate postpositivist scholarship, but, borrowing Pathak's (2013) words, "to hold its space so that other methods may hold their spaces, allowing for a rich, diverse, complex matrix of scholarship" (p. 606). In sum, I don't hold any doubts upon my ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological standpoint, yet I am aware of the risks that my standpoint faces in a context of academic precarity and postpositivist prevalence (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). So many brilliant, exceptional, groundbreaking thinkers, like Anzaldúa, never became professors or were unable to obtain tenure. There are reasons to be concerned and scared. Nothing is simple in this hurtful, transformative, self-decolonizing process that I am undertaking and yet...

And yet

It is deeply useful and effective.

It is empowering and inspiring (Strobel, 1997).

Es necesario.

As la *maestra* Anzaldúa (2015) points out, “The knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them [...] delving more fully into your pain, anger, despair, depression will move you through them to the other side, where you can use their energy to heal” (p. 132). Therefore, despite being uncertain, scary, and painful, it is worth undertaking and sharing my performative self-decolonizing process with you. Because I believe Madison (1998) when she says that, through performance, “both performers and audiences can be transformed: They can be themselves and more as they travel between worlds” (p. 282). Because through this text, I hope I give you, as audience member of my dissertation/performance, “equipment for the journey: empathy and intellect, passion and critique” (Madison, 1998, p. 281). Because we, you and I, can learn and grow by better understanding and overcoming my contextualized pain and fears, which are not yours but can help you identify, comprehend, and heal yours—a way “to understanding self and other, self as other” (M. Alexander, 2005, p. 433).³¹ Because we, you and I, can use the process of delving into pain and healing, through critical self-reflexivity, to engage in queer intimacy and create alternatives to colonization and oppression together (Pérez, 2013);³² to foster social change together. Emphasizing our own change. As Smith (2012) posits, “To imagine a different world is to imagine us as different people in the world” (p. 324). Different people who need to work in solidarity, because decolonizing is not an isolated endeavor. Building upon Mohanty’s (2003) ideas, my self-decolonizing

³¹ Alexander (2005) brilliantly summarizes the purpose and process of autoethnography: “Through autoethnography, I am exploring and sometimes exposing my own vulnerability to racial, gender, and cultural critique as a method of both understanding self and other, and self as other, while engaging in performances (written and embodied) that seek to transform the social and cultural conditions under which I live and labor” (p. 433).

³² For Pérez (2013), “Queer intimacy accounts for those ecstatic, affective performance encounters among performers and audiences wherein discourses are hailed, ruptured, and re-imagined, and wherein subjectivities collide to generate alternatives” (p. 250).

reflexivity embraces a collective practice.³³ To decolonize, we need to connect with our history and communities, and “heal the self, heal the culture” (Strobel, 1997, p. 66). In my case, I join and contribute to multiple groups of human beings who are committed to decolonizing minds, bodies, and land.

First, my research builds upon the work of other scholars committed to decolonizing academia. I join their conversation through my self-decolonizing performance autoethnography. In addition to my own transformation, in my work, I focus on the process of knowledge production, hoping to trigger reflections on how we create knowledge as scholars, how our work contributes to colonizing and decolonizing human beings and nature, and how we can do things differently as researchers. Particularly, this dissertation shows an embodied example of how we can change our academic performativity, especially when we address youth peer abuse and conflict. I just hope that my own ongoing transformation and my methodological approach foster and nurture other decolonizing processes in academia, as Strobel (1997) suggested, in the same way that I have been inspired and challenged by other decolonizing pieces and trajectories. Inspired by the quotidian work of scholars committed to decolonization who create space for academic frameworks that denounce and transform colonialism and all forms of oppression. Scholars committed to unfold decolonial pedagogies (Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2006), to foster hope (Freire, 1994; hooks, 2003). Scholars who promote ontological frameworks that embrace healing, care, and repairing *el daño causado* (Anzaldúa) in the everyday life of academia, including assignments and

³³ Alexander and Mohanty posit that the “centrality of self-reflexive collective practice in the transformation of the self, reconceptualizations of identity, and political mobilization [are] necessary elements of the practice of decolonization” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 8).

rituals—such as a doctoral dissertation—and interpersonal scripts. Scholars who challenge and rewrite inherited scripts on how to be teachers and researchers, creating quotidian performances of possibilities (Madison, 1998), especially for/with those bodies that have been ignored and excluded in the Ivory tower: people of color, queer, gender non-conforming, functional diverse (Palacios & Románach Cabrero, 2006) bodies. Because, as Professor Siu (205) powerfully expressed at Puget Sound's Graduates of Color Ceremony, "As people of color, you were never meant to be at a university. I was never meant to teach at one. And your family and I were never meant to be here celebrating your graduation today." Scholars who create, through quotidian practices of mutual care and recognition, nurturing communities for marginalized and/or underrepresented scholars in academia. In my case, my Chair, my committee members, and other women in my department (mostly female professors and peers of color) are my academic community. They have facilitated my own process. They inspire me, nurture me, support me. Particularly, my dissertation Chair and my writing peers play a central role in my self-decolonizing endeavor, making sure that I don't get lost in the tearing apart stage of the Coyolxauhqui process, making sure that I am able to put my pieces back again. We, together, are making a different academia with our embodied pedagogy of love (Freire). We are rewriting academic performativity. Showing that other relationships are possible between graduate students and professors, in which an ethos of mutual care and respect erases intellectual hazing and academic isolation. In addition to the academic world, I join other Canary islanders—in the Islands and in the diaspora—who are committed to decolonizing the Canary Islands and the Canary people; including my sister, Dr. María Hernández-Ojeda, a scholar who has devoted her academic career to

decolonize our homeland. I hope that my work contributes to this collective endeavor as well. I also build upon and contribute to critical approaches to youth bullying and youth studies in general, highlighting how our good scholarly intentions in preventing and dealing with youth bullying have fed internal neocolonialism against youth of color in the U.S. Most importantly, I contribute to building an alternative and decolonizing methodological approach to the study of youth peer bullying—what I prefer to label as peer abuse and violence, as I describe in Chapter 4. In this dissertation, I am able to address some of the features of the decolonizing reframing of youth bullying that I advocate for, but not all of them. Youth are not co-writers, co-participants, co-agents in this text—which is a central requirement for a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying. As an international student on F1 VISA with limited funding and ability to work in the U.S., I can't join or launch a participatory action research (PAR) method with a community without risking it to make it an extractive experience, because I cannot guarantee whether I will be able to stay in the country the following semester. Engaged scholars point out that “community members’ deep critique of academic research as extractive demonstrates an ongoing need to revisit the local politics of academic practices” (Dempsey, 2010, p. 384). In that sense, I refuse to work with youth for a couple of months, extract their knowledge, strategies, methods, and leave. As a lesbian activist, I suffered knowledge extraction from social scientists in the past, who used to attend my non-profit organization’s meetings and events for months and then disappeared when they obtained the information they needed. I felt used by these researchers, almost abused. I am committed to not reproducing that practice in my scholarship and instead fostering “respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection” (Butin, 2007, p. 35), working

with young activists in methodological design and development of research projects. An engaged approach to knowledge creation that requires a considerable amount of time and dedication (Butin, 2007; Dempsey, 2010). Thus, in this text, I can only suggest ideas for such decolonizing reframing of youth bullying, embodying some of the core ideas that I propose—such as enabling critical reflexivity and my own self-decolonizing process as a researcher. Hoping that after undertaking this transformative endeavor, I will be better prepared to join a reframing process of youth bullying in a near future, working with youth and other adults, when my migratory conditions allow me to settle down in a community.

Likewise, in this dissertation, I join other performance autoethnographers in a twofold way: first, I explore the possibilities of autoethnography as a decolonizing tool; second, I help decolonize this tool that is mostly used and published, according to Chawla and Atay (2018), by white scholars—at least in the discipline of communication.³⁴ I am aware that, for those chasing groundbreaking theories and outcomes or highly sophisticated methodological approaches, this dissertation may look as tiny, humble grass that grows, quietly, in the sidewalk of academia. It may appear powerless, insubstantial, inconsequential. And yet, as *la maestra* Anzaldúa (2015) reminds us, tiny grass can grow and turn a sidewalk apart.³⁵ Tiny grass that can foster academia's own Coyolxauhqui process. Such is my open commitment: To help dismember academia and reconstruct it, transform it, decolonize it, heal, from a standpoint of love and respect.

³⁴ Chawla and Atay (2018) posit that “[e]ven though autoethnography’s intent was to provide scholarly space to the lived experiences of the underrepresented, oppressed, and marginalized, academic publishing within this tradition remains limited to the White majority group in the United States. This is certainly the case in our home field of communication studies” (p. 4).

³⁵ Anzaldúa (2015) argues that “[c]racks in the discourses are like tender shoots of grass, plants pushing against the fixed cement of disciplines and cultural beliefs, eventually overturning the cement slabs” (p. 73).

Previewing Chapters

Now that you know the purpose of this dissertation, who is creating it, and under which conditions, let me invite you to continue being part of my fluid, messy, never-ending Coyolxauhqui transformative process. Let me share with you the alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying that I suggest—and partly embody—in this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I unpack my relationship with the field of youth bullying, trying to understand how and why my research became deleterious—colonizing and oppressive—for youth. For that purpose, I tear apart my own trajectory as a youth bullying researcher. I reflect upon why I decided to become an expert on that area, how I have changed my standpoint about it, and how studying this issue has fostered my scholarly transformation. My experiences, however, don't take place in a vacuum. I need to contextualize where the study of youth bullying takes place, who framed it, under which conditions and expectations it has developed and how it has influenced me, as a researcher. Thus, in this chapter, I map a Western genealogy of youth bullying as discourse (Walton)—the way adults have framed youth peer abuse—and its deleterious consequences (i.e., promoting school-to-prison pipeline, fostering colonization of youth, ignoring youth's transformative agency). Likewise, I question to what extent all this tsunami of words, actions, policies around youth who abuse verbally, physically, or psychologically their peers have been about these interactions. To what extent all these words, actions, and anti-bullying policies—in a society that has declared a war on youth (Giroux, 2000)—, are more related to other issues such as moral panics against youth of color and school shootings, war on terror, culture of fear, commodification of fear, exploitation of youth, fear of being sued, fear of not receiving

public funding, making academic careers, creating new jobs in the prison industrial complex, publishing and enhancing academic or professional careers, or selling advertisements, campaigns and products. Wondering, in my case, whether I have used this topic, youth bullying, to achieve something more than aiming to support youth. Certainly, studying youth bullying has helped build my academic career, but also grow as scholar and person. By trying to understand youth bullying—both the phenomenon of youth peer abuse and violence as well as the concerning adult’s framing of it—I ended up facing my complicity to a colonizing and oppressive academia, recognizing that I am not ready to work with youth in a non-oppressive way. Moreover, I ended up shifting ontologies—embracing the “call to performance” and its embodied, performative approach to culture and change (Denzin, 2003b). I ended up committing to a decolonizing process and academic shift that, as a result, transformed me from organic intellectual to performance nepantlera. A profound transformative process that I unfold in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 allows me to further examine why I became an *enemy* of youth of color and what can I do to unbecoming one. One of the central goals of this dissertation is to figure out whether my colonized colonizer—what I label as colonize(d)(r) in this Chapter—identity has affected my scholarship, particularly my research work on youth bullying in the U.S., and how. With that goal, I take another step into my Coyolxauhqui self-decolonizing process, self-reflecting on my identity as a colonize(d)(r) subject. That step takes me to revisit my homeland, the Canary Islands, and my ancestors, and their practices of compliance and resistance to all forms of colonialism that they/we have and continue experiencing. In this Chapter, I unpack different framings on the colonization of

the Canary Islands, the role of Canary Islanders in the Spanish colonial endeavor, the outcomes of this colonizing process, the ways in which it has been framed and challenged—particularly, through decolonizing efforts—as well as how this process influences my identity as a person and scholar, including my work as a researcher on youth bullying in the U.S. For that purpose, I examine how my socialization as a colonize(d)(r) subject influenced the way I addressed the study of youth bullying. Likewise, this self-decolonizing, fragmenting process that I embrace in the dissertation allows me to cha(lle)nge my inherited lenses, build new ones based on my own experiences, and reexamine my identity as scholar. Acknowledging how I have transitioned from being a critical scholar, an organic intellectual (Gramsci), to becoming a performance studies scholar, deeply influenced by decolonizing methodologies, Third World feminism, and youth of color and queer youth’s performances. My transition, however, is not a rigid dichotomy—organic intellectual versus nepantlera—, albeit part of the same self-decolonizing process. Can I really separate the organic intellectual from the performance nepantlera? I don’t know if I can, I don’t know if I want. From this new standpoint and identity, I am better prepared to unbecoming an *enemy* of youth of color and work, together, on a decolonizing reframing on the study of youth bullying. Chapter 3, in this sense, follows a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it facilitates my self-decolonizing process, helping me better understand how and why I oppress youth of color and finding strategies to unbecoming one. On the other hand, Chapter 3 feeds and helps me embody part of my methodological design of a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying, by further scrutinizing and cha(lle)nging my colonizing and oppressive practices as a scholar.

As I explained in this chapter, a horizontal, inclusive reframing of youth bullying cannot be conducted without the central participation of youth. That was, in fact, a major incoherence that I was developing in previous dissertation drafts. Firstly, I didn't see any problem trying to reframe youth peer abuse and bullying as adult discourse by myself. When I realized how deeply incoherent my position was, then I built a methodological design that made me believe that I was part of a dialogical relationship with youth, when I was not. Thankfully, I was able to confront my own incoherence. I cannot reframe youth bullying by myself. I need to work with youth, in dialogue with youth and other researchers, to make this reframing possible—as long as youth of color and queer youth consider peer abuse a priority in the first place. Right now I can, in any case, humbly provide some ideas to be considered in a collective reframing process of youth bullying that I hope I will be able to join, as well as to advocate for such collective, dialogical, horizontal reframing. Thus, in Chapter 4, I point out ontological and epistemological limitations in the study of youth bullying, such as the invisibility of youth, researchers' epistemic privilege, and the colonizing outcomes of researchers' work. I likewise point out ideas for an alternative ontological approach to youth bullying, building upon critical scholars and youth's contributions to understand and resist peer abuse and violence. An ontological approach where we can distinguish conflict from abuse (Shulman), where we understand peer abuse and violence as inherited scripts that can be challenged and rewritten. An ontological approach where healing and repairing prevail over punishing and commodifying youth, where researchers and other adult agents reflect upon our colonizing role upon youth, our role as soldiers in the war on youth, and take steps to change, transform ourselves. In that sense, in this chapter, I foster critical, embodied self-

reflexivity among scholars as a fundamental step to launch a collective reframing process.

In the last chapter of the dissertation, I provide an overview of the onto-epistemological features of a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying that I discussed throughout the chapters: centering youth's agency, challenging and decentering adult researchers' standpoint, suggesting other onto-epistemological and conceptual approaches, as well as promoting other values and tactics in the study of youth peer abuse and violence. Chapter 5 helps me conclude this Coyolxauhqui cycle, put my pieces together again, at least temporarily. Profoundly transformed, hoping to inspire other transformative processes among researchers and activists.

Here ends Chapter 1. This space has allowed me to begin explaining the methodological design of this dissertation, which is, at the same time, part of its outcome as a methodological analysis on the study of youth bullying. Because the methodology employed in this dissertation infuses my methodological suggestions on the study of youth bullying. As a rock's turner who ended up becoming the worm underneath the rock, I use my body and my experiences and my identity to fertilize the soil of change—borrowing Ricardo Levins Morales' metaphor.³⁶ I don't just conform with self-reflecting: I want to use my reflections and my pain, my ancestors' pain and wisdom, to foster and facilitate change. As earthworms do, by decomposing organic matter and mixing soil layers, which fertilizes the soil, creates food, and facilitates new life. After explaining the purpose and process of this research project and previewing what you, as a

³⁶ Ricardo Levins Morales ("The Soil," n.d.) considers that for social change, "the soil is more important than seeds." We need to make sure that the soil, "the compost of beliefs, ideas, values, narratives that create the environment within we're working" as culture organizers, is not "barren or toxic," because projects won't be able to grow or succeed. Thus, "we need to prepare the soil."

reader, audience member, are going to encounter in this performative text, it is time to continue the Coyolxauhqui process and further tear my selves apart. To dig deeper, as a worm. To keep fertilizing, with your support, the soil of social change.

CHAPTER 2

BECOMING/UNBECOMING AN *ENEMY OF YOUTH*

“Writing is liking pulling miles of entrails through your mouth,” Anzaldúa (2015) explains (p. 102). You resist it, because “you’re scared that you won’t do it justice. Because it’ll take time, and there’s no guarantee that you’ll be able to pull it off. Because it’s stressful and exhausting” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 102). I nod. She is right. As a performance scholar, I always struggle beginning a new autoethnographic piece or chapter. My postpositivist training did not prepare me to self-dismember—in public or by myself—and I am not quite sure where or how to start. For a couple of minutes—or hours—I question my ability to move forward, to achieve my writing goals. The worm, me, freezes up. A cocktail of fear, exhaustion, and pressure hinders my breathing. Why am I feeling this way? In those moments of anxious block, like those that I am experiencing right now, I go back to *la maestra* Anzaldúa, and her words always illuminate my path. Hence, in order to continue Chapter 2, I return to “Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro,” which is actually Anzaldúa’s dissertation, and, once more, her voice guides me.³⁷ Once more, after reading Anzaldúa’s words, I overcome my block. She is here with me, in my small and cold studio in Northampton—I can already feel the harsh New England winter approaching. Her warm presence and wise words soothe my uneasiness. Thanks to her, I can better identify and navigate the source of my anxiety. I want to write something that makes sense, that it is useful to other people, and I must do it fast—the precarity of living as an international student with a student VISA in the U.S.

³⁷ Anzaldúa passed away before she was able to conclude and defend her dissertation. AnaLouise Keating edited her last draft and published it posthumously under the title “Light in the Dark. Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality” (Anzaldúa, 2015).

is becoming unbearable. Most importantly, I feel less lonely. Anzaldúa is with me. The breathing of her dissertation guides mine, and I am finally able to calm down. To inhale and exhale deeply. To continue my Coyolxauhqui process before you, with you.

To continue tearing my selves apart.

In the previous chapter, I introduced an alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying in the United States, a collective decolonizing reframing of youth bullying in which youth become central co-reframing agents, adults cha(lle)nge and decenter their positionality, and youth and adult examine and redress the harmful outcomes that the study of youth bullying has caused to youth of color in the U.S., among other axiological and methodological changes. As explained, in this dissertation, I don't just theorize in abstract: I embody parts of my methodological proposal by cha(lle)nging and decentering my positionality, and by examining the harmful outcomes caused by the dominant framing of youth bullying. For that purpose, I enable, visibilize, and reflect upon the self-decolonizing steps that I am taking, as a researcher, to identify and change my colonizing and oppressive practices against youth of color, in my endless quest to unbecoming an *enemy* of youth of color. My body, my experiences are a heuristic site where I can observe the presence and impact of Western academic performativity—in the research on youth bullying particularly. Where I can trace the scripts on youth bullying that researchers like me inherit, reproduce, and challenge. My body, too, is a tool of transformation, fostering structural and individual change through my own self-decolonizing process. Moreover, my own transformative process as a researcher on youth bullying influences my onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying.

In this second chapter, I trace how and why I, as a researcher on youth bullying, entered an endless cycle of becoming and unbecoming *an enemy* of youth of color in the U.S. I detail/overview the research on youth bullying that I argue shows why good intentions trying to prevent youth peer abuse and violence became harmful. How that research fed a moral panic that enabled and fueled a law-and-order regime in schools that promoted more control and punishment of youth of color's behavior. In order to achieve this purpose, I flesh out and reflect upon why I decided to become an expert on youth bullying. I likewise unpack my relationship with the field of youth bullying, trying to understand how and why my research became deleterious—colonizing and oppressive—for youth of color. For that purpose, I explain what I mean by the study of youth bullying and examine what type of academic performativity on this issue I inherited, reproduced, questioned, and aim to co-rewrite with youth. Trying to achieve this goal, I map a Western genealogy of the way adult researchers and institutions have framed youth bullying, contextualizing where the study of youth bullying originated, who framed it, under which conditions and expectations it has developed—particularly in the United States, where I focus my research. Before I share this story about the genealogy of youth bullying, and to avoid confusion, it is essential to clarify the different ways in which I use the expression “youth bullying” in this dissertation. For many scholars, youth bullying refers to the abusive behavior that takes place among youth, particularly since the 1970s, drawing from academic definitions such as Olweus'.³⁸ Focusing on bullying prevention and management becomes a central task for those researchers. Conversely, other scholars

³⁸ According to Olweus, bullying is an “aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing that is carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an actual or perceived imbalance of power or strength” (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 125).

examine the way youth bullying has been studied, because they highlight concerning absences in such study. The latter is what Walton (2005a) calls bullying as a “discursive practice” (p. 59). For Walton (2011), “the problem—wheel spinning that has resulted despite a wealth of anti-bullying efforts—lies in our very ideas about what bullying is. These ideas are what I refer to as discourse on bullying” (p. 131). Walton’s distinction between the issue, youth bullying, and its study, discourse on bullying, helped me identify that instead of one social issue, we are dealing with two: harmful interactions that youth reproduce, and the way adults framed them. As explained, the latter has fostered colonizing practices against youth of color in the U.S. Moreover, Walton’s distinction triggered key elements in my methodological approach. As a writer, it becomes difficult to discern when we address the initial issue, youth’s harmful interactions, or the way it has been studied, because scholars, including Walton, use the same utterance in both scenarios: youth bullying. That is why I suggest, as I further explain in Chapter 4, to use different terminology to help distinguish when we are addressing youth’s interactions from the study of those interactions. Instead of using the utterance bullying, I tentatively label the abusive interactions—verbal, physical, and relational—that take place among youth as “youth peer abuse and violence,” building upon Sarah Schulman’s (2016) distinction between conflict and abuse. It is a tentative label, though, because other agents need to be part of the reframing of youth peer abuse, not just adult scholars like me. Otherwise, I would repeat the same mistake, again: excluding youth from conceptualizing their own reality. One of the challenges I face in this text is deciding what terminology I should use, because the utterance “youth bullying,” as explained, carries multiple meanings. Thus, I make several distinctions:

when I address the initial issue, harmful interactions among youth, I will employ “youth bullying” as the term used by scholars, journalists, and policy makers. However, I will tentatively use the notion “peer abuse and violence” when I talk about it. Likewise, regarding the study of youth bullying, I will refer to it as “dominant framing of youth bullying” or “the study of youth bullying,” whereas Walton and other scholars call it “youth bullying as discourse” or “discourse on bullying”, to minimize conceptual confusion. In a methodological reflection, these distinctions are essential, as I further explain in Chapter 4. Once I clarified what this chapter covers, which goals I try to achieve, and what motivates me to attain them, let’s resume the Coyolxauhqui process.

Tearing my selves apart.

Connecting Paths

It was 2012. A Canary Islander, me, just landed in the U.S, determined to help youth. Like many other people at that time, I was horrified by what scholars and journalists framed as youth bullying’s dramatic outcomes—including bullycides (suicides motivated by bullying)³⁹ and school shootings. Stories of pain and fear hit the news repeatedly. Stories that likewise called scholars’ attention, who tended to portray “youth bullying” as a “national crisis” (Bryn, 2011)—I guess I did too. Stories of queer youth being harassed and assaulted by their peers that reminded, to those who wanted to listen, that homophobia and transphobia were killing youth in schools and colleges.

The dyke-activist in me needed to commit to that cause, do something. So, I did. Young peer abuse compelled me to go back to graduate school and dedicate the rest of my academic career to analyze it, prevent it, challenge it, stop it. I committed to that goal.

³⁹ In 2001, Marr and Field coined this term in the book *Bullycide: Death at Playtime*.

Once in my master's program, I started the process diligently, spending years reading and writing paper after paper about youth bullying—the way young peer abuse and violence was framed and labeled by researchers (i.e., Olweus)—, profoundly convinced of the usefulness of my effort. I caved in my small apartment for a long time, reading article after article, trying to join an existing conversation about youth bullying. Trying to better understand the whys, whats, and hows of so much pain. I imagined that one day I would design the Hernández Anti-Bullying Program—maybe my dissertation, certainly my first book. I imagined that my awesome project would be implemented in American schools, discussed in the media. A new Olweus, a new Salmivalli⁴⁰ tackling peer-inflicted pain. Me.

An expert, so expert.

Knowing so much.

Mapping a Western Genealogy on Youth Bullying

When was the beginning of young peer abuse and violence? Who knows when a young human abused a peer for the first time. We do know that those abusive practices have been performed and studied throughout history. For instance, in 1897, Frederic Burk, an American educator, published an article titled “Teasing and Bullying,” based on his own research. He framed tyrannical behavior as bullying, explaining that “[c]ases of tyranny among boys and girls” take place “from college hazing and school fagging down to the nursery” (Burk, 1897, p. 336). Yet it was not until the last quarter of the twentieth century that this abusive behavior developed among youth—labeled as bullying—became a central concern in several societies.

⁴⁰ Dan Olweus and Christina Salmivalli are two world-renowned researchers in the study of youth bullying.

The dominant framing of youth bullying that most people know in the Global North today is mostly behavioral, focused on bullying as a “developmental psychological problem among children” (Ringrose & Renold, 2010, p. 575). This approach originated in the Scandinavian countries in the 1970s. Roland (1993) posits that Peter-Paul “Heinemann's work was pioneering and the origin of research on bullying” (p. 16). However, the Swedish psychologist Dan Olweus, who built upon Heinemann’s theories (Horton, 2011), became the central figure in the study of youth bullying. During the 1970s, Olweus commenced to systematically study violent interactions between children, denouncing the deleterious consequences, ranging from the physical and psychological to the relational, that bullying could generate. His analysis on bullying and his anti-bullying program, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)—launched in 1983 in Norway and implemented in multiple countries—play a major influence in the way many societies understand and address bullying, i.e., via legislation or campaigns.⁴¹ Even though several definitions of bullying coexist—i.e., some including relational aggressions, other excluding them—Olweus’ conceptualization still leads the academic and social imaginary. According to Olweus, bullying is an “aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing that is carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an actual or perceived imbalance of power or strength” (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 125).

The process of identifying youth bullying as a harmful behavior expanded progressively from the North of Europe to many other countries around the world in the

⁴¹ The OBPP self-proclaims as “The World's Foremost Bullying Prevention Program” (“Olweus Bullying”, 2015). By request of the Norwegian Ministry of Education, Olweus launched the first version of the program in 1983.

1980s and 1990s (Smith, 2011). In that timespan, initial psychological approaches theorized bullying as an interpersonal behavioral issue between bully and victim (Salmivalli et al., 1996).⁴² In the mid-1990s, the dominant narrative shifted, considering bullying a social activity (Salmivalli et al., 1996) and a small group phenomenon (Salmivalli, 2010).⁴³ Furthermore, an ecological framing of bullying “across individual, family, peer, school, and community contexts” (Swearer & Espelage, 2004, p. 1) enhanced the developmental psychological approach.⁴⁴ The behavioral framing of bullying as well as its emphasis on the harmful effects of bullying and its extended prevalence provided the foreground for bullying researchers from other disciplines. The Norwegian experience, in terms of research and institutional intervention, stimulated researchers and policy makers from other countries (i.e., Ireland, England, Australia, Canada, Belgium) to conceptualize and address youth bullying following Olweus’ framing. In some countries, i.e. England and Ireland, there were already researchers working on these issues, yet not at a large scale (O’Moore, 1988). In Japan, during the 1980s, parallel to the Scandinavian—and Finish—examination and intervention on youth bullying, Japanese researchers were studying “ijime” (Smith, 2011,) which is “a rough equivalent of bullying” in Japanese (Takemura & Takagi, 1988, p. 57). The Japanese approach to youth peer abuse, however, has not affected other countries as the Scandinavian and Finish narrative has. Due to the increasing notoriety of youth bullying

⁴² In these initial psychological developmental approaches, power “is conceived as an individual psychological and intentional acting out of aggression from bully to the victim, setting up a bully/victim binary” (Ringrose & Renold, 2010, p. 576).

⁴³ Salmivalli (2010) highlights that focusing on the group dimension is going back to the origin of bullying as a field of study in the 1970s: “[I]n the early writings on “mobbing” [precursor of bullying] among school children, the idea of group engagement was clearly present” (p. 113).

⁴⁴ Michaud (2009), citing Elgar et al., emphasizes “the importance of addressing not only the problems of adolescents themselves but also the causes of such problems, both immediate and secondary” (p. 324).

as a social concern in Europe, the Council for Cultural Co-operation's (CDCC) promoted a European conference in 1987 (O'Moore, 1988), the European Seminar for Teachers on Bullying in Schools, which sparked the creation of institutional responses to bullying at the European level.⁴⁵ As Minton (2014) explains, quoting O'Moore, this event was “instrumental in awakening Europe to the need for research into school bullying” (as cited in Minton, 2014, p. 109). The Norwegian government, co-organizer of the event, informed the participants in this conference, representing 13 European countries, of the Norwegian anti-bullying strategy implemented in the country (Roland, 1993).⁴⁶ Research on youth bullying continued its expansion into other countries and institutions adopted different anti-bullying measures. This is the context in which youth bullying turned into an international (Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2011) and global public health issue (i.e., Srabstein et al., 2008). In the span of fifteen years, the Scandinavian and Finish discourse on youth bullying was adopted and reproduced by scholars, policy makers, journalists, educators, and popular culture industries across the planet, including the U.S.

In the United States, the development of youth bullying as a social concern followed its own trajectory. In the 1970s, there existed voices who tried to raise collective awareness on the perils of youth bullying. For instance, the former Agency for Instructional Television, National Instructional Television Center, addressed this issue in a short film titled *Bully* (1973), a 15-minutes episode of their educational series *Inside/Out* which was aired and reran on PBS during the 1970s. In the 1980s, influenced

⁴⁵ As a key tool for the Council of Europe, “The Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) was set up in 1961 as a committee of governmental representatives responsible for setting the agenda for action in the fields of education, culture, media, sport and youth” (“Council,” n.d.). In 2001, CDCC was transformed into specialized committees.

⁴⁶ Roland (1993) highlights that several attendees to this conference “contributed to the book 'Bullying: An International Perspective' (Roland and Munthe, 1989)” (p. 16).

by the Scandinavian discourse on youth bullying and Bandura's social learning theory, Nathaniel Floyd conducted research on this topic and began advocating publicly for anti-bullying policies, practices, and prevention—until today.⁴⁷ His research was featured in the media—i.e., *The New York Times* (1986), *People Weekly* (1987), *Oprah Winfrey Show* (1988)—and few scholarly sources. In 1987, Floyd called for a larger commitment to address and prevent youth bullying:

Clearly the time is right to draw parents into the discussion and consult with the community on an acceptable intervention program. Anything less than a partnership among educators, parents and community resources will probably be ineffective. Such a partnership, however salutary, may be some time in the future. And until school officials take the initiative with this problem, aggrieved parents will continue to retain attorneys to circumvent school authorities and take action in court – with school officials in the role of defendants.

Interestingly, Floyd considers that the bullies are victims because they learned aggressive behavior at home, from their fathers; yet at the same time Floyd (1987) frames bullies as terrorists, dangerous young males who “have allowed the contagion of anti-social behavior to turn schools into places of fear and disorder.” His approach is mostly adult-centered—the solution to youth bullying lies on adults' hands—and pro-law-and-order (Floyd, 1985; 1987). Scholarly interest in this issue continued growing in the U.S., with the work of researchers such as John H. Hoover, Richard J. Hazler, or Dorothy Espelage, among others. In 1990, Hoover, Hazler, and Oliver surveyed youth in the Midwest about their experiences with bullying. Hoover et al. (1993) pointed out that “students make a solid case for the conclusion that bullying and victimization are serious and cannot be ignored” (p. 16). Nonetheless, adults did not seem to concur: “To most grownups,

⁴⁷ For Floyd, the bully and the victim are part of a symbiotic relationship. Thus, Floyd studied both bullies and victims' traits. For him, victims are “often boys who are overly attached to their mothers” (Levin, 1987).

bullying is not a significant concern” (Hoover et al., 1993, p. 16). In the 1980s and early 1990s, research about youth bullying in the U.S. was scarce, and mostly presented as “opinion pieces” (Hoover & Hazler, 1991, p. 212).⁴⁸ Borrowing theories and methods from non-American scholars on youth bullying (particularly Olweus’ ideas, as Hoover and Hazler indicate), as well as participating in international projects, more U.S. researchers joined the study of youth bullying during the 1990s. Nansel and colleagues published one of the most influential research projects in 2001 (Bryn, 2011). After conducting “the first large-scale national study of bullying in the schools” (Goode, 2001), this group of social scientists and doctors posited that in the United States, like other countries, bullying was highly prevalent and long-term harmful (Nansel et al., 2001). Nansel and colleagues’ report was part of a “collaborative, cross-national research project involving 30 countries and coordinated by the World Health Organization” (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2095). With the support of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Nansel and colleagues surveyed youth in the U.S. during 1998. Almost 30% of children sampled “reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying” (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2094). Nansel and colleagues highlighted, however, that “further research is needed” (2001, p. 2099). Many of their theoretical premises were extrapolated from other societies, not based on American reality. In this sense, the influence of European and Australian research in the conceptualization of bullying is foundational in Nansel et al.’s (2001) pivotal study, as well as in the way U.S. society became familiar with scientific approaches to youth bullying. As Bosworth, Espelage, and Simon

⁴⁸ According to Hoover and Hazler (1991), “Most reports on bullying and teasing appearing in North America tend to be opinion pieces (Allan, 1983; Bierbauer, 1987; Floyd, 1985; Highland, 1984) although there are significant exceptions (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988)” (p. 212).

highlighted in 1999, “much of the work on these phenomena has been conducted internationally. Although those investigations can inform research conducted in the United States, it is unclear how the findings from international studies will replicate with U.S. students” (p. 343).

Despite these and other scholarly and advocacy efforts, until 1999, American society did not consider bullying a major threat (Bryn, 2011).⁴⁹ According to Bryn (2011), until 2001, “it appeared that the general perception was that bullying was just ‘kids being kids’” (p. 214). Researchers like Nansel framed it similarly: “In the past, bullying has simply been dismissed as kids will be kids” (Goode, 2001). In the 1990s, there were other youth-related moral panics causing alarm among the adult population: mostly, youth of color’s “violent behavior” that was linked to urban zones (Muschert & Madfis, 2014), which is coded language to indicate Black and Brown bodies (Evans-Winters, 2017). Likewise, American society was worried about school violence, but it was considered a deviant behavior *expected* in underprivileged students and students of color (Giroux, 2000), likewise located in urban areas. In the 1990s, “middle-class, suburban, white parents [...] viewed school violence as a problem only for urban schools serving poor and racial or ethnic minority” (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014, p. 54). That said, school shootings became an increasing concern during the 1990s. Regarding youth peer bullying, as aforementioned, it was mostly perceived by American society as a children’s game, a rite of passage, a customary practice even encouraged by coaches to promote traditional masculinity among male athletes (Anderson, 2009; Finley & Finley, 2006) by using homophobic and misogynistic slurs. Something happened in 1999, however, that

⁴⁹ Interestingly, the dominant literature on youth bullying barely contextualizes this phenomenon within the larger framework of school violence.

stunned American society profoundly, even more than previous school shootings, and changed the perception around school safety: The Columbine High School shootings (i.e., Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003). The elevated number of fatal victims and the massive Columbine shootings media coverage were central in making this school shooting a milestone in the long history of school shootings in the U.S. (Elsass et al., 2016; Mears et al, 2017). As Mears et al. (2017) highlight,

The event catapulted school shootings into the forefront of America's consciousness. According to Pew Research Center (1999), 68 percent of Americans reported that they followed news about the event 'very closely.' It ranked a close third to the Rodney King riots and the TWA crash as among the most newsworthy events of the decade. (p. 940)

Moreover, it was not only the immense media coverage that made the Columbine shootings special, but the impact of digital tools on its coverage. As Haberman (2019) argues, "Columbine was more than the deadliest assault till then on a high school in the United States. It was a defining horror of the nascent digital age. Much of it unfolded onscreen in real time." In addition to these factors, the intersection of race and class also explains the social anxiety generated by this event. In the Columbine shootings, white middle-class youth—not Black and Latino youth, no poor disenfranchised white youth—behaved violently, killing at school (Mazzarella, 2006). Media coverage of the Columbine High School shootings posited the surprise for White, middle-class, suburban Americans of how such a crime could have happened in their community, because that type of violent behavior "was expected of urban, poor, and/or African American and Latino youth," not in "White suburbia" (Mazzarella, 2006, p. 233). Due to the heavy media coverage and social anxiety generated by the Columbine shootings, American society demanded an immediate answer (Mazzarella, 2006). And the answer was, among

other hypothesis, that the shooters were victims of bullying and decided to take revenge, planning to kill their peers.⁵⁰ As aforementioned, the narrative of youth bullying was becoming popular in the U.S. at that time in academia and the media, and it provided the perfect answer to explain the Columbine shootings. In fact, after the Columbine shootings, different research projects linked bullying to school violence. Leary et al. (2003) concluded that their “analyses of cases of school violence since 1995 support the hypothesis that social rejection was involved in most cases of lethal school violence” (p. 210). Likewise, Dake, Price, & Telljohann (2003), by citing a report of the U.S. Secret Service, explained that in those cases where mass shooters suffered severe bullying, their experience triggered their attacks to schools. In 2004, however, the FBI and researchers questioned the correlation between bullying and the Columbine shootings (Cullen, 2004). Nonetheless, in 1999, the scholarly discourse on bullying was used to explain the conditions that gave rise to the mass shooting. As Brooks (2014) points out in *The New York Times*, “In the weeks following the killings, commentators and psychologists filled the air with theories about what on earth could have caused those teenagers to lash out as they did. The main one was that Harris and Klebold were the victims of brutal high school bullies.” A new moral panic on youth was born in American society: youth bullying.

