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Decolonization of the mind and spirit : healing strategies through Latin@ critical consciousness

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DECOLONIZATION OF THE MIND AND SPIRIT: HEALING
STRATEGIES THROUGH LATIN@ CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Victor G. Garza
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Dissertation Abstract

Decolonization of the mind and spirit: Healing strategies through Latin@
critical consciousness

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are various systemic conditions and elements that contribute to and
perpetuate the cycle of colonialism, including the deeply epistemic, ontological, and
axiological underpinnings that fuel its existence and maintain its invisibility. Although
having a critical analysis of colonization/colonialism and understanding the impact
historical/intergenerational traumas have on Latina/os is the initial step to decolonization,
the healing phase is crucial in progressing with decolonizing the mind and spirit.

The challenge Latina/os encounter in confronting colonialism and its legacy is
partly due to a lack of educational models to aid them in the decolonization process.
Therefore a need exists to explore and document the process of decolonization of the
mind and spirit and the maintenance of such a state in order to develop decolonization
and healing strategies.

PROCEDURES AND METHODS

This study used critical ethnography in exploring the phenomenon of
decolonization of the mind and spirit amongst a select group of Latina/o educators. Two
group dialogues with seven participants and three individual follow-up dialogues were
conducted. In addition, group activities and interactions were observed during a 3-day
retreat. All formal dialogues were transcribed and shared with each participant for review

to ensure accuracy and maintain integrity. Throughout the research process, informal dialogues and conversations were conducted with participants and group members to enrich the data.

RESULTS

The research participants generated six major generative themes in the process of decolonizing the mind and spirit. They are: 1) Development of Consciousness, 2) Overcoming Internalized Oppression, 3) The Role of Healing, 4) Seeking Authentic Connections, 5) Strategies to Maintain Continuity, and 6) Integrating/Teaching Decolonizing Practices.

CONCLUSIONS

Decolonization of the mind and spirit is a process which requires one to recognize the forces that shape his/her life. For participants, naming the effects of colonialism and its direct impact on their lives led to profound introspection. They were able to recognize how their current positionality is linked to intergenerational experiences (e.g., historical trauma).

This study demonstrated that decolonization of the mind and spirit extends beyond the understanding of colonialism's legacy and the rediscovery of ancestral traditions and values. Having an awareness of the effects of colonialism/oppression on one's life is merely the first step to a life-long process. The "consciousness" of its effects must be felt and experienced – it must penetrate every facet of one's being (mind, body, and soul).

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Victor G. Garza   12/10/2010
Candidate   Date

Dissertation Committee

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Victor R. Garza.
Thank you for walking the path of social justice.

To my mother, Angeles S. Luna,
Thank you for supporting me through this process.

To my beloved wife and partner, Brenda Castillo-Garza,
Thank you for walking with me side-by-side on this journey.
Your own transformation has been an inspiration in doing this work.

To mi hija, Itzel.
This work is for you and future generations.

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CHAPTER I

The Research Problem

Background of the Researcher

My journey to healing, to reclaim cultural legacies in order to become Whole, has been arduous, enlightening, painful, and spiritually liberating. In my personal and professional experience working with Latina/o youth and families, it is the process of healing from past pains and traumas that is often avoided because it requires introspection and a remembering of past experiences that have been long suppressed. When these suppressed memories are accessed and allowed to surface they can and will cause deep grief and pain. It is only when we allow ourselves to experience and feel the confusing and conflicting emotions that we can begin the healing process.

Today, I am acutely aware of how educational assimilationist policies and practices, the media's depiction of what constitutes beauty and who is considered American (i.e., Whiteness as normative), capitalism/consumerism, and Christian fundamentalism stripped me of my identity (cultural, linguistic) and replaced it with Western racialized notions of inferiority. I internalized these notions of racial inferiority and they manifested in violent and harmful ways during my teenage and early adult years, such as drug abuse and repeated physical altercations with loved ones. As a young teenager I became embarrassed about my racial identity and culture, I longed to be anything other than Chicano (I self-identify as Chicano, a political identity as much as it is a racial one). I believed all the negative depictions and portrayals of Mexicans in history books and the media. I was taught to hate myself despite the fact that I have a proud Chicano activist as a father that continues to fight for equality and social justice and a strong, resilient Mexican mother that has overcome obstacles that would have

broken down most people. Yet, there are many positive things that I witnessed and experienced as a child by my parents example that shaped who I am today.

