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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Dissident women's letter writing as decolonial plurilogues of relational solidarities for epistemic justice

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Abstract

Braiding our words, “dissi-dance,” and desires, this article engages how various social actors, and communities—which we are a part of and belong to—challenge structural violence, oppression, inequity, and social, racial, and epistemic justice. We thread these reflections through our written words, in subversive letters which we offer in the form of a written relational conversation among us: a plurilogue that emerges in response to our specific locations, commitments, and refusals, as well as dissents. Our stories and process of dissent within the various locations, relationships, and contexts that we occupy served as the yarn and needle to thread our stories, posed questions and reflections. Braiding, threading and weaving together, we animate deep decolonial inquiries within ourselves, and our different cultural contexts and countries. Refusing individualism—the illusions of objectivity as distance, the academic as expert, and the exile of affect and emotion on academic pages—we choose to occupy academic writing and ask: *What if academic writing were stitched with blood and laughter, relationships and insights, rage and incites? What if, at the nexus of critical psychology and decolonizing feminism, we grew an “embodied praxis?”* Unlike academic writing, traditionally designed to camouflage affect, connection, relationality and subjectivity, these letters are unapologetically saturated in care and wisdom toward a narrative-based embodied practice: decolonial plurilogues of relational solidarities for epistemic justice. Our plurilogue of dissent offers a view to advance community research and action with goals of liberation, decoloniality, and community wellness.

KEYWORDS

aesthetic awakening, decolonial *mujerista* and womanist psychologies, dissidence, epistemic justice, letters, oral histories

Highlights

- Article engages how various communities challenge structural violence, and epistemic injustice.
- A plurilogue of dissent offers a view to advance community research and action.
- Letter writing as decolonial inquiry, a narrative-based embodied practice of solidarity for justice.

We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers, as well as the special issue editorial team, for their recommendations and guidance in finalizing this article.

†A word about “absences.” In our conference panel, we were joined by sister/friend/colleague Dr. Urmitta Dutta. Our ideas grew in conversation with hers. While she is not an official “author,” her wisdom, drawn from collaboration with the Miya community, sits on these pages, even if she could not find the time to write with us. We include Urmitta as a sister-in-inquiry, as she was with us at the conference where our words and maybe tears embraced. When we decided to co-author an article, Urmitta responded—with regret—that she could not write now. And yet our insights and our incites are entwined as she prioritized carework and other fights: caring for students, family, and community; resisting institutionalized whiteness and its myriad manifestations; contending with unfathomable trauma, loss, and rage in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic in India. We are deeply appreciative of Urmitta’s reflections and feedback on earlier versions of this article. We recognize her unwavering support as we wrote in community, connecting with her at various moments throughout our process.

"Dissent is verbal resistance. It is the affirmation of our voices, of our worth....And, in fact, dissent is not unrelated to love....speaking love is an act of dissent." (Carolina De Robertis, 2017, p. 7; In *Radical Hope: Letters of Love and Dissent in Dangerous Times*)

Dear Jessica, Michelle, Nuria and Urmi,

Reading each of your letters did give a feeling of being wrapped in an affirming shawl. It was one among those few moments when I felt that I did not only use my eyes to read the words written but also with my whole heart and body. English is my third language. My mother tongue is bahasa Jawa (Javanese language). It is the language I speak in any context other than those that require formality, like at work, where I have to use Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian official language). So, with English and Bahasa Indonesia, I tend to feel that there is a sense of distance between these languages and myself. Therefore, with English or Bahasa Indonesia, I tend to feel that I speak and write mainly with my head. It is when using Bahasa Jawa that I tend to feel more cognitively and affectively connected to what I speak. However, it was not the case with reading your letters and writing mine. It felt as if I spoke and wrote in Bahasa Jawa.

Thank you. Terima kasih.

Monica

Oh, querida comadrita Michelle, your writing is always a testimonio of deep wisdom and love. It felt like pushing aside everything else to joyfully run to the mailbox and desperately open the long-desired letter that has magical power for our craving souls. In gratitude for continuing to ignite our most invigorating desires to co-create the otherwise.

Abrazos, Nuria

AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR EPISTOLARY PLURIOLOGUE

Letter writing is a long and luscious practice of/by/for dissident women; a typically private exchange of love, pain, stories, struggles, desires and longings. The intimacies of letters can launch movements, as private details seep into public space, catalyzing political possibilities that speak structural truths and taunt dominant narratives (Arendt, 2006; Baldwin, 1963; Kartini, 1985; Letherby & Zrodowski, 1995; Lordi, 2017; Olsen, 1985; Uzwiak &

Bowles, 2021; Walker, 2011). We are reminded of *Letters of a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs* (Lyons, 2007) and Smith-Rosenberg's, 1975 essay, *The Female World of Love and Ritual*, drawing from diaries and correspondence among intimate women in the 19th century United States. We remember *Letters from Mothers to Daughters and Daughters to Mothers* edited by Tillie Olsen (1993), weaving 120 writers of prose and poetry crafting intimate pieces passed between generations, and are moved by Gio Swaby's recent exhibition at the Claire Oliver Gallery, *Both sides of the Sun* framed as a love letter to Black women's style and aesthetics. In 2019, more than 200 Latinx actors, activists, civil rights and labor leaders published *Querida-FamiliaLetter*, in the *New York Times*, that opens with: "If you are feeling terrified, heartbroken and defeated by the barrage of attacks on our community, you are not alone." The tradition of letter writing is pointed and relational, an affective and collective capillary that entwines us across time and space. Powerful and usually outside the canon of academic social science.

Across media, time frame, historic context, a woman writes to woman/women, mothers to daughters, daring to speak into the world words/stories/testimonios/images held in the heart, chest, soul, too dangerous to be spoken but in need of release. Audre Lorde (1984) may have captured our practice as "erotic":

[the] erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various source of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. (p. 53)

So let us assume letters are erotic—unleashing power of unexpressed feelings.