Youth bullying did not become a major social concern in a vacuum. The neoliberal order—which began unfolding in the early 1980s—established a new law-and-

⁵⁰ In addition to youth bullying, popular culture was also targeted as the *cause* of these shootings—according to Giroux and Jenkins—because Goth music and violent video games supposedly influenced the shooters (Mazzarella, 2006, p. 230). Marilyn Manson, particularly, was harshly targeted by the media because the shooters listened to his music. Manson considers that “the Columbine era destroyed [his] entire career at the time” (Petridis, 2017).

order regime (Hall, 1988) embodied by an increasingly authoritarian, coercive, and militarized state.⁵¹ In the early 2000s, the U.S. experienced President Bush's war on terror which fostered the militarization of society (Giroux, 2004),⁵² a culture of fear, a "rhetoric of patriotism and authority" and its "apparatus of punishment" (Schulman, 2016, p. 87),⁵³ and the need of constant security at any cost—metaphorically and materially. As Schulman (2016) points out, this repressive approach emphasizes punishment instead of addressing the causes of conflict, simplifies the complex nuances of our interactions by obsessively identifying "who is right and who is wrong"—so it becomes easy to identify "on whom to inflict punishment"—(p. 87), and grants police the role of conflict mediator. Schools were likewise affected by that repressive transformation (Giroux & McLaren, 1989), using moral panics on youth as an excuse to implement a law-and-order regime in schools.

Since the mid-1980s, youth have increasingly faced the application of zero-tolerance policies in the U.S. Voices of Youth in Chicago Education's (VOYCE), a "youth organizing alliance for education and racial justice led by students of color from across the city of Chicago and Illinois" ("About Us," 2014) explains that zero-tolerance policies function "by assuming that the application of harsh punishments for both major and minor offenses deters students from misconduct, thus creating a safe and positive

⁵¹ Social discontent continues growing and the repressive side of the state grows as well. Militarization of police and schools (Giroux, 2004), militarization as "an antidote to the chaos of individual interests" (Harvey, 2005, p. 82). Surveillance, arbitrary detentions (legitimized by the Patriot Act), massive incarceration of marginalized populations (Harvey, 2005), or financial debt (towards other countries and its own citizens) are a sample of the coercive force of the state in the neoliberal order.

⁵² For Giroux (2004), the militarization of society encompasses "the increasing centrality of the military in American society, the militarization of U.S. culture, and the increased propensity to suppress dissent" (p. 32).

⁵³ Schulman (2016) emphasizes that since the 1980s, the alliance between religious right and the Republican party has fostered the "rhetoric of patriotism and authority" in the U.S., affecting the approach to conflict. Punishing, instead of addressing the causes of conflict, became the dominant strategy (p. 87).

learning environment” (“Voices,” 2011, p. 11). The notion of zero-tolerance policies had its origin in the mid-1980s, as part of Reagan’s War on Drugs in public schools and the passing of the Drug Free Schools Act (1986) (Fuentes, 2014). This strict approach kept expanding during Clinton’s administration thanks to the Gun-Free Schools Act (1994), amid a context of “public hysteria about youth crime” that did not reflect descending youth crime rates (Fuentes, 2014, p. 40). In addition to zero-tolerance policies, schools implemented surveillance and security as a strategy—supposedly—to deal with school-based violence and “to restore order” (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014, p. 59). A myriad of controlling and repressive measures that promoted quotidian surveillance and body control have been increasingly implemented in schools,⁵⁴ such as “[p]olice officers, surveillance cameras, zero-tolerance policies, use of drug-sniffing dogs, metal detectors, and others” (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014, p. 53). In some schools, even SWAT teams, canine units, and Tasers (Heitzeg, 2014). These are examples of the militarization of schools that Giroux denounces (2004).

In the late 1990s, after several school mass shootings, the application of zero-tolerance policies increased (Rich-Shea & Fox, 2014). Yet the Columbine High School shootings became a turning point. After the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, three ideas coalesced in the adult imaginary: schools were more dangerous than adults imagined, including those for suburban white and wealthy youth (Muschert & Peguero, 2010); existing measures proved insufficient to prevent violence in schools—it was

⁵⁴ In 2001, Grossberg already denounced this situation: “Increasingly, every moment of youth's lives are being monitored and disciplined. Total and non-stop surveillance is becoming the acceptable disciplinary matrix for youth. Schools increasingly impose regulations about every aspect of kids' everyday lives, their cultural and consumer choices, their forms of identification and relationships” (p. 118).

urgent to develop further measures to defend youth from themselves (Muschert & Peguero, 2010); and a new social menace was born, the young bully.

According to Muschert et al., (2014), the representation of Columbine High School shootings (1999), the *Columbine Effect* (Muschert & Peguero, 2010), transformed the social perception and interventions on school violence, to the point that the notion of pre-Columbine and post-Columbine is used to explain issues of safety at schools in the U.S. The *Columbine Effect* promoted the idea that children were at risk because schools were unsafe and that previous security measures were inefficient (Muschert et al., 2014; Muschert & Peguero, 2010). Instead of questioning the effectiveness of existing zero-tolerance policies or whether adults' framing of youth reality was proportioned and accurate, repressive measures were reinforced in schools and youth were framed, once more, as a societal threat. In a context of existing moral panics against youth (particularly youth of color), the fear of school mass shootings and the supposed relationship of bullying to them made youth bullying a new social threat. In a different ideological context, adult's response could have been different. In the U.S., within a dominant simplistic, pro-punishment culture of fear (Schulman, 2016)—and influenced by it—, a moral panic on youth bullying unfolded. Even though scholars posited years later that bullying was not the motivation for nor did it account for Columbine High School shootings (i.e., Porter, 2013), in the early 2000s, the believed correlation between youth bullying and school shootings generated a spiral of consequences. As Porter (2013) highlights, “by the time the truth came to light the Myth of Columbine was set in stone, and bullying was on its way to being perceived as one of the biggest threats facing America's children” (p. 61).

A major consequence of the post-Columbine's moral panic on youth bullying—and the supposed correlation between bullying and school shootings—was the emergence of the young bully as a new social and national menace. In a few years, the representation of the *bully* morphed from the abusive boy⁵⁵ that was part of everyday school-life into a dangerous threat, a deviant monster, a folk devil, a young homemade terrorist posing a national threat in American schoolyards that had to be firmly and urgently contained and repressed. Framing *the bully* as a terrorist was not new, though. In the 1980s, Floyd (1987) already asked, “How long will educators and parents tolerate the equivalent of terrorism in their schools? Under the name of ‘bullies,’ boys acting individually and in gangs daily commit criminal acts against children and teen-agers in halls, stairwells, locker rooms and school yards.”⁵⁶ After the Columbine shootings, addressing bullies’ behavior, bullying, became a central concern. Thus, as Stuart-Cassel, Bell, and Springer (2011) posit, Columbine shootings “ignited a wave of new legislative action within state legislatures that aimed to curtail bullying behavior on school campuses or to mitigate its effects” (p. 1). A threat that pushed legislators to force schools to monitor and register

⁵⁵ The literature about bullying it was mostly gendered male at first. Olweus, initially, focused on studying boys only (Roland, 1993). Other researchers likewise focused on male youth. In his article “Terrorism in the Schools,” Floyd (1987) wrote that “[u]nder the name of ‘bullies,’ boys acting individually and in gangs daily commit criminal acts against children” (p. 22). Hoover and Hazler posited, in 1991, that it was necessary to study the role of girls in bullying: “Is there bullying among girls, and does it operate similarly to the behavior Olweus identified among boys?” (p. 216). Even Nansel and colleagues (2001) highlighted that boys get more involved in bullying behavior. The issue was the framing. Indirect forms of aggression (i.e., relational abuse) were not properly measured in the study of youth bullying, which mostly focused on direct forms of aggression (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988). Given that direct and overt aggressions were more associated to boys and indirect aggressions to girls, the latter’s behavior was not equally studied by bullying researchers (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). Once the conceptualization of bullying gave more relevance to indirect aggressions, the representation of the bully changed. Girls who committed indirect aggressions, i.e. *mean girls*, were also categorized as bullies, as seen in the Phoebe Prince’s case (Ryalls, 2012).

⁵⁶ Likewise, Quinn and Meiners (2013) detail how the “self-proclaimed watch-dog organization Bully Police USA [...] defines school bullies as “small scale Terrorist[s]” (p. 151). Kalman (2013) points out that “Characterizing child bullies as terrorists serves to encourage the public to hate them and to treat them like the most heinous criminals” (p. 79).

any interaction labeled as “bullying” and persecute—and even expel and prosecute—students who engaged in *bullying behavior*. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001—known as No Child Left Behind—urged states to pass laws that would bind districts to implement and follow safe-school policies (Edmonson & Zeman, 2011). Therefore, within a framework of growing social alarm around youth bullying, youth bullying as moral panic triggered state governments to pass anti-bullying legislation, which imposed the application of bullying prevention and intervention measures in schools. Thus, state governments assumed a punitive role in the management of bullying, forcing school districts to adhere to strict anti-bullying policies, develop detailed protocols and interventions, as well as implement anti-bullying campaigns and programs. Otherwise, federally funded schools were subject to lose their federal funding (Kalman, 2013). Despite the lack of a homogeneous definition of bullying (Mears et al., 2017), whatever behavior could be considered *bullying* by any member of the scholarly community must be frantically registered and addressed (Porter, 2013). In sum, implementing repressive policies became a central strategy in the prevention of youth bullying, as it was done to prevent other forms of school violence previously. Likewise, repressive policies became a central strategy to counter moral panics on youth bullying, as it was used to counter prior moral panics on youth violence (Walton, 2011). As Porter (2013) ironically points out, “If Zero Tolerance was an appropriate method to use against other ills, then why not use it for bullying?” (p. 98). Consequently, public schools increasingly became “learning prisons” (Giroux, 2004, p. 37), spaces dominated by constant surveillance, zero-tolerance policies, police intervention, and anti-bullying programs.

Good Intentions Gone Wrong

Due to the ineffectiveness, harmfulness, and unfairness of zero-tolerance policies, these repressive school policies have been overwhelmingly contested—including by the American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) and the American Civil Liberties Union.⁵⁷ As Snapp and colleagues (2015) stress, even the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice recognized, in 2014, “how punitive discipline disproportionately affects underrepresented youth” (p. 58). Even though the narrative of zero tolerance has been excluded from codes of conduct, punitive and repressive practices remain in place in many schools,⁵⁸ including “suspensions, expulsions and school-based arrests” (“Voices, 2011, p. 5). Multiple researchers (i.e., Giroux, 2004; Meyer, 2016; Muschert et al., 2014; Walton, 2011) and organizations (i.e., ACLU, GLSEN, VOYCE) criticize the negative impact of these safe-school policies and measures for youth,⁵⁹ especially youth of color, queer youth, and youth with disabilities, because such measures—among other consequences—have been used to unfold a neoliberal war on youth (Giroux; Grossberg), including the school-to-prison pipeline. As Quinn and Meiners (2013) emphasize, “anti-bullying legislation is not just ineffective, it

⁵⁷ VOYCE underlines that “[i]t is time to recognize zero tolerance has fundamentally failed to make our schools safer” (“Voices”, 2011, p. 6). Moreover, these disruptive measures, enforced “regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (“Voices,” 2011, p. 9) promote tension, anxiety and fear, prevents trust between adults and youth, hinder students’ academic success, and criminalize students—specially students of color (“Voices,” 2011).

⁵⁸ VOYCE explains that “[b]y placing no limits on how harshly students can be punished for minor offenses and failing to prioritize due process, parent outreach, or research-based models of prevention and support, CPS [Chicago Public Schools] policy has created a de facto zero tolerance system in which young people are punished far too harshly for small offenses, the application of disciplinary action is extremely inconsistent from student to student or day to day, and youth often have no way to defend themselves against accusations of misconduct” (“Voices,” 2011, p. 9).

⁵⁹ Muschert et al. (2014) posit that the anti-violence school policy developed after Columbine, influenced by fear and anxiety, “may have unintended negative effects in (a) damaging the school learning environment, (b) undermining relationships among students and teachers, and/or (c) exacerbating the problems of violence that they are intended to alleviate” (p. 4). Likewise, post-Columbine anti-violence policy “distracts from the development of a comprehensive, multilevel approach” (p. 4).

supports institutions that reflect and reproduce racism, gender conformity, and class oppression” (p. 167).

In that sense, in addition to fostering a climate of violence in schools (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014), another worrisome outcome of the law-and-order educative system is the promotion of the school-to-prison pipeline, “a growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via ‘zero tolerance’ policies, and tracking them directly and/or indirectly into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems” (Heitzeg, 2009, p. 1). GLSEN denounces that “some policies intended to reduce bullying have had the adverse effect of pushing students into the school-to-prison pipeline” (“Dropout,” n.d.). In fact, VOYCE posits, “Zero tolerance [...] has contributed directly to the low graduation and high incarceration rates of Chicago’s students of color” (“Voices,” 2011, p. 23). There are multiple factors that foment the school-to-prison pipeline, such as school defunding, resegregation, high-stakes testing, drop-out rates, or zero-tolerance policies (Heitzeg, 2014). Regarding the latter, in American schools, the application of severe punishment to deal with major and minor infractions can involve suspension, expulsion, report to the police, arrest—police’s presence in schools has become common procedure—⁶⁰, or prosecution (Heitzeg, 2014). Consequently, students can end up “out into the streets, into the juvenile justice system, and/or into adult prisons and jails” (Heitzeg, 2014, p. 12), even due to minor misconduct or offenses. Tantrums, tardiness, disorderly conduct—such as doodling on a desk—or carrying nail clippers can cause students’ suspension, expulsion, or arrest—even toddlers have been handcuffed and

⁶⁰ According to McCurdy (2014), since mid-1990s, schools have incorporated the figure of the school resource officer (SRO), who combines law enforcement, counseling, and social work. These officers operate as counselors, yet they can arrest students, which places the latter in a vulnerable position.

arrested by police officers at school (Giroux, 2014; Heitzeg, 2014; McCurdy, 2014). As Heitzeg (2014) highlights, previous “disciplinary issues [...] are now called crimes” (p. 13); yet, due to the vagueness of zero-tolerance policies and the wide discretion allowed to officials to apply them, students cannot be sure what may constitute a violation (Heitzeg, 2014; “Voices,” 2011), or they ignore the process to appeal the application of these policies, such as a suspension—basically, because many states have simply not created clear policy guidelines (Heitzeg, 2014). The arbitrary categorization and application of infractions, however, is not neutral (Heitzeg, 2014); it targets specific bodies and practices. Moreover, even institutional punishment of misconduct is applied differently among youth.

Certain clothing (i.e., sagging pants, tight fitted clothes, hijab), hair-styling (i.e., Black girls’ hair), gender performance (i.e., gender non-conforming), or queer public displays of affection (i.e., same-sex couples holding hands) can be considered as conduct violations by school authorities and become criminalized (Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017; Himmelstein & Brückner, 2010; Kosciw et al., 2012; Nocella et al., 2014; Snapp et al., 2015). As Nocella et al., (2014) argues, “behaviors, culture, and daily experiences of youth of color are becoming against the law” (p. 2). Race likewise influences the way teachers react to students’ behavior. Skiba and colleagues’ research uncovers how African American students are referred to the principal’s office for “less serious and more subjective reasons” than their white counterparts (as cited in Fuentes, 2014, p. 44). In the case of queer youth, educators and administrators target them for performing non-normative gender or defending themselves from homophobia and transphobia in school (Kosciw et al., 2012; Snapp et al., 2015). It is not a coincidence that

youth of color and “other marginalized youth”—youth with disabilities, noncitizens, underprivileged, and queer youth—suffer the school-to-prison phenomenon more severely (Nocella et al., 2014, p. 3), especially when these identities intersect (Snapp et al., 2015). As Mitchum and Moodie-Mills (2014) emphasize, “LGBT youth of color [...] suffer harsher consequences under these [zero-tolerance] policies” (p. 17).

Even when misconduct is similar among students, the consequences vary. GLSEN, ACLU, and VOYCE argue that youth of color, youth with disabilities, and queer youth are punished more harshly than their white peers for the same actions (“Dropout,” n.d.; “School,” n.d.; “Voices,” 2011). In fact, non-white students face more suspensions and expulsion than white students. ACLU denounces that “[w]hile Black students only make up 16% of public school enrollment, they account for 42% of all students who have been suspended multiple times” (“School,” n.d.). Black students face suspension and expulsion “3 times more than white students” (“School,” n.d.). Even the medical justification of disruptive behavior as a disorder—i.e., ADHD— operates unequally based on class, race, and insurance coverage (Heitzeg, 2014). As research suggests, “teachers are most likely to expect and define ADHD as an issue for white boys” (Heitzeg, 2014, p. 24). In the case of queer youth, they get punished more severely for displaying affection or for performing non-normative gender (Snapp et al., 2015).

The consequences of these discriminatory zero-tolerance policies are dire. Students suspended or expelled are more likely to enter the criminal justice system (“School,” n.d.; “Voices,” 2011), and thus, youth of color and queer youth encounter the school-to-prison pipeline in a larger proportion. In the case of Black girls, they “receive more severe sentences when they enter the juvenile justice system than do members of

any other group of girls, and they are the fastest growing population in the system (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016)” (as cited in Evans-Winters et al., 2017, p. 416). Likewise, Black girls experience the intersection of gender, race, and class in the application of zero-tolerance policies more severely than their counterparts, being punished for self-defending from sexual harassment or violating dress code (Evans-Winters et al., 2017). Queer youth are also overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. Even though “LGBTQ youth represent only 5% to 7% of the youth population, they represent 13% to 15% of the juvenile justice population (Majd et al., 2009)” (as cited in Snapp et al., 2015, p. 77). Once youth get into the judicial system, they may face long-term “collateral consequences” (Heitzeg, 2014, p. 17) that affect their rights and opportunities, i.e., “denial of federal welfare, medical, housing, or educational benefits” (p. 17), making it more difficult for youth to complete their education, find jobs and housing, and avoid further incarceration. As McCurdy (2014) points out, “Being arrested is sometimes the point of no return for a young person” (p. 87).

An increasing number of voices—young and adult—denounce the school-to-prison pipeline and fight actively to dismantle it, yet many other social agents participate in its reproduction. Maybe because the latter ignore the causes and effects of this phenomenon; maybe because they consider it necessary. As Grossberg (2001) denounces, “it has become common for youth to be seen as a threat to the existing social order, and for kids to be blamed for the problems they experience (much as other ‘minorities’ are)” (pp. 123-124). Youth, according to Giroux, “is no longer at *risk* but the *risk* to democratic public life” (as cited in Grossberg, 2001, p. 123). The militarization of schools and the incarceration of youth of color have been framed as a way to protect youth from itself and

society from youth,⁶¹ while it benefits the prison industrial military complex (Kellner, 2008). Surveilling, controlling, and repressing youth of color and other marginalized youth at school has become a growing industry in the U.S. The so called “Kids for Cash” scandal, in which two judges accepted large amounts of money from for-profit prison companies in exchange of giving disproportionate sentences to young offenders, becomes a gruesome example of how the prison industrial military complex benefits from the application of zero-tolerance policies. As NPR (“Kids,” 2014) informs,

Even minor offenses, like fighting in school or underage drinking, could mean hard time in a juvenile detention facility. Federal prosecutors alleged the judges were actually getting kickbacks from those private detention facilities. They said the judges kept the juvenile detention centers full, and received cash in return.

In this sense, as aforementioned, we need to contextualize school anti-violence policies within a neoliberal regime, because governance in schools reflects neoliberal governance (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014). Adopting punitive and exclusionary measures to deal with school violence, including youth bullying, was an option. A different approach, based on “welfare-oriented responses” (i.e., counseling) and democratic practices (i.e., fostering youth civic engagement, giving more voice to youth), could have been adopted (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014) and still can be adopted. Repressive practices are not secondary effects that tangentially affect youth. In fact, for some Youth Studies scholars, there is a neoliberal war on youth in place (Giroux, 2004; Grossberg, 2001).

⁶¹ Evans-Winters et al. (2017) explain that “[a]s non-White people, [Black girls] are perceived as inherently violent; as nonwealthy youth, they are viewed as in need of discipline and control; and as girls of color, they are believed to be lacking morals and values. Thus, the body of a Black or Brown girl is seen as simultaneously an inherent threat to school officials and other students as well as a threat to her own safety and well-being” (p. 418).

Investment in security officers, metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and police officers in schools have increased dramatically, yet basic educative and mental health services have decreased (Giroux, 2004; “Voices,” 2011).⁶² Moreover, incarcerated youth, like adult inmates, generate profits to a wide array of corporations, as consumers (i.e., prison phone industry), and *users* of the penal system (incarceration in private prisons covered by public funding), and exploited labor force (benefiting Victoria’s Secret, Walmart) (Davis, 1998). For some scholars (Nocella et al., 2016), these exploited prisoners, who make “cents per hour for their labor” (p. 2), should be considered slaves. According to the Thirteen Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, slavery in the U.S. is forbidden “except as a punishment for a crime” (“Thirteen,” p. 1825), and as Nocella et al. (2014) highlight, “we have more convicted individuals in prisons (slaves, according to the Thirteen Amendment) that we did enslaved Africans prior to the Civil War” (p. 2). Among them, there are many youth of color, whose incarceration rate is outrageously disproportionate⁶³ and who become another source of accumulation by dispossession for the neoliberal elite.⁶⁴ Heitzeg (2009) argues that the “age of mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex calls for the continual replenishment of the ranks of the imprisoned, and it is youth of color that are most often selected to fill that onerous role” (p. 8). In this sense, Kupchik and Catlaw (2014) consider suspension and expulsion of

⁶² In Chicago, “CPS has prioritized the hiring of security staff over the hiring of support staff” (“Voices,” 2011, p. 20). More than \$50 million were allocated towards “school-based security guards” and only \$3.5 million “towards college and career coaches based in the schools” (“Voices,” 2011, p. 20).

⁶³ According to NAACP (“Criminal,” n.d.), “African-Americans represent 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth who are detained, 46% of the youth who are judicially waived to criminal court, and 58% of the youth admitted to state prisons (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice).”

⁶⁴ Neoliberalism is based on accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005). It does not create wealth and income; it just redistributes it upwardly. Neoliberalism fundamentally takes “advantage of asymmetries in exchange relations” (Hesmondhalgh, 2008, p. 106).

youth from school, especially “racial and ethnic minority youth” (p. 60), as a market sorting practice. Not only the market rationale but the whole neoliberal enterprise is built upon a racist, sexist, heteronormative, and classist ideology that permeates governance and policies.⁶⁵ We must ponder, however, whether incarcerating and profiting off of certain bodies goes beyond a neoliberal war on youth that targets youth of color, impoverished youth, and queer youth intentionally. This reality should be contextualized within a history of internal colonialism against youth of color in the U.S. A country in which “[w]hite racial dominance politics, and systems (and instruments) [...] serve to control and surveil the Black body” (Evans-Winters, 2017, p. 19). And exploit Black bodies and other people of color. Evans-Winters (2017) posits it clearly: Black youth “live and are schooled in the midst of the prison industrial complex, or what Michelle Alexander (2010) refers to as ‘the new Jim Crow’—a racially and economically mass incarceration process that filters young poor Black and Brown males and females into the prison system” (p. 22).

This is the context in which youth peer abuse and violence takes place and it is addressed by adults, framed as youth bullying. The context in which the concern on youth bullying—triggered and fed primarily by researchers—has turned into another excuse to oppress and colonize youth of color. Another excuse to commodify youth, support authoritarian practices in schools, repress youth of color, fuel the school-to-prison pipeline, and generate profit for the military-prison industry complex. However, large parts of the dominant study of youth bullying ignore this worrisome scenario. Ignore how

⁶⁵ Neoliberal leaders obtained consent to exert authoritarian populism and dismantle the welfare-state by using homophobia, racism, anti-feminism, white supremacy, religion, and cultural nationalism—gathering support from white Christians, including working class individuals (Harvey, 2005, p. 50).

well-intentioned research has, indirectly, facilitated oppression and colonization of youth of color in the U.S. Why?

In order to answer that question, it is essential to not only examine the genealogy of youth bullying in the US—how youth bullying became a central concern for American society overnight—as well as its harmful consequences for youth of color. It is likewise pivotal to better understand how the dominant discourse on youth bullying was framed, how a group of adults conceptualized youth peer abuse and violence in a way that became common sense (in a Gramscian way). Common sense “is a form of ‘everyday thinking’ which offers us frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the world” (Hall & O’Shea, 2013, p. 1). As Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (2013) clarify, “Common sense [...] may be obvious, confused, episodic, or contradictory. The traces of many different traditions of thought are condensed into it leaving behind no inventory [...] in formally democratic societies, ‘becoming common sense’ is one key route to securing popular legitimacy and compliance” (p. xiii). Nonetheless, no matter how “natural it appears, [common sense] always has a structure” (Hall, 1988, p. 8). Thus, in the next section I trace and visibilize how certain premises about youth bullying became naturalized, unquestioned, assumed as essential, when these premises were constructed by researchers.

Understanding the Dominant Framing of Youth Bullying

The idea that anti-bullying narratives or efforts could be harmful to youth of color seems an oxymoron to many people. I have witnessed visceral reactions to this thesis, particularly among adults who suffered peer abuse or violence as children or teenagers as well as parents of kids. Those visceral reactions made me realize to what extent the

premises of youth bullying as discourse became unquestionable common sense in the U.S., even though the approach to bullying was different three decades ago. Therefore, in order to understand the dominant framing of youth bullying in the U.S., we need to answer how a whole society shifted so radically in the way it framed certain forms of youth peer abuse and violence—from being a children’s ritual to a national threat—in less than a decade.

In 2011, Walton underlined that “[t]he language of bullying has grown within public discourse over the past 20 years. Fear and hysteria, springing from extreme and rare instances of school violence, are circulated through journalism” (p. 134). Since the early 2000’s, youth bullying has become a popular narrative and cultural issue (Berry, 2016) featured in the media, academic literature, popular culture, and social campaigns in the U.S. Films like “Mean Girls” (2004), campaigns such as the “It Gets Better Project” (2010), or the recent television show “Thirteen Reasons Why” (2017) are examples of the overwhelming presence of youth bullying as a major social concern in American society. The role of media, as Walton highlights, has been essential in promoting a moral panic on youth bullying and triggering anti-bullying policy, yet those who sparked the flame were scholars. In the pre-Columbine shooting era, media used researchers’ work, such as Floyd’s, to inform on the impact of youth bullying. For instance, in 1986, *The New York Times* published that “mental-health professionals, educators, family therapists and child-care professionals are giving new attention to the phenomenon of childhood bullying,” featuring Floyd’s work at schools (Collins, 1986). During those years, influenced by Scandinavian and Finish scholarship on bullying, researchers and psychologists in the U.S., such as Floyd, framed bullying as “a major problem” (Collins, 1986) because it

could become “a major distraction from the whole educational process.” Or for Hoover and Hazler (1991), youth bullying was an issue that affects the “school climate” and students’ performance (p. 212). In the post-Columbine shooting era, as discussed before, when bullying became a moral panic due to the Columbine shootings in the U.S., scholars’ framing intensified. From a major educational problem, bullying turned into a *health epidemic* (Hamburger et al., 2011) and a “national youth health crisis” (Bryn, 2011, p. 218). Researchers stressed the connection of youth bullying with school shootings, youth suicide, and multiple forms of psychological damage. Such has been the dominant common sense on youth bullying in the post-Columbine shooting era.

Dominant discourses on youth bullying, which are certainly not homogeneous and change over time, share certain premises that are accepted by most researchers, journalists, and legislators and that have permeated common sense. For instance, the idea of bullying as a deviant behavior and concerning issue that generate long-term deleterious consequences. These premises were created by the psychological behavioral approach. As explained, since the 1970s, psychology became the pioneer and leading field in the study of youth bullying and its behavioral approach greatly influenced the subsequent stages of this research topic (i.e., Ringrose & Renold, 2010, 2011). Multiple voices (i.e., Ringrose & Renold, 2010, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2011), however, have questioned the behavioral model and its pathologizing and “individualising logic of bully discourses” (Ringrose & Renold, 2011). These voices challenge unquestioned common sense on youth bullying.⁶⁶ In 2005, Walton, as a graduate student, “advocate[d] for a broader

⁶⁶ Ringrose and Renold (2010) posit that “[s]ociological research has critiqued [the] developmental model of bullying for its focus on psychological typologies of bullies and victims, and failure to address the situational and socio-cultural dimensions of power along the lines of gender, class, race and sexuality (Lloyd & Stead, 2001)” (p. 576).

framework of understanding, one that also provides analyses on power relations of political, historical, and ideological contexts that give rise to environments in which bullying occurs" (p. 55). Furthermore, Pascoe (2013) outlines that "the reproduction of inequality [...] is not taken into account by current popular and academic discourses on bullying" (pp. 96-97).

The erasure of systemic factors—cultural and social—in the developmental approach to the study of youth bullying frames bullying as an individualized behavior (Ringrose & Renold, 2011, p. 182), which ignores "the ways in which bullying reinforces social norms and overlapping hierarchies of social privilege" (Walton, 2011, p. 142). Thus, the dominant framing of youth bullying and its lack of contextualization (i.e., Ringrose & Renold, 2010, 2011; Walton, 2005a), takes youth peer abuse outside of a social/ideological/political-economic framework and ignores the influence of neoliberalism in youth's interactions (Gender JUST, 2013). Peer abuse, in a neoliberal context, is not deviant yet quite the opposite (Pascoe, 2013). Youth reproduce hegemonic neoliberal values—disposability, fierce competitiveness, individualism, aggressive masculinity, or cruelty—in school or through social media. As Pascoe (2013) points out, "Thinking of these aggressive interactions as the reproduction of inequality frames them as normative rather than pathological behaviors" (p. 95)—inequality that youth experience, in diverse ways, in their everyday life.

Even the ecological framing, a psychological approach that examines external factors in people's behaviors, seems insufficient to fully explain what lies behind the notion of bullying as a social construction "that reflects structural inequalities" (Pascoe,

2013, p. 87).⁶⁷ Are youth sovereigns? Do they kick, insult, harass, exclude, discriminate against, ignore, beat, kill other peers just because they choose to do so or because they are psychologically impaired? Peer abuse and violence do not occur in a vacuum and yet the political (Gender JUST, 2013; Walton, 2005a), economic (Meyer, 2016; Gender JUST, 2013), historical (Walton, 2005a), cultural (Ringrose & Renold, 2010), and ideological (Walton, 2005a) context in which bullying unfolds is one of the major absences in the dominant youth bullying literature. Some argue that this de-contextualized discourse on youth bullying has been, among others, gender blind (Meyer, 2008; Ringrose & Renold, 2010), heterocentric (Meyer, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2010) and absent an analysis of homophobia (Meyer, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013; Walton, 2005, 2011),⁶⁸ and focused predominantly on white youth (Paceley & Flynn, 2012; Pritchard, 2013). Moreover, dominant youth bullying discourses miss how “bullying often reflects, reproduces, and prepares young people to accept inequalities embedded in larger social structures” (Pascoe, 2013, p. 95). The practice of young peer abuse marks the deviant—the *sissy*, the *fat*, the *dyke*, the *weirdo*—and create normative identities (Pascoe, 2013) because, as Judith Butler (2011) points out, bullying keeps us “in our gendered place.” Youth, indeed, are “doing the dirty work of social reproduction” (Pascoe, 2013, p. 95), keeping us “in our gendered place” (Butler, 2011). In fact, even though dominant discourses on youth bullying increasingly recognize that queer youth

⁶⁷ As Ringrose and Renold (2010) question, “What does it mean when the concept of ‘bullying’, which largely ignores socio-cultural dimensions of power and identity, constitutes the dominant discursive framework through which schools can interpret and intervene in everyday gendered and sexualised school-based conflict?” (p. 574). Even when bullying is conceptualized as a “school problem” it is framed as individual behavior (Walton, 2005a).

⁶⁸ Walton (2005a) argues that “[t]he exclusions of homophobia from venues in which hundreds of people *conferred* about bullying was the lynchpin from which [he] began to problematize not only research on bullying, but also the dominant notion of bullying that informs such research” (p. 56).

experience more aggressions than their straight and gender normative peers (StopBullying.gov), ⁶⁹ few approaches contextualize these practices within a heteronormative, homophobic, sexist, racist, ableist, and transphobic system of oppression or question researchers' ideological standpoints (Payne & Smith, 2013; Walton, 2005a). For critical voices, these absences question the effectiveness of dominant youth bullying narratives (Payne & Smith, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2010, 2011; Walton, 2005a). ⁷⁰ As Ringrose and Renold (2011) underline, "dominant 'bullying discourses' are untenable for understanding and coping with the complex range of experiences of peer aggression and violence in school" (p. 181). ⁷¹ Yet, those dominant discourses on youth bullying still influence the media and policy, and feed ideas about youth bullying that end up becoming common sense. Common sense that becomes difficult to challenge, question. Common sense that is assumed, undisputed, by new generations of researchers on youth bullying. As I did.

Cha(lle)nging Common Sense

That extended common sense on youth bullying helps me understand my own process as a researcher. It took me years to learn that the dominant way researchers study youth bullying in the U.S. was radically questioned by activists and researchers. It took me years to learn that anti-bullying narratives commodify youth's pain (i.e., costly anti-bullying programs), indirectly help companies profit out of youth of color, or that they

⁶⁹ The major federal anti-bullying resource in the U.S., StopBullying.gov, posits that "[d]epending on the environment, some groups—such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) youth, youth with disabilities, and socially isolated youth—may be at an increased risk of being bullied" ("Who's at Risk," n.d.).

⁷⁰ Ringrose & Renold (2010) challenge the developmental psychological approach on bullying, due to its omission of "social power and hierarchies" as well as the way in which it "tends to reduce and essentialise the relationship between gender, victimisation and bullying" and reinforce gender stereotypes (p. 576).

⁷¹ Due to the invisibility of homophobia in bullying narratives, Walton (2005a) questioned "that safe school policies are written, adopted, and implemented to facilitate safety for all students" (p. 57).

calm institutional fears of being sued or losing funding (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2014). That was not part of the dominant framing that I learned, I read, I reproduced. A dominant framing that, at one point, I felt compelled to question, triggered by the casual encounter with critical scholars and youth of color and their critique to the dominant voices in the study of youth bullying. This encounter facilitated an epistemological challenge that ignited a deep, radical scholarly and personal transformation.