My parents divorced when I was thirteen years of age. Prior to their divorce, my sisters and I accompanied my parents to dozens of events celebrating the Chicano experience, including political events. Although at the time I was incapable of understanding the importance that these experiences would play in my life, I now understand their impact. These childhood experiences left an indelible imprint on my consciousness for the social concern of *mi raza* (my race). Throughout this dissertation I will use the term *raza* interchangeably with Latina/o. The term Latina/o is a more commonly used and accepted one in literature because of its inclusiveness of ethnicities from Mexico, the Caribbean and Latin America (many being previous colonies of Spain). However, the term *raza* is a political one unique to the United States and was historically used during the Civil Rights Movement, a movement that gave rise to other movements such as the Chicano Movement and Puerto Rican Movement in the late 1960's. Therefore the term *raza* because of its historical and political significance will be used.

I never realized until I developed a critical conscious (questioning and analyzing social injustices and inequities) that I had been colonized, that I had internalized oppressions (racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.). As a young adult my judgment was clouded by emotional pain and suffering and my view of reality was skewed. I was angry at the White race for all the injustices people of color endured in their lives. I was angry at family members and friends for befriending the White race and not realizing that they were the enemy. As one can imagine, it wasn't long before I discovered that I had alienated myself from those I cared for most and sought to protect through my well-

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intended but anger-filled version of educational enlightenment. It was at this moment that I had a striking revelation that I was emotionally and mentally unhealthy. I realized this emotional state would inevitably lead to my demise if I continued on this self-destructive path. Shortly thereafter, I sought ways to purge these residual feelings. Through healthy releases (e.g., counseling sessions, tears, sacred/ceremonial practices) spanning several years, I was able to break free from the anger, rage, pain, and depression that had been internalized and projected onto those I loved. However, it took me several years to discover and realize that merely understanding what has caused the pains was not enough – I had to walk the path of healing.

All the lived counter narratives (a deliberate intent to position the voices of marginalized groups as ones of authority to resist dominant societal discursive practices) that I experienced as a child, informing me that I was not inferior, were not enough to insulate me from the incessant messages of inferiority that I received through two of the most powerful U.S. imperial forces: the U.S. public education system and the media. The education I received as a child by my parents and my community about the Chicano legacy was always in the margins, outside of mainstream and accredited (i.e., valid U.S. governmental standards) educational institutions. Therein lied the problem, the Chicano legacy was never validated by the U.S. educational system; therefore, psychologically as a child, the counter narratives which I received and absorbed did not provide me with the resilience needed to overcome the messages of inferiority. And the entire psychological, spiritual, emotional suffering that I endured and the pain that I internalized as a youth and suppressed throughout my teens and early adult years manifested in self-hatred and destructive acts of violence. It wasn't until I came to the realization of how contemporary

colonial forces (hegemony, capitalism, patriarchy, racism, Christian fundamentalism, etc.) deeply affected me holistically and infected me spiritually that I realized the importance of becoming decolonized and recognized healing from this as a vital aspect of the process.

Colonial Manifestations

For more than five hundred years, indigenous peoples have survived various oppressions: land theft, genocide, rape, the killing of our ancestors, forced religious conversion, boarding schools, and the demise of many of our traditional ways of governance, languages, and cultural and spiritual teachings. This legacy is called "historical trauma" or intergenerational trauma. History has left many of us wounded and it has been passed from generation to generation…(Gonzales, 2005).

In order to begin healing internalized oppression we must understand how social structures and systems of domination contribute to and create the oppressions (Gonzales, 2005). Gonzales (2005) believes once we gain a deeper understanding of what has wounded us we can begin to move towards healing and liberation. Freire (1970) sheds light on how colonialism and domination occur through "cultural invasion" by explaining that the colonizers are "the authors of, actors in, the process; those they invade are the objects" (p. 152). Those that are invaded are molded to see their reality with the viewpoint of the colonizers, further stabilizing the position of the colonizer. Another oppressive weapon utilized by the colonizer is "banking" education (Freire, 1970) which transforms students into receiving objects and attempts to control their thinking and

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action, manipulating the colonized to adjust to the world of the colonizer. Freire (1992) asserts for these reasons the colonizer can neither liberate nor be liberated; only the colonized can liberate the colonizer by resisting, opposing, and forbidding the colonizer to keep oppressing. As we move from object to subject, we experience self-recovery and we are no longer shaped and determined by the dominant culture (hooks, 1989).

As we learn about historical social injustices and inequality, and understand societal oppression, our awareness of the political, economic, and social conditions that affect us increases (hooks, 1989; Smith, 1999). In order for *raza* to reach critical consciousness, we must be critical of the dominant culture (hegemony/capitalist seduction/consumer identities) and reject oppression. As hooks (1989) eloquently asserts, "Domination and colonization attempt to destroy our capacity to know the self, to know who we are. We oppose this violation, this dehumanization, when we seek self-recovery, when we work to reunite fragments of being to recover our history" (p. 31). And it is the abstract notion of colonialism that requires a deeper analysis and understanding as to its individual, communal, and societal manifestations and what, if anything, can Latina/os do to prevent the seemingly continual destruction of *raza*. Therefore, a need exists to explore and understand colonialism by examining its impact on the socio-psychological and spiritual consciousness of Latina/os and how they can liberate themselves from the legacy of colonialism and domination.