Letters have been primarily, but not only (see Ta-nehisi Coates' letter to his son, *Between the World and Me*, 2015), a practice by/for/with those who identify as women. Perhaps as women it has been/is always too dangerous to speak aloud what we are thinking, feeling, and holding, but a letter takes form when passions refuse to be contained. When "our insides jump, even as we may appear still" as Monica told us during one of our writing/reflecting meetings. Letters are penned in the ink of affect, pain, longing, connection; drafted for an audience, with a purpose and unapologetic intent. Once they sail out into the world, the writers can't control the response, the receipt or the reverberations. The release is thrilling and anxiety gathers until we hear how/if they land.

We stand on the sweet and worn shoulders of women who dared to write—trans and cis, highly educated and barely, mothers who tucked notes into children's lunch boxes, girls who wrote on bathroom walls. Those who came before and wrote before. These letters too often die with the women who receive, or they have been lost to

his-story, erased/ignored, treated as if too messy or sentimental or the contents not “rigorous.”

Letters stand in bold and bodacious contrast to academic writing. As Mik Billig in *Learning to Write Badly* (2013), and Sandra Harding in *Whose science? Whose knowledge?* (1991) would argue, the voice of the academic scholarship is militantly singular, “objective” and passive. While many have contested these academic traditions, within our disciplines we learn to narrate from a God’s eye view, a view from nowhere; we are disciplined to extract the word “I,” remove all sticky traces of affect, erase clues of relationship and delete words that may reveal our desires or commitments. We worry this is what passes for “appropriate” social science academic writing: “evidence based”—no audience, no heartbeat; accountable to no one; form pre-determined; a pile of evidence designed to prove/convince “what is” rather than a gesture and embrace to provoke a sense of what else is possible, how might things be otherwise. We seek to decolonize academic writing in psychology so it has a pulse. Therefore, we write in this epistolary shape and form to offer a view to advance community research and action with goals of liberation, decoloniality, and community wellness.

In this article we stitch care-fully a series of letters we have written to each other. The letters reflect the relationalities we formed as co-panelists at a professional gathering, and the subsequent reflections we shared with each other through what feminist scholars have described as an epistolary methodology (Cisneros, 2018; Davies & Gannon, 2006; De Robertis, 2017; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; White et al., 2007). Grounded in transnational relational solidarities of dissent and epistemic justice, our letters reflect a plurilogue of what surfaced among us at the 8th International Congress on Community Psychology conference panel on *Creating Inclusive Cultures and Healthy Communities*, where we shared our activist community-based inquiries nourished in solidarity with movements for justice and where we curated a transnational plurilogue about community research “with” not “on” communities and movements to which we align. Unlike much academic writing, designed to camouflage affect, pain, connection, relationality and subjectivity, these letters are unapologetically saturated in care and wisdom—embodied evidence. In the spirit of dissident women, in this article, Jessica, Monica, Nuria and Michelle have written letters to each other, not outside the genre of academic writing, but within.

With these letters we offer a journal the affects, solidarities, disappointments, rage, laughter and connections we embody alongside community-based struggles—our site of activist research—and with each other. Refusing illusions of objectivity as distance, refusing the academic as expert and refusing the exile of affect and emotion on academic pages, we choose to occupy academic writing with a piece of experimental, multi-voiced writing. We remain ever-aware of a set of ghostly questions that haunt our critical community praxis and so we pose to ourselves, to each other and to you—our readers—a set of troubling questions, we will address for the rest of our lives:

On the neoliberal academy: We wonder if the university is worthy and trustworthy to hold the wisdom borne in communities of struggle.

On accountabilities: To whom are we accountable in our decolonial feminist praxis? And then.

On audience: To whom do we yearn to speak/write/engage poetry, spirituality, theory, aesthetic provocation?

On solidarities: With whom are you engaged in intimate praxis of inquiry?

On gendered violence: We wonder, how is it possible—in every context we sit and accompany—we hear whispers of gendered violence? How do we understand that bloody stream of social life predictable across land/nation/class, and why are we always surprised?

On wounds: How do we speak of the suffering and wounds without reproducing a damage centered narrative, and how do we refuse the conflation of resistance/survival as if this were justice.

On privilege: We wonder why we don’t conduct ethnographies of privilege to reveal the deeply unjust accumulations of power, wealth, control and the enactments of exploitation.

On building communities in hell: We wonder how we continue to build living/loving communities of sensing and feeling, inquiry and provocation, in institutions of state violence.

Across contexts and rooted in a decolonial feminist praxis, we write to and with each other, through emotion, connections, passion and vulnerabilities, across nation states and oceans, about inquiries launched in feminist solidarity between academics and communities in struggle. We enact a collective, decolonizing feminist epistemic bricolage. We document the resonances of oppression, resistance and love that shimmer across the Majority World and Global North. We share with you our archived letters as a cross-generational gift for critical psychologists yet to come. We are activists/poets/journalists/storytellers and researchers-teachers of communities situated in the borderlands with youth and families of children with disabilities in rural Indonesia, with Lacandón youth activists fighting for the rainforest in Chiapas, with immigration justice youth activists across the United States. With frayed edges our shawl reaches deep into a women’s prison in New York State to detention centers across the border. We begin this process to knitting our *rebozo*, a shawl of threaded letters, in honor and in remembrance of the long and generative history of decolonial feminist letter writing, specifically of Kartini’s letters in radical moments of dissent, resistance and revolution—times of a past with relevance for today and tomorrow.

GROUNDING OUR PROCESS, HONORING KARTINI’S LETTERS

Fostering solidarity and radically inclusive imaginaries was the yearning and question that brought us together into a series of dissident conversations. Echoing the iconic quote

from philosopher Maxine Greene, conversations may not change the world, but conversations may change the ways we think about *our world*. In the case of Indonesia, such a provocative conversation was embodied in the figure of Kartini, an iconic historical figure in the Indonesian women's movement. Kartini was born in Jepara, central Java on April 21st 1879 to an aristocratic family that afforded her an opportunity to attend a Dutch elementary school. During the colonial era, the Dutch created a schooling system to produce low-rank colonial administrations. Instead of complying with the system, Kartini occupied the language of the colonizer to amplify her subversive voice. Letter writing thus became central to her struggle against the colonial oppressive systems of her lifetime in Indonesia: Western colonization, Javanese feudalism, patriarchy, racism, and sexism (Kartini, 1992, 2005).