At one point of my growth as scholar, due to this encounter with critical voices on the discourse on youth bullying, I faced a profound crisis. Most of what I had read about youth bullying—canonic approaches to the issue—and what I felt about that dominant literature were increasingly detaching from each other. Cha(lle)nging common sense ideas is not an easy task; it made me feel disoriented, confused, insecure. On top of that, the methodological tools that I had acquired as a social scientist did not allow me to make sense, embrace, and conceptualize those emotions. Until I encountered performance studies, decolonizing methodologies, and re-read, with a different gaze, Third World feminism. Slowly, article after article, performance after performance, I was able to bring youth's bodies and my body as researcher to the forefront. I was able to question academia's and my own complicity with colonization. Slowly I found ways to understand what was happening, what was missing, what was failing in the study of youth bullying. What I was doing wrong too. As mentioned, I undertook that process thanks to two groups of agents: scholars critical with the dominant voices in the study of youth bullying as well as queer and of color youth performers whose videos on YouTube I audienced and planned to analyze in my dissertation. As a result, here we are. Instead of designing the Hernández Anti-Bullying Program in my dissertation, as I imagined I would do one

day, I am explaining how research on youth bullying contributes to colonizing and oppressive practices against youth of color. Trying to better understand how and why I entered a cycle of becoming/unbecoming *an enemy* of youth as a researcher on youth bullying. Reflecting upon my own experience to change me. Using those reflections to create methodological alternatives that help us repair the harm caused to youth of color, that helps us study peer abuse and violence in a decolonizing way, that helps us change academia.

Transformation, thus, continues taking place for me. Not only theoretically but ontologically, methodologically. Enfleshed. As a result, the magnifying lens that I used to employ as a social scientist becomes a mirror. I embrace embodied methodologies that allow me to scrutinize me, such as performance autoethnography. I approach Third World feminism as a contributor to the conversation initiated by these women. I learn from Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith or Eve Tuck, trying not to coopt their theories and agenda. Thanks to these researchers, performers and activists, I am able to use methods that question my role as researcher, in context, and theories that help me make sense of everything that I am discovering and feeling. Thanks to them, I found tools to self-decolonize and a group of people who guides me. Making me feel painfully uncomfortable sometimes, like Tuck and Yang do when they rightfully label me as a settler. People who call me out and yet support me, providing me with a space and language to heal and change—like Anzaldúa does with her words and epistemology. Particularly, young performers of color and adult women of color push me to go deeper, deeper, and explore my own identity in ways that I never tried before. All these people, who don't know me, encourage me to keep tearing my selves apart—from a standpoint of

love, self-care, and healing. They motivate me to self-decolonize and share that process with others, hoping that, one day, I will be better prepared to work with youth of color as an ally and not as a well-intended *enemy*.

And I have tried my best. During the last three years, I have written and performed several pieces that helped me scrutinize, using my body and my voice, the way youth bullying is studied in the U.S. Challenging dichotomic and decontextualized viewpoints that reduce a highly complex problem into a caricature of monstrous deviant bullies versus powerless victims. Viewpoints that seem to ignore that peer abuse and violence are not deviant in a neoliberal society (Pascoe, 2013; Gender JUST, 2013). For instance, in my performance “Missing Conversation” (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2016), I decided to use my body as a space to launch a critical conversation about the incoherent and harmful consequences of the study of youth bullying (as part of a graduate seminar). Conventional writing and lecturing did not work any longer for me. Instead of lecturing my ideas, I wrote a performative piece. I used my body to examine the study of youth bullying from different viewpoints, embodying several characters located in a neoliberal context—the bully, the well-intentioned yet harmful scholar, the concerned audience member, and the critical scholar. I needed to embody a conversation and hear all these personas coming out from inside of me. I needed to express the anger and sadness and hope that this painful mess about the study of youth bullying made me feel. Not only by writing words but also by embodying them. It was the only way all these ideas could have any meaning, any sense. They needed my body and I let them use it. To address the world but also myself. At one point in the piece, the bully, the main character, addresses the audience:

“Yes

I am the bully

The *mean girl*

Or maybe not

Are you the bully?

Who is the bully?

Bully. Bully-victim. Victim-bully.

Bullshit!!

Somebody mocked you yesterday

You may mock others tomorrow

Why people keep using labels?

I ask them. I ask you

Who is the bully?

You wish I existed.

You need me to exist.

Because violence is painfully real

People suffer it every single day. Every hour. Every second.

You know. Rejection. Insults. Loneliness. Harm. Death.

You need me to carry the weight of blame, the responsibility, the infamy.

You need a bad character. Evil. Despicable. In your Disney movie.

But I’m sorry to tell you the news: I don’t exist.

I am just a label!!!

[...]

You put a tag-price on my shoulders, but I just did the job you asked me to do.

Beware of the abnormal

If somebody is too queer, too tall, too short, too smart, too dumb, too tasteless

‘Weirdo!! What’s wrong with you? You’ve got to be cool! Man up, you’ve gotta learn to survive.’

So, yeah, we teach each other how to be cool. And spend hours at the mall and prepare our cool dates for the prom. Become normal.

That’s what you want, right?

So then, why putting the label ‘Dangerous Bully’ on my shoulder?

[...]

Let me ask you

Why the system wants me to become a gladiator and then it punishes me when I perform as one?”

Saying out loud “I am the bully” was the most powerful manifestation of my rejection to the immoral narrative of the bully as folk-devil. At the same time, hearing my own voice pronouncing those heretic words while remembering kids calling me *marimacho* (tomboy) or laughing at my body hair—and the pain it caused during my childhood—felt profoundly liberating. Because I resisted, challenged, imploded the common sense on youth bullying with a simple bunch of words and movements. I refused to simplify a profoundly complex problem, as Jack Halberstam requests (Bennet, 2013), and it felt liberating—because I, too, have laughed at others (haven’t you?). In my piece “I Don’t Want to Be the Well-Intentioned Enemy of Youth” (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2018), I reflect upon my own experiences of bullying as a teenager, building upon Pascoe’s (2013) and

Gender JUST (2013) activists' claim—who reject framing bullying as a deviant behavior.

In this piece, I engage in dialogue with excerpts of the theater script “Bully Me”

(Dreams, 2010-2011), which examines the impact of bullying on LGBTQ youth (C.

Hernández-Ojeda, 2017):⁷²

“‘I’ve done it.

Me too. Me too’

Say the young queer performers of Dreams of Hope

A theater troupe located in Pittsburgh

‘I laughed/giggled

CRACKED A JOKE AT SOMEONE ELSE’S EXPENSE’

And I’ve done it, too.

I remember Carmen the teenager, on Saturday afternoons,

eating ‘papas locas’ (French fries topped with garlic mayo sauce) with her friends

at a local fast food restaurant on Las Canteras Beach

back home in the Canary Islands.

The still closeted Carmen

Laughing in unison with her friends at the waiter

who used to serve the mayo sauce with flamboyant, exaggerated movements

Homophobic laughs.

Why did I mock him, Saturday after Saturday?

Borrowing from the young queer actors and actresses of Dreams of Hope,

⁷² “Bully Me” (Dreams, 2010-2011) was created and performed by TheatriQ, a youth’s performance group (ranging from 13 to 21 years old) in collaboration with adult professional artists (Vanessa German, Ted Hoover, and Douglas Levine). TheatriQ is an empowering and educative program coordinated by Dreams of Hope, a Pittsburgh “arts-focused organization for queer and allied youth” (“Our Story,” n.d.).

‘Because I was with my friends

Because it made me feel good at the time

I thought it was funny

I wanted to fit in.’

Even though such performance of gender policing

Muted into self-inflicted homophobic harm

Pushing me deeper into my asphyxiating closet

Leaving me with a disgusting aftertaste of garlic, shame, and sadness

Saturday after Saturday.

[pause]

Who is the bully, who the victim?

Is it really that simple?

Adults blame youth without contextualizing why they do what they do.

Adults call them ‘deviant youth’

How on Earth can be deviant to perform as a neoliberal subject

—selfish, aggressive, competitive, impassive to human suffering—

in a neoliberal era?

When abusing others, unfortunately, is not deviant

It’s the norm.”

Writing and performing this piece, acknowledging the complexity of interpersonal and small group interactions was profoundly challenging and healing at the same time.

Because, still today, I feel profoundly ashamed for hurting other human being in order to escape from my own fears, to escape from systemic homophobia. Writing this piece

helped me understand my guilt, helped me contextualize my actions, and forgive Carmen the closeted lesbian teenager. My critique to the dominant study of youth bullying was not abstract: I felt it. It changed me. Likewise, the different masks I wore in “Missing Conversation” (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2016), embodying experiences of abuse, uncovering societal hypocrisy in blaming youth for reproducing normative values, facilitated a new approach in my own research. The experience of feeling the complexity of bullying gave me strength to publicly question the dominant common sense about this issue—reading other critical voices to anti-bullying narratives was not enough. Performance, as Bertolt Brecht posits, works as “the hammer that breaks the mirror, distorts the reflection, to build a new reality” (Madison, 2010, p. 12). Writing and performing these pieces generated other essential outcomes too. In the case of “Missing Conversation” (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2016), on April 2016, I performed the piece in a graduate performance studies showcase in the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. It was the first time that I performed my research in a performative way outside of the warm, safe confines of the classroom-cocoon to a group of professors, graduate peers, undergraduate students, and guests. By doing so, “Missing Conversation” made me *come out* as a new performance scholar. Moreover, the performative dimension of my piece *made me* a performance studies scholar. During my performance, I delivered a new academic persona, right there, in front of familiar and unfamiliar eyes. I felt profoundly vulnerable, like a new-born baby, clumsy and insecure, observed by doctors, nurses, administrators, mothers, fathers, and relatives. Nonetheless, when I finished my performance, despite feeling emotionally torn and exhausted, I was equally excited and hopeful. I finally found the tools that I was looking for to navigate

the endless cycle of becoming and unbecoming an *enemy* of youth as a researcher. I felt that, for the first time in years conducting research about bullying, I was able to address this painful issue without feeding youth bullying as a moral panic, blaming youth, or telling them what to do. As Joshua T. Chambers-Letson (2013) explains, “Performance provides us with the means to interrupt the conditions of reproduction that reify the inequalities of the present” (p. 24). I felt I could finally breathe. I found the methodological and epistemological way to navigate my incoherence, challenge common sense on youth bullying, foster my own transformation as a researcher, and invite others to transform themselves too.

More importantly, audiencing youth’s performances, listening to young activists, and embodying roles of youth in my performances helped me realize the most essential absence in the dominant study of youth bullying: That, overall, in the conversation about youth bullying, youth are not the main focus.

All About Youth ... without Youth

If there is something that unifies the study of youth bullying, it is adults’ epistemic privilege and adultism. Even when we call out the ways in which discourses on youth bullying have ignored youth’s agency and resistance, it is adults who are speaking. Not always, thankfully, but it is the dominant pattern among the literature on youth bullying. Why does this happen? I reflected upon youth’s absences in my own work as a researcher in my piece “I Don’t Want to Be the Well-Intentioned Enemy of Youth” (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2018):

“I am so eager to help youth

That I ended up thinking that I am essential

That without me, youth cannot develop agency, or recognize it, or enable it.

And they do, they don't need adults like me to see themselves.

To resist, heal, and transform the world

At all.

The problem is not youth lacking agency or voice.

The problem is me

An adult facing an incessant flow of peer-reviewed articles to publish

A tenured job to get and maintain

And a huge pile of bills to pay.

Don't hate me for saying it out loud."

We could engage in conversations about the politics of knowledge production, how it is essential to recognize those voices muted, ignored by academia (Carrillo Rowe, 2005).

Yet, how those absences are part of the "'material apparatus of theory production' inscribed within the politics of seeing, knowing, being derived from Western thought," as Sandoval argues (as cited in Carrillo Rowe, 2005, p. 24). We could talk about the constraints upon tenure-track and promotion processes, the complexity of employing participatory research methods, albeit the issue is deeper. Do adult researchers see youth as creators of knowledge? Not participants in our projects, but colleagues, equals in the process of understanding and theorizing social phenomena, members of our community? Are adult researchers trained to do so? Do we have the legal conditions to make it possible, given the legal limitations that youth face when they are underage? Can we navigate the multiple constraints that hinder youth/adult working together as peers? What happens then with our research work, our research methods, our outcomes when youth

are not present as co/creators? That is the challenge that I faced once I realized that my actions and my discourse in my previous dissertation draft, as explained in Chapter 1, did not match. I was assuming belonging with youth, borrowing from Carrillo Rowe (2005), but instead I was longing for their company. In the same way that Rich fails to properly center feminists of color in her book *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (Carrillo Rowe, 2005), youth were not central in my reframing of youth peer abuse, when I was convinced otherwise. In the same way that Rich's "text produces her location as an individual, not as a community member" (Carrillo Rowe, 2005, p. 23), my previous dissertation draft situated me outside of a community with youth, when I was convinced of being working in dialogue with youth, which was not the case. Not only was I contributing to the war on youth and internal neocolonialism as a researcher, but I did not know how to stop reproducing my epistemic privilege. Or whether I will ever be able to do it, because no matter how hard I try to unbecoming an *enemy* of youth of color, I will remain oppressing and colonizing youth of color as a cog in the neoliberal and colonizing wheel that I embody, i.e., as a professor or researcher, as a settler on occupied land. Yet, youth's voices and transformative agency need to be present in analysis that go beyond their quotidian experiences, in the same way that adults study youth's problems. Because youth respond to the violence of capitalism itself, to its colonizing practices, particularly youth of color. We just need to listen to young activists such as Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, "an indigenous climate activist, hip-hop artist, and powerful voice on the front lines of a global youth-led environmental movement," who started advocating for change when he was 6 years old ("Xiuhtezcatl," 2019). Or to Autumn Peltier, an "internationally recognized Canadian water activist," a member of the Wikwemikong First Nation, who

has been advocating “for water rights since she was eight years old” (Euse, 2019). These young activists are not exceptions. Youth resist by themselves or in alliances with adults. Youth are not powerless, agentless. As teenagers leaving class across the world to protest climate change since 2018 have shown. Or youth taking the streets of the U.S. demanding gun control in 2018 (Never Again movement) or leading the Black Lives Matter movement since 2013. Youth protesting the Vietnam war in the 1960s. Youth defending Spanish democracy on the streets of New York and volunteering to defend the Spanish Republic against fascism in the 1930s. Many youth activists bring justice, hope, in a healing, restorative, and transformative way, as I explain in Chapter 4. In the study of youth bullying, adult’s gaze has mostly failed to acknowledge youth’s tactics of resistance, youth’s theorization of social phenomena, and their contributions to social change.

And I did it too.

Yet acknowledging this absence is not enough. Inserting youth’s voices in my work is not enough. Audiencing and learning from their performances—slam poetry, theater, rap—is not enough. Even engaging in a youth participatory action research, navigating all sorts of power and legal constraints when my material and legal conditions allow it (as explained in Chapter 1), would not be enough.

Because the problem is not youth’s voice but me.

How profoundly colonized/colonizing I was, I still am.

And yet, connections are possible upon differences.

I bring Carrillo Rowe’s (2005) notion of differential belonging to answer my dilemma. She says that “[d]ifferential belonging entails navigating across such

boundaries of difference to build intimate knowledge of that which lies between self and other. Thus differential belonging becomes a vehicle for healing by empowering us to cross the lines of separation that deaden and wound” (p. 38). I am committed to navigating those boundaries and co-creating knowledge with youth. I must change, though, if I want to be better prepared to “cross the lines of separation.”

Thanks to queer and young performers of color and activists and other peers, I was able to realize, face how incoherent and lost I was, I still am. How I was imposing my agenda, assuming that youth peer abuse would be a priority in youth’ lives—when police brutality, precarity, or the school-to-prison pipeline could be more relevant to youth of color (Gender JUST, 2013).

Young and adult voices of color cha(lle)nged me. They forced me to face my incoherence, how colonized and colonizing I was, I still am. How unprepared to work with youth, in a non-oppressive way, I was. I still am. They pushed me to go beyond guilt and shame. To be willing to change how I am. To self-decolonize. Such is the purpose of my next chapter in this dissertation. The purpose of this whole dissertation.

Before I go deeper into my Coyolxauhqui process, I need to put a closure to this second Chapter, which allowed me to address one of the central features of my onto-epistemo-methodological proposal to reframe the study of youth bullying: challenging adult researchers’ standpoint. Including challenging my own standpoint. The inability of thousands of researchers, journalists, and legislators to contextualize youth bullying, among other factors, has created a concerning outcome: adults’—most likely unintended—support to the neoliberal war on youth and internal neocolonialism against youth of color, fueling a law-and-order regime that has funneled so many youth of color

into the school-to-prison pipeline. Joining and promoting that dominant approach in the study of youth bullying—reproducing its common sense—made me part of an endless cycle of becoming/unbecoming an *enemy* of youth of color. Once I realized the devastating consequences of my research standpoint, challenged by critical voices, I faced a radical need to change my epistemic privilege, adultism, and connivance with internal and settler (neo)colonialism against youth of color. That need led me to face an ontological, epistemological, and axiological transformation, pushing me to explore embodied methodologies and embrace a self-decolonizing process. To continue that self-decolonizing process, I keep unfolding/enabling my Coyolxauhqui process in the next Chapter, further tearing my selves apart as a colonize(d)(r) worm. A self-reflective, painful, and strenuous experience that takes me back to my homeland, to examine my own process of colonization as a Canarian Islander: a colonized subject, a mestiza descendant of Amazigh, European, and Caribbean cultures who—following the path of five centuries of Canarian diaspora—contributes to colonize other land and peoples.

CHAPTER 3

FURTHERING MY SELF-DECOLONIZING PROCESS

Aicá maragá, aítitú aguahae

Maicá guere, demancihani

Neiga haruuiti alemalai.

[Sed bienvenido; mataron a nuestra madre esta gente extranjera, pero ya que estamos juntos, hermano, quiero unirme, pues estamos perdidos] [Welcome; this foreign people killed our mother, but now that we are together, brother, I want to join you, because we are doomed].

—Endecha Canaria ⁷³

I have come to realize how many of the voices in my head are the remnants of histories. They are the songs of my great-grandparents, the hopes of my ancestors, and even the judgements of the oppressors. (Popova, 2016, p. 175)

When I was a child, my parents, my sister, my brother, and I used to visit my mother's parents during holidays and even long weekends. My father drove what it was considered a long ride for islanders' standards—more than three hours—to get to my mother's town, La Aldea de San Nicolás. ⁷⁴ My island, Gran Canaria, is not vast, but the trip to La Aldea was challenging. We had two options to get to our destination from the capital city, our hometown—fun thing living in a round-shaped island. The southern option was easier, but too long. The northern option was shorter, but much more intense. The last 40 kilometers were a combo of vertigo, nausea, and adrenaline. A winding and narrow road bordered an endless, massive volcanic mountain. From the car window, you could see waves crashing into rocks at the bottom of mesmerizing and tall cliffs. Right underneath you. We were just used to it, but many people avoided that road. It was too scary, and not a good experience for your stomach. To me, however, it was an adventure.

⁷³ This endecha is one of the only two texts collected from the original Indigenous inhabitants of the Canary Islands that we know today, part of their oral culture. It was collected and transcribed by an Italian engineer, Leonardo Torriani, at the end of the sixteenth century (Farrujia & M. Hernández-Ojeda, 2019).

⁷⁴ The town's official name is San Nicolás de Tolentino.

If I close my eyes, I can still see the endless view of the ocean from those impossible curves. Deeply beautiful. Peaceful. Once we left the curves behind, we entered the valley where my mother's town was located. You could see her town at the end of the valley. My brothers and I, at that point, fully excited, always started to yell, "La Aldea! La Aldea!" We were happy to have survived those scary curves and thrilled because we were getting closer to the end. Twenty minutes later, we arrived at my mother's family home, downtown, near the Plaza and the Church. What an amazing feeling, getting out of the car and opening my grandparents' front door, which was always unlocked during the day.

My mother's family has lived in La Aldea for more than 150 years. I hardly can remember my grandparents, because they passed away when I was a child. After they died, my family continued visiting La Aldea to spend time with my Aunts and cousin. In those trips, my Aunt Fela, one of the bravest women I have ever met, used to tell us, over and over, family stories about my great-grandmother María Sosa Aguiar aka "La Meliana," a local reference in the recent history of La Aldea.⁷⁵ My Aunt Fela described, with so much detail, stories that were passed to her—she was not born when they took place. Stories of farmers resisting greedy landowners, stories in which "La Meliana" played a remarkable role, organizing women's resistance in what it was called "El Pleito de la Aldea." As a kid, I listened to her with a mixed feeling of fascination and boredom—I basically wanted to go to my cousin's room and play with his Madelman.⁷⁶ I was never a fan of cute dolls. Today, as an adult, I wish I could visit my Aunt Fela once

⁷⁵ In La Aldea, when somebody wants to praise female's courage, they compare that woman to "La Meliana." My mother's town even named a Women's Center, Centro Municipal de Promoción de la Igualdad "La Meliana," and a street in my great-grandmother's name. La Meliana was the code name that my great-grandmother used to communicate with lawyers without being identified by the authorities, who repressed those protesting against latifundium in La Aldea (Suárez Moreno, 2007).

⁷⁶ Hyper-masculine Spanish articulated figures that were popular in the 1970s and early 1980s.

again and ask her to share those stories with me, now that I am aware of the relevance of those family stories in the history of subaltern resistance in the Canary Islands. Yet I can't visit or call her anymore. My Aunt Fela is gone. She passed away years ago. I wish I could go back in time and reach the oblivious, impatient kid who was listening stories shared at home by resilient women about their resilient ancestors.

That part of history of the Canary Islands that nobody taught me at school.

That part of history that was not included in my textbooks.

How could I understand the relevance of my Aunt's words, stories about 300 years of struggle for land and water, the collective pride and pain and sacrifice and fear and hope behind them? It has taken me decades to fully contextualize my ancestors' and their neighbors' experiences of resistance, value them, and reflect upon how they are related to my own trajectory and my identity. In fact, I am doing it now due to the self-decolonizing process that I am undertaking in this dissertation. The extent of my colonization did not only prevent me from seeing in what ways I oppress and foster youth of color's colonization in the U.S., as I explained in Chapter 2; I was likewise unable to fully recognize my internalized colonization as a Canary Islander. One realization triggered the other. That is the issue with turning stones and finding worms underneath, following Anzaldúa's suggestion—it can be difficult to stop exploring, questioning.

Even when one of those worms is you.

Especially when one of those worms is you.

Because it is hard to close your notes and move on. Pretend that everything remains the same. It doesn't. Furthermore, you need to dig deeper, in order to find answers to new questions. Thanks to Indigenous scholars such as Eve Tuck, I painfully understood that

no matter how deeply committed I am to fighting oppression and how oppressed I am as a queer diasporic woman, I reproduce oppressive and (neo)colonizing practices in my everyday life in the United States. Those practices cannot be isolated from how (Min-ha) I am. They are connected to my complex identity as colonized/colonizer mestiza woman in the diaspora. A fluid mestiza identity that I label as colonize(d)(r). This notion expresses the complexities of my fluid insider-outsider identity as a colonized subject who simultaneously colonizes other bodies, borrowing from Anzaldúa (2015). As Anzaldúa (2015) points out, “We live in each other’s pockets, occupy each other’s territories [...] We are mutually complicitous—us and them, nosotras y los otros, white and colored, straight and queer, Christian and Jew, self and Other, oppressor and oppressed” (p. 79). Instead of supporting dichotomies, Anzaldúa advocates for “a third point of view and a way to reconfigure ourselves as subjects outside binary oppositions, outside existing dominant relations,” as insiders-outsiders (p. 79). Anzaldúa (2015) uses the word *nos/otras* to embody that third position and identity “born of negotiating the cracks between worlds,” full of contradictions and possibilities. Indicating that “[w]e are both subject and object, self and other, haves and have-nots, conqueror and conquered, oppressor and oppressed” (p. 79). Building upon Anzaldúa’s work, I coin the word *colonize(d)(r)* to underline how my body negotiates this third position that I embody as a colonized subject who is also a colonizer. By using parenthesis, I want to emphasize my struggle accepting this third positionality, the tension and uneasiness that I experience acknowledging it. The shame that I feel for colonizing other peoples and land; anger for being colonized as a Canary Islander. Likewise, the parenthesis helps me stress that those

experiences are different, and yet, they co-exist; moreover, they affect each other, and they influence my gaze and my identity.

In order to identify and avoid oppressive and colonizing practices against youth of color, I need to better identify their origin and/as the "effects of colonialism and ethnocentrism" (Farrugia, 2014, p. 4) on my body, identity, and soul. That is the first purpose of this Chapter: to examine how and why I am a colonize(d)(r) scholar in order to further my self-decolonizing process. Secondly, as I did in Chapter 2, this Chapter provides an example on how an adult researcher cha(lle)nges and decenters her positionality, a pivotal component of the onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying that I offer in this dissertation. If I am committed to unbecoming an *enemy* of youth of color, I need to address those effects of colonization on me. I need to not just discursively theorize about epistemic disobedience, delinking from Eurocentrism—a key feature in a (self)decolonizing endeavor (Mignolo)—,⁷⁷ but embody it. Commit to identifying my incoherence as a colonize(d)(r) subject. Commit to identifying the multiple forms in which I contribute to colonization—as a settler in the US; as a scholar imposing Western epistemology, epistemic privilege, and adultism on youth of color. Commit to changing that contribution. Commit to self-transforming. Endlessly. And embodying that commitment. Self-decolonizing, in sum. Before you, with you.

That transformative, self-decolonizing endeavor takes me, thanks to performance autoethnography, to continue examining my own experiences as a scholar and human being in context. Because I am the worm that I must foremost scrutinize, understand, and

⁷⁷ Drawing from Quijano, Mignolo (2011) conceptualizes epistemic disobedience as a need to de-link from Eurocentrism, from Western notions of modernity.

change if I want to be better prepared to work with youth—unbecoming their enemy. I need to keep knowing myself. For that purpose, I continue my Coyolxauhqui process, which started questioning my role as a researcher on youth bullying, and now it takes me back home, to the Canary Islands, to my origins. I keep turning the magnifier glass into a mirror and using it to tear my selves apart, asking Edward Said's questions again: "Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances?" (Smith, 2012, p. 86). Yet I prefer to place Said's words through Minh-ha's (1989) gaze, asking, instead, *how* is the worm that writes.⁷⁸ I am a highly educated immigrant worm that colonizes Native Americans' land in her quest of becoming a tenured professor; a worm that benefits from neocolonialism as a researcher and contributes to oppressing youth of color. Yet I am also a diasporic worm that grew up in colonized land, the Canary Islands; a worm that lives far from the soil that she considers a central site of her belonging, a central part of the notion "home" built upon her connection with different places and people living on the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean (Carrillo Rowe, 2005).⁷⁹ A worm that tries to survive her precarious, isolated life as a student visa holder in the U.S., navigating a constant sense of unbelonging. I am also a worm that resists and tries to transform her-selves, academia, and society, fertilizing the soil for change as an activist and critical pedagogue. A worm in movement, never static, so difficult to portray. A worm socialized as a European subject who used to self-define as a lesbian feminist

⁷⁸ As Claudio Moreira taught me in his class and in his work, "*How* can I not write and teach how I am?/ The key being *how* not who/ *How* am I, under what circumstances? (Minh-ha 1989)" (Moreira, 2012, p. 153).

⁷⁹ Carrillo Rowe (2005) reflects upon the concept "home," which it is not tied to a given location based on geographical features (i.e., the place we were born or where we live), but instead refers to our relationships of belonging with other people and the places where they inhabit. "'Home' itself is a shifting construction, contingent upon temporal, spatial, and affective investments in place and relations" (p. 40). The notion of home may shift throughout our lives, inasmuch as that those relationships may change as well.

organic intellectual (Gramsci).⁸⁰ A worm taught to ignore and reject her Amazigh heritage⁸¹ and geographical/cultural connection with North Africa. A worm that grew up eating colonized culture, that has colonized blood running through her body and colonized thoughts in her mind.

A colonize(d)(r) worm.

Me.

Who not only embodies the Eurocentric values of an organic intellectual,

But also embraces her newly discovered identity as Non-Eurocentric performance mestiza nepantlera, an “agent of awakening (conocimiento)” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 83) who uses her body as ontology, epistemology, methodology.⁸²

Avoiding simple dichotomist readings

One versus the other

The organic intellectual versus the performance nepantlera

But both viewpoints merging, dissenting, agreeing

Forcing me to ask how I am

And provoking changes in the process.

I still cannot believe that this is the first time that I examine my identity as a Canary Islander and the role of colonization in the Canary Islands in my research, which shocks me, because that component of my identity has heavily influenced my personal

⁸⁰ According to Gramsci (Hoare & Novell Smith, 1971), traditional intellectuals—who work for the status quo—facilitate the reproduction of hegemony whereas organic intellectuals aim to challenge it and embrace social change.

⁸¹ The background of the Indigenous inhabitants of the Canary Islands has been contested for a long time. Today, it is unquestionable the “Amazigh roots of Canarian indigenous societies” (Farrugia, 2014, p. 63).

⁸² In this concept, I merge Anzaldúa’s notion of nepantlera and my role as a performance scholar to better explain my ontological, epistemological, and axiological turn as a researcher and activist who challenges (post)positivism, embraces the body as ontology, and fosters healing and reparation as core scholarly values.

and professional path, as I explain in this Chapter. Now I can see my intellectual detachment from such essential part of my identity as the perfect example of how deeply colonized I am. I have examined other embodied dimensions of oppression, such as my gender and sexual orientation, but not my role as a colonized subject—or how the three intersect.

Why did I study those forms of oppression but not colonization?

In my postpositivist education, I have been socialized to ignore not only my body as a scholar, but my history and culture as well. To diminish my cultural experiences as a valuable source of knowledge production. Instead, I have been trained to see reality through other's standpoint, not mine. Since I was a child, I have been wearing somebody else's glasses. They were prescribed for somebody else's sight—a white, Eurocentric, cisgender, straight, Christian man's sight. Not mine. I have spent all my adult life challenging those lenses. But it is not easy to get rid of them. When you think those glasses are gone, then you realize you are still wearing them. Instead of yours, those based on your experience and needs.

Thanks to the ontological and epistemological shift that I have undertaken in the last four years, drawing upon Third World feminism and performance studies, I feel supported and prepared to go back to my body, to question my gaze and the glasses that I wear. To tear them apart, following the Coyolxauhqui process. I feel ready to take my body back to where it grew up. To the values, scripts, smells, experiences, stories, expectations, land, communities, and collective trauma—sustos (Anzaldúa, 2012)—⁸³

⁸³ AnaLouise Keating explains that Anzaldúa uses the notion of “susto” “to represent soul loss: individual/collective trauma, fragmentation, and other wounds caused by sexism, homophobia, racism, and other acts of violation” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 246).

that, in great measure, make the selves that I perform. To take me back to my ancestors; those whom I know, those I don't. Performance autoethnography becomes a decolonizing tool, thinking of *maestra* Lorde, outside of the inherited (post)positivist Eurocentric master's toolkit, that allows me to take "untrodden paths" (Anzaldúa) to understand and change me, to change academia. Self-decolonize. Decolonize, using performance autoethnography in that task.⁸⁴ Performance autoethnography helps me tear my selves apart, better understand the relationship between the Eurocentric organic intellectual and the performance nepantlera, which not only helps me trace my own colonizing experience, but also show how academia fosters colonization. Performance autoethnography helps me better understand how and why I am a colonize(d)(r) scholar. And change. As Chawla and Atay (2018) argue, "With its focus on everyday practices, decolonization can be empowering for individuals and, in our case, academics who might enact this process in their research, in reflecting upon the education system that reproduces colonial practices, and their own training" (p. 4). Because I have been trained to think as a Eurocentric man. Decolonizing is a form of re-training, re-building, delinking (Mignolo) from (post)positivist standpoints that trained me to think as a Eurocentric man. As a scholar, I decolonize my mind and body and foster decolonization in society, in academia. Furthermore, I use my experiences to heal the trauma inherited and experienced, such as my family's stories of emigration and resistance against greedy landowners, because "stories ('teachings) are also healers" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 24). I

⁸⁴ Chawla and Atay (2018) posit that "The emergence of critical and cultural methods, as well as ethnographic and auto-methods, and the increasing usage of these methods by postcolonial, transnational, diasporic, or other minority scholars in the arts, humanities, and social sciences suggests that new epistemologies which encourage and facilitate different ways of thinking and being could assist in the activation and embodiment of the decolonization processes. We believe that autoethnography is one of these powerful methods and genres" (p. 6).

likewise use my ancestors' *sustos* and pain to feed my *facultad*, to help me see collective problems—such as youth bullying—differently. And, by sharing my process, I invite other people to explore their own stories of colonization and resistance (Strobel, 1997).

Borrowing Mignolo's (2003) words, citing Khatibi and Anzaldúa, I don't aim to talk "*about* colonization from the rules of a disciplinary game" but "*from* the personal inscription" (p. xiii). For that purpose, after contextualizing my relationship with the Islands, I unpack the role of Canary Islanders in the Spanish colonial endeavor, examine framings of colonialism in the Canary Islands, address decolonizing approaches, and reflect on how being a colonize(d)r subject influences my identity as a person and scholar, including my work as a researcher on youth bullying in the U.S. It all began back home, in colonized soil.

Colonized Soil

“Ya desde aquí en adelante
me seguirás en la marcha,
cresta de la lejanía, esposa de la distancia
[...]
Para saber que te llevo
en el costado clavada
no has de leerme la mano,
ha de bastar mi palabra.
Mas si la quieres leer
verás tan sólo en sus rayas
los caminos de una isla
que se llama Gran Canaria.”
Pedro García Cabrera (2005, p. 78)

During my first eighteen years of life, every day I breathed air coming from the Atlantic Ocean, which surrounds my island, Gran Canaria, one of the seven major islands that comprise the Canary Islands. Imagine a round pancake on which you add several layers of toppings at the center, making a tall pile with them, like an inverted cone. That

is the shape of Gran Canaria. A stunning volcanic land, round-shaped, with tall mountains that create a variety of climates on the island, which is why my island is labeled as a miniature continent and it is considered a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. Endless sea clouds, created by the refreshing Alisios (Trade Winds), water the Islands' tall mountains (with the exception of the flatter Eastern islands) making the warm, dry, and stable Canary subtropical weather be considered *paradisiac*.⁸⁵ Although, as Pérez Flores (2017) wisely reminds her readers, things are not that simple on the Canary Islands: “En algunas partes hay desierto, en otras hay bosques frondosos que datan del terciario. Dicen que siempre hace calor, pero en invierno nieva” [“In some parts, we have deserts; in other parts, thick forests from the Tertiary period. People say that it’s always warm, but it snows during the Winter”] (p. 35). Pérez Flores’ reality check takes me back to my childhood’s neighborhood, built so fast and so carelessly, as tourism boomed in my city in the 1960s and those who migrated to the city to work in the tourist industry needed a place to live, that urban designers forgot to leave room for parks. Or schools. Or libraries. We just had buildings. Tall towers. Cement on top of cement. To this day, I despise towers. And yet, I hold other memories of my city, of my island, of so many amazing moments shared with amazing human beings. En la Playa de Las Canteras, Agaete, Tamadaba, La Aldea. When I think of Gran Canaria, from the American side of the Canarian diaspora, nostalgia invades me. Despite being so far away from my island, when I close my eyes, I can feel the seaside breeze, the sounds of waves crashing on the

⁸⁵ Given its latitude, the Canarian Archipelago should have a different weather (the Sahara Desert is less than 100 miles away). Yet the combination of the Trade Winds, bringing fresh air from the North, the cold sea current (the Canary Current), and the steep orography on most of the Western Islands, generate a warm, dry, and relatively stable weather. This feature makes the Islands highly attractive, particularly among North European tourists.

shore, the smell of pine tree up *en la Cumbre*, the mesmerizing “sea of clouds” watering, drop by drop, the north side of the mountains. That north side of the Island that reminds me of my father, of my mother. Family. Friends. Belonging (Carrillo Rowe, 2005). The main exception to the Atlantic breeze is the hot and occasionally sandy air, la *calima*, that comes from our neighbor Sahara Desert. Those days, the air becomes drier and warmer than usual, and minuscule particles of sand make breathing a little bit challenging. A reminder of where Gran Canaria is situated. Because I was born and raised in an Archipelago located less than 65 miles away from the African continent, on a bunch of big and small islands that belong and move at the same pace that the African tectonic plaque. Despite these geographical features, many Canary Islanders do not consider themselves African. Politically, the Canary Islands are a Spanish region, one of the Spanish Autonomous Communities, and categorized as one of the outermost territories of the European Union—mainland Spain is more than 700 miles away.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, in their culture and Spanish accent, Canary Islanders are more connected to the Caribbean Islands, thousands of miles away, than they are to Europe. Canarian writer Luis León Barreto posits that the Canary Islands are “a un tiro de piedra de África sin ser África, a miles de kilómetros del Caribe, siendo emocionalmente el Caribe, a mil doscientos kilómetros de Cádiz sin ser propiamente Europa” [“The Canary Islands are a stone’s throw away from Africa, yet they are not African; they are located thousands of kilometers away from the Caribbean Islands, and they are emotionally Caribbean; and

⁸⁶ “The European Union (EU) has nine ‘outermost regions’ (ORs): Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion and Saint Martin (France), the Canary Islands (Spain) and the Azores and Madeira (Portugal). The ORs are an integral part of the EU and must apply its laws and obligations. The ORs are distinguished by their remoteness from mainland Europe, insularity, small size (except French Guiana), difficult topography and climate and economic dependence on a few products” (Outermost, n.d.).

one thousand two hundred kilometers away from Cadiz, but they are not really Europe”] (as cited in M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014, p.102). How does any of this make sense?