There exists a group of Latina/o educators called MAESTR@S that are actively engaged in the process of decolonizing their minds and spirits and this research is based on their work. Through exercises and activities designed to help them reflect deeply and recall painful memories, they are working towards understanding intellectually how they

were brought within this system of domination and came to be colonized while simultaneously reconnecting spiritually. For the purpose of this research study, spirituality is defined as "one's internal sense of connection to the universe", which may include a connection to humanity or the environment (Wilson, 2008, p. 91). This connection to humanity and the environment is essential to the decolonization process because it humanizes all people and helps one to see that all living things are interrelated. This process of reconnection exorcises the toxic materialistic messages of capitalist greed, leaving one capable of recognizing that attempting to fill up on consumerism only leaves us spiritually empty (hooks, 2000). As Wilson (2008) states, "any exercise that increases connection or builds relationship is spiritual in nature" (p. 91). And connecting to one another to heal individually and collectively is precisely what the members of MAESTR@S are pursuing.

The members of MAESTR@S recognize when we become critically conscious of how hegemonic practices and structures influence and to an extent control us in our daily lives then we can begin to recover and reclaim cultural legacies (traditions, language, spiritual teachings, among others) to become Whole. However, this has not been the case for the majority of *raza*. Indeed, racist colonial oppressions have been internalized by U.S. Latina/os and their manifestations (school dropout rates, gang violence, suicide rates, drug and alcohol abuse, etc.) are perceived to be the cause of Latina/o cultural deficiencies (Scheurich & Young, 1997; Yosso, 2006) rather than the result of the legacy of colonialism.

The dismal success rates of Latina/o youth in school have been well-documented for decades (San Miguel, 1987; Pizarro, 2005; Yosso, 2006) and as it currently stands

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there do not seem to be any foreseeable changes. Indeed, in 2006 the high school dropout rate for Latina/os was 22 percent, compared with six percent for Whites and 11 percent for Blacks (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Although there have been some fluctuations over the past 35 years, the Latina/o dropout rate pattern has relatively gone unchanged (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007).

It is believed that performance on fourth grade reading and math assessments predict academic success in future grades (National Assessment of Education Progress, 2008). In 2007, the Children's Defense Fund issued a report citing that in California, 78% of fourth grade public school students cannot read nor do math at grade level. According to the same report, 90% of Latina/os are not performing at grade level. Among fourth graders, 41 percent of Whites are reading at grade level compared to 16 percent of Latina/os. In math, 39 percent of White students perform at grade level compared to 13 percent of Latina/os. In every category Latina/os lagged behind their White counterparts indicating that future school success for Latina/os is bleak. However, all of the previously cited data only provides limited insight into the challenges Latina/os face daily in U.S. society.

A significant development in the past decade has been the growing proportion of the Latina/o population entering prisons and jails. According to a report issued by the Sentencing Project (2007), in 2005 Latina/os comprised 20% of the state and federal prison population, a rise of 43% since 1990. As a result of these trends, one of every six Latino males and one of every 45 Latina females born today can expect to go to prison in his or her lifetime. These rates are more than double those for Whites. The incarceration rates for Latina/o youth are equally disturbing.

According to a recent report published by the National Council of La Raza (May 2009), Latina/o youth are treated more harshly by the justice system than White youth at "all stages in the justice system including police stops, arrests, detention, waiver to the adult criminal justice system, and sentencing" (p. 5). In California, one out of every five Latina/os arrested is a youth. Although Latina/o youth account for less than 10% of total arrests in California, they make up 51% of the youth arrested. The fact that a Latina/o youth is more likely to go to prison than college in their lifetime is catastrophic and it sends a message to millions of Latina/os that "America's dream is not for all" (Children's Defense Fund, 2007).

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) report on National Youth Risk Behaviors (2007) found that Latina/o students were more likely than either Black students or White students to attempt suicide, use cocaine, heroin or ecstasy, and ride with a driver who had been drinking alcohol. Latina/o students were also more likely than both Black students and White students to say they did not go to school on occasion because of safety concerns, were offered or sold illegal drugs on school property or drank alcohol on school property.

The CDC's 2008 data sheet reported that more than 11 percent of all Latina/o students said they had attempted suicide compared to White and Black rates of 7.5 percent. More alarming is the rate for females was higher, where 14 percent of Latina high school students in grades 9-12 reported suicide attempts, compared to their White (7.7%) or Black (9.9%) female counterparts. About 36 percent of Latina/os reported prolonged feelings of sadness or hopelessness, slightly higher than previous years. In contrast, about 28.5 percent of Black students reported such feelings in the 2005 survey,

about the same as two previous surveys. Approximately 26 percent of White students reported such feelings, down slightly from 2003 and 2001 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2006).