Kartini saw modern education as a liberating door for Javanese women to have access to knowledge, skills and occupations, which were reserved for Europeans and/or men. She envisioned living in a society where women could have autonomy and equal legal rights, and this served to further her ambition for pursuing higher education. Yet her dream was shattered when she was forced to leave school to follow the Javanese tradition of *pingitan* (being confined at home until her parents found a suitable husband). The sexism and gender double-standards limited her opportunities, while it benefited men, like her brother, who could pursue university education in the Netherlands. During her painful years of seclusion, however, Kartini used letter writing as a tool to challenge the status quo and fight against sexism. Written between 1899 and 1904, Kartini's letters documented her correspondence with friends in the Netherlands and the colonized Indonesia. Through letter writing Kartini found a means to cry out her despair and anguish, as well as her undeterred dreams of dissent and resistance to the coloniality of gender. Through letters she exposed varied forms of oppression in Javanese society (Kartini & Coté, 2021). In one of her letters, she stated it said that a knowledge of right and wrong is imbibed with a mother's milk. But how can Javanese mothers now educate their children if they themselves are uneducated? The education and development of the Javanese people can never adequately advance if women are excluded, if they are not given a role to play in this. Develop the hearts and minds of Javanese women and one will have a powerful collaborator in that beautiful and gigantic task: the enlightenment of a people which numbers millions! Give Java fine, intelligent mothers and the improvement, the raising of a people, will be but a matter of time (Kartini & Coté, 2021, p. 811).

Although Kartini was detained in her own house, through letter writing she developed a progressive radical voice that gave life to her thoughts and desires, and that allowed her to reach and inspire others, especially generations of Indonesian women. Her letters were the megaphone she used to advocate for women's liberation, including equal access in education, which at the time was a radically inclusive imaginary no one dared dream or speak of.

Kartini's letters offer us an intimate, emotion-laden, uncensored personal documentation of embodied experiences of dissent, resistance and epistemic justice that can turn into powerful political statements through acts of compassion—reciprocal conversations across time and space, and among many. Her letters are an example of a plurilogue in writing that became a fundamental tool for building transnational solidarities in colonial and post-colonial times. Intended as personal communication, Kartini's letters became subversive texts that ignited greater acts of resistance. Indeed, so subversive were her letters that their publication was subjected to varied forms of censorship (Bijl & Chin, 2020). In fact, there was a period in Indonesian postcolonial history when the power of Kartini's letters was obscured from public awareness. Such an obscurity occurred during the New Order Era (1965–1998) when Indonesia was governed by a militaristic regime that was culturally sustained by a patriarchal system that glorified hegemonic masculinity and men's power in public and domestic spheres. During this period, Kartini's heroism was represented as a domestic role, as a devoted wife and mother (Bijl & Chin, 2020). Her political letters and voice were hardly mentioned in any school textbooks, thereby leading to her political agency and dissent being erased from society's historical awareness. Consequently, Kartini became a symbol of unquestioned complicity to the status quo, especially the sexism that prevailed in Indonesian tradition and society—the very system that Kartini opposed and wrote about. Today, Kartini's letters are a political embodiment of dissent and resistance.

FOUR LETTERS ON DISSIDENT RADICAL SOLIDARITIES, LOVE, REFUSAL, AND IMAGINATION

Inspired by Kartini's letters of dissent and revolution, which resonated and echoed with the transnational solidarities we offered through our conference panel conversations on epistemic justice, herein we offer you the letters we wrote to each other. Kartini's life and letters affirmed for us the power of letter writing for fostering solidarity and radically inclusive imaginaries. We join *Kartini* in this practice of dissent through our letters—we dedicated ourselves to stitching our work with and into each other's projects.

Queridas compañeras, Michelle, Monica, Nuria and Urmi,

I am inclined to begin this letter as I have been starting most of my emails and correspondence these days, wishing that you and your loved ones are healthy, well and cared for. I mean it every time I write it, and I am also desperately wanting to embrace each of you because so much has unfolded in varied ways over the past year or more, that I long for that physical connection that can only be experienced when in the embodied material presence of a dear long missed friend, sister, mother, grandmother, *mujer*, *compañera*—*nosotras*.

I have been piecing together this letter over the past days, trying to discern how to best begin to describe what I want to share with you. And how the plurilogue of threaded words and reflections still evokes for me what Michelle described as an “aesthetic awakening.” I would characterize our plurilogue as a multi-vocal intersectional conversation (Einola et al., 2020), and the connections and links we have continued to cultivate since then, as human and humanizing risings! Waking up feels passive, but *rising*—rising with the sun, the blooming greeneries of spring, the waves of trembling waters that clash and settle back. Your plurilogue is a friendship, a *comadrerismo*, that evokes human/humanizing risings in resistance to colonial violence; violence within and outside the discipline, the academy, the locations, places and spaces wherein we are situated and often (mis)placed by those who use power to structure the people's lives, yet fail to embrace reciprocal human recognitions.

Nosotras, the we and them, and the us, is a word that surfaced for me because as Gloria E. Anzaldúa describes it, *nosotras* is a linking expression of communality, mutuality, interconnections and reciprocal human recognition, *al estilo Fanon*. As I reflected on the powerful stories, provocations and words of dissent, resistance and refusal you all shared, I felt a connection to each of you as there was so much fullness in what you generously offered and provoked! What we strive to sow, till and grow among the communities wherein our collaborative research in action and practice unfolds and flows. Indeed resonating with what Monica described as living with purpose, *vivir con proposito*. Monica described how social care is fundamental to the Javanese cultural ethic of being of service to and with others. Specifically, of the importance of being acknowledged and recognized with the capacity to contribute to communities, and to be provided with opportunities to be of service—to be cared for and to care. To engage in social care, in a meaningful, authentic and relational way, is to live with purpose, intention and direction toward the betterment of communities, and society. This cultural value of importance and significance among Javanese communities, especially the disability community, affirms for me what my parents raised my siblings and I to practice consistently: *vivir para servir*. That is, about utilizing the privileged resources at our disposal—the tools and strategies—within our complex positionalities of power to privilege and reach and wield what is within our settings to support the struggles and desires of communities who may welcome or call upon us, in their own ways, to unite.