It is impossible to understand Canary history and identity without examining its relationship with colonialism (Pérez Flores, 2017), because the last 500 years of the Archipelago have been determined by European colonial practices. Likewise, it is difficult to explain the history of European colonialism in America and Africa—or the history of imperialism and capitalism—without mentioning the Canary Islands (Pérez Flores, 2017).⁸⁷ How you frame the role of this Archipelago and its inhabitants in those economic and ideological processes, however, can create very different stories. Stories that may combine complicity, compliance, and resistance in different ways. Unpacking and challenging those stories is essential to understand how I am, in what ways those stories—some normative, others ignored or silenced—influence my identity and practices. As a human being, as a researcher. The way I comply with colonialism, yet also the way I resist it. Like my ancestors have done.

What I have learned in this self-decolonizing process is that, as a Canary Islander, colonialism has deeply conditioned my gaze. A colonizing culture and ideology convinced many Canary Islanders who live in North Africa, who breathe Africa, that they are not African. It convinced many Canary Islanders that they are fellow Europeans, as if a symmetrical relationship existed between the European continent and the Islands, when Europe has used the Archipelago and their inhabitants as pawns since the XV century,

⁸⁷ Quijano (2000) points out that as an outcome of the relationship between Europe and America, “a region was configured as the site of control of the Atlantic routes, which became in turn, and for this very reason, the decisive routes of the world market” (p. 552). Due to their key geo-strategic position, the Canary Islands were essential in developing and controlling the Atlantic routes, and thus, the world market.

determining Canary economy (Gari-Montllor Hayek, 1992). As the Canarian poet Pedro García Cabrera describes, "Canarias pertenece políticamente a España, geográficamente a África y económicamente al extranjero" ["The Canary Islands belong politically to Spain, geographically to Africa, and economically to foreign countries"] (as cited in M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014, p.102). A colonizing narrative depoliticized and romanticized the cultural links between the Canary Islands and the Caribbean Islands, transforming stories of colonized subjects pushed to emigrate and colonize other territories in America into an edulcorated tale of entrepreneurship.

However, this is one of the readings, one of the framings, one of the stories of the history of the Canary Islands.

Not the dominant.

Not the one that I learned at school or at home, though.

My mother was only able to attend school until she was 12 years old. She had to help her family, like other kids her age during the post-Civil War Spanish society. Today, in her mid-eighties, my mother can still recite the list of Visigoth kings that ruled the Iberian Peninsula from fifth to eighth centuries AD. A territory, mainland Spain, that my mother visited for the first time in her thirties. Under Franco's regime, Spanish children like my mom had to memorize the names of those considered the forefathers of the Spanish kingdom, those who came before the *infamous* Al-Andalus and the *glorious* era of the Spanish Empire. Of course, in my mother's classroom, in the late 1930s-early 1940s, there were no positive mentions to the Muslim Califas who reigned parts of the Iberian Peninsula for hundreds of years. There were no positive mentions to the Indigenous people who lived in the Canary Islands for hundreds of years, before the

islands were conquered in the XV century by European conquerors. Non-Catholic bodies were a mistake in the history of Spain. Infidels to be defeated and expelled. From the land. From the books. From the memory.

The worst part of it?

Most of my teachers didn't mention these non-Catholic bodies either, or at least not as central components of our collective identity as Spanish citizens and Canary inhabitants. If my teachers did, Muslim, Jewish, and Canary Indigenous people were framed as external, uncomfortable, exotic parts of Spanish history, not a substantial one. Like when some goofy stranger gets within the frame of your family picture at a restaurant. The stranger becomes part of a funny or annoying anecdote, based on how much they disrupted the planned image of the family. In fact, I don't recall studying Canary history or culture in my classes, just a few exceptions. Everything—i.e., literature, history, social sciences—was about mainland Spain and Europe. Their wars, famous characters, books, rivers, and places. I just had to assume that they were also mine, supposedly reflecting my reality—which they did not. I think that my first rigorous encounter with Canary culture and history took place in high school, when I took an elective class about it—I still can remember our History teacher, Francisco Morote, an exceptional instructor. It only took me 16 years to learn basic stuff about my own culture at school. Outside of school, I read some books, some of them targeting young readers, which addressed the Conquest of the Canary Islands. But that was it. When I went to school, in the 1970s and 1980s, Canary Islanders were socialized to just see themselves as Spanish and European subjects who had a lovely connection with the Caribbean islands.

Never African

Even though we live on African land.

Since I was a child, I grew up seeing on television the map of the Canary Islands situated, awkwardly, either under the Balearic Islands or Portugal. Otherwise, the Canary Islands wouldn't fit in the frame. To clarify that such location was fake, the Canary Islands were framed within a rectangle. A symbolic reminder of our lack of self-determination; how to, in order to exist for the European gaze, we have been constantly reframed and detached from Africa. Not only geographically, but culturally as well. For centuries, dominant colonial narratives have disconnected colonized Canary Islanders from the original inhabitants of the Islands and detached the latter from their North African continental origin. According to the dominant narrative, the Canary Islands were known since Ancient times.⁸⁸ After the fourteenth century, occasionally, European pirates and merchants stopped by the islands to loot, enslave Indigenous people, or trade with them (Adhikari, 2017).⁸⁹ During the fifteenth century, European conquerors—i.e., Castilian, French, and Portuguese—occupied the islands in the name of the Catholic Kings and exterminated the population who inhabited the Archipelago. These Indigenous inhabitants were labeled as primitive people who were annihilated by the conquerors. Their bodies. Their society. Their culture: The Islands and the new inhabitants were European. And Catholic. Period. Anything that challenged this framing of the history of

⁸⁸ Adhikari (2017) points out that “The Canaries and other islands of the eastern Atlantic were known to Roman, Carthaginian, Phoenician, and other ancient world mariners” (p. 3).

⁸⁹ According to Adhikari (2017), “The Canaries came to the attention of European explorers for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire when the Genoese navigator Lancelotto Malocello in 1336 landed on Lanzarote, which is named after him. The Canaries became the object of Portuguese, Genovese, Majorcan, Aragonese, Catalan, Norman, and Castilian voyages of exploration and raiding, and ultimately of conquest by Castile” (p. 6).

the Canary Islands was disregarded. In high school, probably in my class on Canary History and Culture, I superficially studied the Indigenous people, commonly labeled as Guanches,⁹⁰ and imagined them almost as lost primates who ended up living, isolated from European evolution, in the islands. Other times they were framed as gorgeous Celtic descendants who lived in the Atlas Mountains and ended up, mysteriously, in the Canary Islands. Now I realize how insane and absurd those framings were, yet I didn't question them at that time. Whether pseudo-primates or gorgeous Celts, the main idea is that Indigenous Islanders—framed as pre-Hispanic—somehow were connected to Europe, were part of the past, were gone, and that they were inferior (Farrujia, 2014). A similar pattern that European colonizers developed in other colonized territories. As Quijano (2000) argues,

the Europeans generated a new temporal perspective of history and relocated the colonized population, along with their respective histories and cultures, in the past of a historical trajectory whose culmination was Europe (Mignolo 1995; Blaut 1993; Lander 1997). Notably, however, they were not in the same line of continuity as the Europeans, but in another, naturally different category. The colonized peoples were inferior races and in that manner were the past vis-à-vis the Europeans. (pp. 541-542)

In the case of the Canary Islands, this Eurocentric framing of Indigenous history was enabled and promoted by historians and archaeologists for centuries after the conquest (Farrujia, 2014).⁹¹ I remember studying that “the Guanches” did not have a written language, that is was just oral, and for that reason it got lost. Now I know that that story is

⁹⁰ The Indigenous inhabitants of Tenerife were called Guanches, yet, commonly, this term is used to label all Indigenous Islanders in the Canary Islands.

⁹¹ Farrujia (2014) explains that “the replacement of each historical conjunction was followed systematically by a change in the way in which historical discourses were constructed. These changes involve the creation of specific versions of the past history of the Canary Islands, all of which are completely different from each other and sometimes totally contradictory, while all tending to justify the social order established in the particular period in which they are produced. Thus, the ‘indigenous Canarian of European origins’ from the end of the nineteenth century became the ‘indigenous Canarian of Hispanic origins’ with Ibero-Saharan and Ibero-Mauritanian roots during the Franco period” (p. 55).

incomplete. The Canarian Indigenous had a rich culture that was present in traditions, rituals, and artifacts. Their language was transmitted orally, and it used the Libyco-Berber script, as it has been found on rock inscriptions (Farrujia, 2015). The orality of the Amazigh culture is a key feature shared among other North African Imazighen—plural of Amazigh—communities that remain alive in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Egypt, and in the diaspora (Lafkioui, 2008).⁹² The Indigenous Canarian language and culture didn't disappear because it was oral; it did it because Indigenous Canarian societies disappeared (Farrujia, 2015), they did not have space to co-exist under the Spanish model of colonialism. Haas (2015), explaining Mignolo's thesis on the role of writing in Indigenous colonization, highlights how

colonial relationship has resulted in the re-writing of indigenous histories, the privileging of Western ways of organizing knowledge, the diminished capacity for a coexistence of languages, literacies, memories, and space with indigenous knowledges, and the perpetuation of the notion that what is different is wrong or deficient. (pp. 188-189)

That is precisely what has happened to Canary Indigenous culture. A hegemonic construction of the Canarian history framed Indigenous Islanders as inferior, illiterate, subhuman, and infidels to justify their colonization.⁹³ Yet an increasing number of Canary scholars and activists question this hegemonic narrative on the history of the Canary Islands, denouncing its colonizing features (i.e., Farrujia, 2014; Pérez Flores, 2017).

Connecting with those postcolonial and decolonizing/decolonial approaches to the Canary Islands has been a critical step in my self-decolonizing endeavor. Not only

⁹² Women play a central role “preserving the Amazigh language and the culture” (Sadiqi, 2007, p. 26).

⁹³ Bhabha (1994) posits that “the objective of colonial discourse [was] to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (p. 70).

because it enabled my self-decolonizing process, but also because this connection infused my sense of belonging with the Islands and scholars living there and in the diaspora. In this sense, the framing of the history of the Canary Islands deserves more attention among decolonial and postcolonial researchers and activists worldwide. First, because it helps understand the development of colonialism and capitalism (Pérez Flores, 2017). Second, because it is another exceptional and painful example of the role of academia in justifying colonialism (Smith, 2012) and educating colonize(d)(r) researchers like me. Or should I say, miseducating me?

While reading one of these postcolonial/decolonial voices, José Farrujia's work, I experienced an epiphanic moment in which I realized that the way I had conceptualized my homeland was profoundly misleading, incomplete. Throughout my entire life, I had viewed the history and identity of the Canary Islands through a European colonizer's viewpoint, not a colonized subject, not my standpoint. Moreover, a colonizer's viewpoint obsessed to erase any African link to the Canary identity. It shocked me profoundly to realize how oblivious I'd been for decades, how despite being so critical, and question everything around me, I did not address my own identity as a Canary Islander, my own image of the Canary Islands. After that epiphanic moment, I tore that image down, and spent months reading other recent framings. Other stories. Re-learning the history of my homeland from a decolonial lens. Because, as Smith (2012) claims, "Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization" (p. 36). Dealing with all kind of emotions while reading and thinking and writing on the past and present of the soil where my family, my ancestors, and this worm, I, grew up. This process of re-learning the past is painful. I cried a lot, feeling sadness, anger, and melancholy while

reading the stories of constant oppression and colonization and resistance that the Islands and the Islanders have dealt with—and continue dealing with. For Strobel (1997), “Decolonization is an emotional process. It stirs up feelings of anger, betrayal, confusion, doubt, and anxiety. Simultaneously, it feels empowering and inspiring” (pp. 66-67). Indeed, I also felt excitement, as one would feel after encountering a lost relative, because I have found one part of my family whose existence I completely ignored: my Amazigh heritage.

The Canary Islands have only been under European control for 500 years, yet the Islands were inhabited and ruled by Amazigh people for more than 1000 years, since the first millennium BC, before Europeans conquered their land in the fifteenth century (Farrujia, 2015). More importantly, the Indigenous Islanders were not exterminated, as I was told. After being conquered during the fifteenth century—it took more than 90 years to conquer all Islands—, Indigenous societies were dismantled,⁹⁴ their land was taken and distributed among settlers, and the Islands became part of the Kingdom of Castile, and then of the Spanish Empire. Many Indigenous Islanders died, either fighting European invaders, from disease brought by Europeans, or from suicide (Lobo, 2012). Adhikari (2017) frames it as the “modern Europe’s first overseas settler colonial genocide” (p.1).

But the Indigenous Islanders were not exterminated.

Some scholars emphasize that Indigenous bodies remained alive (i.e., Lobo, 2012) while other scholars highlight how their societies (i.e., Farrujia, 2014) and identities (Adhikari, 2017) disappeared. From all these voices, it seems clear that Indigenous

⁹⁴ According to Farrujia (2014), “indigenous societies did not survive in the archipelago” (p. 63).

bodies were defeated, decimated, and repressed but a small part of the population survived. Many of the Indigenous Islanders were enslaved and sold in Europe—some were taken, as slaves, to conquer America as well. In fact, Colon brought an Indigenous man with him to help him communicate with Natives in the *new* land (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014). Other Indigenous Islanders were forced to exile or deported, to other islands or to the Iberian Peninsula—the Spanish settlers were afraid that the Indigenous Islanders would revolt (Lobo, 2012). A minority was able to stay, converting to Christianity, mixing with European settlers—particularly women—and, in some cases, helping the new rulers colonize the remaining islands (Lobo, 2012). There are multiple factors that explain why more Indigenous Canarian women mixed with settlers than men. On the one hand, “there existed a strong bias favouring matings between European males and aboriginal females, and to the important aboriginal male mortality during the Conquest” (Maca-Meyer et al., 2004, p. 155). On the other hand, many of the settlers who initially arrived in the Islands came alone and coupled with Indigenous women (Arias Marín de Cubas, 1986; Lobo, 2012)—the story of these women, and the conditions of their interactions with settlers have been relegated or ignored. Some former Indigenous slaves, kidnapped before the conquest, were able to return, “adoctrinados, como intérpretes de lenguas” [“indoctrinated, as interpreters”] (Lobo, 2012, p. 169). There is so much about these survivors that we need to find out without using the colonizer’s lens, which proves a difficult task because colonizers controlled the narrative about Indigenous Islanders before their land was taken and after, and Indigenous Islanders embraced an oral culture that was dismantled, as explained (Farrujia & M. Hernández-Ojeda, 2019). Yet, as Mignolo (2003) highlights, “The links

between the past, which I strive to understand, and the present, which motivates me to speak and write, are not always obvious. Thus the constant need for new interpretations (understanding the past and speaking the present), be they of texts, events, actions, or ideas” (pp. 6-7). There is so much to rewrite and reinterpret about Indigenous history, culture, and ideology before and after they were colonized.

At this point, through DNA testing and linguistic studies, we know that the original inhabitants of the Canary Islands were Amazigh, North African (Farrujia, 2014). When, why, and how they left the African continent remains a point of dissent among historians and archaeologists. What seems clear is that the Indigenous Canarian inhabitants arrived in different waves from the continent (Ordoñez et al., 2017). Thanks to scripts carved in rocks and caves, we know that they used the Libyan-Berber script (Farrujia, 2015). For centuries, Indigenous Islanders adapted to the limited resources found in the islands and their difficult orography, fostering isolated cultures on each Island. Indigenous Islanders focused on farming, fishing, and shepherding (Farrujia, 2015). Each island developed a different organizational system based on social hierarchies and matrilineal descent (Farrujia, 2015; Maca-Meyer et al., 2004). Women had a relevant role in the Indigenous society (Farrujia, 2015)—especially compared to European societies at that time. Despite their persistent resistance to be conquered—or maybe because of it—, Indigenous Islanders and the Canary Islands became a “training camp” (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014; Mcleod 1999) or “lab” (Martu, 2018) for European conquerors. Conquering Canary Indigenous taught European many

lessons that were implemented in the conquest of America.⁹⁵ Even the plantation model was tried first in the Canary Islands and exported to America (Adhikari, 2017; M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014). Unfortunately, there is so much that we still ignore about the Indigenous Canary Islanders.

Even if we don't have first-hand access to Indigenous testimonies, we can question the dominant standpoint we have inherited about them—which, I insist, has tried desperately, for centuries, to delink Canarian identity from North Africa. A premise that promoted the idea of Indigenous Canarian bodies' extinction, ignoring their mestizaje or assuming an essentialist approach to identity—why should mestizaje be the end for a culture or group? DNA testing of current Canarian population shows their biological connection with Indigenous Canarian Islanders who inhabited the Islands before they were conquered: 6% for the paternal side, and 33% for the maternal side (Maca-Meyer et al., 2004). Women were the ones, as primary survivors from the violent conquest, who passed along their Amazigh DNA to their mestizo descendants. A unique DNA, the U6b1 subclade, different to the DNA of other Imazighen groups, given the isolation that the Amazigh inhabitants of the Islands experienced for more than 1000 years (Maca-Meyer et al., 2004). Along with their DNA, I wonder what other parts of the Indigenous culture these women may have passed to their mestizo descendants after the Islands were colonized and Indigenous societies were dismantled. Particularly given the central role

⁹⁵ Adhikari (2017) explains that “The reconnaissance and colonisation of three island clusters southwest of the Iberian Peninsula—the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands—by the Spanish and Portuguese during the two centuries before Columbus’ voyages served as strategic bases for further European exploration and were in a real sense testing grounds for Iberian colonialism in the New World. Not only were ideas and methods developed in the Canaries applied in the Americas, but the plunder of natural resources, development of plantation economies, widespread use of slave labour, unrestrained violence towards the indigenous population and the devastating impact of disease also foreshadowed the holocaust that was to engulf the New World” (p. 2).

that women played—and still play—in Imazighen cultures. Every time that I read articles about Amazigh women as the keepers of an oral culture, as the ones passing the stories of their communities, or as warriors (Sadiqi, 2012), I think of my Aunt Fela and her role as a storyteller, and all the brave women that lived and live in my mother’s hometown, La Aldea. My intuition, *la facultad*, tells me that there is something in those women’s performances that needs to be studied—women’s empowerment and agency was not precisely a primary value taught to women under Spanish Catholic colonialism. I think that there is something deeper than DNA connections that needs to be examined: the survival of a culture through embodied values. This is just a hypothesis that I need to investigate. What we need to and can discuss now is why current Canary Islanders, like me, have been lied or misinformed about our origin, and the impact of those lies. Larisa Pérez Flores explains this idea:

A mí me contaron que por mi cuerpo no corría una sola gota de sangre aborigen. Esto no sería relevante si no formara parte de toda una lectura epistémicamente inadecuada de la historia y la identidad canarias, centrada entre otras cosas en desvincularlas de la oscura entidad “África” y vincularla a un Mediterráneo luminoso [...] Lo que ocurre es que si no leemos a Canarias en el seno del colonialismo moderno nos perdemos la mitad de la historia. [I was told that my body did not have a single drop of aboriginal blood. This is relevant because it reproduces an epistemologically inadequate reading of Canarian history and identity. A reading that has been focused on de-linking Canarian history and identity from the dark entity “Africa,” while linking them to a bright Mediterranean Sea [...] If we do not read Canarian history amid modern colonialism, we miss half of it]. Martu (2018)

I concur with Pérez Flores that we need to contextualize Canarian experience within colonialism (Martu, 2018). We would benefit from using a decolonizing lens to acknowledge how Indigenous bodies survived, mostly women, mostly through *mestizaje*. To see how Indigenous cultural heritage remains alive, despite the questionable

management of Indigenous sites and remains or how Indigenous dead bodies are treated as objects by some institutions and artists, as Farrujia (2014) denounces.

Despite lacking proper information, I always felt something uneasy about the past and the present of Canary people. I wasn't taught about Indigenous people at elementary and middle school, but I saw the embodiment of their culture around me. When we visited my grandparents in La Aldea—before a big bridge was built in 1979, el Puente de Silva—, we had to pass nearby caves, el Cenobio de Valerón, that used to be inhabited by Indigenous people before Spanish conquerors conquered my island. Indigenous cave-houses, burials, paintings, symbols, words were presented to me as the reminders of a dead culture that was not related to me at all. Only, sometimes, very specific instances, like historical anecdotes or present rituals, were tied *to the pre-Hispanic culture*, such as Canarian wrestling (Lucha Canaria), gofio,⁹⁶ or shepherd traditions (shepherd's leap). Or Indigenous names and words, like those uttered by local journalist Mara Torres every morning on her radio show—"Tamaragua, Buenos días." All these culture rites and words weren't framed as the continuation of the Indigenous culture, though. Yet, I didn't feel it that way, I felt those cultural manifestations to be alive, part of me, albeit I wasn't able to articulate that feeling or share it. Fascination, longing, deep sadness... it is difficult for me to explain what exactly I felt when I was in relative closedness with what was framed as *remains* of the Indigenous culture as a child.

Things started to change when I was a teenager and I began listening to Canary bands such as Taller Canario de la Canción and Taburiente. Their combative lyrics, denouncing Spanish colonialism and embracing Indigenous identity, alongside my high

⁹⁶ Gofio is a type of flour made of grains. Indigenous Islanders made it with wheat or barley. Once corn was brought from America, it became a central ingredient of gofio.

school class on Canary History and Culture, made me realize that my identity and relationship with Spain was way more complex than I had imagined. I wasn't still able, however, to clearly articulate my thoughts and emotions. I felt profoundly sad when I listened to songs about enslaved Indigenous Canarian people sold in Europe, "Se la llevaron los invasores/Cuando venía de la montaña [...] Juguete de algún Marqués/ menina de alguna dama/ sierva de grandes señores/ en algún lugar de España/ Cathaysa la niña guanche, no verá más Taganana" ["Invaders took her away/when she came back from the mountain... A Marques' toy/A Lady's menina/Servant of Lords/Somewhere in Spain/Cathaysa the Guanche girl will not see Taganana anymore"] (Guerra Cabrera, 1989)—even typing this stanza brings tears to my eyes. The idea of exile, enslavement, being forced to live far from the Islands made/makes me heavy-hearted. Conversely, I felt excited when Taburiente claimed that the Indigenous race was not extinguished, "La Raza no se extinguió/aún vive/ en la nueva juventud" ["the Indigenous race was not extinguished/it is still alive/in our new youth"] (Taburiente, 1976) although it didn't occur to me that I could be one of the youth Taburiente referred to.

Now that I reflect upon it, the first cracks in my relationship with Spain and Europe happened through this untheorized critique to European colonialism, through the pain and anger that I felt as a teenager thinking on how European colonizers harmed Indigenous peoples on the Islands. I wasn't prepared to go further, to visualize those Indigenous peoples as my ancestors, to see their culture as mine as well, to connect their experience and mine in a continuum of colonialism and oppression, to realize that those conquistadores are part of my ancestry too. I'm making, rationally, those connections now. Yet, somehow, my body made those connections back then too, in the late 1980s,

early 1990s, as a teenager. I didn't feel anger and sadness only due to the enslavement of Indigenous youth 500 years ago. I felt those emotions because my future and other Canarian youth's future were conditioned by colonialism as well—even though I wasn't able to articulate these thoughts back then. I likewise felt angry at the way Spain and Europe had treated and remain treating the Islands, how Canarian land is used as a NATO base, and military forces use the Islands and the shore to exercise everywhere, even in the middle of towns, destroying wild life, disrupting people's lives, and rehearsing performances of violence while ignoring civil society's complaints (González, 2017). I felt eager when Taller rebelled against the Canary migratory and colonized fate in her song "La Maleta," a poem written by Pedro Lezcano, "¡no quiero más maletas en la historia de la insular miseria!" ["I do not want more suitcases in the history of insular misery!"] (Lezcano & Botanz, 1988). And yet, like my sister, and two of my great-grand uncles, and many other people before and after us, I ended up packing my maleta, leaving the Islands, joining the Canary diaspora and becoming a colonizer somewhere else. Reproducing centuries of emigration—the Canary fate since its European colonization—, trauma, resistance, and resilience.

Colonized Worms Who Colonize Other Land

Since the XV century, the Canary Islands have remained under Spanish control, yet their natural and human resources and their geo-strategic position were exploited by other Europeans as well. The Archipelago became a key tool for colonization purposes in America and Africa (Maca-Meyer, 2004; Márquez Quevedo, 2010). Firstly, it was the last stop before ships sailed to America, taking advantage of the Trade Winds, carrying settlers, enslaved people, merchants, missionaries, and soldiers. The Islands become a

bridge between Europe, Africa, and America; a central hub of provisioning for ships. Secondly, the Islands became a space for all sort of foreign capitalist enterprises on the islands: agricultural, including sugar cane plantations, extraction of cochineal insects, wine, bananas, or tomatoes; services, mostly tourism in the twentieth century; and infrastructures, such as telegraph cable in the nineteenth century. The introduction and development of these products and services were determined by foreign companies. As Márquez Quevedo (2010) argues, “Telegraph cables are a good example of the degree of intervention to which this geographical area was subjected by industrial capitalist countries” (p. 108). Thirdly, the Islands provided laborers that played multiple roles. At the beginning of the conquest of America, Canary Islanders participated as soldiers, sailors, and settlers. Their bodies were used by the Spanish kingdom to found and populate colonized territories—as human shields defending the kingdom’s interests against other empires interested in taking over those territories—both in the Canary Islands and in America (Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992).⁹⁷ Multiple locations in Cuba, San Antonio (Texas), or Montevideo (Uruguay) are some of the towns founded and inhabited by Canary families (Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992). Canary Islanders were also used as valuable laborers, particularly as skilled farmers—they were used to introduce and cultivate sugar cane in America—, shepherds (M. Hernández Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014), or sex workers (Pérez Flores, 2017). Both in the Islands and in America, Canary Islanders, men and women, were mostly used to work in the economic product of the time and provide all resources needed by the metropolis.

⁹⁷ In La Habana, between 1585 and 1645, 25% of the total number of immigrants were from the Canary Islands, men and, to a lesser extent, women (M. Hernández Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2015). In general, more Canarian women emigrated to America than from any other part of Spain (Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992).

Given the profitability and usefulness of Canary bodies, Canary migration has been heavily regulated by Spanish rulers, allowing or forbidding it based on the kingdom's interests, deciding when and how many people should go, or even where (M. Hernández Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014; Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992).⁹⁸ Canary bodies were also used to “whitening” the colonies’ population (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014), to replace enslaved workers when slavery was forbidden in South and Central America (Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992). Even as soldiers to defend the kingdom’s interests (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014, 96). As M. Hernández-Ojeda and Santana Pérez (2014) argue,

Canarias constituye una subjetividad compleja: en el proceso de la emigración canaria a América, el isleño ha sido instrumento portador del proyecto colonial de occidente, con el objetivo de fundar ciudades y ‘blanquear’ las colonias. Pero por otro lado, el canario representa principalmente un subalterno trasatlántico, con el que el americano se ha identificado históricamente desde el comienzo de sus viajes en el siglo XVI. [The Canary Islands embody a complex subjectivity: in the Canary emigration process to America, the Islander has been a commodity of the Western colonial project, with the goal of founding cities and “whitening” colonies. Conversely, the Canary Islander mainly represents a transatlantic subaltern subject, one with whom Americans have historically identified with since the beginning of [Canary Islanders’] trips [to America] in the sixteenth century]. (pp. 100-101)

Canary population is the result of being a strategic hub between continents, with multiple groups passing by or settling in, and migrant bodies in constant movement between America and the Islands. M. Hernández-Ojeda and Santana Pérez (2014) highlight that la "condición de espacio híbrido fronterizo ha sido un elemento primordial en la

⁹⁸ According to M. Hernández-Ojeda and Santana Pérez (2014), from 1679 until 1778, in order to facilitate and control the migration of Canarian families to America, the Spanish Kingdom offered a deal to shipping companies (called “El Tributo de Sangre”). Instead of paying a tax, “impuesto de averias,” these companies had to offer transportation to Canarian families (5 families per one hundred tons of exported goods) to destinations chosen by the King. Those emigrant families received money, land, seeds, and tools to farm. Wealthier emigrants were able to pay their trip and choose destination. Likewise, many Canary emigrants decided to emigrate illegally, resisting the Kingdom’s control.

construcción cultural de las Islas Canarias" ["The border hybrid position of the Canary Islands has been a pivotal aspect in the cultural construction of the Archipelago"] (p. 102). The Canary population are hybrid descendants of Moriscos, Black African, Indigenous Amazigh, Portuguese, Castilian, Andalusian, as well as peoples coming from America, among others (Maca-Meyer et al., 2005). This ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity influenced the way Canary Islanders were read in mainland Spain as well as in the diaspora. In America, Canary emigrants were treated differently from Iberian emigrants due to their mestizo identity, which questioned their "blood purity," and class status (Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992).

The Canarian diaspora—initiated with Indigenous Islanders' expulsion and enslavement—reflects colonization in multiple ways. It embodies Canary cultural and ethnic diversity; the outcomes of a weak colonized economy, with cycles of inevitable emigration; and the way capitalism used colonized subjects to develop colonial projects and profited from their labor. Yet the diaspora also reflects Canary Islanders' resistance and effort to change their life conditions, overcoming Spanish King's attempts to regulate emigration—illegal immigration was huge (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014). For many Canary Islanders, emigration was also the only chance to attempt to obtain upward mobility (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014, p. 93). Not everybody emigrated with the same conditions, though. Some emigrated as merchants, creating their business (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014). Some farmers were able to get small farms. Nonetheless, other emigrants faced worse conditions, particularly when they had to emigrate massively in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to major economic crises in the Islands—they had to work in low-paid jobs in America (M.

Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014). In addition to this narrative, who has been based upon the experiences of male migrants, Larisa Pérez Flores (2017) points out the role of Canary women as well:

Una visión adecuada de nuestro atlántico debería incluir no sólo el papel de comerciantes, fundadores, esclavos o expertos de la plantación, sino de esas madres de familia y putas habaneras que llenaron el Caribe de sangre isleña y habilitaron propiamente la diáspora [A fair vision of our Atlantic should include not only the role of traders, founders, slaves, or plantation experts, but also the role of those mothers and Habana whores that filled the Caribbean Islands with Canary Islander blood and facilitated the diaspora]. (p. 325)

Women's role tends to be invisibilized in the emigrant narrative, or just briefly mentioned. Likewise, we need to know more of other reasons that motivated Canary Islanders, women and men, to emigrate, such as avoiding political, religious, or social persecution—i.e., Inquisition repression. Despite the central role of colonialism in the fate and identity of Canary bodies, are Canary Islanders, in the Islands or in the diaspora, aware of it?

Framing Colonialism in the Canary Islands

Officially, the Canary Islands are one of the autonomous communities that comprise the Kingdom of Spain and one of the outermost UE regions. This is the official framework—albeit other readings try to co-exist in the Canary imaginary. As Farrujia (2014) points out,

The actual geostrategic location of the Canarian archipelago in the Atlantic has helped to reinforce historically the concept of the islands as a Spanish overseas possession and a strategic enclave in relation to the neighboring continent of Africa. These factors and the almost total lack of theory renewal within Canarian archaeology help to explain, to a great extent, why the colonial discourse still lives on in archaeology in the Canary Islands (p. 63)

Moreover, this colonial discourse permeates other realms of Canary society and scholarship. Yet many Canary inhabitants ignore or reject the existence of such colonial

discourse. They do not see the Canary Islands as a colonized territory; they don't see themselves as colonized subjects. Given 500 years of colonial effort in delinking the Canary Islands to their African connection—by only promoting Spanish language and Spanish view of the local history—, this lack of self-awareness makes sense. Mignolo (2003) underscores that “the colonization of space and the colonization of languages mean that dominant views of languages, or recording the past, and of charting territories become synonymous with real by obstructing possible alternatives” (p. 5). This has been the case of the Canary Islands. Throughout history, alternative narratives to the colonizing discourse—such as independentist movements—⁹⁹ have been diminished and attacked, never obtaining the same level of collective support than other similar movements within the Spanish State have achieved (i.e., in Catalunya or Euskadi). For instance, in the most recent general elections in Spain, the confluence of pro-independence parties in the Islands, *Ahora Canarias*, only obtained 0.26% of support (“Cataluña,” 2019). In Catalunya, however, two pro-independence parties, ERC and JxCAT-JUNTS, obtained almost 37% of votes. A more moderate approach to Canarian nationalism received a 13% of support in the same elections.

Addressing Canarian identity is not a simple task. According to official statistics, 6% of Canary Islanders only self-identify as Canarian; and a 30% feels more Canarian than Spanish, which is uncommon in Spain (Brunat, 2019). In that survey, on average, only 10% of Spaniards prioritized their regional identity over their Spanish identity (CIS,

⁹⁹ Due to the international advocacy task developed by Antonio Cubillo, one of the main leaders of the Canarian pro-independence movement, the Organization of African Unity, in 1968, proclaimed the “carácter colonial de la formación social canaria y el consiguiente apoyo al movimiento independentista canario” [“colonial condition of the Canarian society and their subsequent support to the Canarian pro-independence movement”] (Gari-Montllor Hayek, 1992, p. 950).

2018). Yet that standpoint does not extrapolate Canarian positionalities toward colonialism, both in terms of accepting that framing or supporting a given political decolonizing strategy. In my case, I argue that the Islands remain colonized since the fifteenth century, suffering simultaneous forms of colonization: first, as a colony of the Spanish Empire, using Canary land and people in its imperialist colonizing enterprise, and, later, as a subject of internal colonialism within the Spanish state. Likewise, as a target of external colonial practices for other European countries (i.e., Portugal, England, Germany).

After the conquest, land and water were distributed among few hands. For Farrujia (2015), “The resulting colonial society was composed of a ruling group (the aristocracy, clergy and merchants i.e. those who held political positions and controlled the economy) and the majority whom they ruled (labourers, those marginalised for religious reasons, and slaves, including the indigenous Canarians)” (p. 6). The unequal access to land and water remained for centuries. Many Canary Islanders were able to use the land as peasants (*medianeros*), but they had to give parts of their harvest and pay taxes to the landowner—which make survival difficult when farming was negatively affected by draught and pests. In addition to that circumstance, the colonial economy in the Islands has always pivoted on one or two major products, lacking diversification—based on foreign interests. As aforementioned, Canarian land, resources, people, weather, and geostrategic location have been used for other nations’ benefit since the Islands became a Spanish colony. Foreign companies have decided the path of Canarian economy, “dependent and peripheral” (Farrujia, 2015, p. 6), using the land to generate one major product until it failed in the international market and then introduced another

one, without securing stability or continuity, without acknowledging physical limitations (such as water scarcity). Not thinking on what could benefit the Islands and their population long-term or adapting the capitalist adventure to the region's needs and resources. There has not been developed a long-term economic plan, just the generation of short-term benefits for external companies. The outcomes of this economic model have been a weak economy, cyclic crisis, endemic unemployment, and emigration for the Canary inhabitants. The Canary Islands were mainly agrarian until 1960s, and the Canarian population experienced high rates of illiteracy and low working skills (Gari-Montllor Hayek, 1992). Civil servants used to come from mainland Spain. However, in just a couple of decades, the productive system in the Islands changed dramatically, “Pasó de ser una sociedad eminentemente agraria en 1960, a convertirse en una sociedad de servicios en 1975” [“from being primarily an agrarian society in the 1960s, the Canary Islands turned into a service society in 1975”] (Gari-Montllor Hayek, 1992, p. 942). Quality of life has improved and yet, even more within a neoliberal framework, the economy remains influenced by external neocolonial influences. Despite having more access to formal education than our ancestors and receiving more than 10 million tourists annually, Canary Islanders suffer high rates of unemployment and poverty. The Canarian economy stills relies on one major industry, tourism. Emigration is still the best option for many Islanders—achieving higher levels of cultural capital have not stopped the Canarian migratory fate.