These alarming trends are a clear indication that *raza* have a dismal future where hopelessness can be internalized and embedded in familial/communal legacies – being passed from one generation to the next – eventually establishing itself as the norm. Indeed, Duran (2006) warns us that helplessness/hopelessness can be learned and internalized and if it is not dealt with it can affect subsequent generations. He stresses that interventions that address "these issues at the source" are required (p. 23). If not, it will continue to plague future generations despite the number of interventions provided to treat the symptoms.

It is evident that levels of racism (individual, institutional, societal, civilizational) play a significant role in dramatic inequalities and injustices, such as a Latina/o youth receiving a harsher punishment by the justice system than a White youth for the same crime. The question is: How do some of these levels remain difficult to detect and relatively invisible to the majority of U.S. society? In their seminal piece, Scheurich and Young (1997a) provide a critical analysis of the four levels of racism and describe them as follows:

- Individual Racism consists of overt and covert (p. 4):
  - Overt racism is a public, conscious, and intended act by a person or persons from one race with the intent of doing damage to a person or persons of another race chiefly because of the race of the second person or persons.

- Covert racism occurs when people making covert, racially biased decisions do not explicitly broadcast their intentions; instead, they veil them or provide reasons that society will find more palatable.

- Institutional Racism exists when institutions or organizations have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race (p. 5).

- Societal Racism exists when prevailing societal or cultural assumptions, norms, concepts, habits, expectations, etc. favor one over one or more other races (p. 6).

- Civilizational Racism is the level of broad civilizational assumptions, assumptions that, though they construct the nature of our world and our experience of it, are not typically conscious to most members of a civilization (p. 7).

The descriptions above provide insight into racism's complexity while, at the same time, making it easier to comprehend how acts of individual and institutional racism can harm victims of such acts. Yet, it is the abstract and deeper levels of societal and civilizational racism which remain difficult to discern and comprehend. However, through the lens of Critical Race Theory – which theorizes race and racism in relationship to issues of labor, economics, and law – a critical awareness of race as a historically evolved social construct ensues, in addition to an understanding that racism is encoded in our everyday lives. Although several scholars would agree that the various levels of racism contribute to societal ills, (Omni & Winant 1994; Scheurich & Young, 1997a; Wise, 2005), other scholars argue that underneath the layers of inequality lies the core, which is the legacy of colonization and oppression (Duran, 2006; hooks, 1989; Smith, 1999).

Several models have been developed and applied to explain the academic shortcomings and failures of Latina/o youth such as the deficit model, which assumes that people of color do not do well academically because of their culture, their parents, their peers, and their race/ethnicity (Scheurich & Young, 1997b). However, many scholars believe that schools are designed to perpetuate inequality and ensure that only a few succeed (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fischer, et al., 1996), thus, maintaining systemic oppression. Other scholars claim that U.S. schools strip Latino/as of their identity by way of assimilationist practices that are inherently racist (Pizarro, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2006).

In response to racist theoretical models, like the deficit model, other theoretical explanations have been developed to understand the complexities of the educational experiences of *raza*. One such counter deficit model is Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling, which argues that schools subtract resources from Latina/o youth in two major ways: (a) they dismiss Latina/o's definition of education and (b) they minimize Latina/os culture and language through assimilationist policies and practices. With more counter deficit model research being published, alternative paradigms are produced, which point to institutional policies and practices (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fischer, et al., 1996; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002), hegemony, systemic racism (Pizarro, 2005; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Yosso, 2006), and the legacy of colonialism as the source of the problem (Duran & Duran, 1996; Laenui, 2000; Smith, 1999).

As we develop a critical consciousness, our awareness of the process of hegemony is increased. The implication is that in identifying the processes by which

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oppression occurs, we challenge the so-called "truth" of the dominant ideology in ways that expose and destabilize colonialism (Anzaldúa, 2007; Duran & Duran, 1996; Freire, 1995; hooks, 1989; Smith, 1999). To achieve a just and equitable society, individuals must become critically aware of how hegemony, capitalism, globalism, racism, patriarchy, heterosexism, ableism, and Christian fundamentalism play a powerful role in shaping and influencing societal values, beliefs, laws, policies and educational practices. In addition, they must reflect on their willingness to invest spiritual and emotional energy in order to support others in the community to reach critical consciousness.