La union hace la fuerza, in unity there is strength; and it is in this commUNION of transnational solidarities that I was reminded of the importance of holding multiplicity, pluriversality and complexity, as not only a metaphor for a beautiful tapestry of *saberes entretajidos*, but a necessary *rebozo* to cloak us from the singularity, the narrowness and hegemony that often constitute, and continues to circulate within and outside of the academe. Nuria's journey into the voices of decolonial scholars from the Majority World that

have contributed to decoloniality and decolonization affirms the expansiveness of knowledge, of *cosmovisiones* and *realidades* that are otherwise. *Pachamama* is us, *nosotras*. How we care for ourselves cannot be detached from how we care for our earth, and all nonhuman beings. Once more, I am reminded of the interlacing threads and bonds that hold us together, that sustain communities across tides of tension, and across generations, land, and dimensions.

To the youth that are witnessing and contesting the violence of this very moment—from *la Selva Lacandóna*, the rivers near the Beki river in Lower Assam, to the urban and rural streets in protest affirming Black Lives Matter, as do the lives of those whom are perceived as sub-human or lacking because of how our societies have hegemonically constructed what it means to be an “able-bodied” being. Indeed, from student activists organizing to decolonize the university to elementary, middle and high school youth calling for “police free schools.” The youth, advocates, poets, and formerly incarcerated women—they are the vanguard of change. In the jungle and river valleys, in the classroom, and at home and in the streets, they carry the torch to light and agitate for institutional change. And from here, from where I stand as an educator-accomplice/ally to dissenters, especially youth activists within the neoliberal university, and from whom I learn to co-organize/strategize, they keep the embers of my day-dreaming and imaginations radically hopeful.

What would our lives be without the capacity to imagine, dream? What is lost by the death of envisioning and seeing, and therefore sensing in the soul-flesh-heart, something transformatively different from what is? The loss and death of freedom, and the struggle to claim, demand and fight for it. Michelle's experience with incarcerated women whose dreams of another reality are foreclosed by the limited opportunities to imagine, to dream and envision their lives apart, away and outside of where they are confined leads me to conclude that perhaps the greatest disruption we can wield and leverage is that of cultivating a radical revolutionary imagination to dream! Dare communities in struggle dream into being the conditions they strive and must exist in. It is not a matter of deservingness, of who can or should earn freedoms from the carceral state, but rather a recognition that emancipation and emancipatory praxes, like decolonial dreaming and imaginings, radical relational solidarities, and pluriversalities, are strategic moves that can lead to collective liberation.

Collectively the plurilogue among *nosotras* underscore the urgencies, and possibilities of epistemic transformative justice in action and practice. And, I add, across multiple-levels from the relational and communal, to the structural, political and cosmological, as well as domains and mediums, such as poetry, organizing, advocacy, stories, and policies. What I humbly offered in this letter are *sentir-pensamientos*, feeling/sensing-thoughts, that I describe as reflections on the kinds of “moves” I, we, *nosotras*, engage in as we pursue and engage consistently in dissident acts. In the dissidence—the dizzy daring double-dutch *doble paso*

dance—of disrupting hegemonic power, deconstructing coloniality and colonialism, and unsettling all that must not be nor continue to structure communities and lives: the racism, sexism, heteronormativity, ableism, classism, and more beyond naming.

Each of you, Monica, Nuria, Michelle and Urmi, through your praxis, ways of knowing and being, as well as responding to the amalgamation of oppressive power, exemplify Gloria E. Anzaldúa's (2003) notion of "spiritual activism." That is the recognition of the "sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings—*somos todos un país*" (p. 558). The work of love, of heart-soul, that you each engage in with and within your respective communities and contexts affirm for me that the spiritual activism that Anzaldúa described is not only possible but desperately necessary if we are to radically imagine and create otherwise, and anew more humane and transformative just conditions in communities and collectives in the present, and with and for generations to come. Let us continue in this rEVOLution where we sign on to embracing and enacting dissent as an imperative to decolonial liberation.

Abrazos, Jessica

Dear Jessica, Monica, Nuria, and Urmi,

As I write I want to bathe in and also think critically about the kinds of transnational solidarities we breathe, bend toward, struggle to sustain, cherish. I want to resist romanticizing and yet in the midst of COVID-19, it feels so good to be in conversation with you(s). As I sat to write this letter, looking for where to begin, I was reminded of a story about knitted caps in detention centers, that my friend/colleague/activist Andrea Juarez Mendoza told me. As a doctoral student/translator/researcher, Andrea traveled, with a legal watchdog group, to Dilley detention camp in Texas, where she met and translated with/for/alongside women and children seeking asylum, originally from Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala... There she witnessed sweet and bold solidarities nourished in hell. As some refugee women and children were leaving, and others staying, weeping/smiling/confused/holding hands across borders of state violence, those who were leaving wore the small caps of green and brown that the collective of women knit within the center. As they left, all sang, "*Si una se queda, todas nos quedamos. Si una se va, todas nos vamos.*" "If one of us stays, we all stay. If one of us leaves, we all leave" (personal communication, 2018, see also Mendoza, A. J. A *Nepantlera* in the Academy: Sowing Seeds con El Hilo, forthcoming). I wonder about the radical solidarities we stitch together and the knitted caps we wear when we are working in/with/alongside communities of struggle, and where we place our caps when we enter the academy. These questions of inquiry hatched in struggle, and then sustained across place/time/movements/writing/poetry/praxis, sit at the heart of my letter to you.