One of the major limitations of being a colonized territory is the lack of self-determination and self-control on major social and economic matters. Throughout history, Canary Islanders have tried to obtain higher levels of self-determination and they

have suffered repression as a result. Secundino Delgado, for instance, considered the founder of Canarian nationalism, was persecuted and imprisoned for supporting the independence of Cuba and the Canary Islands at the end of the nineteenth century (Varela-Lago, 2018). Canarian Islanders have resisted oppression. They have tried to break their dependency from land/water owners, as my ancestors did in my mother's town, La Aldea, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I already mentioned the role of my great-grandmother, La Meliana, in the mid-1920s organizing women for land and water in my mother's town. In the late-1800s, La Meliana's grandfather, Domingo Aguiar, was one of the leaders of the revolt against the Marques Nava Grimón—whose family owned large areas of my mother's town (Suárez Moreno, 2018). Domingo Aguiar was briefly imprisoned and released, wrongly accused of killing a civil servant who protected the Marques' interests. Moreover, another of the men wrongly accused of the crime was Antonio Ojeda, who became, years later, La Meliana's father-in-law. I proudly carry his last name, Ojeda. Mine is just one of the stories of resistance to the legacy of colonialism in the Canary Islands. There are many others. In recent years, Canary Islanders have massively rejected Spanish Government's support to oil corporations to extract oil near the Islands (Morel, 2012). Likewise, multiple voices question the Canarian economic model and support sustainable alternatives that preserve life in the Islands—i.e., by reducing ecological footprint from tourism, promoting renewable energies (González Hernández, 2018; Rendeiro Martín-Cejas & Ramírez Sánchez, 2010).

External and internal colonialism manifest for Canary Islanders in other ways. For instance, the Canary Islands and the Islanders still hold an inferior status within the Spanish state, as our ancestors did.

Madrid, September 1992.

A couple of weeks ago, I moved to Madrid to study as an undergraduate student, so far from the Islands, in mainland Spain. I am about to turn 18. Today is my first day of class at the University Complutense. I am sitting in a huge classroom, surrounded by 100 students. Something is going on, and students are addressing each other, in an assembly mode. I listen to other peers, and then I raise my arm, to talk to them and share my opinion. As soon as I begin talking, the whole group starts laughing, out loud. I don't recall saying anything funny. At all. I quickly recollect my thoughts, track the words uttered. Ah, I see. I used "ustedes" instead of "vosotros," and my classmates think that it is hilarious. They think that I am addressing them formally, even though we are all young people. I may be the only Spanish speaking person in this room, then, who does not use the form "vosotros," who instead uses "ustedes" in both formal and informal contexts.

Like Canary people do.

Like most of the Spanish speakers in the world, in fact, do.

But in less than a day, my otherness as Canary Islander was established. From my peers' reactions, I learned that they saw me as a sweet Canary Islander who can't really speak Spanish. So lovely, so warm... so different to the norm. As Pérez Flores (2017) explains, "El acento y el léxico canarios provocan una cierta hilaridad en la península ibérica" ["Canarian accent and lexicon generate hilarity in the Iberian Peninsula"] (p. 45). For years, during college, my friends in Madrid would say "Canaria, pronounce this word;" "Canaria, say this expression," to hear and enjoy how I pronounced the z or the c. differently to them, mainland Spaniards. Other students would highlight stereotypes about Canary identity—that we were slower, *aplatanaos*. I played along. Probably

because I didn't realize how diminishing and colonizing those comments were.

Borrowing Spry's (2000) words, my body performed as "a cultural billboard advertising the effects of selves/others/contexts interacting with and upon it" (p. 84). I don't blame my peers. They are the product of 500 years of Castilian imperialism and colonialism. They looked at me through the colonizer's lens—even though some of them also suffered the oppressive impact of Castilian imperialism in their regions. The fallacy of Spanish identity needs bodies like mine, accents like mine to exist. The performance of Spanish identity needs the Other to exist: the non-Catholic infidel, the bad woman, the colonized subject. To show me as a counterexample, the sweet anomaly, those who don't really belong. Canary Islanders are told to be Spanish—that is what our IDs say. Yet our Canary accent is not included in the possibilities of Spanish identity. Whenever I looked to rent apartments in Madrid, I had to ask friends from the Peninsula to call on my behalf. Xenophobic landlords would read my accent as Latin American and thus, they would not give me information about the apartment. In Madrid, my ability to teach Spanish as a second language to American students was questioned once—"but you are from the Canary Islands, right?" To that person, my accent and dialect disqualified me.

Historically, most Canary artists had to change their accent if they wanted to succeed in Spain. For instance, the lack of Canary accents in mainstream national pop was the norm. There were Canary bands, but their reach was mostly limited to the Islands—things have changed in the last decades, though, with the international success of Canary bands such as *Efecto Pasillo*. In fact, I still feel shocked when I listen to the accent of the singer of *El Sueño de Morfeo*, a Spanish band from the North of Spain, Asturias, that incorporated a Canary singer, Raquel del Rosario, in 2002 (until 2013). She didn't change her accent. I

am so unused to hear Canary accents outside of the context of the Canary Islands, that even today, when I listened to old songs by *El Sueño de Morfeo* while driving on American roads, Raquel's Canary accent surprises me. My reaction makes me think of my own internalized colonization.

Another expression of internal colonialism was the invisibility of Canary experience and knowledge in the curriculum I studied in college. Or in my three master's degrees in two continents. Subreenduth underlines, addressing the otherness of people from former colonies, that "[l]ike most 'others' our lives remain marginalized, our experiences undervalued, and our knowledge disregarded or contested within the mainstream" (as cited in Popova, 2016, p. 46). I do not recall studying anything that included examples from the Canary Islands—aside from a couple of exceptions, such as the writer Benito Pérez Galdós (who lived in Madrid). Canarian experience does not fit Western categories of knowledge. For instance, in the U.S., when does a Spanish major study literature from the Canary Islands? In Iberian Studies? In Latin American Studies? To compensate this painful absence, a group of scholars, including my sister María Hernández-Ojeda, promote the study of Atlantic Studies.¹⁰⁰

Growing up as an othered, diminished, invisibilized, second-class colonized citizen generates consequences. Many Canary Islanders have internalized oppression, feeling ashamed of their Canary culture, identity, or accent.¹⁰¹ When I was a child in the

¹⁰⁰ As part of that endeavor, in 2015, María Hernández-Ojeda, who is an Associate Professor at Hunter College, and Germán Santana Pérez, Associate Professor at the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, created the Centro de Estudios Canarias-América, "the first academic center in the United States to specialize in the relationship between the Canary Islands and the Americas" ("Descripción," n.d.).

¹⁰¹ In the West Indian context, Popova (2016) explains how "Since times of slavery, it has been assumed that high culture resides outside the islands, in the land of the colonizer rather than in that of the colonized. To this day, more prestige is awarded to those who have received education, training, and life experiences abroad" (p. 173). A similar perception takes place in the Canary Islands.

Islands, I noticed how some adults tended to pronounce differently whenever they felt socially challenged—surrounded by somebody with higher forms of capital. They would try to pronounce final “s” of words, like a Castilian speaker, something that Gran Canarian natives don’t do. It felt deeply awkward. It felt like they were ashamed of their accent. With their actions, they taught me that something was wrong with my accent. Maybe that is why I let people in the Iberian Peninsula play around with my accent, why I didn’t counter their stereotypical comments about Canarian Islanders. Popova (2016), sharing her experience as a West Indian, explains this situation perfectly:

Though there is a growing movement to reclaim a sense of pride in all things local, we are still a people bound in a state of what Bob Marley describes as mental slavery. This neocolonial state is often accompanied by an element of unconsciousness, in which we often fail to realize how many of our perceptions can be traced to our colonial roots. This outlook fosters a capacity of rootlessness in the West Indian (Walcott, 1999) and oftentimes a sense of inferiority that can last a lifetime. (p. 174)

Popova brilliantly reflects on the complexity of colonized subjectivity because pride and a sense of inferiority can coexist, do coexist. I pause. I’m blushing right now. I think of my teenagerhood, despising “*mataos*,” young uneducated and unemployed men and women that face the lack of opportunities in the Islands. No cultural capital, no economic capital, no social capital. They used to spend time hanging out on the streets of my barrio, any day of the week, any time of the day. I am deeply ashamed of Carmen the classist teenager, the ignorant teenager, who blamed the most unprotected victims of internal and external colonialism for their situation. I also forgive Carmen the teenager, because she was reproducing an inherited narrative of a colonized society that self-blames for its economic and social failure. I need more time to keep unfolding my own contradictions,

continue identifying the traces of colonization in my identity. Certainly, my self-decolonizing process will not end in this chapter, in this dissertation.

Other contradictions need to be addressed in this Chapter, though. The other side of the Canarian diasporic reality, barely mentioned in the romanticized narrative about Canary emigration, is the role of Canary emigrants as settlers, as accomplices of colonialism and neocolonialism in America. I listen to Tuck and Yang (2012) carefully when they say that “an anti-colonial critique is not the same as a decolonizing framework; anti-colonial critique often celebrates empowered postcolonial subjects who seize denied privileges from the metropole” (p. 19). I need to acknowledge how my Canary ancestors and I are settlers in America, despite our reasons to do so. Many Canary emigrants suffered greatly in the diaspora, exploited and diminished; never considered fully Spanish, or fully American, and labeled as “*brutos*” [dumb] (Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992). As José Martí, a key figure of the Cuban Independence movement proclaimed, “Oprimidos como nosotros, los isleños nos aman. Nosotros, agradecidos, los amamos” [“Oppressed, just like us, Canary Islanders love us. We, gratefully, love them back”] (as cited in Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992, p. 22). And yet, Canary Islanders contributed to occupation of Indigenous lands. By not addressing how Canarian emigrants played a role in colonizing America, we, current members of the Canary diaspora, ignore our role in colonizing other land and people. Having influenced and participated in American independence movements (M. Hernández-Ojeda & Santana Pérez, 2014, p. 93) does not free the Canarian diaspora from its role as settlers. Acknowledging this part of the story is essential to find alternatives to my positionality, to my current presence on occupied land that is reclaimed by Native

Americans. This reflection is a first step: I am not trying to “escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one’s self” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 9). Yet I don’t have an easy answer to the migratory mess that colonialism has generated for centuries. In that sense, acknowledging the colonizing role of colonized subjects helps us see the complexity of European colonization, how it changed lives, how it made some people victims and victimizers at the same time, how it changed the way they, we, understand the world and ourselves. As Quijano (2000) posits,

Europe not only had control of the world market, but it was also able to impose its colonial dominance over all the regions and populations of the planet, incorporating them into its world-system and its specific model of power. For such regions and populations, this model of power involved a process of historical reidentification; from Europe such regions and populations were attributed new geocultural identities. (p. 540)

In the Canarian case, creating the fiction of being Europeans only even though our identity is more complex. Labelling as inferior, not only the Indigenous people to facilitate their dispossession, but also the mestizos and new inhabitants of the Islands. All this background, so deeply influenced by colonialism and Eurocentrism, is where Canary mestizo identities are built, performed, changed. Included mine. Although I had to cross the planet to see it clearly. Being far from my homeland, like Popova, “awakened my consciousness and opened my mind to aspects of my colonial identity that were invisible to me in the land of my birth” (p. 175). Awakening is an essential step, but in order to (self)decolonize, we need to go deeper, keep tearing our selves apart. Collectively. Because, borrowing Mohanty’s (2003) words again, “decolonization involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures” (p. 7).

Decolonizing Is a Collective Effort

It is not enough to examine and challenge the role of colonialism in Canary history and identity. It is a positive step, but it won't change our reality. We need to go further, we need to change our lenses, use others adapted to our reality. Allow change to happen. We need to decolonize. Our bodies, our minds. Land. And we shouldn't, we can't do this alone.

Thankfully, a growing decolonizing wave expands thanks to activists, artists, and scholars in the Canary Islands and in the diaspora. In addition to researchers such as José Farrujia de la Rosa or Larisa Pérez Flores, it is essential to mention the work of Fundación Tamaimos, created in 2014. This organization not only organizes cultural and social events, but also supports the creation of critical knowledge related to Canary culture and identity. They publish books and magazines, organize talks and courses, fund social initiatives, and recognize individual contributions through annual awards. Likewise, sectors of the Canary feminist movement promote decolonial strategies and claims, organizing events such as a “*campamento decolonial*” (decolonial camping) that took place in 2018. This feminist, intersectional approach scrutinizes patriarchy and heteronormativity in their decolonial proposal (Cabrera Suárez, 2018). One of the reasons why I did not feel attracted to the independentist or nationalist movement in the Islands as a teenager or adult is because they did not include my lesbian body in their discourse. Even my beloved Taller's and Taburiente's lyrics were heteronormative. My body, my gender, my sexual orientation was not present in their lyrics, in their vision of new Canary Islands. In fact, that was the primary reason for me to leave the Islands when I was 18: because I thought that I did not have a future in the Islands as a lesbian. It is

difficult to fully embrace those who ignore you, or even worse, diminish you, no matter how much you respect them. It is a similar feeling that many queer people may feel when they read Fanon. As Muñoz (1999) points out, “Think, for a moment, of the queer revolutionary from the Antilles, perhaps a young woman who has already been burned in Fanon's text by his writing on the colonized woman. What process can keep an identification with Fanon, his politics, his work possible for this woman?” (p. 9). Muñoz (1999) posits that it is possible for that queer woman, for me, to still embrace heteronormative male voices by engaging in a process of disidentification with them.

Disidentification offers a Fanon, for that queer and lesbian reader, who would not be sanitized; instead, his homophobia and misogyny would be interrogated while his anticolonial discourse was engaged as a *still* valuable yet mediated identification. This maneuver resists an unproductive turn toward good dog/bad dog criticism and instead leads to an identification that is both mediated and immediate, a disidentification that enables politics. (p. 9)

Yet disidentification is not automatic. Or easy. You need to build your self-esteem, develop your consciousness, embrace your queerness and feminist standpoint in order to come to terms to what's missing in those men's voices. Or what hurts you in their words and absences. You need to find a theoretical and methodological framework that helps you understand what is happening and models to imitate, in order to disidentify in a healthy and non-hurtful way. Anzaldúa or bell hooks, in that sense, become *maestras* of how to embrace and critique their male peers. Yet, I need to highlight a relevant nuance. Disidentification is powerful to deal with the past, but potentially harmful as a main strategy to build the future. I can work with heteronormative men, value their decolonial commitment, inasmuch I critique their heteronormativity and/or lack of intersectionality, and I see them change. If they don't change, I could be alienating myself. Can I really join a decolonizing strategy that doesn't fight intersectional oppression? For how long

could I be part of a narrative that is hurtful? That is a central question that lesbian and bisexual activists like me have pondered when working with gay cisgender men.

Disidentification, yes, but not at whatever cost. I don't want to do to other people what I experienced: lack of references that hindered my awakening process as a Canarian, lesbian, and woman.

As other feminist Canary activists/scholars, I miss more intersectionality among those voices that pursue decolonizing the Canary Islands/Islanders today (Cabrera Suárez, 2018). I see hints, secondary mentions to issues that seem central to me. For instance, the role of women, gender identities, or sexual practices in the Indigenous society. I read mentions, here and there, about indigenous women, but that's it. There are so many gaps, so many questions. The more I read, the more I realize that women were highly relevant in the Indigenous Canarian culture. For instance, Arminda Masequera was the successor of one of the two Guanartemes (main leaders) that ruled Gran Canaria, and yet, she was invisibilized first, by chroniclers, but also by those who re-read that past. Why Arminda Masequera doesn't occupy a more relevant role in those readings? Why do I only know male warriors or rulers as popular Indigenous figures? Furthermore, the way Indigenous women have been interpreted by Eurocentric historians tells so much about the complicity of history with colonialism. Women's lives were seen through a Catholic, patriarchal, heteronormative colonial lens. For instance, Lobo (2012) highlights that "Aunque muy poco se dice de las mujeres, salvo de sus rasgos físicos y actividades, en la guerra también participaron prestando ayuda a los guerreros a los cuales les alcanzaban armas y piedras para arrojar sobre los invasores" ["Even though little has been said about Indigenous women, with the exception of their physical attributes and activities, they also

participated in the war by fetching stones that male warriors threw against invaders”] (p. 155). Lobo (2012) reflects that "es curioso que las crónicas solo citen a dos mujeres indígenas de la casta noble" ["It is noticeable that chronicles only cite two Indigenous women from the noble cast"] (p. 156). This short paragraph encapsulates the patriarchal gaze that has recorded and interpreted history, in the past and in the present. First, ignoring women in the chronicles and only focusing on their physical appearance when included. Second, assuming that women were helping warriors instead of framing them as warriors as well. Third, conceptualizing women's absence in chronicles as "a curiosity," instead of the consequence of a Eurocentric, patriarchal colonialism that assumes women's inferiority as a historic given, when it is not the case. In fact, as Allen (1992) highlights, in the context of Native Americans, colonial framings of Indigenous women as inferior in their societies was a key strategy to attack and change those societies or tribal life. Likewise, not all cultures categorize human beings using a binary gender framework (Allen, 1992) or even a gender framework (Lugones, 2007; Oyewumi, 2010). Not all cultures diminish or ignore same sex practices (Allen, 1992). As Lugones (2007) denounces, "The heterosexualist patriarchy has been an ahistorical framework of analysis" (p. 187). In this sense, we need a queer feminist intersectional decolonizing reading of Indigenous societies in the Canary Islands. A reading that is not (post)positivist, that avoids rigid binary categories. Because Canarian identity is fluid, mestiza. Moreover, I have the perception that some current Canary Islanders address their origin with the same complex as Mexicans did, the trauma of being "*hijos de la chingada*," blaming women for having children with Spanish conquerors—whether it was consented or unconsented—, for being the "scapegoat for or representative of blood

mixing” (Calafell, 2005, p. 49). Or, conversely, for having children with non-European conquerors. Maybe these men also blame women for the hybrid condition of Canary Islanders after the conquest, for not having pure blood that satisfied Spanish Imperialist fictions, for having impure blood that Othered, diminished the Canary emigrant in America (Paz Sánchez & Hernández González, 1992) and in Spain. This trauma may be one of the reasons why some researchers frame the lack of male Indigenous descendancy as the extinction of an ethnic group, even though Indigenous Canarian women were able to survive and have mestizo descendants. In that sense, we should theorize Canarian mestizaje and/as resistance, borrowing from Lugones (1994). For that purpose, to embrace a queer feminist decolonizing endeavor, using Pérez Florez’s (2018) words, we need to count “con la inspiración de cuerpos feminizados y racializados que a lo largo y ancho del globo han propuesto claves más complejas para abordar la identidad: encrucijadas, intersecciones y también otras palabras intraducibles que datan de épocas precoloniales y escapan de la lógica binaria” [“with the inspiration of feminized and racialized bodies that have suggested more complex approaches to address identity across the planet: crossroads, intersections, as well as untranslatable words that were created during pre-colonial times, and which escape a binary logic”](pp. 59-60). Bodies like Anzaldúa’s, Lorde’s, Smith’s and many others. Asking us to look at our bodies and write our stories as well.

My Identity as a Canary Worm

Part of my self-decolonizing process is to come to terms with identitarian unresolved issues. Tuck and Yang (2012) tell me that I’m a settler, occupying Native American land. And it’s true. Their message forced me to question what my land is. As

aforementioned, I have barely explored my relationship with my homeland as a researcher. Why? Because it hurts looking back to a place that I love, but where I can hardly return? Because I prefer to see myself and the history of the Canary Islanders as victims of European colonialism, not victimizers? Because I don't know if I can claim myself as a descendant of an Indigenous culture and people that were brutally decimated? Can we claim that Canary Native culture never died, despite the fragmentation, mixing with Europeans, slavery, or suicides? Have I avoided addressing my identity because I am afraid of coopting Native's narratives in other parts of the world? Afraid of coopting current Amazigh narratives? For a second, I wonder whether a DNA test could help me figure out how am I. Would biology ease my doubts if I carried the U6b1 subclade? Those are some of the questions that have haunted me since I began this self-decolonizing project. A process that has been a turmoil, pulling me apart, provoking mixed emotions. Feeling ashamed, because I realized how ignorant I am about my own culture. Feeling angry, because many of the few things I learned about Canarian culture were wrong, which fed my internalized colonization. Feeling curious about exploring my identitarian connection with the Amazigh culture, tracing new cultural components of my hybridity.

How am I?

A hybrid European, North African, and Caribbean subject. The outcome of an endless cycle of *mestizaje* from peoples moving between continents, going back and forth the Atlantic Ocean—voluntarily and forced. How does such hybridity work? How do I negotiate my in-betweenness?

How am I?

What I've been told incessantly, what my documents say, is that I am a Spanish and European citizen. I've been socialized as a European subject, as a Spanish subject. And even though I despise European colonialism, the pain, trauma and pillage caused in my land and elsewhere, even though I despise Spanish nationalism and its cultural impositions, I can't erase my European and Spanish roots, my emotional and cultural connection with them. Yes, I'm also Spanish and European. I feel connected to the diverse side of Europe and Spain, the side that is the result of thousands of years of endless *mestizaje*; the side that fights European internal and endless intolerance—exile has been a common fate for the Other in Europe. Remember Al-Andalus, Sefarad. I feel connected to the Other in Europe, the non-Christian, the non-normative, those who don't speak dominant languages.¹⁰² I feel connected to sounds, life in the street, food, music, landscapes, languages, people... experiences of my life in Spain and Europe. Being in the U.S. helps me realize how much I miss Valencia, a city where I lived for 12 years. When I'm driving and listening to music, I often cry when I listen to Catalan songs, because I've loved in Catalan, because that language feels home as well. Even when I visited Montreal last year, the street life, sounds of French, and food reminded me of something familiar that felt home.

Yes, I am a European *mestiza*, but what happens with my African identity, the geography, the weather, the land, the Amazigh culture? What happens with my closedness with the Caribbean culture, built upon the interaction of peoples from Africa and Europe and the Macaronesia? How saying I am European explains all that?

¹⁰² In Spain, linking Hispanic identity and whiteness is a fascinating fiction, considering how that country is the result of thousands of years of *mestizaje*, biological and cultural, between peoples coming from Asia, North Africa, Europe, and America.

My European identity has been forced upon me through centuries of violence, silence, half-truths. So European companies could exploit the Canary Islands and the Islanders. Detaching my connection with Africa, both land and culture. Convincing me that I was somewhere else, somebody else.

But I am also African.

Although it took me a long time to realize it and embrace it.

My body was made in Africa, ate food and drank water from African land, breathed African air.

My cultural roots are also Amazigh, the legacy of a people who have lived in North Africa for thousands of years.

I never realized that I am African until I lived in mainland Spain when I was 18 years old. I can still remember how I reacted when somebody in Madrid asked me how often I traveled to the African continent. I frowned, as if they were asking me how often I visit the Moon. Africa? Why? I was socialized to see my body floating underneath Portugal or the Mediterranean, never inhabiting African territory. Being called “African” is still an insult for many Canary Islanders. Africa, until I was 18, was this far, mysterious, fearful land. So far away from me, my culture, my country. Even though it wasn’t. The African continent is less than 100 kilometers away. How can a human being deny what’s in front of them in Geography classes? I did. I simply couldn’t see my own incoherence, didn’t think about it. Didn’t have to. In the Islands, we try to live like other Spaniards in the Iberian Peninsula do. We assimilate to Spanish culture. We follow the same fashion, buy in the same chain stores, even deny the reality of our subtropical weather. Pretending we also have weather seasons, like in Madrid—when in many parts

of the islands, we do not (a cold day in my city means 64 Fahrenheit degrees). In December, in my city, it is so common to see Canary Islanders wearing some sort of winter clothing while tourists wear shorts and sandals. I remember staring at the latter thinking how absurd they were. Now I realize that I was the absurd one, wearing a sweater when I probably didn't need it. Because my body was breathing on Latitude 28 05' 59.03" and Longitude-15 24' 48.35" W8. North Africa.

Yes, I am African. But not only African.

I cannot say that I'm only an Amazigh descendant, because that's not true.

I'm also European

And Caribbean. Can I say that I am Caribbean too?

Outside of the Canary Islands, many people read my body, my accent as a Caribbean subject. They read me as Cuban or Venezuelan. It makes sense, given the cultural similitudes between Canary Islanders and parts of the Caribbean culture. We share music, food, accent, history. Even DNA. We are connected through transoceanic migrations, movements in both directions. Paradoxically, the ocean doesn't separate us but makes us closer. Like other Caribbean bodies, I grew up dancing Caribbean salsa, merengue, and—to lesser extent—bachata. I laughed when I listened to the ingenious improvised *décimas* by Mestisay and loved listening to *parrandas* around Triana Street in Christmas, in my city. I drank rum.

And coke. I listened to Western pop music too.

Because I'm a mestiza, without percentages

Culturally, biologically

I'm a Canary Islander

I carry the legacy of my ancestors—the Indigenous Amazigh, the European conquerors, the emigrants, the immigrants, the *conversos*, the *inquisidores*, those who went, those who came back, those who died trying to start over, those who killed and raped and stole lands, those who resisted being dispossessed, the farmers, the merchants, the teachers, las putas. They are all my family. I can't just choose one side and ignore the others. I can question them, but not ignore them. I would become one of those Spaniards who reject their Muslim and Jewish heritage, choosing one side of history, the narrative that they prefer, getting obsessed as they are and have been to prove purity, their connection with old Christians. I don't want to be that way. There is no pure identity.

I need to embrace my complexity and acknowledge that I carry the trauma of generations surviving as colonize(d)(r) subjects used by the Spanish Empire to colonize territories in America, occupying Native land, contributing to violence against Native peoples, and whitening the population in the American colonies (even though I struggle with the idea of a Canarian mestizo being read as white). The official discourse in the Islands praises the Canary ancestry who founded cities like San Antonio or Montevideo. Stories on their tenacity and bravery crossing the ocean—often in risky, life-threatening conditions—and starting over in a new place. Stories that fail to mention that Canary emigrants' hands were not clean, because they lived on stolen land in America. Like I do. My dirty hands coexist with the pain, the sacrifice that I experience as a migrant. Like my ancestors, I am also a diasporic subject, carrying my life in suitcases and boxes, *buscando una vida mejor*. First, as a lesbian. Then, as an activist researcher who loves teaching. An eternal in-betweeners that doesn't fit anywhere and yet survives, oppressing, colonizing.

I cannot look at our past and present, as Canarian diasporic members, with an innocent gaze. My/our history is complex, as subjects raised in a colonized territory whose fate was determined by the metropolis of the empire, badly managed by a small local elite, depending on a fragile economy that generated periodic crisis, with other Europeans commodifying and profiting upon the Islands. Even today.

I had to cross the ocean to better understand and embrace my complex and fluid identity as diasporic in-betweener. I had to come to America to go back to Africa. Not the first Canary Islander experiencing that process, not the last. As Pérez Flores (Martu, 2018) explains, “Tristemente, tuve que cruzar el atlántico, tuve que desplazarme, para poder añadir a las lentes violetas otras lentes nuevas, caribeñas si se quiere. Entonces todas las contradicciones, ausencias, tropiezos, que tenemos los cuerpos canarios, empezaron a cobrar sentido como piezas de un puzzle.” [Sadly, I had to cross the Atlantic Ocean, I had to move so that I could add new lenses, Caribbean lenses, to my purple lenses. Then, all contradictions, absences, and obstacles that Canarian bodies face finally made sense, fitting as pieces in a puzzle”]. Contradictions such as being colonized subjects who colonize others. Other land, other people. Contradictions such as carrying a UE passport that grants me some privileges, making migration easier, but says so little about me, how I am, where I come from. When I feel European or Spanish, when I don’t. How I navigate my privileges as an EU citizen, or how that passport doesn’t prevent me from being targeted by xenophobic, sexist, or homophobic practices in the United States or Europe. Contradictions that permeate my identity and practices as a scholar.

Colonize(d)(r) Scholar as a Fertilizing Worm

One of the central goals of this dissertation—and this Chapter—is to figure out whether my colonize(d)(r) identity has affected my scholarship, particularly my research work on youth bullying in the U.S., and how. The first question has a simple answer: yes, my colonize(d)(r) identity has influenced my academic work. The how requires a longer explanation.

As a colonized subject, I have worn lenses prescribed for other body, not mine. Not based on my embodied experiences as a colonized, oppressed lesbian Canary Islander, and later, as a diasporic colonize(d)(r) subject. Not based on my viewpoint, my body, my reality, my history, my conditions. These lenses influence the way I see and interpret everything around me, myself. These lenses combine different crystals. Until I was a teenager, those crystals were mass-produced by patriarchal Eurocentrism and colonialism, for colonized subjects like me. Once I joined social movements and critical voices, my lenses incorporated other crystals made by critical male scholars who challenged capitalism. I have had to make sense of life through those lenses, dealing with contradictions between what I thought and what I felt. Or even what I heard in my meetings with feminist and LGBT activists—whose voices were mostly absent in academic curriculum (and in the new prescribed lenses). As a result of my socialization in Eurocentric and modernist values, I addressed those tensions by following (post)positivist premises: reject emotions, ignore my body and experiences, value reason, be objective. Become a Western scholar.

Wa Thiong'o (1986) suggests that “we have to consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe” (p. 88).

For decades, I have thought and wrote as if I were a white, European, critical male theorist. Even when I discovered feminism and queer theory, in my early and mid-twenties. I saw myself as an organic intellectual, imitating my beloved Antonio Gramsci. This organic intellectual, supposedly, doesn't have a gender or race or sexual orientation, but it is not true. It does. I was socialized to think like these men, to see life like them. Yet I am not them. I'm done pretending I'm one. Not even other men that I admire profoundly like Stuart Hall. I am not him. Until I read feminists of color, I was unable to see me, my fluid, changing, incoherent identity as a woman, queer, mestiza Canary Islander, eternal in-between, another diasporic member never fully belonging anywhere. A northafroeurocaribbean mestiza. I was able to feel that identity, but not conceptualize it or recognize it.

Not being able to see life with lenses based on your needs is harmful. I have been always confused, always feeling that something wrong was happening to me. I have spent all my adult life in and out of academia, knowing that I wanted to become a professor, but feeling repelled by it simultaneously. This is my third attempt to study a Ph.D. Now I understand why. First I thought that not being able to be an activist and scholar was the reason that make academia so unappealing to me. Then I learned that it is not true, that it is possible to combine both worlds. The issue was more complex. It is related to my inability to see the world through my own lenses. How the assigned readings and discussions held in my graduate classes kept ignoring my body, my reality, my needs. That alienation deterred my involvement with the academic community. When I look at my CV, I don't see many scholarly publications. Until recently, whenever I read my papers, I felt disconnected to them, like somebody else wrote them, not me. I didn't want

to publish those words. They had my name, but I didn't feel them mine. I just did what I was told I had to do as a critical scholar. But I didn't see me in those words. To certain extent, I was ashamed to share them. These negative outcomes have affected me and my career, but there is a worse outcome of colonization: how can I recognize that I am colonized when I am looking at myself with colonized lenses? As Lorde brilliantly says, you cannot bring down the master's house with his tools. Not having suitable epistemological tools and an ontological standpoint made it difficult to see me, to observe me and what was wrong about my lenses, my words. As an obedient scholar, I just studied others and the system, critically, but others, not me. Until I discovered performance studies and read Third World feminists and Indigenous decolonizing scholars—which enabled my ontological turn to embodiment. Then, I was able to wear my own lenses, see my body in context, recognize my emotions, embrace my soul, liberate myself. I found my tools to disobey. Such as performance autoethnography. I concur with Popova (2016): “Critical autoethnography has provided me with the space and the language to connect my experiences to the dynamics of power and privilege I encounter daily” (p. 175). It helped me find possibilities to exist in academia as me, not as a white Eurocentric man. I was able to fully embody my delinking to (post)positivism, finding the epistemologies and methodologies that allow me to do so. See me in my writings. As Popova (2016) highlights, “Theory has lent voice to the vexations of my spirit and has helped me find the words to express these emotions” (p. 175). And heal. Because for me, disobedience needs to be ontological as well—or it risks becoming a dialectical pose. When Mignolo (2009) says that “in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the

knower rather than on the known” (p. 4), I also say, and it is necessary to focus on the saying rather than the said. Disobeying through our writing—incorporating performative writing as scholars. Disobeying by visibilizing our bodies and experiences as researchers, by avoiding the universal “we,” even among colonized subjects. Disobeying by focusing on healing and repairing the harm caused, not only denouncing what fails. Disobeying by visibilizing readers as active audience members and by recognizing scholars’ epistemic imperialism. I don’t only challenge (post)positivism in abstract, I use my words, my methodology, my flesh to embody my disobedience. I am not implying that every scholar committed to decolonizing needs to use performance autoethnography, albeit that we need to be aware how our methodologies, values, or writing can reproduce colonizing principles.¹⁰³ In that sense, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) reminds us that “[i]f we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous. Writing can also be dangerous because we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent” (p. 84). Promoting decolonizing or decolonial theory may not be enough to embody change. How far can decolonizing go if we don’t self-decolonize first, “centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith, 2012, p. 89)?

Smith’s (2012) words take me back to my own self-decolonizing process, my process of figuring out my perspective and goals as a scholar. What happened with the organic intellectual? As I explained in this Chapter, it is still part of my identity, part of my gaze, but I mixed it with the non-Eurocentric performance nepantlera, making me

¹⁰³ Smith (2012) explains that “the methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied” (p. 89).

more critical, more holistic, visualizing and drawing from my embodied experiences. Going beyond explanations but aiming to spread hope and healing. Transformation. Better preparing me to navigate cultures and epistemologies. Making me a more comprehensive scholar. Overcoming (post)positivist limitations. Contributing to decolonize academia. Supporting epistemic mestizaje. Yes, my gaze is mestiza. Thanks to my self-decolonizing process, I can better identify and trace its multiple roots, those that I feel proud of and those that I despise. I try to neutralize the colonizing patriarchal imperialist racist gaze and use it in reverse, tracking its presence in my practices and others’.

What now? As a scholar, I continue my process of delinking from colonialism and rewrite “the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized” (Smith, 2012, p. 31). I support this strategy inasmuch it acknowledges mestizaje, fluidity as well as its impossibility of completion. Like the Coyolxauhqui process, self-decolonizing is endless. I assume that I will never fully decolonize, because that would entail that I won’t participate in colonizing practices anymore. And, unfortunately, that is a lie. I am. I will. Being part of a society that benefits from internal neocolonialism against bodies of color, whether I talk of Europe or the U.S. I dream of alternatives, but I can’t romanticize my self-decolonizing process or my mestiza identity or the consequences of my actions, because I’m trying to survive under a neoliberal disorder. As Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasize, I don’t get a free pass for saying these words. In order to prevent romanticized narratives, I need to go back to Anzaldúa and Moraga, and other feminists of color. And to young performers of color. Their embodied theorization makes more sense to me. It guides me. I don’t want to theorize in abstract my self-decolonizing

process. I need to theorize from my body. Because if we don't theorize from our bodies, we risk using others' lenses or imposing ours to others, no matter how committed to change we are. In my case, I need to see and deal with my incoherence, the symbolic and material legacies that I inherited, the lenses that I was given. What matter the most is that, after undertaking this painful self-decolonizing process, I can now see myself as a complex, incoherent worm committed to fertilizing soil, healing wounds, creating space for hope.

This Coyolxauhqui/self-decolonizing process has transformed me so deeply. It really works. It has helped me find soil, reconnect with the soil I thought lost—my Canary soil—even in the diaspora. It has even helped me heal my body, after a long year of sickness and despair. The process has given me purpose to carry on. While I was working on this project, it saddened me to realize that my family is not cultivating the land that my ancestors defended so fiercely. In my case, I am not a farmer, I am a performer autoethnographer and teacher living thousands of miles away from the land they cultivated. Yet, like my ancestors, like La Meliana, I am a worm who tries to survive while fertilizing the soil with hope and future. A scholar/worm. I may not feel the humid soil in my hands, like my ancestors did in La Aldea, but I can feel that soil in different ways, fertilizing it with embodied ideas. Through that soil, I reconnect with my ancestors, to their fight for land and water, and I see my role contributing to a better future for the Islands and the world. An image comes to my mind. It's a picture of my mother and my sister in New York City in 2014, the city where my sister, as a professor, works. Both are standing outside the Spanish Consulate with other activists, protesting oil drillings in the

Canary Islands. La Meliana would be proud of her descendants.¹⁰⁴ I see my sister carrying my nephew, still a baby, tied to her chest, while my mother carries a sign that reads “Shame Repsol,” the corporation interested in drilling so close to the Islands. The diaspora united with the Islands, fighting for a better future, protecting the land and the water, once more. While looking at them, I just realized that Canary Islanders have so much to offer to the world. Way more than our weather and beaches, tomatoes or *plátanos*. Canary Islands’ best product is hope and resilience. In a world full of selfishness, Canary warmth, generosity, and solidarity prove more necessary than ever. Our islands have been a space for refugees to start over: from conversos and enslaved people who were able to escape from slavery in their horrific trip to America, to Palestinians and Saharans in the twentieth century. Don’t take me wrong. Canary society is far from being a perfect model. And the Canarian diaspora, in their quest for a better life, has contributed to oppress other peoples. But there is something about the way Canary Islanders embrace life and resist oppression that gives me hope. That keeps me alive in these cold winters in New England, in the era of unregulated neoliberalism, disposability, and growing xenophobia. I think of Anzaldúa and how she emphasizes la facultad, how in-betweeners like Canary Islanders learn from their pain and use their embodied experience to foster change. Like I try to do as a teacher, activist, and scholar.