Decolonization of the mind is generally defined as having a clear understanding of how capitalism/hegemony, racism/White supremacy, patriarchy/sexism, homophobia/heterosexism and Christian fundamentalism play a powerful role in shaping and maintaining systems of oppression (Grande, 2004). Decolonization of the spirit is generally defined as healing from a legacy of colonization and a recovery of cultural/indigenous roots that leads to the restoration of Self to a condition of wholeness (hooks, 1989; Laenui, 2000). Together, decolonization of the mind and spirit is an intellectual, psychological, emotional, and spiritual journey to self-determination (Duran 2006; Grande, 2004; Hibbard, 2001) and becoming Whole. It is a holistic process, which entails resurrecting painful memories and experiences that have been suppressed and requires critical analysis of dominant hegemonies that manipulate and seduce the mind and spirit, and mutes the liberatory voice (hooks, 1989).

Statement of the Problem

Several scholars maintain that colonialism and its legacy has profoundly impacted and devastated communities globally (Duran, 2006; Gonzales, 2005; Grande, 2004;

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Grosfoguel, 2008; Smith 1999). While their definitions of colonialism may differ, there is

one common element that they share: colonialism transcends the traditional meaning of

foreign governmental rule over occupied territories. Grosfoguel (2008) goes beyond the

traditional definition and defines colonialism as "the cultural, political, sexual, spiritual,

epistemic and economic oppressive/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups

by dominant racial/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial

administrations" (p. 129). Although Grosfoguel captures various systemic conditions and

elements that contribute to and perpetuate the cycle of contemporary colonialism, he does

not capture its deeply epistemic, ontological, and axiological underpinnings that fuel its

existence and maintain its invisibility. For this reason, Grande's (2004) definition of

colonialism will be used, which she describes as "a multidimensional force underwritten

by religious fundamentalism, defined by White supremacy, and fueled by global

capitalism" (p. 8). By naming the multidimensional forces that are deeply embedded

within U.S. society, she not only captures the essence of colonialism, but also its

complexity. Part of the intent of this research is to explore the effects of colonialism and

how *raza* can heal from its legacy.

Historically, decolonization has been referred to as political, economic, and

cultural liberation from colonialism (Grosfoguel, 2008). In short, it refers to

independence from governance and authority by another country. However, this

definition is incomplete because it does not include the devastating and lasting effects of

colonialism on a population that is subjugated and whose human consciousness is

enslaved. According to Grande (2004), "Decolonization (like democracy) is neither

achievable nor *definable* [emphasis mine], rendering it ephemeral as a goal, but perpetual

as a process" (p. 166). Laenui (2000) also claims that decolonization is not easily understood and the process is perpetual. He believes it is helpful and, at times, necessary to revisit phases of the decolonization process (outlined in the literature review).

Through narratives, past research has explored decolonization amongst various groups that have experienced and lived oppression within the U.S. and its territories, such as Filipinos (Strobel, 1996), Native Americans (Battiste, 2000; Dei, Hal, & Rosenberg, 2000) and Mexicans (Viramontes, 2006). Although these groups share a history of oppression, there is no guarantee that the experiences of decolonization will be the same. The strength of past studies is the rich description of individual experiences of decolonization; yet, these studies have not explored and documented the process of decolonization of the mind and spirit and the maintenance of such a state. A need exists to explore and describe the phenomenon to better understand it in hopes of developing educational decolonizing and healing strategies and sharing them with marginalized and oppressed groups seeking to heal from a legacy of colonization to become Whole. Understanding the process of decolonization of the mind and spirit and how it relates to Latina/os healing will be explored.

Purpose of the Study

Some of the glaring manifestations of colonization are dramatic inequality and injustice in society. As I searched for answers in an attempt to understand this complex phenomenon, I became interested in who is working towards confronting this issue. This led me to a local group called MAESTR@S that consists of Latina/o educators that are doing social justice work and believe we are living in a colonized state, which is what this research investigated. The intent of this study was not to address the issue of

decolonization at large, but to focus on a group of social justice educators/workers that recognize the impact of colonization in the community and want to change it and how they address and overcome the challenges in doing that work.

The purpose of this critical ethnographic study was to understand and describe the process of decolonization of the mind and spirit by exploring and documenting the experiences of seven Latino/a educators that are members of the MAESTR@S organization, while bringing my perspectives and experiences into the research. This method allowed me to actively participate, while inquiring and dialoguing with participants and documenting activities. In addition, a critical ethnographer typically seeks to connect the meaning of their research to the broader structures of social power and control (Creswell, 2005), which is my objective.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the researcher and participants in their quest to understand the process of decolonization of the mind and spirit:

1. Does a lived critique of contemporary colonization affect *raza* educators (mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually) and shape/influence their work?