Sister/friends as I listened to us, I felt a soft shawl of knowledge/love-soaked inquiry draped across a sprawling we. This shawl of epistemic justice, held by our 10 hands and many more, embraced the spaces where we each sit

with/listen to/resist alongside/hold sacred and nourish counter storytelling. In our distinct sites of inquiry, we commit to hearing voices and lines of analysis long silenced, buried and clipped; we recognize these as forms of knowledge, challenging the belief that the academy holds a monopoly on knowledge (Fals-Borda, 1984). Together we bend toward emancipatory ethics as Monica speaks through disability justice and calls for a radical commitment to *silaturahmi*—to chat beside without predetermined diagnoses. We are indebted to the stunning critical ancestry Nuria narrated, grounded in Indigenous epistemologies so that we may make the road [together] by walking otherwise. Nuria beckoned us to envision pluriverses, drawn by wisdom and epistemes of the Majority World, the Global South, engaged by the ethical and political obligations to humans/non-humans, building an ecology of noncapitalist solidarities.

Not surprising, but nourishing, we all spoke of love and our inquiries forged "with." Each of us speaks/writes to challenge dominant and dehumanizing policies, practices, ideologies, enactments of state violence aimed at marginalized groups, people with disabilities, outsiders, insiders excluded within and the earth as we "perforate the official archive" (thank you Urmi), sit beside and refuse to intervene (thank you Monica), and offer up stories long silenced and buried (thank you Nuria). We animated our attempts to reveal the connective tissue of suffering, resistance and history to structural violence, dignity, and desire (thank you Jessica), even as we acknowledged that we labor in deeply contradictory spaces drenched in/threatened by neoliberalism, white supremacy, racial capitalist logics—otherwise called the academy. And throughout our sister-talk, across time zones and on distinct lands all trembling with state violence, racial capitalism, neoliberalism, environmental crises, and the relentless assaults of heteropatriarchy, we were held/listened to/reflected back and encouraged by the activist scholar spirit of Jessica.

Since that evening, and again since watching, at odd moments, I can feel your smile, Nuria, float across my screen and into my heart. This morning as I was walking with my 17-month-old grandbaby Rosie to the park, I tried to imagine how you sit, Monica, beside families of children with disabilities, particularly at a moment of COVID-19, isolation, separation, and what comfort you must convey. And whenever I turn on the news and hear a Republican declare that January 6 insurrectionists were patriots, seared into my soul are Urmi's words: "Majoritarian stories rely upon strategic forgetting." That morning/evening/afternoon, we held each other, as we accompanied our projects and co-conspirators, co-researchers and comrades, as I imagine we try to curate "holding environments" (thank you Winnicott) with our students. In these enactments of fragile-ities (not so solid), we knit pluriversity, a public shared space where knowledges from the ground up filled our hearts and provoked us to imagine what else is possible.

Across our brief "tapas" of presentations, I could hear exquisite care and attention to the local, and an insistence

on contesting the dominant gaze and violence on families of children with disabilities in Indonesia, and those who love and live in the rainforests in South America. I could hear demands for epistemic justice, appreciating the words/actions/poetry, sensing and feeling of those so generous to welcome us into their struggles. Together we wondered aloud: To whom/with whom/for whom do we write? To whom and with whom do we sit, alongside, in silence? How do we document the knowledge and practices already woven over generations by communities of struggle and survival, resistance and desire? What do we want to keep sacred and what might we speak back, to psychology and the academy, about the spaces/poetry/struggles seeping into our bodies? I felt warm and held by the connections stitched across, and laden with the weight of questions of accountability, provocation, and transformation across our varied sites of practice.

I am at once interested in the fragile and deliberate solidarities that Andrea found at the border, and the very different but also fragile and deliberate solidarities we forge across the academy as we dismantle illusions of objectivity and expertise, pierce the membrane between academic knowledge and the knowledge of struggle, culture, desire marinating on the ground in communities and lands under siege. And so for comfort, I turned to an old intellectual friend, French political theorist Chantal Mouffe, to think about how we might always honor the historic and current particulars of the local, and yet also make visible the capillaries of oppression and resistance, struggle and joy, that travel across. Mouffe calls these “chains of equivalence”:

³ I am not talking about abandoning particular forms of struggle. But when we talk about collective will, we will inevitably create some contradictions. That is politics. The chain of equivalence is about mobilizing people together through their different struggles—we call this a convergence of struggles. And creating a bond between those struggles in a way that recognizes the specificities of different struggles but also fiercely recognizing the commonalities and solidarities among the various struggles. (December 13, 2016, *The Nation*)

And so, I giggle to imagine that we too don knitted caps sitting atop our heads somewhere in the cyber-cloud above Melbourne (Australia) even as we commit to inquiry forged with movements for land and cultural dignity, disability justice, the earth, and for prison abolition.

I wonder when we will be able to hug
 Sending you sweet thoughts, friends.
 Michelle

Dear Jessica, Michelle, Monica, and Urmi, we will continue pursuing our denunciations to the national and international levels [in such forums] as the UN [United Nations] and OAS [Organization of American States] about the violation of human rights, and we will continue

to denounce the violations to our human rights as indigenous pueblos. And that we do not want to continue being used as booty in election campaigns that profit from our poverty. We are in solidarity with the struggle that is being developed by our *compañeras* in the Yacaltecas Union of Women for their respect of their free determination in the election of their own authorities and the defense of communitarian institutions [traditional indigenous communal structures] (“Weaving in the Spaces,” p. 139).

⁹ We started with about fifty women and girls and we were able to officially constitute ourselves and start to get support. We were called Te Gunaa Ruinchi Laadi [Women who Weave]. This group still exists (“Indigenous Women's Activism in Oaxaca and Chiapas,” p. 168). (In Speed et al., 2006, *Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*).

I tried to weave my feelings and thoughts after reading your loving and encouraging letters and my clumsy reply, incapable of articulating the soulful *movimiento* in my heart. I sat in front of my computer screen just feeling, allowing mis *lágrimas* to speak on my behalf. I did not mind if my audience spoke Spanglish or not, disregarding the need for imposed translation in the monolingual empire, and avoiding academic language. Jessica, you gave me the necessary courage. Your powerful words invite us to continuously dismantle the empire, the hegemonic academy, troubling the status quo *comadreando*. You ignite my enthusiasm with love and courage *para seguir caminando*.