¹⁰⁴ Canarian journalist Juan García Luján (2014) reflected upon my mother’s participation in that demonstration: “No se imaginaba La Meliana que casi 100 años después iba a tener descendientes (tres generaciones distintas) manifestándose en Nueva York para defender a las islas de los nuevos aguatienientes. Aquellos se creían los dueños de las aguas para regar la tierra, estos se creen los dueños de los mares que nos rodean.” [“How could La Meliana imagine that, one hundred years later, she would have her descendants (three different generations) demonstrating in New York City to defend the Canary Islands from the new water owners. In La Meliana’s time, water owners controlled water to farm; today, they act as if they owned the ocean around us”].

Fertilizing Soil

Now that I am more aware of my colonize(d)(r) identity as a Canary Islander, I can better see how and why I contribute to colonize others. I can better understand how my colonize(d)(r) identity influenced my approach to youth bullying. The way I obviously reproduced inherited epistemic privilege, adultism, and internal colonizing practices against youth of color. Yet, also, how the pain that I have experienced as a diasporic and colonized subject—and my ancestors’—and my in-betweenness has sharpened my facultad. A facultad that has helped me challenge the dominant narratives that I was expected to follow as a researcher. I challenged those narratives by trusting my instinct, my body whilst I was trained to reject the body as a site of knowledge production and as a research method. Now, I need to move forward. This Chapter helped me realize that I can’t wait to fully decolonize to work with youth, because that won’t happen. Decolonizing is an endless process. Nonetheless, I am more prepared than I was two years ago to unbecoming youth’s enemy. From that permanent state of critical self-reflexivity, I need to take my next step as a researcher, better prepared to catch my next incoherence and address it. In the meantime, I want to embody a larger commitment to decolonize academia and stop imposing Eurocentric lenses on youth of color, facilitating instead that all bodies can create/understand knowledge from their standpoint; that they can challenge premises, delink, disobey, without being incarcerated or repressed for doing it. Acknowledging that other people outside academia are decolonizing as well—scholars are not saviors. From that decolonizing standpoint, I join other voices that ask for a reframing of youth bullying. In Chapter 4, I share suggestions for such collective reframing process.

This Chapter comes to an end, and with it, another step of my Coyolxauhqui process. I can feel how my pieces are coming together, slowly, until it is time to tear them apart again. I look in the mirror and I see my body, once more, like I have done a million times before. It seems the same image, but it is not. I am not the same. As a scholar, as a human being. My gaze has changed, my ability to understand social phenomena has expanded as well. I feel ready to launch a new Chapter, before you. With you.

CHAPTER 4

ADVOCATING FOR A DECOLONIZING REFRAMING OF YOUTH

BULLYING

It is imperative that I stop spending my time critiquing the totalizing forms of western historicism and engage in the discourse of possibility, where the missing voices and knowledges can be heard and validated. (Wane, 2008, p. 194)

One of the outcomes of the Coyolxauhqui process is that, after tearing yourself apart and gathering the pieces together again, you are not the same. Your gaze is not the same. You look at things, at people, at yourself differently. You read them differently. Or at least, that has been my case. My relationship with the Canary Islands—my homeland—, my understanding of my own complicity with oppression and colonization as a colonize(d)(r) subject, my identity... All that has changed from last year, when I fully committed to undertaking this self-decolonizing, transformative process that I am sharing and embodying with you. Of course, I experienced change before that, I have been changing my understandings of the world and myself since I was a child. This self-decolonizing process did not start in a vacuum; it is another step in a life-long process of consciousness, emancipation, and transformation. A pivotal step. Thanks to this self-decolonizing process, I reconnected with the Canary Islands and those committed to decolonizing them. Likewise, my identity as scholar has been radically, deeply affected. My academic gaze has shifted, incorporating in my own academic practice some of the decolonizing values and theories that I had studied albeit hadn't fully embrace—"moving from decolonizing discourse towards decolonizing praxis" (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 28), such as acknowledging that I am a settler on occupied land. Mostly, because I was not urged to incorporate them in my own praxis—one thing is to theorize about

oppression and colonialism or coloniality and something different is to develop decolonizing and non-oppressive academic practices. Now, when I look at social phenomena, I realize that something has shifted. It feels like if by focusing on self-decolonizing, I was able to change my eye prescription, change my lenses, and acquire a sharper sight that allowed me to notice details that I missed before. It is not a coincidence. The Coyolxauhqui self-decolonizing process tore my selves apart, making me reflect upon my identity and practices as a researcher in context. As explained in previous Chapters, that painful reflective and transformative process fed *la facultad*. *La Maestra* Anzaldúa whispers me that inbetweeners *nepantleras* like me develop *la facultad*, an ability “to accommodate mutually exclusive, discontinuous, and inconsistent worlds” (pp. 79-81) and “look at the world with new eyes.” My experience as a queer diasporic colonize(d)(r) Canary worm, my own self-decolonizing transformation, and my painful self-reflexivity feed my *facultad*, my ability to see things from the border, from the interstices of life, “from the cracks” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 79)—a perspective that tend to be invisible in dominant narratives. Furthermore, *la facultad* facilitated *el conocimiento*. *Conocimiento* is another pivotal concept in Anzaldúa’s theoretical framework: “In trying to make sense of what’s happening, some of us come into deep awareness (*conocimiento*) of political and spiritual situations and the unconscious mechanisms that abet hate, intolerance, and discord. I name this searching, inquiring, and healing consciousness ‘*conocimiento*’” (Anzaldúa, 2015, pp. 17-19). *La facultad* and *el conocimiento* gave me new lenses, a new gaze. As aforementioned, a sharper sight that allowed me to notice details that I missed before. Still incompletely, because social life is always changing, in fluid performance, events and meanings; I will be unable to fully

grasp and understand what is happening around me. Inside me. Caused by me. Yet I am more aware of that impossibility than I was a year ago. From that position of acceptance and awareness, I use my new gaze to go back to the issue that brought me, years ago, to graduate school, research, academia, and this dissertation: youth bullying. Because reflecting on youth bullying with my new gaze, my new lenses, my sharpened sight may help me see something different, something maybe unnoticed; supplement existing analyses, add nuances to existing narratives, and fertilize the soil of social change, joining others' efforts.

It shocks me to think of myself seven years ago, when I encountered research narratives on youth bullying in the U.S. It never occurred to me that studying this issue would foster such a deep self-transformation, as a researcher and human being, and how much my understanding of youth bullying would change as well. I can't believe that, years ago, my planned culmination was to create my own anti-bullying program, which would be implemented in several countries: The Hernández Antibullying Program. Now, I just want to suggest, humbly, a couple of ideas on how to navigate this highly complex issue, which is, in fact, the purpose and scope of this Chapter. Or should I say issues? Building upon Walton and other critical voices, such as the activist group Gender JUST, I argue that we need to separate the initial issue, what I tentatively label as peer youth abuse and violence, from the adult framing of it, which was labeled as "youth bullying" in the 1970s, as I explained in Chapter 2. American society, youth and adults, needs to address two different sets of problems: on the one hand, the abuse and violence that youth reproduce and challenge, which could be the same abuse and violence that adults reproduce and challenge as well; on the other hand, the consequences of a problematic

framing, labeled by adults as youth bullying, that has been used to further oppress and neocolonize youth of color in the U.S, as explained in Chapter 2. Drawing from Smith (2012), I posit that both issues should be reframed in separated yet interconnected ways. In one case, the goal is to better understand and redress peer abuse and violence; in the other case, the goal is to reflect upon the study of youth bullying and repair the harm that it has caused in the U.S. To facilitate such reframing process, I suggest incorporating a decolonizing approach: Asking adults to deal with epistemic privilege and adultism on the study of youth bullying. Asking adults to acknowledge that the dominant study of youth bullying has been used to expand oppressive and colonizing practices against young bodies of color. Asking adults to unbecoming accomplices of those colonizing practices against youth of color. Asking everybody, youth and adults, how we can escape the limitations of bullying as category. In this decolonizing reframing that I suggest, youth voices and bodies and agency should be central, as main agents in reproducing and challenging youth peer abuse and violence—if young people consider it that way, because they may prefer to work without adults, or create alliances with restrictions (i.e., in terms of decision-making processes). As explained in Chapter 2, these young voices are already out there, speaking up through music, art, speeches, slam poetry, theater. Many adult journalists, researchers, activists, and policy makers acknowledge youth as agents, listening to them, working with them. (i.e., Evans-Winters, 2017; Harman & Varga-Dobai, 2012; Nocella II, 2014; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2016). Yet these adults are still a minority. Most adults that I have encountered in my research process talk about youth bullying without youth. Including me. I would love to offer more than ideas right now. I would love to join or co-create a decolonizing project with young artists and

activists, now that I feel better prepared to work with youth after undertaking this self-decolonizing project. Nonetheless, as explained in Chapter 1, my current material and legal constraints prevent me from committing to short-term or long-term collective projects in the U.S. As a student VISA holder, with no more funding guaranteed, depending on finding a job on campus every four months, I don't know whether I would be able to stay another semester in this country. I do not have the conditions to build a reciprocal relationship with community members and I want to establish a long-term commitment that is based on reciprocity and co-decided rules. For that reason, I need to change my migratory status and conditions to commit to long-term projects or find other ways to work with youth in other countries in which my financial and legal conditions improved. In the meantime, I share suggestions with you, without assuming that my voice and knowledge are more important than youth's, because they are not. As a junior scholar, I may have more opportunities than young bodies to be heard among scholars and maybe journalists and policy makers. But don't confuse academic privilege with relevance, accuracy, and effectiveness. Just because my adult academic voice has more systemic opportunities to be shared in dominant spaces, it doesn't make it more important, wiser, and accurate than youth's voices. Mine is just another voice. Decentering my voice, while acknowledging power imbalances in knowledge legitimacy and distribution between and among young and adult bodies, is an essential step for me. Difficult to achieve, however, insofar I am unable to work with youth right now.

By decentering adult voices and bodies we may realize that, for many young bodies of color, their peer abuse and violence could be a secondary concern, considering the oppressive and repressive practices that they face as primary targets of the war on

youth—i.e., police brutality, mass incarceration (Gender JUST, 2013). Or at least, some youth of color do not embrace the dominant framing of peer violence and abuse, “youth bullying.” For instance, Voices of Youth in Chicago Education’s (VOYCE) report on school safety does not mention the word “bullying” at all (“Voices,” 2011). Another example can be seen in Brave New Voices (BNV), a poetry slam festival where 13-18 years old participants—many of them, youth of color—supported by coaches, create and perform critical short pieces. In the final performances since 2010, few young poets mention “bullying” in their combative pieces.

Decentering adults’ voice, however, may not be enough to prepare adult researchers for a collective reframing on youth bullying. Can adult researchers use the same methodological and epistemological approaches that we have employed in our academic work if we want to change relationships with youth? Can we avoid epistemic privilege and adultism when we use ontological approaches that prioritize certain forms of knowledge production—i.e., academic sources—and delegitimize others—i.e., non-academic voices? Ontologies that prioritize academic expertise and deny the body as a site of knowledge production? Ontologies that privilege textualism above other forms of knowledge production and distribution (i.e., dance, music, etc.)? Would be enough if adult researchers changed their research methods and used participatory action research, would it guarantee avoiding epistemic privilege and adultism? Would it limit academia’s colonizing complicity? Should those adult researchers self-decolonize first, acknowledge their complicity in the war on youth and internal neocolonialism on youth of color first, change themselves first? As an autoethnographer, I can only talk about my own experience, hoping that my process sparks reflection among others. Because sharing my

story, building upon Strobel (1997), aims to inspire others to share theirs and fosters, hopefully, decolonization. In order to transform my inherited epistemic privilege and adultism and other axiological values that permeate my academic labor—such as ignoring the body as site of knowledge production, ignoring healing as a primary goal, assuming that academic expertise is the only legitimized voice—I need to recognize my inherited academic performativity and its colonizing toxicity first. Self-transform, first. I do believe that once I commit to cha(lle)nging my training and ontological standpoint, I have more chances to unbecoming youth's enemy because I will be better prepared to work with them, not against them. Acknowledging that power dynamics may condition our interactions, and that youth's legal constraints may impact our dialogue as well. For instance, working with minors—in Massachusetts, human beings under 18 years old—can be legally problematic, because adult researchers need parental or legal guardian permission. Likewise, in the case of intergenerational power dynamics, youth are often forced by adults—legislators, educators, parents—to participate in certain events, such as anti-bullying initiatives at school, without their consent. I don't want to impose my standpoint on youth, especially in a context where youth's disagreement or critical opinion could potentially be decoded as a violation of the code of student conduct and penalized subsequently. Despite these limitations, it is essential to interpellate youth, ask them to work together with adults like me, negotiating the terms of interactions. Because as an adult researcher, I can contribute, help reframe and change what is not working in the study of youth bullying—if my help is wanted, of course. When it comes to youth peer abuse and youth bullying as framing, there are many things that remain to be addressed.

First, the issue itself, what I label as “youth as peer abuse and violence,” borrowing from Sarah Shulman’s (2016) distinction between conflict, abuse, and violence. There is a growing body of literature advocating for contextualizing the abuse and violence that takes place among young, to better understand why it happens (i.e., Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Walton, 2005a). I would also question in what ways it is useful to separate youth peer abuse and violence from adult peer abuse and violence, as we do in the dominant study of youth bullying. Or labeling expressions of homophobic rhetoric and performances as youth bullying. Why should we separate the performance of inherited scripts on racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, according to the place where they take place, or the age of the individuals involved? What are the consequences of decontextualizing the causes and consequences of youth peer violence and abuse as well as detaching it from adult peer abuse, or even from intergenerational abuse?

The second issue to address is the study of youth bullying. It is essential to further explore in what ways the study of youth bullying in many countries, or what Walton (2005a) calls “bullying as discourse,” has become a colonizing and oppressive agent against youth of color in the U.S. Rawlings (2017) defines bullying discourse as “an assemblage of knowledge and understanding that exists within schools, academia and popular culture, and infers the existence of definitive ‘truths’ about bullying” (p. 17). Furthermore, Rawlings (2017) emphasizes, “The discourse of bullying has particular strength when it is produced at the academic or institutional/school level” (p. 18). As explained in Chapter 2, scholars’ framing of youth bullying permeated other realms of society—legislation, media industries, popular culture—, promoting a moral panic in American society. In this context, American society has supported or ignored the

militarization of schools and the implementation of punitive zero-tolerance practices. As explained in Chapter 2, these zero-tolerance practices have fueled the school-to-prison pipeline that primarily affects youth of color in the U.S., a gruesome practice of internal colonization. Moreover, it is urgent to better understand how this framing has fostered a neoliberal war on youth in general, likewise explained in Chapter 2, facilitating the hard war on youth—the “youth crime-control complex that operates through a logic of punishment, surveillance, and control” (Giroux, 2015)—as well as the soft war on youth, which has allowed corporations and professionals to profit upon youth’s pain. This is an adult-created problem and adults must deal with it and its consequences—working with youth, so we avoid repeating the same mistakes. What can we do to better comprehend this issue, the harmful consequences generated by the study of youth bullying? To what extent the inability to foresee and acknowledge the effects of this problematic framing is due to the colonizing role of academia? To the “academy’s complicity in the exercise and normativization of state terror” against people of color?, borrowing M. Alexander’s (2005) words (p. 2). A colonizing role that may permeate in our training, in our academic performativity, no matter how critical or not we are. Do we need to decolonize academia to deal with the negative consequences of the study of youth bullying and prevent other similar cases in the future? How can we do this? Moreover, what should researchers do to repair the harm that we have caused by feeding repressive and decontextualized anti-bullying laws and policies? How can we stop the moral panic on youth bullying, the militarization of schools, and the decontextualization of a systemic issue—peer abuse and violence—while supporting youth in dealing with the inherited scripts of peer violence and abuse that they reproduce and challenge (in the same way that adults do)? Among

other ideas that I detail in this chapter, I concur that we should stop using the notion of bullying to address the abuse and violence that takes place among youth (i.e., Kalman, 2013; Gender JUST, 2013). To help us understand that the framing and study of youth bullying was a well-intentioned yet problematic attempt to deal with a complex, systemic problem that, however, has become another concerning issue to address.

Chapter 4 becomes, in sum, a space to share conceptual and axiological suggestions to reframe the study of youth bullying as well as peer youth abuse and violence, a central component of the onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying that I propose in this dissertation. These suggestions are built upon critical voices', scholarly and non-scholarly, as well as the outcomes of my self-reflective endeavor. Many of my suggestions are geared towards scholars that are also interested in unbecoming an enemy of youth. I invite you to read my suggestions, disagree and/or agree with them, build upon them, question them. They are suggestions to be discussed in an ongoing conversation in which youth—activists, researchers, artists—should occupy a central role, as explained in several parts of this dissertation, if we aim to generate a decolonizing framing. My task in this chapter, as a worm, is to fertilize the soil, to “engage in the discourse of possibility, where the missing voices and knowledges can be heard and validated” (Wane, 2008, p. 194). As I explain in Chapter 1, I can't, I shouldn't, I won't reframe youth peer abuse and youth bullying by myself. Such endeavor needs other worms, other bodies—younger and older—as reframing agents as well. Abuse and violence are collective problems and thus they need collective and contextualized solutions.

Ideas to Rethink the Study of Youth Bullying

As NGOs and activists (i.e., Gender Just; GLSEN) as well as scholars (i.e., Quinn & Meiners, 2013) denounce, the dominant narrative of youth bullying is problematic.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, it ended up being hurtful and colonizing for youth of color, despite good intentions of those who created and disseminated such narrative. You may disagree. You may be convinced that both issues—the framing of youth bullying and its impact on fostering the school-to-prison pipeline—are not related. Given what is at stake in this situation—freedom and well-being of youth of color in the U.S.—, I invite you to question your assumptions on youth bullying, to rethink them, to co-reframe this issue. I urge those involved in reproducing the dominant narrative of youth bullying to reflect upon several issues, from a standpoint of love and care. On the one hand, we should explore our role and responsibility in promoting and sustaining a moral panic on youth bullying since the early 2000s in the U.S., which ended up generating severe consequences, as explained in Chapter 2. Among others, the implementation of a law-and-order regime in schools, with its militarization, punitive zero-tolerance policies, and constant surveillance. A law-and-order regime that has targeted young bodies of color disproportionately, fostering the infamous school-to-prison pipeline. On the other hand, we should reflect on what we can do to neutralize the framing scholars fostered as well as repair the harm caused. Likewise, as explained in Chapter 2, we need to reflect upon the epistemic privilege and adultism in the study of youth bullying that has treated youth, in many cases, as agentless, for decades. For how long can many scholars continue ignoring these links, ignoring how many of us write about youth without youth, ignoring the

¹⁰⁵ GLSEN denounces that “some policies intended to reduce bullying have had the adverse effect of pushing students into the school-to-prison pipeline” (“Dropout,” n.d.).

negative impact of our academic work? How can we change these practices? I would like to share several suggestions.

First, we must embrace (more) contextualization, as Walton and other scholars have requested for years. The behavioral literature of youth bullying should not be isolated from the literature on school violence, mass shootings, and the neoliberal war on youth. Or neoliberalism.¹⁰⁶ Once you connect those bodies of literature—which often don’t cite each other—, paying attention to the genealogies of these issues in the U.S. within the context of neoliberalism and the law-and-order regime (Hall), it is easier to understand in what ways the moral panic on youth bullying has been used to oppress, commodify, incarcerate, and exploit youth of color and non-normative youth in the U.S. As explained in Chapter 2, the confluence of moral panics—on youth of color, on school mass shootings, especially after the Columbine High School shootings, on terrorism—and institutional repressive responses—war on terror, war on youth—at the beginning of the 2000s, paved the way to the emergence of a new moral panic in the U.S., youth bullying. In that sense, the framing of youth bullying arose amid the intersection of moral panics unfolding in a neoliberal context in the U.S. Youth were framed both as powerless victims who needed adult protection and dangerous monsters that needed to be contained by adults (Kellner, 2008). The dominant framing of youth bullying in the U.S. resembles how humanitarian narratives have been used as excuses to invade, neocolonize, and exploit Global South countries. Based upon the premise of “humanitarian morality” (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010, p. 12), corporations and governments have benefited from

¹⁰⁶ Rawlings (2017) argues “that 'bullying' is often a simplistic representation of complex and multifaceted interactions within schooling environments--interactions that reference hierarchical structures of being and produce inequalities based upon collective social and institutional understandings” (p. 14).

framing other countries as agentless victims of wars and catastrophes, intervening them (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010; Million, 2013), and implementing extractive external colonizing practices. Drawing from this idea, I posit that the narratives of youth bullying have been used to promote internal colonizing practices against youth of color in the U.S. I posit that in the name of a sort of domestic humanitarianism, corporations have benefited from framing youth as powerless victims of bullying and intervening their lives and their quotidian spaces—schools—with the support of state and federal legislation. Particularly, the prison industrial-military complex has been one of the central beneficiaries of this process, as explained in Chapter 2.¹⁰⁷ On the one hand, by providing a myriad of surveillance, control services, and products in U.S. schools such as surveillance cameras, gun detectors, or security officers while basic educative and mental health services were reduced (Giroux, 2004; “Voices,” 2011). On the other hand, by profiting upon those young bodies funneled through the school-to-prison pipeline (mostly youth of color), and by making money from youth’s incarcerated labor and consumption (i.e., phone calls, etc.). As Heitzeg (2009) denounces, “the so-called prison– industrial complex is now a source of corporate profit, governmental agency funding, cheap neo-slave labor, and employment for economically depressed regions” (p. 7). A growing industry that we need to contextualize within a neoliberal and imperialist framework and its “permanent war economy, whose internal elements devolve on the militarization of the police and the resultant criminalization of immigrants, people of color, and working-class communities through the massive expansion of a punishment economy at whose center is the prison

¹⁰⁷ The militarization of schools and the incarceration of youth of color have been framed to protect youth from itself—and society from youth—, while it benefits the prison industrial military complex (Kellner, 2008).

industrial complex” (M. Alexander, 2005, p. 234). Alike moral humanitarian intervention that ignores intervened states’ sovereignty (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010), youth sovereignty and agency has been largely ignored in the dominant framing of youth bullying in the U.S. As researchers on youth bullying, we simply cannot pretend that this situation is not happening.

In that sense, my second main suggestion to foster change among researchers of youth bullying is promoting more self-reflexivity. I find problematic that several generations of scholars studying youth bullying, who reproduce dominant narratives, hardly or never cite other critical approaches to this topic. Nor even to criticize them. Consequently, as explained in Chapter 2, certain premises on youth bullying remain accepted as Gramscian common sense and new researchers, from multiple disciplines, keep building their work upon those normative premises, without questioning them. As Rawlings (2017) points out, “Aspects that have been widely accepted as traditional or 'essentialist' understandings of bullying have been deconstructed, criticised and rejected by more sociological research approaches, yet they remain dominant in a research that is experiencing growth in interest and investment” (p. 18). Thus, I believe that the study of youth bullying in the U.S., as a result, has become an example of groupthink, “the mode of thinking that group members engage in when they are dominated by the concurrence-seeking tendency” (Janis, 1973, pp. 20-21), ignoring voices that ultimately challenged the unchallenged, such as Walton did in 2005. Walton began questioning the framing of youth bullying as a graduate student in the mid-2000s, what he called “bullying as discourse.” A novice researcher on youth bullying would hardly reach to Walton’s work, or other critical voices like his, by reading the sources cited by the canonic names in the

study of youth bullying (i.e., Olweus, Salmivalli, Espelage, Swearer). In my case, it took me years of research on this topic until I found the “dissident” voices, such as Walton’s. I can’t recall when or how it happened, but I do remember feeling deeply surprised and uneasy. How could I miss them? What kind of poor researcher was I? Why did it take me so long to find these critical voices? Once I read these critical scholars as well as young anti-school-to-prison pipeline activists, once I faced the failures and damages that the framing of youth bullying was causing, I realized that scholars, including me, had to change. Yet how can you change when your ontological and epistemological environment is homogenous, when you don’t need to listen to other discordant voices, read their papers, attend their panels in conferences? How can you challenge yourself when being self-reflective is not an ontological requirement for you? I wish I had the answers to these questions, but I don’t have them. I do believe, like Córdova (1998), that, as scholars, “our purpose here, is for the humanization of the University and making the University accountable to the community” (p. 42). I hope that more researchers and youth activists, whether they reproduce the dominant framing of youth bullying or challenge it, foster self-reflexivity and dialogue among them. They don’t need to agree but be aware of each other’s existence and standpoint. I hope more people listen to youth’s stories and realize how many young lives have been negatively affected by the study of youth bullying. I hope more people ponder what the price for some young bodies is when adults try to extinguish a fire, youth bullying, by feeding another one, school-to-prison pipeline. We should scrutinize academia, analyze inherited scripts, reflect upon our colonizing academic performativity that allows us to produce endless amounts of knowledge without forcing us to be socially responsible—IRBs effectiveness in this sense remains

questioned (i.e., Christians, 2011). To produce knowledge ignoring the agency of the peoples we “study,” ignoring our epistemic privilege and adultism when it comes to study youth’s lives. In my case, I faced my inherited adultism and epistemic privilege thanks to the encounter with youth of color and queer youth’s performances and activism posted online—particularly videos on restorative justice projects and strategies to deal with peer abuse and violence. These young bodies pushed me to identify and face my inherited academic colonizing practices, to face my incoherence; certainly, they have played a pivotal role in my self-decolonizing process. Yet I found these youth’s voices as an accident, not as a central strategy. I could have perfectly continued my professional path ignoring their existence. Who is holding me accountable for recognizing youth’s agency and strategies in my work? Not academia precisely. Not my discipline. It is neither the community’s nor youth’s task. It is my responsibility to hold myself accountable. To be in a permanent state of critical self-reflexivity.

Contextualizing and self-reflexivity, therefore, are essential suggestions for researchers interested in co-participating in a reframing of youth bullying. Yet, that alone would not be enough to change our colonizing labor, our adultism and epistemic privilege. Neither it would be to counter the moral panic on youth bullying or change the Gramscian common sense on youth bullying easily, when it has permeated legislation and popular culture so deeply, for decades. It is a complex process. As Mazzarella (2006) argues, “negative media representations of youth enable adults and adult institutions to blame youth for a variety of problems created by those very same adults and adult institutions” (p. 238). If they are not already doing it, adults will need to be proactive and work with young activists to find ways to re-write dominant narratives about youth peer

abuse and violence. Help contextualize it better—complex issues shouldn’t be addressed from a decontextualized moral panic framing. Join other scholars, such as Rawlings (2017), “interested in undermining 'taken for granted' or 'common sense' truths that operate to affirm normative values in schools like 'girls' and 'boys', or 'bully' and 'victim'” (p. 11). I do believe, however, that we need to change ourselves first, being aware of our complicity in a problematic framing, and inviting others to change as well (including journalists and law makers). Promoting self-reflexivity, from a standpoint of love and care, and being more critical about the framing of youth bullying. Committing to decolonize academia (Diversi & Moreira, 2009) and redressing its contribution to external and internal colonialism (Córdova, 1998). We should not repeat the same mistakes we have made in the study and framing of youth bullying again.

In addition to countering the framing of youth bullying, researchers should embrace “the wish to repair and heal” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 143) to further decolonize academia. We need to repair the harm that scholars have caused by fostering a moral panic on youth bullying—again, doing it from a standpoint of love and care. First, researchers need to acknowledge our complicity in fostering internal neocolonialism and the war on youth. As Kupchik & Catlaw (2014) suggest, we should support “welfare-oriented responses” (i.e., counseling instead of repressing) and democratic practices where youth’s agency is acknowledged and respected. Furthermore, we should join those voices who demand the demilitarization of schools—limiting the presence of police in schools, questioning the usefulness of constant surveillance and mandatory reporting (i.e., Meyer, 2016). We should support youth working against school-to-prison pipeline and youth organizations in schools and communities. Nevertheless, we should not speak in

the name of youth without youth. Coopt their voice. As Michael, a young activist of color points out, youth cannot be excluded from task forces addressing school-to-prison pipeline. Because, as he argues, “it affects us (youth) the most” (“Youth Voice,” n.d.). Yet, youth are excluded in many cases. In the context of the Michigan Leadership Summit on School-Justice Partnerships held in September 2013, in Ann Arbor, Michigan (“Youth Voice,” n.d.), Michael, along with other young Executive Board members of Youth Voice,¹⁰⁸ a grass-roots organization for young people in Michigan, addressed a group of school administrators, principals, judges, lawyers, police officers, and teachers who participated in the event. In the recorded presentation, Michael, after inviting the audience to stand up based on their profession, asked them: “And, this is the most important thing, if you are a youth, may please stand up” (“Youth Voice,” n.d.). Michael looked around and posed an ironic and perplexed expression. The audience giggled because not a single young individual stood up. “Where is the youth in the audience?”, Michael wondered rhetorically, adding so powerfully, “That’s the issue, people, especially when we are addressing the school-to-prison pipeline. Because it affects us the most. Let’s get youth in the county [School-to-Prison- Pipeline Taskforce] Let’s do it together.” He concluded by clapping to his own words, sparking the audience to clap as well (“Youth Voice,” n.d.).

By listening and working with youth, especially youth of color and queer youth, adults may realize that youth’s problems and adult perception of youth’s problems may differ significantly. For youth of color, queer youth, or undocumented youth, for

¹⁰⁸ YOUTH VOICE was a project of the Harriet Tubman Center. In 2014, these young activists created a new project, Youth Voice Adult Allies (YVAA), “an organization for young people fighting for educational justice and supported by adult allies” (“Youth Voice Members,” n.d.). It is unclear whether this organization remains operative.

example, peer abuse may not be a primary concern when they suffer police brutality, mass incarceration, deportation, systemic transphobia and homophobia, and lack of basic services (quality education, healthcare, and so forth). Gender JUST (2013) activists express it clearly:

Although youth violence is a very serious issue, the real bullies we face in our schools take the form of systemic violence perpetrated by the school system itself: sex education that either ignores, insults, or criminalizes queer and trans*sex (or punishes youth for even advocating for queer and trans*sex ed in the first place), alongside a curriculum that denies our history, with the country's most militarized school district, a process of privatization that displaces us, increasing class sizes, and the shutting down of schools. All of this undermines both our education and our safety. The national calls to end the violence against queer and trans*youth completely ignore the violent nature of our educational experience. (p. 47)

In this sense, adult researchers need to ask who has set their agendas on youth's life and who should set them in the future. As Mignolo (2009) points out, "The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges (Mignolo, 1999, 2005 [1995])?" (p. 2). Because, maybe unawarely, we may be fostering a well-intended and yet colonizing agenda against youth.

Another difficult question to posit is what to do with the myriad of antibullying campaigns that exist nowadays, what to do with anti-bullying legislation and procedures. From a decolonizing standpoint, we should examine them carefully. How much sense does to promote anti-bullying campaigns and measures in spaces where young bodies suffer all type of structural inequality, discrimination, violence, and abuse? How can we demand empathy to the same bodies that are treated without empathy by the system? Treated as disposable; constantly surveilled; punished harshly for minor offenses; exploited in low-wage jobs and working for free in prisons; prevented from having basic education, health, or food; segregated in schools and neighborhoods; sexually abused; or

killed by police officers.¹⁰⁹ As Gender JUST (2013) points out, “It is critical to remember that we face violence as youth, as people of color, as people living in poverty, as people with disabilities, as queers, as trans*, and gender nonconforming people. We can’t separate our identities, and any approach to preventing violence must take our multiple realities into consideration” (pp. 46-47). Even more privileged youth are subject to neoliberal ideological premises based on disposability and brutal competitiveness, and they are commodified by a myriad of industries since their childhood (Giroux, 2004). In sum, can we celebrate the outcomes of anti-bullying programs when the narratives behind them feed a decontextualized moral panic on youth that foster neocolonial and neoliberal practices against youth—particularly youth of color? Programs that in many cases may ignore the systemic violence and abuse that underprivileged youth face? Is it possible to keep using these campaigns, programs, legislation, and measures tactically? I don’t think we can generalize. We should analyze each item individually, because I am sure that there must be anti-bullying projects that incorporate a critical, decolonizing approach. That said, when I researched major anti-bullying programs developed in the U.S., I did not see the application of decolonizing approaches in their description (i.e., Olweus Bullying Prevention Program). As a suggestion, anti-bullying programs and campaigns could be used to counter the dominant framing of bullying, if they are not doing it already: to advocate for the demilitarization of schools and the end of the school-to-prison pipeline, redirecting those funds to support public education; to help students rewrite and perform inherited scripts on gender, heteronormativity; to advocate against police brutality and migratory repression; to advocate for universal healthcare, healthy

¹⁰⁹ According to EdBuild (2019), “there remains a \$23 billion gap between white and nonwhite school districts, even though they serve the same number of children” (p. 2).

food, and better and affordable education to all children and youth. In terms of legislation and measures, it would be necessary to discuss reframing anti-bullying legislation as well, because public schools must comply with anti-bullying policy in order to receive federal funding (Kalman, 2013). Sadly, bullying prevention has become a lucrative business and we need to face it. Walton (2011b) posits that “[c]orporate interests are involved in keeping the public concerned and worried about bullies in schools so that anti-bullying products will fly off the shelves” (p. 218). We need to face our participation in this business as scholars as well. Because not only the military-prison industry complex benefits from youth’s pain. The brutal competition among anti-bullying programs—backed by scholars—to prove which one is more effective, and thus marketable, results questionable.¹¹⁰ It is the embodiment of good intentions that evolved into something else, like the study of youth bullying overall.

In sum, these are ideas that could be discussed, among others, by those involved in undertaking a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying while we figure out how to collectively reframe youth peer abuse and violence. Or should we just say peer abuse and violence?

Co-Reframing Youth Peer Abuse and Violence

In addition to dealing with the consequences of a problematic framing, youth bullying, we still need to address the original concern, the peer abuse and violence that youth reproduce and challenge. Thus, in this chapter, I share suggestions to be used in a co-reframing of youth peer abuse and violence; a process that—if we want to avoid

¹¹⁰ As KiVa, a popular anti-bullying program, states on their official website, “There are numerous antibullying programs *on the market* [my emphasis] but unfortunately, only few of them have been tested in rigorous scientific studies” (“Welcome,” n.d.).

previous mistakes—should include youth and adults in dialogue, producing knowledge together.