2. What challenges and obstacles do they face? What are their needs?

3. What strategies are employed to meet those needs?

Theoretical Framework

Two theories informed this research study: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Indigenous Decolonization. CRT emphasizes the socially constructed nature of race and sees racism as the primary contributing factor to social injustice and dramatic inequality (Crenshaw, et al., 1995). Critical Race Theorists assert that racist assumptions are encoded in our everyday landscape (e.g., legal system, educational system, etc.) and critique these perceived normative realities in an attempt to eliminate racism. While CRT provides a framework for this research study and Critical Race Theorists help articulate and envision a more just society and genuine democracy, the limitation of this theory is that it theorizes within a Western framework (Grande, 2004). A portion of this research study goes beyond the reach of CRT and requires deeper critical analysis, that which can only be accomplished via Indigenous Decolonization.

Indigenous Decolonization transcends theory – it is a process that individuals/groups/communities must experience in their journey in understanding the history of their colonization and rediscovering their ancestral traditions and cultural values. It is a socio-psychological and spiritual journey that may involve grief, anger, rage, growth and empowerment. In addition, there is an intergenerational component (Duran, 2006; Duran & Duran, 1995; Lambert, 2008) that considers the accumulation of trauma in individuals/groups/communities over decades or centuries of intense struggle and resistance against assimilation, domination, oppression, or annihilation.

The significance of CRT and Indigenous Decolonization theories to this study are: CRT contextualizes the relationship between race, class, and gender demonstrating how their historically evolved social constructions have shaped and, to an extent, determined

Latina/os positionality in the United States. Whereas, Indigenous Decolonization explains the historical impact of colonization on the minds, spirits, and bodies of the colonized; this includes the awareness of its present day grasp and effects. In addition, Indigenous Decolonization does something which theories rarely do – they engage emotions. It places abstract notions into the form of a testimonial/story, and it is details that stir the emotions, it has the power to fill us with feeling. Together, these theories bring clarity to the inherent challenges colonial subjects encounter in their daily lives in the U.S. by providing a historical and systemic analysis of their condition while also providing a map to aid them in their journey of rediscovery and recovery of Self.

Significance of the Study

This study documents how a select group of Latina/o educators from Northern California that practice decolonizing methods are able to heal from contemporary and historical traumas developing a healthy self-concept. In addition, it provides an educational framework for educators and community workers helping and supporting Latina/o youth who are seeking alternative teaching strategies from mainstream practices that have historically failed and have only re-colonized the minds and spirits of Latina/o youth. The development of educational decolonizing and healing strategies can aid those seeking to heal from a legacy of colonization, enabling them in their recovery of Self to become Whole. This could lead to a more engaged and critically conscious student, parent, and educator resulting in a democratic and socially just society that respects the experiences and languages of others.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

The literature reviewed in this section was collected from a variety of sources. Scholarly journals and books provide the background to understanding the need for the study of how the process of colonialism remains invisible to a majority of the U.S. society. Other materials, such as dissertations, were used to better understand the process of decolonization and how others have applied various methods of decolonization to liberate themselves. According to Grosfoguel (2008), one of the principal problems with studies calling for the decolonization of knowledge is that they take as "the primary source of critical theory from mainly European male thinkers ignoring the large number of decolonial thinkers from the Global South" (p. 116). For this reason, this study, although utilizing Western theories and research to explicate the phenomenon under investigation, primarily used research developed by people of color and indigenous scholars.

The review of the literature is divided into five sections: master narratives and counter narratives, White privilege, epistemological racism, colonialism and its legacy, and decolonization. The first section defines and describes master narratives and explores how they are perpetuated and used to control some social processes. In addition, this section discusses how counter narratives can be used to challenge mainstream assumptions and notions. The second section sheds light on how White privilege remains undetected and almost invisible to the majority of U.S. society. The third section discusses epistemological racism and how it has become deeply embedded in the U.S., permeating all facets of society. The bulk of the literature review will come from the final

two sections entitled "Colonialism and Its Legacy" and "Decolonization." These two sections explore several areas of colonization and its manifestation: the psychological, the physical, the material, the spiritual, and the overall imprint on consciousness. The last section reviews past research on decolonization and the methods employed in fostering the decolonized state.

Master Narratives and Counter Narratives

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement that challenges the ways in which race is constructed and racial power represented and maintained in U.S. society (Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). One principle of CRT is narrative theory, which is used to analyze the endemic oppressive myths of U.S. society often referred to as "master" narratives. Further, CRT also examines acts of racism which can be subtle and unconscious, ranging from macroaggressive code language like "illegal aliens" to microaggressive expressions like "You're not like the rest of them. You're different" (Isaksen, 2009).

A master narrative is a method of retelling the experiences and perspectives of the dominant culture that often perpetuate negative racialized myths (Yosso, 2006). Yosso (2006) argues that everyday master narratives portray working-class people and people of color as irresponsible and less intelligent while depicting White middle- and upper-class people as just the opposite. Master narratives are often models of how voices of the dominant culture have justified systems and rules in society and educational research in such a way that makes these models "the standard" and perceived as "normative." For critical race theorists, these narratives shape social reality and serve as "interpretive

structures by which we impose order on experience" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57).