I feel at home with you, dissident women who are “weaving in the spaces” from *muchos lugares*. I feel deep joy and permission to confide what is brewing in my heart and migrant flesh. *Comadrel/compañera* Monica, you dare us to rethink our positionalities in the hegemonic academy while committing to work with our communities with ethical accountability. I would like to share how painful it was to enter the academy in foreign lands trapped in-between languages, misrepresentations, pretensions, jargons, discriminations, insecurities, and equivocations. My parents wanted me to be educated in the Global North. I had to learn a different language and practice a new walk. Because of my short legs, I always had to catch up. There was never time, I always had to run. No matter how hard I tried, I was gazed at as an uneducated, sensual, and exotic woman in search of a European husband, a home, financial security, a fake reputation, and so on. But more than anything, I was expected to become fully white, to speak the European language without an accent, to cover my *pecas* and stay away from the sun. International government grants covered the costs of my education and required a secured return to my “salvaged land.” I was expected to teach others what I learned in their “civilized land” in order to promote progress and modernization. But it was a total failure. The conviviality with the Indigenous communities forged my deep admiration for their knowledge and ethical relationality with nature. It was hard to

unlearn the lies of the West but as many dissident women declare, we must dare!

We come from various grounds but weaving in spaces we become aware of the pervasive colonial difference in our daily lives. It is not the same to enunciate injustice from the social struggle as it is to write about it in the academe. We know because we have been in both places. I cannot stop the inner struggle, the deep conflict, the constant question: "What am I doing in the ivory tower? Have I lost my way home to *el otro lado*, where *nuestras comunidades* speak a different language? I want to *palabrandar* with them, walking and weaving insurrect words, making roads otherwise, *sentipensando* in affective conviviality with them. Asking day after day, where are the meeting points of solidarity in our struggles for liberation? How can we conspire in the belly of the beast, the hegemonic academy and its institutions, to dismantle the pervasive racism, heteronormativity, ableism, white supremacy, decapitating the capitalist hydra, mobilizing resources, and finally ending the epistemic and political ignorance and lies written in academic textbooks? How can we manifest decolonial imagination into transformative embodied action? We must ask many questions because in times of trouble it is not about finding the right answers but constantly questioning what is taken for granted. It is about finding ruptures that create systemic dysfunction.

During the time I spent in affective conviviality with the Lacandón communities in the Sacred Rainforest of Chiapas, I witnessed in awe her powerful and rhythmic song, constantly reminding us of the insignificance of human existence. The Anthropocene diluted in her loving presence, permeating every breath, every pulse, and body movement with her rich biodiversity. There I understood her ancestral wisdom *con corazón* as Indigenous knowledges can only be deeply comprehended with our hearts. For Indigenous cosmovisions, the Earth is testimony of the right for life. But this right is differently understood in the global discourse of universal human rights conceived by and for whites.

Comadrelcompañera Michelle, you stir trouble raising the demands and solidarities of courageous incarcerated women against their brutal confinement that is only possible in the systemic decadence we continue to live in. You teach us how these women survive the violent attack of abuse and claustrophobic coloniality in their solidarity of resistance against the capitalist hydra and its weapons of racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, pathological greediness, emptiness, alienation, and despair. You courageously accompany them demanding the end of violence against them and their children. Their powerful stories forever tattooed their feminine, sacred power in *nuestras almas*: Yes ¹² can—*si se puede*!

Three dissident women from Abya Yala, Yuderkis Espinosa, Dina ¹²omez, and Karina Ochoa shared in their work entitled, *Tejiendo de Otro Modo: Feminismo, Epistemología y Apuestas Decoloniales* (Feminism, Epistemology, and Decolonial Bets) (Espinosa et al., 2014) the *retos y tropiezos* when forging intercultural plurilogues with Zapatista women in Chiapas. One Indigenous woman said

to them, "*Compañeras, su palabra es muy dura y mi corazón no las entiende* (Comrades, your words are too hard and my heart cannot understand them)" (p. 22). This transformative wisdom made them realize how coloniality is socialized in the academe, obsessively insisting in the abyssal difference marking one side of the line as "unintelligible knowledge" that needs to be reformulated with "intelligible academic jargon" in the other side of the line to warrant white supremacy and expand the legitimized arrogant ignorance (De Sousa Santos, 2018). But you, *comadrelcompañera* Michelle, know how to talk with these dissident women locked in cruel prisons because of patriarchal abuse with soft words and open-heart weaving plurilogues of deep mutual understanding.

It is easy to forget the authentic commitment for anti-racist justice due to the seduced and devouring tentacles of the academy with the purpose of maintaining coloniality disguised as universal science. In contrast, you all show us how to authentically co-create intercultural relations with communities in struggle based on mutual recognition and dignified promotion of their own cultural language and identities—instead of the colonial lexicon and imposed exclusion of their beings. You teach us via the powerful resistance and emancipatory poetry that softens our hearts and sparks our bodies to imagine action against linguistic, genocide, epistemicide, and ecocide. Our dissident solidarities dismantle, disapprove, repudiate, contradict, and confront the hegemonic ivory tower and use it to center community struggles and social movements in our classrooms, based on our praxes. We learn from movements around the world that have been demanding the rights of Mother Earth, cultures and traditions, as well as the right for a dignified life, sovereignty, and autonomous cultural identity for centuries.

Comadrelcompañera Monica, holding our hands against the colonial episteme based on race, gender, heterosexuality, and ableism, you courageously address the intersectionality caused by coloniality on dignified bodies that devalues and labels them "not able" to serve the brutal capitalist hydra. You teach us how communities build cohesion and power to define themselves. You demonstrate how they co-construct the needed infrastructure for their everyday existence and political demands, imagining their world not as "the other" but otherwise. That is, a world in which their world fits. You sensitively weave solidarities with them and courageously dismantle the colonial episteme of difference and exclusion.