My first suggestion is rhetorical, building upon activists and researchers such as Gender JUST (2013), Porter (2012), or Rawlings (2017). We should stop using the term “youth bullying” when we want to examine youth peer abuse and violence (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2014; Gender JUST, 2013). For multiple reasons. First, because “bullying” has become a polysemic utterance that represents all sorts of negative interactions (Porter, 2013). Rawlings (2017) asks whether it is “possible for us to transcend a concept embedded with so much meaning” (p. 20). I don’t think so, because the word “bullying” has become a concerning floating signifier, a signifier that is “in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning” (Lévi-Strauss, 1987, p. 64). In a study on the representation of youth bullying on YouTube (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2014), I found that YouTubers labeled all sorts of abusive or violent interactions as bullying: “a teenager who throws a piece of paper to a classmate, a man who sexually harasses a female passenger, a group of people brutally beating up an individual” (p. 153). Even worse, situations that could be interpreted as conflict, such as a group of girls not inviting a classmate to have lunch with them, have been labeled as bullying as well (Porter, 2012). As long as a student claims to be victim of bullying, schools have to frame it that way, unfolding strict protocols (Porter, 2012). Encompassing all sorts of interactions as “bullying” has been a gruesome mistake. Excluding somebody from a group is not the same as insulting them. Disagreeing upon an idea is not the same as punching somebody in the face. Teasing a peer is not the same as flushing someone’s head in the toilet. By labeling these interactions as forms of bullying, and forcing

institutions to register them as bullying, adults have generated several problems. Adults have criminalized youth for interactions that are not abusive or violent (Steeves & Marx, 2014), what Schulman calls “normative conflict” (p. 21); adults have applied zero-tolerance policies to extremes that are incomprehensible, such as punishing students for carrying cough drops, which has promoted a culture of fear among students (Hillyard & McDermott, 2014); adults have criminalized women, queer youth, and youth of color who were defending themselves, resisting from sexual abuse as well as from homophobic and transphobic violence (Rawlings, 2017); adults have pathologized and created essentialist binary identities, bully and victim, negatively affecting “individuals' subjectivities” (Rawlings, 2017, p. 23); and adults have hindered the promotion of more effective strategies, because as Schulman (2016) explains, conflict, abuse, and violence are different forms of interactions that require different interventions. Conflict, in fact, is not negative, is part of everyday life, “is rooted in difference and people are and will be different” (Schulman, 2016, p. 20). That is why it is essential to distinguish meanings and avoid the conflation of abuse, violence, and conflict, something that the utterance “bullying” has proven unable to do. Schulman warns on the danger of mixing the notions of conflict, abuse, and violence in our society. As she points out, “The word 'violence' has expanded far beyond the field of physical assault to also mean emotional abuse and, unfortunately, emotional conflict where there is no abuse” (p. 92). As Schulman (2016) underscores, we must distinguish conflict from abuse, and abuse from violence. For Schulman, violence limits to physical aggressions. Following that premise, abuse would address mistreatment that is not physical. I appreciate this distinction, and yet it needs further work. Another problem is agreeing on what behavior or interaction constitutes

conflict, abuse, or violence—and why similar interactions are read differently. For instance, the medical justification of disruptive behavior as a disorder—i.e., ADHD—operates unequally based on class, race, and insurance coverage (Heitzeg, 2014). As research suggests, “teachers are most likely to expect and define ADHD as an issue for white boys” (Heitzeg, 2014, p. 24). In a racist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, ableist, and sexist culture, when do we consider a given behavior or performance conflictive, abusive, or violent? Who decides it? Based on what criteria?

The ideological and subjective dimension of these concepts is one of the central reasons why we need to contextualize how and when abuse and violence take place and what factors influence their framing. Unfortunately, “bullying” has become a term highly decontextualized—referring to individual behavior disconnected from systemic dynamics (i.e., Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Walton, 2005a). As Gender JUST (2013) activists suggest,

we call upon students, educators, and activists to reject watered-down, generic language like “bullying” that does nothing to name the power structures and systems of oppression at play. Instead, we call upon everyone to think about and through the issue of violence at large, and to link that violence to economic forces that are currently crushing the public school system—the violence of capitalism itself. (p. 48)

I concur with Gender JUST activists that the focus should be twofold: addressing how power dynamics and ideological scripts permeate everyday performances; and how we cannot address youth peer abuse and violence outside of a larger framework, “the violence of capitalism itself.” Overall, we need to understand that peer abuse and violence happen not only among youth, but among human beings of all ages. It is dangerous to separate those practices by age groups because we end up framing children’s quotidian performances of abuse and violence as anomalies when they are not.

Youth, like adults, reproduce—and challenge—scripts they are expected to reproduce. As the young poets of *Brave New Voice* indicate, “if you don’t conform, if you don’t shift, you’ll be penalized” (Youth Speaks, 2013a).¹¹¹ In different ways and extents, we all reproduce different forms of abuse to survive in a neoliberal, patriarchal, racist, homophobic, classist, ableist, transphobic society. For more than 15 years, critical voices have questioned the inaccuracy of addressing youth peer abuse and violence as deviant behavior (i.e., Walton, Ringrose, Rawlings, Pascoe)—although using the narrative of youth bullying. Rawlings (2017) argues that, “[a]s many psychologically based studies have conceptualised discriminatory performances as pertaining to 'bullying', they have contributed to simplistic pathological understandings including typified roles and performances” (p. 14). These critical voices point out that youth don’t abuse and harm their peers because they randomly choose so, but because abuse and violence are normative scripts in our neoliberal society, not individual and isolated decisions. Youth reproduce hegemonic neoliberal values—disposability, fierce competitiveness, individualism, aggressive masculinity, or cruelty—in school or through social media. For Pascoe (2013), “Thinking of these aggressive interactions as the reproduction of inequality frames them as normative rather than pathological behaviors” (p. 95). Rawlings’ (2017) conclusion is clear: “Bullying can no longer be understood as a deviant, inexplicable or deplorable individual act. Instead, we need to recognize the particular social, cultural and institutional factors that encourage the persecution of others” (pp. 4-5). According to Horton (2011), framing the bully as deviant was not the initial approach in the study of youth bullying in the 1970s. Peter Paul Heinemann, a Swedish physician,

¹¹¹ In this piece, New York City Team Round #1 (Youth Speaks, 2013a), three youth of color flesh out the multiple forms of peer discrimination they endure in their quotidian life.

“argued that bullies are not deviant children per se, but rather ordinary children who partake in bullying in particular group situations” (p. 268). Heinemann was more interested in the context of the interaction. Even though Dan Olweus theorized bullying upon Heinemann’s work, “Olweus shifted the focus and placed more emphasis on the behavioural characteristics of those involved (Roland, 1993)” (Horton, 2011, p. 268). And Olweus’ approach became the dominant influence in the study of youth bullying. Forty years later, why should we keep using decontextualized, demonized notions such as “the bully,” as if bullies were monstrous deviants? Even the main anti-bullying federal resource in the U.S., the campaign Stopbullying.gov, encourages experts and parents to avoid labeling children as bullies or victims (“Roles”, n.d.), and yet, that label is still used (Porter, 2013). If we want to co-reframe youth and abuse, escaping the harm caused by the dominant framing of youth bullying, it is essential to avoid decontextualized analysis and simplistic dichotomies such as the binary bully versus victim. Context must be a central focus, because it would provide more tools to understand and prevent abuse and violence, especially at the conflict stage.

By learning how to navigate conflict in context, by learning how to be more assertive, by studying systemic oppression and privilege, we have more opportunities to prevent the escalation from conflict to abuse or violence as well as negotiate and clarify meanings (Schulman, 2016). As Schulman (2016) argues, “it is at the Conflict stage that the hideous future is still not inevitable and can be resolved. Once the cruelty and perhaps violence erupts, it is too late. Or at least it requires a lever of repair outside of the range of what many of us will do without encouragement and support” (p. 20). We need to focus our efforts on developing more strategies to navigate conflict, the conflict we

experience and witness (Shulman, 2016). Developing collective strategies that must incorporate those who face conflict, as Schulman suggests. Thus, youth must co-decide those collective strategies to navigate conflict.

What should those strategies entail? Fostering empathy, as several anti-bullying initiatives do, is relevant, yet insufficient. It is like teaching ancient Roman youth that they need to be mutually caring and empathic when they see all kind of atrocities in the Roman circus. When they see that certain bodies are disposable, and cruelty is a collective pastime. Given the necropolitics ¹¹² prevalent within American society (Evans-Winters, 2017), in which migrant children are caged like dogs at the South border (Associated Press, 2018), in which “White-on-Black violence is intentional, sanctioned, and normalized by policy, institutions (e.g., media, education, religion, judiciary), and the popular imagination” (Evans-Winters, 2017), it may be urgent to develop other skills and strategies in addition to empathy. According to Nocella (2014), “we must start developing skills and alternative systems. Skills can include the ability to communicate, actively listen, build groups and teams of mutual support and understanding, forgive ourselves and others, and develop methods for positively transforming those who have hurt others” (p. 212). To facilitate that alternative system, we need to enhance critical thinking skills, understand and challenge neoliberal values and scripts, visibilize and redress colonizing practices, promote the creation of alternative scripts (in terms of performing gender identity and gender relations, for instance), and foster communication

¹¹² Necropolitics, according to Mbembe (2003), are “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (p. 39).

skills to facilitate assertiveness and negotiation.¹¹³ In their study of children's interactions, Camodeca and Goossens (2005) noticed that children "involved in bullying most frequently choose mediation and assertive skills as an intervention strategy to stop bullying" yet it seems that "they do not have the knowledge to act that way" (as cited in Battey & Ebbeck, 2013, p. 204). Enhancing these skills can be quite difficult to achieve in the reign of standardized testing and increasingly defunded public education, where banking education becomes the model to be implemented, where "testing and punishing have become the two most influential forces that now shape American public education" (Giroux, 2013, p. 459). Countering the neoliberalization of education is, therefore, a priority if we want to receive an education that prepares us to navigate conflict and prevent abuse and violence.

What to do when peer conflict has evolved into abuse or violence? How do we navigate existing peer abuse and violence that is taking place in our society? Again, we need to listen to youth. For youth activists such as the members of Gender JUST (2013), or transformative justice groups such as Pa'lante ("About," 2019),¹¹⁴ punishment is not the solution. We need to foster existing alternative approaches to punishment, based upon reparation and healing. As Schulman (2016) points out, "Any pain that human beings can create, human beings can transcend. But we have to understand what we are doing" (p. 25). I see a clear example of this willingness to transcend pain in the autoethnographic stories featured in "*Bullied*" (Berry, 2016). These stories were written by youth who dealt

¹¹³ Infante and Rancer (1982) define assertiveness as the "individuals' tendencies to defend their positions on controversial issues and verbally refute the other person's position on that issue (as cited in Mansson, Myers, & Martin, 2012, p. 239).

¹¹⁴ Pa'lante is "a youth-led transformative justice program at Holyoke High School", Massachusetts ("About," 2019).

with peer abuse and violence in school—suffering it, causing it, or both. Interestingly, almost all participants in Berry’s (2016) book conclude their stories with “some sort of affirming or positive resolution” (p. 145). In these stories, I don’t see youth demanding punishment to those who inflicted pain. Or more surveillance. Gender JUST (2013) activists “call for a transformative and restorative response that seeks solutions to the underlying issues to repair harm done by both structural and interpersonal violence, that takes into account the circumstances surrounding violence, and we work to change the very culture of our schools and communities” (Gender JUST, 2013, p. 47). Restorative justice is “an alternative to punitive models in justice and education” (Wachtel, 2003, p. 83), a philosophy (Wachtel, 2003), and social movement (Fronius et al., 2016) adopted from Indigenous justice practices (Smith, 2012) that advocates for a non-punitive, community-based response to conflict, abuse, and violence. Transformative justice, created by Ruth Morris, provides a holistic understanding of conflict and discrimination, pointing to systemic factors that influence them, as well as questions dichotomist approaches—victim versus oppressor (Nocella, 2014). As Nocella (2014) argues, “transformative justice asks that *everyone* and *everything* change—we as individuals, as well as our systems, structures, and relationships” (p. 216). It differs from restorative justice models because it aims to go beyond the instance of conflict, abuse, or violence: it “seeks to challenge all aspects of authoritarianism, domination, oppression and control within society” (Nocella, 2014, p. 217). Nocella (2014) emphasizes how transformative justice encourages and facilitates change using creative approaches to conflict, violence, and abuse. In many restorative and transformative justice programs, youth occupy a central role, as Pa’lante, “a youth-led transformative justice program at Holyoke High

School”, Massachusetts, demonstrates (“Pa’lante,” 2019). Pa’lante is committed “to build youth power, center student voice, and organize for school discipline and educational policies and practices that actively dismantle the school to prison pipeline in Holyoke and beyond” (“About,” 2019). As part of one of Pa’lante week of actions to stop peer violence at school, two Holyoke High School students, Roshay and Ajnassudah, made a hip hop song and music video, “Stop Violence” (Roshay, 2017) inviting their peers to stop peer violence (Melendez & Courchesne, 2017). As Roshay (2017) rhymes, “I took a second to realize/what makes the difference if/he's knocked to the floor?/Beatin' out your insecurities is not a reward/I wonder what would've happened/if we had talked it before.” In two years, “Stop Violence” has reached more than 2.7 million views on Facebook. Roshay and Ajnassudah also invite youth to join restorative justice projects in a note at the end of his music video: “Follow Restorative Justice on facebook @Palante RJ!, learn more about what they do! Play your part in local communities!”

Performance, in fact, becomes an extraordinary tool to embody, advocate for healing and reparation, resist oppression and colonization (Nocella, 2014). To reflect upon dominant cultural and identitarian scripts as well as offer and embody alternative scripts. In the U.S., youth of color and queer youth speak up, educate, advocate, stimulate, and move their audience as well as foster social change through their performances (i.e., music, theater, slam poetry, dance). They teach others the pedagogical and transformative power of performance. Performers’ transformative power. I think of Anzaldúa (2015) when she unfolds how she uses “writing and reading, and border arte [...] to intervene in, make change, and thus heal colonialism’s wounds” (p. 44), how central creativity is in imagining and creating and transforming and healing. We, adults

and youth, need to keep exploring the role of youth performance as a source of knowledge production and pedagogical tool as well as a source of managing conflict. And, as adult researchers, learn from youth's work.

Within the study of youth bullying, there is a significant research dearth on youth bullying and the role of youth-led performance. Wernick et al. (2013) posit that “no research has examined the use of youth-led performance and dialogue in cultivating anti-bullying behaviors among students” (p. 1576). Wernick and colleagues’ (2013) pioneer research assessed youth-led anti-bullying performances that the members of Gayrilla theater group performed in Chicago schools during 2011 and 2012. Gayrilla theater is a project of Riot Youth, “a youth-run, safe space [for] lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and agender/asexual (LGBTQQIA) youth and their allies” located in Ann Arbor, Michigan (“Riot,” n.d.). They were recipients of a Mukti Fund grant in 2010 to develop and perform their youth-led participatory action research anti-bullying project (“Riot Youth,” 2010).

Despite occupying a secondary role in the study of youth bullying, a myriad of youth-led performances that address peer abuse and violence is shared on social media: Rap, poetry, or short films. Often, these performances are the outcomes of academic assignments or after-school activities.¹¹⁵ In fact, multiple performances, coordinated and directed by adults, take place in schools and local organizations across the country to implement anti-bullying campaigns and programs—such as the Hudson River Playback

¹¹⁵ In my master's thesis, I examined ten videos posted on YouTube that featured youth bullying. Three of them were created by teenagers. One of the videos, “Hey” - Short Film on Bullying (Lugo, 2013), is the author's MYP Personal Project—a requirement for tenth grade students (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2014).

Theatre's program "No More Bullying!"¹¹⁶ Cowie and Jennifer (2008) encourages researchers and educators to use narrative—"symbolic play, narratives of everyday life, children's fiction, role play and drama, and virtual reality narratives" (p. 105)—in order to better understand the phenomenon of bullying, raise awareness about it, and support children who have suffered the consequences of bullying. Performance has been long-used in schools to deal with peer conflict. In the 1980s, Jamie Walker, who studied the application of "human rights education in schools throughout Europe," observed how children's theatre in Rome "actively involved its audience so that the children could examine their fears and conflict- and ways of resolving them" (as cited in O'Moore, 1988, p. 29).

Good intentions, as we have seen in this dissertation, do not suffice. When working with adults, it becomes essential to examine the context in which youth produce and distribute their performances as well as possible limitations (i.e., the constraints that youth poets may face working with adults in *Brave New Voices*). As Gregory (2013) stresses, many teachers who use performance as a pedagogical tool (i.e. poetry) refuse to abandon their authoritarian role in the classroom, which may hinder youth's creativity and critical stance. For instance, a middle school teacher in the Comal Independent School District (Texas) asked her students to write and perform their experiences on bullying. Interestingly, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, a federal project founded in 1999 to support school districts in the prevention and intervention of

¹¹⁶ Jo Salas launched this program in 1999 ("No More," n.d.). A group of trained actors perform children's stories on bullying experiences, using playback theatre, an interactive practice that "forges connections, promotes dialogue, and provides a forum for often-unheard voices" (Salas, 2005, p. 78).

bullying,¹¹⁷ uses this experience as an example of youth involvement in bullying prevention. SS/HS Initiative indicates that “the play is based on the themes of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program [OBPP], which the SS/HS Initiative is implementing in the district” (Storey et al., 2012, p. 12). As SS/HS Initiative’s report unfolds, “The play begins with a video that shows examples of students being bullied in real life and includes stories of celebrities, such as Tom Cruise and Eva Longoria, who were bullied growing up” (p. 12). This entity, however, does not question the constraints that youth encounter in school-based contexts. Incorporating OBPP in the play, was it a students’ decision? Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative acknowledges that “youth involvement” is “important” to prevent bullying (p. 11). Does the notion of “involvement” recognize youth’s agency? Or could it become a way to coopt it and constraint it? A way to use youth’s skills (i.e., digital literacy), motivation, and bodies to unfold adult’s agendas? Fostering youth’s participation, in sum, does not equate acknowledging youth’s transformative agency and will.

In addition to power constraints, intersectional concerns in youth performances are fundamental. Jocson (2011) highlights that “[y]outh poetry encourages conversations that make explicit the asymmetrical relations of power based on various markers of difference, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and language” (p. 155). Performance offers the possibility of addressing “micropolitics to converge” (Jocson, 2011, p. 155) yet without guarantees. As Wernick et

¹¹⁷ According to Storey et al. (2012), “Launched in 1999 after a series of school shootings, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative is instrumental in providing school districts across the country with the support, resources, and opportunities they need to successfully address bullying in their schools and communities. It is the first program jointly designed and supported by three federal agencies: the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services. Providing support to school-community collaborations, SS/HS has reached millions of students and thousands of schools in 365 communities across 49 states” (p. 2).

al. (2013) point out, Gayrilla theater group's performance was white-centered, both in terms of experiences shared as well as bodies performing and conducting dialogues, which might have negatively affected young people of color's engagement with the play and dialogue. Likewise, hip hop maintains a difficult relationship with misogyny, sexism, and homophobia. As a group of hip hop activists point out, "Women love Hip Hop as much as men, but they don't always feel Hip Hop loves them back" ("Let the Woman," 2015).¹¹⁸

Despite constraints and contradictions, performance plays a vital role in youth's lives. For instance, poetry "provides a penetrating insight into how young people view the world, the issues that affect them and the identities they construct" (Gregory, 2013, p. 127). Moreover, performance not only embodies and visibilizes youth's agency, it enables it, especially for youth of color and queer youth, who experience more systemic oppression and exclusion (Gregory, 2013). Performance likewise allows space for youth to co-participate with adults—while their transformative agency is acknowledged—, as seen in youth participatory action research projects (i.e., Evans-Winters and Girls for Gender Equity, 2017; Harman & Varga-Dobai, 2012; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2016).

¹¹⁹ Performance is also a relevant pedagogical tool for critical pedagogues (i.e., Dimitriadis, 2009). According to Tintiangco-Cubales et al.'s (2016), "When performance

¹¹⁸ Shaun King underscores that "hip-hop is a mirror to the truth of who and what America is, the ugly truth, from violence, to materialism, to misogyny, to social justice" (Robertson, 2016).

¹¹⁹ In Evans-Winters and Girls for Gender Equity's project (2017), "Through research as performance and art, the youth researchers (a) expose that their body is scripted upon by society (i.e., racialized gender narratives of dangerous), then (b) unscript their bodies (i.e., empowerment through the telling of their stories in the research process), and simultaneously (c) rewrite the scripts of their lives (i.e., research presentations as texts and performance). In Black vernacular, the girl researchers 'flipped the script' on dangerous bodies" (p. 421). Tintiangco-Cubales et al.'s (2016) explain that critical performance pedagogy "help[s] students uncover what is happening in their 'hoods,' but also to use performance to imagine and create the type of 'hoods' they need to thrive" (p. 1311).

is used as a pedagogical tool to foster student engagement and relationships, performance can become an important tool in developing community, dialogue, understanding, and solidarity” (p. 1312). Performance is a pedagogical tool for youth, inside or outside of the classroom. Youth’s performances are pedagogical per default and they are part of youth’s everyday life. Youth use performance to address, redress, and promote alternatives to manage their peer conflict, violence, and abuse, even though the dominant study of youth bullying fails to acknowledge it and value it, among other serious absences.

Are more adult researchers willing to recognize youth’s performances as a source of knowledge production? As pedagogical sites? In order to employ a decolonizing reframing in the study of peer violence and abuse, no matter bodies’ age, researchers may need to delink as well—borrowing Mignolo’s idea—by being more critical on the methodology they employ, on their ontological premises. On their epistemic privilege and adultism. Likewise, refusing to use the notion of youth bullying as a research topic requires delinking from dominant post-positivist narratives, highly influenced by behavioral frameworks. As discussed, I suggest using the notion of peer violence and abuse instead of bullying. Two issues, two sets of strategies. Whether you agree or disagree with this distinction, I strongly encourage you to advocate for decentering adults’ voices and promote a collective, intergenerational reframing of peer abuse and violence. Before I conclude this chapter, I would like to pinpoint some of the challenges that researchers may need to address in order to work with youth in reframing the study of youth bullying.

Logistics for Organizing Collective Reframing

Despite increasing interest in engaged scholarship and fostering research and service-learning projects with community partners (Kecskes & Foster, 2013), single authorship or academic co-authorship remain a central expectation in faculty's tenure cases in several disciplines in the U.S. In the description of tenure and promotion guidelines, the School of Communication at Ohio State University explicates that "[t]he most direct way to demonstrate intellectual leadership is through publishing articles in excellent journals that are either single-authored or first-authored with graduate students or other untenured colleagues as co-authors" ("School," 2018, p. 49). That could be problematic when a scholar co-creates knowledge with non-scholars and want to visibilize and acknowledge their co-authorship. Engaged scholars also face other constraints that can negatively affect their scholarly performance, such as time and funding pressures. Working with communities in respectful, reciprocal ways may take longer and require more resources than other forms of knowledge creation (Butin, 2007). In addition to institutional constraints, I am concerned with epistemic privilege and adultism, internalized colonialism, and lack of critical, decolonizing self-reflexivity that scholars may inherit. I am convinced of the usefulness of embodied methodologies such as performance autoethnography to facilitate critical, decolonizing, self-reflexivity, even if researchers only undertake it as a training methodology. As mentioned earlier, no matter how participatory our research methods are that, if we don't change our colonizing academic performativity, we may replicate epistemic privilege and adultism unawaresly.

Other constraints that could hinder working with youth are legal issues and intergenerational power dynamics. For minors, as aforementioned, parent(s) or legal

guardians can legally prevent youth from working with adult researchers. In the case of intergenerational power dynamics, we must be sure that youth are not forced to participate in projects. Likewise, we need to avoid situations that can hinder youth ability to express, organize, criticize institutions. How to create intergenerational spaces where power dynamics don't refrain youth or adults from expressing freely? How to make sure that we build a collective, dialogical, horizontal reframing? Academic and legal constraints should not hinder co-reframing processes of youth bullying. Many YPAR researchers in social justice education or critical race theory have provided good examples of how to incorporate adult and young's researchers work in academia. We can all learn from their work with youth. Likewise, adults and youth co-created knowledge can be generated and distributed outside of academia, using other forms of knowledge expression and production—songs, theater, slam poetry, art, dance, films, blogs, etc.

Here ends Chapter 4, a compilation of suggestions to be read, discussed, challenged by those interested in addressing youth bullying differently. Conceptual and axiological ideas that are pivotal in the methodological approach—a decolonizing reframing—to the study of youth bullying that I provide in this dissertation. These ideas are built upon critical voices, including adult researchers and young activists and performers. I created these ideas influenced by my Coyolxauhqui process, by my self-decolonizing process. The message is simple. The dominant study and framing of youth bullying is harming youth of color and needs to be reframed. I suggest doing it by following a decolonizing reframing. Researchers, who have played a central role in framing youth bullying as moral panic, need to assume responsibility in the harm caused and commit to repairing it. Simultaneously, we need to keep understanding why human

beings, no matter their age, engage in (peer) abuse and violence as well as the ways in which dominant ideological values influence the reproduction of quotidian peer abusive and violent scripts. We need to keep examining how to prevent and navigate those scripts, rejecting punishing and repressive narratives as well as embracing repairing and healing. Both processes—reframing the study of youth bullying and reframing young peer abuse and violence—require that adults decenter their voices, embrace critical self-reflexivity, recognize youth’s agency and resistance, and co-create strategies with youth. These collective experiences are already happening, but not enough within academia or within certain disciplines, where epistemic privilege and adultism remain dominant. Finally, we should stop using the word “bullying” to encompass different forms of abuse and violence, and instead, be more specific. As a floating signifier, the utterance “bullying” generates more confusion and trauma than support. Again, I insist that the ideas presented in this Chapter are suggestions. I can’t reframe youth bullying by myself: youth and other adult voices need to be active participants in such reframing. I hope that one day, soon, I will be sharing these ideas with an intergenerational working group, where I can join older and younger human beings trying, together, to better understand peer abuse and violence, to prevent it, to navigate it without feeding the military-industrial prison complex, the neoliberal war on youth and internal neocolonialism against youth of color. To foster healing and reparation. To write alternative scripts that allow human beings to stop hurting each other, hurting the planet, hurting themselves.

Like little, anonymous worms fertilizing the soil

Human worms

Creating hope

Using their pain caused by others

Using their guilt for the pain inflicted to others

Repairing, healing

Creating change.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Coyolxauhqui is also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is an ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just the process of healing. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 20)

The healing of our wounds results in transformation, and transformation results in the healing of our wounds. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p 19)

To imagine a different world is to imagine us as different people in the world. (Smith, 2012, p. 324)

In this project and academic ritual, my dissertation, I have tried, querida Gloria, to follow your advice. I tried to add knowledge, “not just duplicate what’s already there” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 97) and in the process of adding, of exploring “untrodden caminos,” I turned over all rocks I found in my path, as you suggested. I even turned those “with worms underneath them” and decided to examine them (p. 97). Realizing, disorientated and surprised, that one of those worms was me. Did you know that it would happen that way, querida Gloria, *maestra* nepantlera? I didn’t. It never occurred to me, a communication scholar trained as a critical social scientist, that one day I would become the subject of my own research. That in order to better understand and change discrimination and inequality—a commitment that has guided my life since I was a teenager—I would need to turn the magnifier glass into a mirror and scrutinize me, tear my selves apart, face pain and shame, expose my fragments to foreign gazes, learn from that experience, grow, heal, become a new person. Hopefully, wiser. Definitively, more compassionate and aware of my limitations, of the harm that I suffer and reproduce. Those are the features of what you, Gloria, call the Coyolxauhqui imperative, your “symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that

self or the situations you're embroiled in differently" as well as your "symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 20). What I learned in this process, querida Gloria, is that your Coyolxauhqui imperative, in addition to helping heal, is also a research method, "a methodology grounded in remembering or delving into our historias by investigating our myths, artifacts, and narratives" (Andrade, 2019, p. 81). The Coyolxauhqui imperative is a method that is not part of the academic master's toolkit, bringing *maestra* Lorde to the conversation. At least, it was not a method included in my undergraduate or most of my graduate curriculum. A method that, however, answers Córdova's (1998) quest to develop methodological alternatives to resist colonialism in the academia because the Coyolxauhqui imperative, as process, does facilitate my "involvement in our communities, not detachment" (p. 41) and allows me to embrace my subjectivity as a queer diasporic woman of color. Interestingly, I embraced and used the Coyolxauhqui imperative as a research method, as a transformative process, before I knew of its existence. The method found me. And it changed me.

As I have explained in these Chapters, Gloria, I went back to graduate school in my late thirties because, among other reasons, I wanted to study youth bullying. I wanted to help youth, I wanted to prevent pain, trauma, suicides. I used graduate school for that purpose. Yet, slowly, my body realized that something was wrong, something didn't make sense in what I was reading and watching about the study of youth bullying in the U.S. I think that was the moment in which I began the Coyolxauhqui process that I describe/unfold in this dissertation, using my body as a source of knowledge production. Feeling, slowly, how my understanding of youth bullying was falling apart, and with it,

my multiple selves. I was able to reach critical voices to the narrative of youth bullying, who criticize multiple gaps in the way adults had framed youth bullying. Particularly, how the discourse on youth bullying has been greatly decontextualized, ignoring the ideological and cultural factors that inform youth's—and adults'—abusive and violent behavior (i.e., Walton, Ringrose, Renold). Even worse, activists and non-profit organizations, such as GLSEN, complained on how “some policies intended to reduce bullying have had the adverse effect of pushing students into the school-to-prison pipeline,” a measure that mostly affects youth of color, queer youth, and youth with disabilities (“Dropout,” n.d.). As I explain in Chapter 2, those policies were the response to a problem framed, in great measure, by researchers. Yet I wanted to become one of those researchers. Thanks to the Coyolxauhqui imperative—that process of fragmentation, questioning, challenging that I was unawarely undertaking—, I was able to see things differently, connect dots in ways that I didn't see elsewhere. Thus, I realized that by joining those voices that, indirectly, were fostering the school-to-prison pipeline, I was hurting youth too, I was becoming another *enemy* of youth of color in the U.S. I felt devastated. I was the problem that I foremost needed to understand and solve. How did my good intentions ended up becoming harmful? At this point, I could feel the physical effects of the Coyolxauhqui process. I felt pain, shame, confusion, disorientation. I didn't have, however, the proper tools to deal with my new puzzle: me. I didn't have the proper onto-epistemological tools to study me. As a social scientist, I wasn't prepared for that task. I needed other tools, other glasses. That is when my turn to the body took place, thanks to the encounter with performance studies, Third World feminism, and decolonizing methodologies. This encounter further pushed my Coyolxauhqui process,

generating more fragmentation, more confusion, more change. Getting sick, enhancing la facultad, achieving new conocimiento, and acquiring new lenses from that process. Because this encounter changed my gaze. It helped me see social phenomena from a different axiological and onto-epistemological approach: using the body as a central tool to create and understand knowledge; promoting healing and repairing harm caused by researchers as guiding principles; embracing (self)decolonizing practices in my scholarly labor. By using these new glasses, I looked at youth bullying again, Gloria.

As soon as I examined the study of youth bullying with my new decolonizing glasses, from a different perspective, I realized that the problem pivoted around framing. Smith (2012) argues that the framing “of an issue is about making decisions about its parameters, about what is in the foreground, what is in the background, and what shadings or complexities exist within the frame” (p. 255). Inspired by Smith’s words, I decided that my work, instead of focusing on youth bullying, had first to examine how youth bullying was studied, framed. Likewise, I had to examine why researchers’ work, including me, ended up being harmful. Who framed the dominant and even critical approaches to youth bullying? Who were excluded in that framing process and why? Who should be included? How can we change conditions for that inclusion to happen? In order to answer those questions, I examined how youth bullying has been framed in the last decades, focusing on dominant narratives and how they are contested. Since the 1970s, the framing of youth bullying as a major social concern has been an adult task; “all about youth without youth,” paraphrasing Ricardo Levins Morales. Youth have had a secondary role in this framing process. They have been mostly present as research subjects or participants in anti-bullying initiatives, but youth’s initiatives and activism to

deal with peer abuse and violence, their agency, has been barely mentioned. This could be a consequence of adultism and epistemic privilege, two features of the academic performativity that I (re)produce as a scholar. Adultism, as defined in Chapter 1, is a form of oppression that discriminates youth due to their age (DeJong & Love, 2015) and adults treat them as subordinate subjects; likewise, scholars have been trained to think that knowledge that is created by non-scholars is less accurate and valid. Even worse than the absence or secondary role of youth's agency in the framing of their own reality, is that without intending it, many researchers on youth bullying, trying to prevent youth from suffering peer abuse, have contributed to internal neocolonialism against youth of color in the U.S. Researchers' work has been used to facilitate internal neocolonialism, as discussed in Chapter 2. This is the context in which I use a difficult and painful word, *enemy* of youth, Gloria. When I say enemy, I mean that despite my good intentions, my work is/can be used to harm youth of color, when I intend to achieve the opposite goal. Therefore, unbecoming an *enemy* of youth proves an essential priority in my academic life. For that purpose, I needed to focus on developing an approach to youth bullying that allowed me to work on the issue while unbecoming an *enemy* of youth—which, I realized, will be a life-long process of critically examining my oppressive practices. For all these reasons, Gloria, this dissertation transformed into a meta-analysis, an embodied methodological reflection that joins critical voices to the dominant study of youth bullying. An embodied reflection. An onto-epistemo-methodological contribution to the study of youth bullying based on, built upon my own approach and transformation as a researcher on youth bullying. In this methodological contribution, I advocate for a collective decolonizing reframing of youth bullying in which youth's agency and voice

should occupy a central role. A reframing in which we should, calmly, from a standpoint of love and compassion, rethink the harm adults—particularly scholars—have fostered, despite our good intentions. A reframing in which we should offer different frameworks and strategies to understand, address, and redress peer abuse and violence. Thus, my onto-epistemo-methodological approach, which advocates for a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying, encompasses several key features: centering youth’s agency, challenging adult researchers’ standpoint, suggesting other onto-epistemological and conceptual approaches, as well as promoting other values and tactics in the study of youth peer abuse and violence.

Decolonizing Reframing: Youth, Central Voice

In the dominant framing of youth bullying, we unusually read or watch youth-lead’s analysis, strategies, actions on their peer violence. Youth’s transformative agency is scarcely featured, valued, highlighted, respected, acknowledged, and included in the study of youth bullying. Yet, youth are the main protagonists of peer abuse and violence, those who reproduce it, challenge it, change it. That said, it is essential to clarify an important point. Even though youth’s agency has been largely ignored in the framing of youth bullying, it would be a mistake to present youth as powerless victims of adultism. Youth, particularly marginalized youth, do not need adults to resist from systemic oppression and colonization, using “words in the movement toward individual and social transformation” (Jocson, 2011, p. 159). Youth’s concerns on “prison industrial complex, capitalism, food, and the environment”, Angela Davis stresses, make youth “the future of social movements” (as cited in Jocson, 2013, p. 9). From this approach—not seeing youth as victims but essential agents of social change—I argue that, in a reframing process of

youth bullying, youth's transformative agency and voices need to occupy a central role. Youth, but particularly youth of color, as main targets of school-to-prison pipeline and other forms of internal colonization that anti-bullying narratives have fostered. If youth are so central in a reframing on youth bullying, Gloria, why weren't they co-creators of this project?

My goal in this dissertation was not only to theorize in abstract about a reframing process of youth bullying, but to embrace it, enable it as far as my material and legal conditions, as a non-American citizen or resident, allowed me to. Smith (2012) posits that “it is crucial that researchers [...] pay particular attention to matters that impact on the integrity of research and the researcher, continuously develop their understandings of ethics and community sensibilities, and critically examine their research practices” (pp. 326-327). Reflecting upon my own circumstances, Gloria, I realize that I was not ready to work with youth, as a graduate student, in this dissertation. On the one hand, I was still unaware of my colonizing role against youth of color. After the transformative process I am enabling and sharing in this dissertation, I feel better prepared to deal with my internalized colonization and my colonizing practices against youth of color in the U.S. On the other hand, as an international graduate student on student visa, I did not have the conditions to build a reciprocal relationship, a core idea that I discussed in Chapter 1. As somebody who suffered knowledge extraction when I was a LGBTI activist, decades ago, feeling used by researchers who came to our group to learn from us and left giving nothing behind, I refuse to do the same with other community members. Particularly those who are more predated by academia. I want to establish a long-term commitment with community members and groups that is based on reciprocity and co-decided rules—

a form of relationship that requires time and dedication, something that I can't guarantee with my actual migratory status. For that reason, I prefer waiting to count with better legal and material means that facilitate such long-term commitment. In my case, that would require finishing this ritual, the dissertation, graduate, and find a tenured position that provides the legal and material stability that I need to stay in the same area for an unlimited period. That scenario would get me closer to a possibility of working with youth ethically. If that option doesn't work, I would need to find other alternatives, Gloria. In the meantime, until I have better conditions to work with youth—particularly, youth of color—I can only share suggestions for a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying, drawing from young and adult activists/researchers' proposals. Actually, I can do something else: tracing adult's mistakes in the framing of youth bullying—from a standpoint of compassion, respect, and love—and fostering my own transformation.