Not only do master narratives operate in academia that often defines and limits what is valued as scholarship and who is entitled to create scholarship, but it reifies the epistemologies of the dominant White culture. Stanley (2007) declares, "Members of marginalized groups, such as women and people of color, have had little or no input into the shaping of this master narrative" (p. 14). In addition, some of us actively or passively reinforce this system and legitimize the process by associating it with terms such as fairness, neutrality, and colorblindness (Stanley, 2007).

Perspectives that run opposite or counter to the presumed order and control are counter narratives. Counter narratives act to deconstruct the master narratives, and they offer alternatives to the dominant discourse in educational research (Stanley, 2007; Yosso, 2006). They present numerous models of understanding social and cultural identities that challenge mainstream assumptions and notions. For example, the term "at-risk" (typically code to describe youth of color) is used to describe students who do not have the skills and cultural capital to succeed, implying they are deficient. Typically, when teaching strategies fail to achieve desired results, the students, not the instructor or teaching methods, are found to be lacking (Ladson-Billings, 1998). A counter narrative to this argument is that students who are often perceived at-risk possess cultural legacies, whose experiences and contributions in shaping U.S. history are often omitted from educational text and curricula.

Counter narratives are a "deliberate intent to position the voices of marginalized groups as ones of authority and privilege and give them an opportunity to resist dominant

societal and academic discursive practices" (Stanley, 2007 p. 16). For instance, utilizing census data from the National Center of Education Statistics, Yosso (2006) demonstrates the harsh reality of the Latina/o educational pipeline. She skillfully uses counter narratives to humanize these statistical realities challenging, what she calls "majoritarian stories" that assume all students have access to the same educational opportunities and conditions. It is an opportunity for individuals pushed to the margins of society to contribute to the theorizing about the world in which they live. More importantly, it is an opportunity to tell the story of one's condition, to understand how one became subjugated in order to begin healing the wounds caused by racial oppression (Duran, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Because those who have bought into the dominant culture rarely question master narratives, they inevitably appear as natural parts of everyday life. Conversely, when one offers evidence contradicting these racially unbalanced portrayals (such as the earlier example of at-risk youth), master narratives (such as educational quantitative reports on high school graduation rates that highlight race, SES, etc.) tend to silence or dismiss them reifying the epistemologies of the White dominant culture.

White Privilege

> White denial, in other words, has been nothing if not an intergenerational
> phenomenon. In each generation White folks have essentially said, in the
> main, that there was no problem….History has been taught as if racism
> were something done to people of color, with *no beneficiaries* at all; as if
> there could be a down without an up; as if one can have an
> "underprivileged" (a word we dearly love in this culture, and often

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audibilize with great sympathy), and yet not an overprivileged (Wise,

(2005, p. 63).

A counternarrative, as a social tool for deconstruction of oppressive structures, exposes how the dominant group justifies its power with narratives, which construct reality to maintain their privilege (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT refers to this as White privilege, which Yosso (2006) defines "as a system of advantage resulting from a legacy of racism and benefiting individuals and groups based on the notions of Whiteness" (p.54). However, she asserts that one does not have to be White to enjoy these privileges. As a light-skinned Latina of mixed race she claims to enjoy the multiple layers of White privilege, such as traveling internationally without border harassment and being tracked into college preparatory classes. Indeed, Ladson-Billings (1998) further explains due to the saliency of race, a person of color may be accepted as White by change of economic and social status. However, she also points out that this upward social status for racial minorities is typically temporary and situational.

Using CRT for analysis, it becomes evident how White privilege is maintained and perceived as natural to the majority of U.S. society. Yosso (2006) explains that White privilege seems invisible because those who experience everyday benefits may not recognize that the systemic oppression of people of color enables institutionalized racial preferences. Indeed, Scheurich and Young's (1997a) work on research epistemologies being racially "biased" supports Yosso's notion of the invisibility of White privilege. Sheurich and Young (1997a) expand on this notion asserting:

> The White race has unquestionably dominated western civilization during
>
> all of the modernist period (500 – 600 years)…When any group – within a

large, complex civilization – significantly dominates other groups for hundreds of years, the ways of the dominant group (its epistemologies, its ontologies, its axiologies) not only become the dominant ways of that civilization, but also these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as 'natural' or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions. (p.7)

McIntosh (1988), in her personal account of White privilege, states "Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow them to be more like us" (p.4). And one of the principal ways researchers in education avoid White privilege and racism is by believing or presuming that somehow it does not infect research epistemologies and methodologies. Somehow, those in the academy, believe they are immune from reproducing racism, even though education and education research continue to be replete with racist concepts like the deficit model, which is the assumption that the reason children of color do not do well academically is because of their attitudes, their parents, their neighborhoods, their cultures, their Socio Economic Status, their genetics, or their race (Scheurich & Young, 1997b).