Dissident women from Abya Yala, Suarez et al. (2017), name plurilogues of knowledges with communities in struggle for antiracist, social, epistemic, and ecological justice as "*El Círculo de la Palabra: Entetejiendo palabra y Pensamiento Bonito* (The Circle of Words: Weaving Words and Beautiful Thought)." *Comadrelcompañera* Jessica, you conclude lovingly our dissident plurilogue *entetejiendo saberes* in beautiful thought, imagining the not yet, and skillfully *corazonando* with deep sensitivity. Outside the hegemonic jargon, you loudly whisper our *chismes* to dismantle patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, and ableism.

In your work, you empower generations of students to stand up and demand transformative change in the rusted university by embodying decolonial pedagogy while holding a loving container for them to confront white privilege.

We come from diverse geopolitical localities and positionalities and have the common privilege of being in the ivory tower as well as with communities. Yes, we can build transnational solidarities against the capitalist hydra! (Sixth Commission of the EZLN November, 2016). We must unite and conspire, weaving *nuestros rebozos*, like Jessica proposed, and joyfully raising our knitted caps, like Michelle proposed, opposing western hegemony in different forms. We denounce the white feminist savior complex as continuation of patriarchal hegemony that generates hierarchical difference as colonial legacy. We reclaim our womanist-mujerista (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016) dissidence joining hands of many colors with *campesinas*, *artesanías*, *poetas*, *curanderas*, students, *maestras*, scholar-activists, Indigenous peoples, Black communities, people of color, women in prisons, people of marginalized genders, activists, migrants, *caravanas sin fronteras*, and dreamers from the North and the South. We build cartographies of insurgent subjectivities from different localities: Indonesia, India, the United States, and México. Let's unite our *corazones*, "stirring trouble and building theories in the flesh" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Morawski et al., 1995), *sentipensando*, *palabrando*, and performing dissidence in our classrooms and beyond. Resisting being called subaltern, we shall create, embrace, cry, sing together, hope, dance, denounce, dream, and dare!

Con mucho cariño and dissident love,
 Nuria

Dear Jessica, Michelle, Nuria and Urmi, While reading your letters, and writing mine, I was imagining that we were actually sitting across from each having a kind of interconnected monologue and plurilogue at the same time. I was imagining a kind of conversation where strengths and encouragements did not only come from our words, but also through our shared pauses and silences and moments where we couldn't really find the word to name the thought and feeling we were battling with, yet somehow, we felt that our friends/sisters could understand it anyway.

With each story of liberation and resistance we shared, our belief in the possibilities for and the power of solidarities and radically inclusive imaginaries were affirmed. The activism of Lacandóna youth sends a sense of hope about the possibilities of departing ourselves from the "taken-for-granted fascinations" with the anthropocentric, paternalistic, colonizing, capitalistic ways of being that have disrespected and endangered our bio and socio-ecology. The shared commitment among women and children seeking asylum in a detention camp in Texas as well as among women/activists/researchers involved in the Public Science Project in New York, is an "aesthetic provocation" for envisioning our shared quest for a more humane society. Witnessing the daring youth involved in the "police-free school" activism reignite our belief that challenging status-quo is possible. And, it is from the determination of

disability activists in Indonesia and families impacted by the stigmatizing-ableist society, I learn about the power of fostering collective critical consciousness as an avenue for surfacing and dismantling my ignorance of and partaking in the perpetuation of normalized dehumanization.

At the same time, however, as we travelled together from one story to the next, I couldn't help but notice that the colonial legacies of being had become the heart-wrenching thread that connects our stories. In our shared stories, I found embodied testaments of what became the opening sentence of Jessica's publication: "Coloniality outlives colonialism" (Fernández et al., 2021, p. 1; Quijano, 2000). I was particularly drawn into what I read as the narratives of inflicted unworthiness. These appear to be the narratives that have also become the connected thread between my grandmother, my mother and my generation. My grandmother was born in the early 1900s, the last century out of three centuries of the Dutch colonization in Indonesia. During her teenage years, when she attended a Catholic school run by a colonial missionary, she was baptized into Catholic church. With this baptism, her belief in and practices of Javanese spirituality (the spirituality with which she was raised by her family and community) had gradually sidelined. In other words, her baptism was also a memento of how colonialism had set the parameter for what could be considered as a worthy or unworthy spiritualities. So, the narrative of inflicted unworthiness during my grandmother's era was in the form of people being undermined for not following the religions introduced (or perhaps imposed) by the colonial ruling power.

My mother was born in the late 1940s, the time when Indonesia was a young postcolonial nation. During her teenage years in the mid 1960s, when Indonesia was governed by the New Order regime, she witnessed what was considered as one of the darkest periods in Indonesian history. It was the time when political tensions and upheavals related with anti-communism happened in many countries and regions, including in Indonesia. During these years, hundreds of thousands of people associated or were accused of having association with the Indonesian Communist Party (ICP) or other leftist organizations were massacred, and 100,000 or more were tortured and imprisoned without any prosecution (Mulder, 1996). One of the dominant narratives used to justify this atrocity was the depictions of the supporters of the ICP as devilish atheists, therefore, it was morally mandatory to brutally exterminate those people. As a result, there was a political pressure for people to overtly express their religious identities and/or affiliations as a way of declaring 'I am not a communist.' During these years the narrative of inflicted unworthiness forced people to live their religions in ways that were instructed by the regime, otherwise they were at risk of being stigmatized as the enemy of the society or even being criminalized.

I was born in the mid 1970s. Like most of those who were born in this decade, religion was central in our upbringing, throughout our schooling years and eventually it

becomes a major part of how we live our lives, relate to each other and give meaning to our existence and environments. Throughout my adult life, I have witnessed how religions have become a kind of political commodity upon which political tensions, intergroup conflicts and violence, as well as community segregations are built or even orchestrated. What comes next has been the depictions of religions as a key problem that has impeded the ability of Indonesia to be a progressive, modern, and democratic society. And with this, I experience the cliché of history repeating itself. My grandmother's generation was undermined for believing in their traditional spiritualities, my mother generation has to bear a severe socio-political trauma for being forced to be religiously correct, and now my generation appears to be questioned and problematized for centering religions in both our personal and communal life. It was this kind of repeated story of inflicted unworthiness that also caught my mind when we were sharing our stories of liberation and resistance.