Decolonizing Reframing: Tracing Adults' Mistakes

I want to recognize the hard labor of thousands of researchers who have invested their careers aiming to support youth. At the same time, despite good intentions, if we want to reframe youth bullying, it is essential to recognize our mistakes as adult researchers in order to examine them and understand why they took place. We need to face that public and academic youth bullying discourses have been used to inflict more pain and suffering upon the young bodies they tried to help; especially upon those bodies which were not even featured by the media when addressing youth bullying (Paceley & Flynn, 2012; Pritchard, 2013) or by many scholars (Meyer, 2016)—youth of color, transgender, or underprivileged. On the one hand, the pervasiveness and deleterious effects of bullying—featured by researchers and the media—have been used as another

excuse to create punitive laws against youth and transform schools into repressive institutions where daily interactions among peers are closely surveilled, registered, and subject to criminalization (i.e., Meyer, 2016). As Meyer (2016) highlights, “reporting and intervening in anti-bullying discourse [...] has encouraged more monitoring and surveillance, which potentially subjects individuals, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged groups,” such as low-income youth of color, “to heightened disciplinary measures” (p. 357).¹²⁰ This anti-bullying reaction matches the hard dimension of nation states’ “war on youth,” “the harshest elements of a growing youth crime-control complex that operates through a logic of punishment, surveillance, and control” (Giroux, 2015). On the other hand, Gloria, academic and media texts have diverted public attention from youth’s main problem: The systemic conditions that encumber youth’s lives in our current neoliberal times. In different degrees, youth experience the devastating effects of systemic homophobia/transphobia, racism, and sexism, as well as neoliberal outcomes such as disposability, precarity, difficult access to basic needs (i.e., health care, public education, healthy food, clean water and air), mass incarceration, debt, inhumane migratory policies, and the application of “pedagogies of repression” (i.e., high-stakes testing; Giroux, 2015). Bodies of color, low-income youth, youth with disabilities, and gender nonconforming individuals are more severely affected by these constraining

¹²⁰ Institutional anti-bullying surveillance and regulation remains a powerful strategy in anti-bullying narratives in the U.S., as the National Safe Schools Partnership’s demand for anti-bullying federal legislation—Safe Schools Improvement Act—exemplifies (“Safe Schools,” n.d.). This coalition—led by GLSEN—, which encompasses more than 115 advocacy groups, considers that a federal law would ensure that “[s]chools and districts develop and use comprehensive and effective student conduct policies that include clear prohibitions against bullying and harassment.” A federal law would likewise guarantee that “[s]tates and districts maintain and report data regarding incidents of bullying and harassment in order to inform the development of effective federal, state and local policies that address these issues (“Safe Schools,” n.d.). I join those voices that disagree with this strategy. As we see in this dissertation, “in turning to the law, one runs the risk of becoming broken by the law” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 77).

conditions. Especially as primary targets of the school-to-prison pipeline that is pushing youth of color, youth with disabilities, and queer youth into the juvenile justice system even due to minor misconduct in school (“Dropout,” n.d.). Furthermore, dominant discourses on youth bullying ignore that youth bullying has become another commodity (Walton, 2011b). From corporations to scholars, different agents benefit from youth peer abuse and violence. For instance, youth violence and death (i.e., videos of suicidal notes, aggressions, or memes) are used as Dallas Smythe’s *free lunch* to sell ads on YouTube, turning those who suffer violence into dehumanized disposable bodies and endless sources of capitalist profit (C. Hernández-Ojeda, 2014). Likewise, anti-bullying programs are purchased and implemented in schools all over the world, using scientific discourse to gain legitimacy within a highly competitive market. Youth bullying discourses have morphed into another profitable way of benefiting from young bodies (including the prison industrial-military complex). This process, in fact, reflects the soft side of the war on youth, in which children become valuable commodities for corporations, not only as consumers but also as “brands and merchandise [...] and as marketing agents” (Giroux, 2017). Simply put, Gloria, the study of youth bullying has fostered the war on youth and fed internal neocolonialism against youth of color. Furthermore, while feeding and facilitating the neoliberal war on youth (hard and soft) and internal neocolonialism in the U.S., the framing of youth bullying has distracted society from acknowledging the implications of the war on youth and internal neocolonialism and assuming collective responsibilities. Borrowing from Grossberg (2001), the problem is not just the war on youth, “but also the fact that this intolerable situation is tolerated, not only by politicians but also by the general population” (p. 112). As researchers, we need to ask not only

whether we are tolerating the neoliberal war on youth and internal neocolonialism, but in what ways we have been and remain complicit with its existence.

Decolonizing Reframing: Scholars' Reflexivity and Decolonizing Academia

For youth being central agents in a reframing process of youth bullying, adults need to change practices that can, unintentionally, foster oppression against youth of color and queer youth. As a researcher, per default, my academic practices support neocolonialism and oppression. As Wane (2008) argues, "Academic practices take place within the context of a history of colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonial, post-colonial and anti-colonial conditionalities" (p. 193). My academic performativity, the scholarly scripts that I inherited, is built upon colonizing and oppressive premises, such as adultism and epistemic privilege. It is not easy to identify those premises in our quotidian academic practices, even among critical scholars. Conducting decolonizing or social justice agenda doesn't mean that we are not reproducing colonizing or oppressive practices. For that purpose, it is essential to embrace critical self-reflexivity as a basic academic praxis. Investigating whether we reproduce adultism and epistemic privilege in our research, in our classrooms, in our syllabi and curriculum. Because youth speak up, they have always spoken up, yet many adult researchers, including critical scholars, including me, don't listen actively, don't recognize or value youth's agency, don't question who decides researchers' agenda on youth issues.

Smith (2012) warns that "institution of research by its nature would alienate [Indigenous scholars] from their own communities and aspirations, and would perpetuate the colonizing structures that many aspired to overcome, and [...] they needed to be more conscious about decolonizing the academy" (p. 345). Even though I am not an

Indigenous scholar, I must remain aware of how academia colonizes me and uses me to colonize others. Sharing my experience, my process with you, Gloria, and other bodies is part of my (self)decolonizing commitment as a scholar. To hold myself accountable to you and many other people who probably will never read my words. To prevent succumbing to colonizing performativity. To consciously promote decolonizing academia. I share my process with other people without expecting anything from them, whether they are a scholar or not. My job, as a performance autoethnographer, as an engaged communication scholar, as a critical communication pedagogue, is to fertilize the soil—our collective soil—using my pain and experience and reflections to foster dialogue and other reflections. Embracing "[a] critical framework that privileges practice, politics, action, consequences, performances, discourses, methodologies of the heart, pedagogies of hope, love, care, forgiveness, and healing" (Denzin & Giardina, 2016, p. 12). Because such critical framework "is needed now more so than ever before" (Denzin & Giardina, 2016, p. 12). From a transformative standpoint of love, hope, and respect. To my scholarly peers, to youth, to you, and to myself, Gloria. From that standpoint, I highlight the endless possibilities of performance autoethnography as a (self)decolonizing tool. As a transformative, heuristic, and pedagogical tool that forces us to turn the magnifier glass into a mirror. Researchers can benefit from using performance autoethnography to foster self-reflective, transformative processes. It can be a useful tool for everybody, if used respectfully, ethically, and honestly, but particularly for colonize(d)r or colonized subjects, because it allows them to visibilize and value their bodies and cultures. Whatever the tools used, if researchers want to change their relationship with youth, they need to embrace critical, painful, transformative self-

reflective processes. We, adult researchers, are the ones who need to listen to youth—particularly youth of color—and cha(lle)nge our inherited prejudices against youth. A decolonizing reframing of youth bullying needs, in sum, that adults decenter and cha(lle)nge their role in the framing of youth bullying.

Therefore, if I want to work with youth of color unbecoming their enemy, Gloria, I need to change first. I need to understand why and how I colonize youth of color unawares. I need to change my oppressive and colonizing practices. That questioning pushed me to examine why I chose youth bullying as a research topic as well as scrutinize other aspects of my identity that I hadn't explored, such my identity as a Canary Islander. By doing so, I realized that being a colonized subject that was also pushed to colonize others, as my ancestors have been pushed to do for the last 500 years, limited my academic gaze. If I couldn't see how deeply colonized I was, how could I see my colonizing practices, how could I see the colonizing role of academia? I realized that if I wanted to change my hurtful, colonizing practices as scholar, I needed to self-decolonize first. I needed to take another step in my Coyolxauhqui process, going deeper, tearing more selves apart. I decided, Gloria, that I should include such process in the dissertation, use the dissertation to facilitate such process. Make the dissertation part of my self-decolonizing, transformative process. How? Performance autoethnography is a method, such as your notion of autohistoria-teoría, Gloria, that allows us to embrace the Coyolxauhqui imperative and make it a transformative process. As you describe, Gloria, you use the autohistoria when you connect personal stories with social phenomena, and when you theorize about this process, you call it "autohistoria-teoría" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 6). Building upon your work, Gloria,

Gutierrez-Pérez views autohistoria-teoría as a Coyolxauhqui-like process where a person rips their identity and memories into pieces to re-assemble these into a holistic story. Weaving together our historias reveals new insights that explain our onto-epistemological reality. In many ways, remembering and creating new autohistoria-teorías is autoethnographic, and it challenges traditional research methodologies because it seeks to reveal the hidden lived experiences of subjects living under colonization. (Andrade, 2019, p. 81)

In that sense, I likewise visualize performance autoethnography as autohistoria-teoría. It allows me, as a researcher, to examine my own embodied experiences in context.

Moreover, it allows me to do it by tearing my experiences and their outcomes apart, by tearing my selves apart. Which is the goal of the Coyolxauhqui process. Why is fragmentation so relevant? Why wouldn't I just examine my experiences at a superficial level, without touching them or me? Because the effect wouldn't be the same. As you emphasize, Gloria, "to be healed we must be dismembered, pulled apart," we need to "shift our perspective" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 29). Then, when we put the pieces back together again, we can see things differently. This is precisely what I have done in this dissertation, Gloria: I used performance autoethnography as a tool to facilitate and reflect upon my Coyolxauhqui process as a researcher who needs to undertake a self-decolonizing process in order to unbecoming youth's enemy and be better prepared to work with youth in a reframing of youth bullying. At the same time, I used the dissertation to enable and reflect on such self-decolonizing process. It is difficult to separate methods and theories in these intersected processes, because fragmentation helped me self-decolonize, and vice versa.

In addition to embracing critical and transformative self-reflexivity, researchers should commit to repairing the harm they caused. In the case of youth bullying, we need to denounce the school-to-prison pipeline and militarization of schools, work with youth

in campaigns, projects, and consider incorporating this issue in our research and agenda. Moreover, if we want to avoid similar mistakes in the future, we need to decolonize academia, we need to address our academic complicity in oppressing youth of color and marginalized youth, to question our curricula, our syllabi, our activities—whose bodies and experiences are there; whose bodies are not. In my case, thanks to the Coyolxauhqui process, I was also able to embrace repairing practices in this dissertation, aiming to redress the harm research on youth bullying has caused against youth of color. On the one hand, by advocating against the school-to-prison pipeline and educating people about the harmful outcomes of the dominant framing of youth bullying. On the other hand, by offering an alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying. In this sense, the method, the process, and the outcome are profoundly entangled in my work. I find highly difficult to separate them, to figure out what happened first, whether my need to repair the harm caused by researchers compelled me to design an alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying, or whether the design of such methodological approach helped me realize that it would be a way to repair the harm caused. I can't separate them. The linear (post)positivist mode of knowledge production—deductive or inductive—does not have room in this project. I am creating knowledge from fragmenting my embodied experiences and my ancestors' and reflecting upon them in context. From the pain caused by sustos, Gloria, from the shame of realizing in what ways we—my ancestors and I—have hurt other people. I have tried, following my social scientist training, to separate the process I have undertaken. I simply can't. There is no logical order, clear boundaries between method, epistemology, ontology, results. It is all one, feeding each other, making

each other. The issue, however, is that processes of knowledge production like mine, or even others that are more scholarly “normative”—meaning, less rejected by (post)positivist lenses—, are still marginalized in the study of youth bullying and that reality should change.

Decolonizing Reframing: Onto-Epistemological Diversity

As hundreds of researchers across the planet, I joined the research of youth bullying committed to supporting youth. Alike many researchers, I focused on conceptualizing bullying as a dangerous deviant behavior, and unawarely, I contributed to feed a moral panic on this topic that has caused so much pain and harm against youth of color, as I discussed in Chapter 2.

Since the mid-2000s, critical voices to the framing of youth bullying have questioned the effectiveness of decontextualized behavioral approaches, asking to situate youth’s experiences of peer abuse and violence within an ideological framework that can better explicate the systemic factors behind those behaviors. As Gender JUST’s activists (2013) argue, we must examine abuse and violence within a neoliberal order. I agree, we must contextualize our behaviors within a larger economic-ideological system, yet I take the claim even further. What do we miss, as researchers, when we don’t contextualize our gaze as researchers; when we study abuse and violence from the fence, without including our bodies and experiences in the process? What do we miss when we still diminish the body as a site of knowledge production, or we ignore in which ways our body/identities/culture influence the way we create knowledge?

For a long time, Gloria, my body felt that something was wrong in the way we conceptualized youth bullying, even before I was able to find other critical voices in the

field—younger and older. Yet I was not able to rationally support or articulate the discomfort and uneasiness that my body experienced—that was not part of my training as a critical social scientist. That is why, when I encountered performance studies, my bodymind/soul found a long-desired framework to theorize, articulate, understand, and express the feelings and ideas that haunted me for years. Such as acknowledging that I had become a well-intended *enemy* of youth. By that time, I had encountered other critical voices on youth bullying like mine, and I was able to learn from them, join them. Thanks to this process I learned, as you and Lorde point out, that intuition and the body are essential tools to understand and create knowledge. Yet if I want to use my body—ontologically, epistemologically, methodologically—, first I need to “retake” it, self-decolonize, develop my own gaze based on my experiences, not on a white critical Eurocentric man’s, which are the lenses that I have been wearing all my life, the outcome of my Eurocentric socialization. Another pivotal lesson taught by you, Lorde, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and many other people of color. First, I need to see my own body, with its fluid and changing identities. First, I need to heal the trauma inflicted upon me AND I need to acknowledge and understand and address the trauma that I inflict upon others. First, I need to articulate and conceptualize my experiences as a colonize(d)(r) diasporic queer cisgender woman. That is why I devoted a whole chapter in this dissertation, Chapter 3, Gloria, to such endeavor, to examine my identity as a Canary Islander. To understand, in context, the reasons why I colonize other land and people in the U.S., while I am a colonized subject, a native of a land exploited by European countries and corporations. As my ancestors have been for centuries, I am another Canary colonize(d)(r) subject in the diaspora. By turning to the body, my body as a researcher, I

was able to see youth bullying differently. I was able to focus on how my body and other bodies study youth bullying. I think it is essential that all of us who study youth bullying pay attention to where our bodies are in the conversation about youth bullying. How we study youth bullying is the problem, that idea is not new. But even when we put the emphasis on questioning methodological or epistemological approaches to the study of youth bullying, we focus on what other people are doing wrong, not what each of us, I am doing wrong. It happened when the socio-ecological psychologists questioned the developmental approaches to youth bullying; it happened when the socio-cultural scholars questioned all behavioral approaches, developmental and socio-ecological. I see these bodies criticizing other bodies, but I don't see them self-reflecting, self-criticizing. That is why I believe that a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying needs to expand epistemological approaches: we need to reflect on what each of us, as researchers, could do better. Otherwise, Gloria, we may be supporting internal neocolonialism against youth of color while we criticize dominant framings of youth bullying. Or we continue imposing on youth our interpretation of their reality.

Likewise, we need to listen to each other. The study of youth bullying feels like being in a huge room where multiple groups of people, some larger and more prestigious than others, talk without listening to other groups. It makes sense that many adult researchers ignore youth's voices, given how normative is to ignore other scholars' voices who are conducting research on the same topic. One of the major problems of this scenario is that it is difficult for junior researchers to find marginalized voices that are relevant. If we want to avoid groupthink in the study of youth bullying, ontological and epistemological diversity is essential. It is indeed pivotal that dominant figures in the

field of youth bullying recognize the existence of other ontological approaches, even if it is just to criticize them.

Precisely, one of those marginalized groups in the study of youth bullying explores the notion of bullying as performance (i.e., Ringrose, Renold, Rawlings). For performance scholars, human beings reproduce inherited cultural scripts in the quotidian performance of our identities (i.e., as students, professors, men, women, transgender people, gay, straight, bisexual). Those inherited scripts may incorporate communicative practices that are abusive or violent, or even deny that certain practices—i.e., anti-gay slurs within a heteronormative society—are abusive or violent. From this point of view, peer abuse or violence, as Rawlings (2017) posits, is not a “behavioural problem that can be ‘fixed’ by assessing individual conditions and disrupting these with targeted programmes” (p. 21). There are not deviant youth attacking good youth, but human beings reproducing and challenging inherited cultural scripts, performing “moments of social persecution” (Rawlings, 2017, p. 27). From this perspective, the dichotomy bully versus victim is inaccurate, because, borrowing your words, “we’re all complicit in the existing power structures” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 83). We can all suffer and reproduce peer abuse and violence in our quotidian interactions. By reflecting critically upon inherited scripts, in context with our bodies and cultures, in dialogue, we can challenge and try to rewrite those scripts. In addition to using performance as a conceptual framework to explain and redress peer abuse and violence, we can also use performance to examine the way youth use performance—staged or non-staged—to embody agency and foster social change. Or the way in which researchers like me use performance as a heuristic tool to create knowledge about abuse and violence as well as to scrutinize the study of youth

bullying; or as a pedagogical and transformative tool, by performing my work with different audiences, inviting them to participate in a process of queer intimacy (Pérez, 2013) in which we can create alternatives to colonization and oppression together. In sum, there are multiple approaches to the study of youth bullying, and it is essential to engage in dialogue among them, even if the outcome is total disagreement. Not only scholars and youth activists are questioning the way we should study youth bullying, but also its definition.

Decolonizing Reframing: Conceptual Changes

Another relevant element in a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying, Gloria, is addressing conceptual changes. Critical voices to the dominant framing of youth bullying question the way it has been conceptualized. Based upon these critiques, we should reconsider, not only its definition but the usage of the utterance “youth bullying” for several reasons. Firstly, encompassing all sorts of hurtful interactions under one label, bullying, has been ineffective. “Bullying” has become a floating signifier in American society that is used in endless scenarios, making hardly difficult to understand what bullying really stands for. By using the same word to encompass a myriad of behaviors, from refusing to invite a classmate to lunch to flushing their head in the toilet, it makes it more difficult to tailor prevention and intervention. Furthermore, it contributes to promote an adult moral panic on youth bullying.

Secondly, it is necessary to separate the initial issue, the violent and abusive ways youth interact among each other, from the way adults framed it, youth bullying, because the latter framing has become a harmful, colonizing tool against youth of color, as discussed in this dissertation. We need to deal with the consequences of the study of

youth bullying, particularly its relationship with the school-to-prison pipeline that mostly targets youth of color. While we deal with this harmful framework, we need to keep addressing peer violence and abuse that youth—and adults—reproduce and endure. In order to facilitate both processes, we should be able to label each issue differently. I propose using the label of *peer youth violence and abuse*, borrowing from Schulman (2016), to address the type of harmful communication that takes place among young individuals. This categorization is useful to distinguish conflict from abuse, and abuse from violence (Schulman). By doing so, we “separate out the cultural phenomena of overstatement of harm from harm itself in order to retain the legitimate protections and recognitions afforded the experience of actual violence and real oppression” (Shulman, 2016, pp. 21-22). I would leave the label of “youth bullying” just to identify the adult framing created by European scholars in the 1970s and 1980s that was adopted and used in other countries. A problematic framing that needs, urgently, to be questioned and redressed in the United States. By avoiding the utterance “bullying” to address the abusive or violent interaction among youth (or adults), we would be delinking from previous framings that have been accepted as common sense—even when they are criticized.

In addition to re-conceptualizing youth bullying, Gloria, it is essential to contextualize each interaction—i.e., queer youth defending themselves from homophobic attacks have been framed as bullying; or young women defending from sexual abuse too. Likewise, conflict should stop being included under the bullying umbrella, because conflict, in interpersonal communication, does not have to be negative (Shulman, 2016). Conversely, as Córdova (1998) argues, conflict is essential, “personally, theoretically,

and politically” (p. 42). It is the space where we negotiate meanings, where we unfold “the ideological battle over the construction of knowledge” (p. 42). The key, Córdova highlights, is to “learn how to effectively engage in it” (p. 42). Although she contextualizes conflict within the university, we should apply her standpoint elsewhere. If we learn to better identify and navigate conflict, we may stop some situations from escalating to abuse or violence. In order to focus on the conflict stage, to prevent abuse and violence, we need to emphasize the development of skills that can facilitate this task.

Decolonizing Reframing: Developing Communication and Critical Thinking Skills

In the decolonizing reframing of youth bullying that I suggest, Gloria, we need to keep unfolding strategies to prevent peer abuse/violence. If we want to identify, understand, and deal with conflict in everyday communication, we need to enhance skills that can help us comprehend why conflict takes place and how to face the conflict without resorting to abusive or violent responses. In that sense, developing media education and critical thinking skills, as well as using critical and decolonizing theoretical approaches—i.e., critical race theory, Third World feminism, Indigenous epistemologies, queer theory—can be useful to identify and interrogate inherited cultural scripts that may generate interpersonal conflict in our quotidian interactions (Nocella, 2014). Likewise, developing communication skills can facilitate our ability to respond to conflict. For instance, a participant in a conversation or interaction may be better prepared to express, in an assertive way, when a given interaction is hurting them or generating discomfort without needing to resort to abusive or violent responses. Yet, in order to enhance communication, media education, and critical thinking skills, we need to support an educative system that does not pivot around standardizing testing—highly criticized by

its inability to enhance these types of skills (Giroux, 2004)—and that facilitates critical readings of colonialism and oppression. Likewise, in a society where normative racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of systemic oppression infuse interpersonal conflict, youth should not be framed as sole responsible for reproducing those conflicts. Schulman (2016) points out that “the community surrounding a Conflict is the source of its resolution. The community holds the crucial responsibility to resist overreaction to difference, and to offer alternatives of understanding and complexity” (p. 20). Youth and adults should, together, better understand and transform inherited scripts that generate interpersonal conflict, because “we have a better chance at interrupting unnecessary pain if we articulate our *shared* responsibility in creating alternatives” (p. 20). Enhancing our ability to understand and overcome conflict is not only useful to prevent peer abuse and violence, but also to address situations—from a restorative and non-punitive standpoint—in which abuse and violence have already taken place.

Decolonizing Reframing: Axiological Changes

Another crucial component in a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying is supporting axiological changes. Instead of focusing on punishing measures and militarizing schools to prevent abuse and violence, more and more voices—particularly bodies of color—are asking for a restorative or transformative justice, non-punitive, and healing approach to youth peer abuse and violence. This approach is adopted from Indigenous justice practices (Smith, 2012) that advocate for a non-punitive, community-based response to conflict, abuse, and violence. The goal, Gloria, is to address conflict to prevent its escalation into abuse or violence, but if escalation happens, restorative practices can still be used to deal with abuse or violence. Youth-led organizations across

the country are developing restorative and transformative justice practices in schools. An example is Pa'lante, a youth-led transformative justice program at Holyoke High School, Massachusetts, that organizes campaigns advocating against peer violence and promoting restorative justice practices when harm is caused.

This approach to youth peer abuse and violence requires a shift towards reparation but also healing trauma and pain, decentering the role of punishment and incarceration—which has been dominant in the U.S. until today. As you point out, Gloria, when we engage in retaliation, fear, and hatred—“the path of desconocimiento”—, we foster more violence and division (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). Conversely, when we embrace *conocimiento*, “the more difficult path, [it] leads to awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, and courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways that have the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). *Conocimiento* requires self-reflexivity, it requires using our pain and trauma not to hurt others or ourselves, but to foster (self)transformation and healing. Because, as you powerfully argue, Gloria (Anzaldúa, 2015), “We are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that's alienated us from others. When the wound forms a cicatrix, the scar can become a bridge linking people split apart” (p. 21). If we consider that the roots of youth peer abuse and violence are systemic, incarcerating and punishing youth will neither solve the problem nor prevent further pain and trauma. A different approach is needed, an approach that emphasizes youth-led conflict resolution and restorative or transformative justice practices. An approach that already exists in the U.S. and needs more support. Furthermore, a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying must redress internal neocolonialism and the war on youth; it needs to support youth's basic rights—

such as public education, health care—, prevent institutional violence, and avoid incarceration because, as youth of color activists denounce (i.e., Gender JUST), the major abuse and violence that they receive comes from the system through incarceration, police brutality, and defunded education, not from their peers.

Axiological changes not only apply to the study of youth bullying, or the examination of peer abuse and violence, but to our understanding—or at least my understanding—of academia, of conducting research, of creating knowledge as well. As a result of my Coyolxauhqui process, I am able to identify wounds that I had ignored until now, Gloria, such as acknowledging how much I have lost in my colonization as a European subject, how this socializing process prevented me from recognizing that I am also North African, that part of my ancestry is Amazigh, and that my homeland still suffers multiple forms of internal colonialism, from Spain, and external colonialism, from other European countries. At the same time, I am aware that I participate in processes of (neo)colonialism in the U.S. against Native People and other people of color. Being aware of the ways in which I am colonized and I help colonize others is painful and shameful. All that pain, that shame doesn't and shouldn't go away just because I reflect upon it. That pain will help me further commit to further (self)decolonizing, it will teach me, it will trigger new Coyolxauhqui processes.

In sum, querida Gloria, those are the main features of the alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying that I offer in this dissertation, some of which I have embodied in the previous Chapters. As I have explained before, in this dissertation, I suggest a method to reframe the study of youth bullying in a decolonizing way, yet I must reiterate that I am not reframing youth

bullying in these pages. Such endeavor, to be decolonizing, requires that youth are central agents in the reframing process. Youth, however, are not co-creators of this project, for reasons previously discussed. Thus, I am not reframing youth bullying, but contributing with ideas, reflections, and embodied experience to that process. Offering a method to undertake a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying. Before I finish this Chapter, I would like to briefly explain in which ways I believe my work contributes to different existing conversations.

Contributions

This dissertation contributes to the development of several fields. First, the field of youth bullying. I join other voices who ask for changes in the study of youth bullying, yet I bring together ideas and approaches that are scattered across the literature and activism. Moreover, I create a methodological study that provides an alternative onto-epistemo-methodological approach to the study of youth bullying. I emphasize the researchers' role and responsibility in order to better understand and change the limitations of the dominant framing of youth bullying. To understand why youth's agency in deciding other approaches to abuse and violence has been secondary. To understand why few adult researchers of youth bullying are taking youth seriously, listening to them, working with them. Not as research subjects but co-creators of knowledge and action. To understand, Gloria, why our good intentions in tackling bullying are supporting the oppression and colonization of youth of color in the US, such as the school-to-prison pipeline. Yet instead of pointing to each other, finding who is guiltier than me, I advocate for a self-reflective approach, working on our change, on healing, on repairing the harm caused as researchers from a standpoint of compassion and

love. This approach is uncommon in the literature of youth bullying, including critical voices. I want to embrace what I advocate for. Showing, following those values in my academic practice in addition to mentioning, theorizing about them. My approach is greatly influenced by the healing and repairing principles promoted by Indigenous scholars and feminists of color.

In addition to contributing to the study of youth bullying as a field, I also contribute to performance studies. My dissertation advocates for the performative, pedagogical, activist dimension of performance, both staged and non-staged. Particularly, how youth—and even more, youth of color—use performance to address, reproduce, and redress the oppression they experience and to foster social change. Likewise, Gloria, this dissertation theorizes and embodies the possibilities of using performance autoethnography as a (self)decolonizing tool, by sharing my own process. In that sense, my work also participates in conversations about decolonizing methodologies. This dissertation theorizes, enables, and presents an example of how a researcher self-decolonizes, sharing how this process transformed me as a scholar and researcher. Examining the ways in which I am colonized and also the ways in which I colonize others. As a result, I better see my role as a diasporic subject and the contributions that I can make to the study of the Canary diaspora and to migration studies. Likewise, I can envision how my work contributes to decolonize academia. First, by delinking, disobeying (Mignolo) to inherited academic premises—such as epistemic privilege and adultism. Second, by challenging the centrality of my academic adult voice and recognizing the essential usefulness of non-academic sources of knowledge production, such as youth's hip hop or slam poetry. Third, by questioning other premises related to

ignoring the body and emotions in knowledge production, by turning the researcher's magnifying lens into a mirror, analyzing my embodied experiences, and becoming the subject scrutinized. In this sense, I help decolonize academia by pointing to its historic role in colonizing and oppressing "the Other." Fourth, by inviting other scholars to reflect critically about their epistemic privilege, adultism, and support to neocolonial and oppressive practices against colonized subjects, such as the school-to-prison pipeline. Beyond academia, my work can be also useful to activists interested in decolonizing, such as Canary Islanders, for instance. I am interested in exploring the role of autoethnography or similar versions of it across time and space, especially among Canary Islanders in the diaspora and in the islands. In this sense, Gloria, I hope that my work in this dissertation and future essays contributes to better understanding the complexities of diasporic subjects, building upon your work.

This dissertation likewise contributes to communication as a discipline. The interdisciplinarity of my research labor, drawing from the performing arts, humanities, and social sciences, embodies the endless possibilities of communication as a discipline. A fluid discipline that can help our students and society address many of the crucial issues we face today, such as peer abuse and violence.

The End of a Coyolxauhqui Cycle

How would I have known that instead of creating the Hernández Antibullying Program, what I envisioned as the outcome of my dissertation, I would end up using my dissertation as part and tool for my own Coyolxauhqui, transformative process, querida Gloria? These pages have allowed me to put my selves apart, as a scholar who realized that she was becoming an *enemy* of youth, by reproducing an anti-bullying narrative that

has indirectly fostered internal colonizing practices against youth of color in the U.S. A scholar committed to unbecoming an *enemy* of youth. My Coyolxauhqui process helped me realize that I needed to embrace a self-decolonizing framework to unbecoming youth's *enemy*, identifying in what ways and why my academic practices can colonize and harm youth of color in the U.S., and how to change those colonizing and oppressive practices. At the same time, my Coyolxauhqui process helped me realize that, in order to self-decolonize, I must endlessly undertake Coyolxauhqui processes to foster transformation and address issues differently. As you say, Gloria, it is an endless process. A life-long commitment. Tomorrow, next week, I will have to start over, experiencing fragmentation and confusion again. Moreover, this process has taught me that I must share my transformative endeavor with other bodies, for multiple reasons. First, because decolonizing is not an isolated act, it is part of a collective endeavor that requires "self-reflexive collective practice in the transformation of the self, reconceptualizations of identity, and political mobilization" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 8). Because, as you argue, Gloria, "self-change and social transformation are mutually interdependent" (Keating, 2006, p. 12). Second, because my commitment to unbecoming youth's *enemy* leads to self-transforming and promoting the transformation of a system that colonizes and oppresses human beings and Earth, a system that has used academia to expand and perpetuate its colonizing values and agenda (Smith, 2012). Oyewumi (2010) underscores that "it is clear that the university is a major site for the making and reproduction of (post)colonial society" (p. 27). Thus, decolonizing academia and transforming its colonizing performativity is essential if we want scholars to be more socially responsible of our work, more critical of our role in reproducing neoliberal and neocolonial ideology and

practices, more accountable in stopping Earth's destruction. I hope that by sharing my experience and reflections, by interpellating other bodies, I foster other conversations, other reflections that may lead to further change—without guarantees. Third, by sharing my transformative, self-decolonizing process with other bodies—using performance autoethnography as method and theory—I embody the theory; I don't reflect in abstract about decolonizing processes, about changing scholar's roles, about offering alternatives: I do it with my words, with my embodied examples. Disobeying (Mignolo) the inherited (post)positivist, Eurocentric script that rejects the body as a source of knowledge production, as a heuristic tool; particularly, the researcher's body. Disobeying in the expected way of sharing that knowledge by using performative writing, by following a different organizational structure in my text. Disobeying by tearing down the fourth wall of academic production, by focusing on the researcher's body, voice, agency, responsibility, accountability. By doing so, I offer an example of how to delink (Mignolo) from Eurocentric epistemologies and methodologies, I invite others to delink as well, to find and build other methodological tools—not included in the positivist master's toolkit—that help us decolonize and promote other ways of doing/being academia, working with multiple communities from a standpoint of respect, love, and reciprocity; challenging epistemic privileges and adultism; fostering healing and repairing the harm caused by our scholarship. Beginning with our own practices, our own change. Because “To imagine a different world is to imagine us as different people in the world” (Smith, 2012, p. 324).

I am a different person, indeed. The Coyolxauhqui process facilitated that transformative process. It helped me see my-selves differently, heal, reframe my-selves,

transform me (Anzaldúa, 2015). The Coyolxauhqui process helps us become a different person. Heal from the trauma, the sustos that we suffer and reproduce. In that manner, as I sense myself coming back together, I can see and feel the difference. I feel renovated, healthier, transformed, and more motivated than I was months ago. On the one hand, I can breathe better and my frequent visits to the doctor have ceased—luckily, my body has healed from all the physical and emotional discomfort and exhaustion suffered last year. On the other hand, I have also developed a different gaze, decolonized lenses—better adapted to my history, identity, experiences—that help me see life with a different perspective. Thanks to those lenses, I have learned things that I didn't know before about me, the history of my homeland, and academia. I certainly feel the presence of the *conocimiento* acquired in this process. I feel its transformative impact. After undertaking this deep self-reflective process, I have a clearer purpose about my research: I want to work with youth in co-reframing peer abuse and violence, identifying and sharing contextualized, restorative and transformative practices as well as fostering the enhancement of communication and critical thinking skills. I also plan to write and perform new texts advocating for a decolonizing reframing of youth bullying and stopping the school-to-prison pipeline. Likewise, I want to support a decolonizing movement for the Canary Islands—on the islands and in the diaspora; I also want to promote performance autoethnography as a decolonizing tool, following Chawla and Atay's (2018) call, and decolonize performance autoethnography. Moreover, for the first time, after decades going in and out of academia, I can visualize my role within this institution without having to perform somebody else's scripts. Without having to wear somebody else's lenses. Finally, I can join academia being me, a queer Canary diasporic

worm committed to fertilizing soil for change. A vertebrate worm that uses her waste, like invertebrate earthworms do, to fertilize soil and improve soil's fertility, facilitating life and the possibility of change. A vertebrate worm that uses her pain, her trauma, her *conocimiento* to foster and enable change. My own change, as a scholar who aims to self-decolonize in order to work with youth unbecoming their enemy. And others' change. Because as you say, Gloria, the other outcome of the Coyolxauhqui process is helping us/others "seeing [...] the situations you're embroiled in differently" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). I know that this painful Coyolxauhqui process has changed me in ways that words are unable to express. In the same way that the pain and transformation of my ancestors—those stories I know, those that got lost—have helped me better understand how I am, why I am here, and where my path goes next.

I promise you, dear Gloria, that I will never stop exploring untrodden caminos. I cannot conceive being a scholar otherwise. While I am trying to find the best words to conclude this ritual, this dissertation, an image visits me. I see you drinking café—or is it an herbal tea?—with my Tía Fela, my mother's sister, the storyteller of the family, the one that used to tell the stories of my great-grandmother La Meliana when I was a child. I imagine both of you, in my Tía's living room, from where you can see La Plaza y la Iglesia, the same view that my maternal ancestors have contemplated for decades. Gloria and Fela, two amazing *nepantleras*, *fuertes y peleonas*, sharing stories of our ancestors, of how you both navigate your *enfermedades*—your diabetes, Gloria; my Aunt, her rheumatoid arthritis. Diseases that ended up taking your lives too soon. I see you both, creating and sharing knowledge with your stories. And suddenly I realize that your stories and your embodied experiences are the most important knowledge I have acquired in my

entire life, even though it took me four decades to acknowledge it. A whole life reading an endless amount of literature, looking for answers and better questions as a student in five universities, to realize that the most relevant knowledge was always close to me, in the stories of my childhood, in the embodied wisdom of so many anonymous people whose names will be forgotten. Knowledge and names that are not included in the curriculum I have studied.

I am crying while typing these words, queridas Gloria and Tía Fela, because thinking of you makes me feel the weight of colonialism, patriarchy, Eurocentrism. How deeply it has affected so many lives, particularly women of color and mestizas. Including me. Yet, at the same time, here we are. Here we will be. Resisting. Like you did. Like you still do. And I smile. Imagining both of you, and my *bisabuela* La Meliana, my *abuelas*, my *madre*, my *hermana*, mi *cuñada*, my dissertation Chair, my committee members, my other *mentoras*—Leda, Mari, Martha—, my friends, my colleagues, and all the *peleonas*, *chingonas* who will continue telling your stories and their stories.

Fertilizing the soil of social change with their words.

Our words.

Changing the world with our love and compassion and hope.

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