Dear friends, as my heart was full of admiration for the powerful resistance and solidarity enacted by the communities we are working with, at the same time, my mind was troubled by the lingering legacy of colonialism upon which the hierarchy of superiority and inferiority has been continuously maintained and reproduced. With this reflection, I found that Michelle's question about "the ethnographies of privilege" was really right on point. From the families and disability activists from whom I have been indebted for their "aesthetic provocation", I learned that continuously reflecting on and having conversations around this question of 'ethnographies of privilege' has become a gateway for experiencing a consciousness-rising. Such reflections and conversations may help us gaining an awareness that (as academics/researchers/activists), we have maintained our privileges through what anthropologist Tania Li's (2007) calls as "the will to improve."

In the context of disability in Indonesia, this "will to improve" has been in the form of stigmatizing and patronizing research and interventions which position able-bodied persons in superior roles for abnormalizing, pitying, correcting and rehabilitating people with disabilities. Perhaps, in a way, it was the same with what my grandmother experienced. For her, this "will to improve" was in the form of 'saving people from false beliefs.' And, in the case of my mother generation, it was in the form of 'saving people from the danger of communism.' So, as the narrative of inflicted unworthiness is repeated, apparently, so does the presumptuous 'will to improve' myths.

With this reflection, it seems that interrogating the question of ethnographies of privilege, may have to be started by interrogating my versions of "will to improve" that have consciously or unconsciously guided my positioning and role as an academic, the studies and activism I am involved in, as well as the ways I relate to the university where I work.

Monica

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON EPISTOLARY WRITINGS TO RESIST ERASURES

April 22 commemorates Earth Day. A memorable day of ecological awareness and celebratory gratitude to our Mother Earth. A day in which we humbly immerse ourselves in deep reflection on our arrogance, greediness, and destruction. A planetary consciousness that "womanifests" our insignificant existence in the Anthropocene. It vanishes and merges with the soothing surrounding of ecological ontologies in relation with and in the Earth. This is one of the significant erasures and exclusions in the hegemonic academy. We barely engage in spiritual relation with the Earth, *sentipensando* and *palabrendo* to co-construct the eEcocene.

In our epistemic disobedience, we also note, as many feminists from the Global North and South have denounced, that our voices and contributions continue to be erased, shadowed, and appropriated by so-called "dissident men." For instance, Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, 2018), an inspiring dissident and Indigenous *mujerista* from Bolivia, overtly stated that those who have become popular in hegemonic discourse on decoloniality are mostly men teaching in prestigious universities in the Global North. These decolonial scholars, she added, forget to acknowledge the contributions of women who are still struggling in the southern trenches in solidarity with communities and social movements. These are courageous women who many times risk their lives. We dedicate our relationally threaded letters—our epistolary methodology of disruption against erasure—to these dissident and courageous women's contributions. ⁷

Committed community psychologists embrace values of social justice and inclusion. Yet the voices of rebellious women and all those labeled as "the marginalized, the oppressed, the colonized" are transformed into victims and excluded as agentic contributors of significant knowledge and *praxes* in our field. Our scholarly productions rarely invite activists to create and lead the discourse; to write the "herstory" that is known but difficult to see: the absent narrative that is erased and excluded from academic discourse. We, *mujeristas*, academics and practitioners, "womanifest" our commitment and transnational solidarities, our epistemic disobedience and resistance. In doing so we center the voices of dissent of revolutionary women for epistemic justice.

CLOSING OUR THREADED PLURILOGUE

The letters we, as dissident women, have humbly offered in this article move ² us close(r) in a time when we are "together apart." Letters transcend and trespass; they also thread. They are the needle that weaves, *el hilo y la aguja*, our stories alongside the longings for connection,

relationality and radical solidarities that are grounded in what is felt in body, bone and flesh, in the marrow of our soul. Letters connect and amend when words are lost, when we cannot express verbally or even physically what is felt. Thus, the needle and thread that is the pen and paper, the strokes of the keyboard on a blank screen that is a canvas, resurface words from the heart. The needle and thread begin to move. Letters move, reach, and live on unlike any other mode of writing. They have the capacity to invite, incite and ignite reflection along with emotions and actions (De Robertis, 2017; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Rosales & Rosales, 2019; White et al., 2007). Your/our letters have rekindled the embers of our wilted sensibilities in the face of violence. Our letters are the salve with which we can, to some degree, be at ease. We are threading meanings and dreams into being.

We are *mujeres*, each of us of a different thread—texture, feel, color. And each of us *tejidas*, threaded relationally, humanly, and lovingly. We care for each other not because we have something to offer to one another, or because we are crafting and stitching together. We care for each other because we can see ourselves in each other, because we walk together, even dance in dissent. We unravel the yarns of the academy that entangle us, not alone or isolated but rather in the company/accompaniment of each other; we have no other ways to exist and resist the academy. Our relational decolonial love is our disruption against the erasure of our heart-soul-fist, our foremothers and those that came and will come before, and after us.

Letters are a mode through which we can reach out, lean in. Letters cross, perforate the boundaries of what is often difficult to say out loud and express. We can reach, extend and embrace the self with and within ourselves. What we wrote and what we offered, are our writings in letter form, speaking back and affirming to ourselves and each other how we resist. We resist the threads that wound, shackle and bind us, and we refuse being trimmed and knotted. We are threading/reading, we are writing/righting. The letters we have offered here are our letters of hope, love and dissent that what we have shared through these reflections circulate beyond the paginations of a journal, the academy and the positionalities that have been ascribed to us. Yet we affirm, know, see and feel ourselves as being, holding, carrying and threading much more than what we allow ourselves to show. We are piecing together these letters to invite you, dear reader, to thread with us with a needle of hope and a yarn of heart a *rebozo* that will hold and uplift.

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