One has to consider how these systems of White privilege persist and remain unknown to the majority of U.S. society. Johnson (2006) provides insight into the maintenance of White privilege by explaining that systems organized around privilege have three key characteristics. First, they are "dominated" by privileged groups. Second, they are "identified" with privileged groups. Lastly, they are "centered" on privileged groups. Johnson declares, "All three characteristics support the idea that members of

privileged groups are superior to those below them and, therefore, deserve their privilege" (p. 91). Until those with privilege begin to recognize their privilege and how it maintains racialized patterns of inequality (Bush, 2004), these systems of privilege will persist and reify Whiteness as the universal model and basis for a homogeneous identity.

If these notions of Whiteness remain unchallenged and invisible, then the possibility for educational transformation cannot occur. Whiteness and its inherent privileges must be de-centered and racialized in order to critically analyze and deconstruct its presumed neutrality. Through counter narratives, marginalized groups realize that in order to survive in educational institutions they must draw on their languages, histories, and experiences that are marginalized in society; they recognize the contradictory nature of academia itself. And this is where the power of counter narratives lies – providing a space for dialogue, reflection, and critical thinking where cultural and social capital of marginalized groups are valued and validated.

Epistemological Racism

Racism in the U.S. has a long and contemptible history of subjugating people of color by instilling a sense of inferiority (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although certain acts of racism are apparent, there are other forms that remain invisible to most and are difficult to detect. It is those subtle and invisible forms of racism that have become woven into the very fabric of U.S. society, to the extent that even those who are victims of racism are unaware. Scheurich and Young (1997a), in their illuminative article on research epistemologies being racially biased, claim that there are five categories of racism: overt, covert, institutional, societal, and civilizational. According to them, it is the last category that creates the possibility for all the other categories to exist. They assert

that epistemological racism comes from or emerges out of the civilizational level, which they define as:

the level that encompasses the deepest, most primary assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the ways of knowing that reality (epistemology), and the disputational contours of right and wrong or morality and values (axiology) – in short, presumptions about the real, the true, and the good. (p. 6)

Therefore, according to Scheurich and Young (1997a), if all knowledge is relative to the context in which it is generated, then, when academics and public opinion leaders construct knowledge, they are influenced by the ideas, assumptions, and norms of the cultures and societies in which they are socialized. This assumes that when different social groups (races, cultures, societies, civilizations) evolve different epistemologies, they reflect the social history of that particular group. Yet, all of the epistemologies currently legitimated in education arise exclusively out of the social history of the dominant culture (Pizarro, 1998; Scheurich & Young, 1997a; Stanley, 2007; Yosso, 2006).

As a consequence of this fact, racial and cultural groups that are not among the dominant culture are confronted with a number of research dilemmas. For example, the research and epistemologies that stem from cultural histories and experiences outside the domain of the dominant culture fight an uphill battle in the struggle for legitimacy within the mainstream research community (Scheurich & Young, 1997a; Stanley, 2007). The most common research paradigms reflect a cultural influence that is historically derived from a Western, and predominately White, standard. Scholars of ethnic and cultural

backgrounds outside the dominant culture, according to Scheurich and Young (1997a), "must learn and become accomplished in epistemologies that arise out of a social history that has been profoundly hostile to their race and that ignores or excludes alternative race-based epistemologies" (p. 143).

Indeed, Stanley (2007) shares her challenging experiences with the editorial-review process while publishing a qualitative research study on the teaching experiences of African-American faculty members at two predominately White research institutions. A majority of the feedback and criticisms were related to her research methodology and theoretical framework requesting that she revise in accordance with their recommendations (those of the dominant culture). Pizarro (1998, 2005) also questions the epistemology underlying contemporary, innovative approaches to research. In particular, he is critical of the negative impact that educational institutions and their epistemological and methodological traditions have on Latina/os.

The aforementioned works highlight the role of racism in society as endemic to epistemology. Many of these scholars, which come from ethnic and cultural backgrounds outside the dominant culture, have attempted to establish epistemologies that counter the oppressive epistemologies of the dominant culture. However, as previously mentioned, the challenge lies in legitimatizing their research through mainstream research communities that historically have excluded or ignored alternative race-based epistemologies.

Colonialism and Its Legacy

> History is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they
> became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in

positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of

this relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and

Othered (Smith, 1999, p. 34).

Although several indigenous scholars would agree with CRT's critique of racism

being deeply embedded in dominant cultural epistemologies contributing to the

maintenance of White racism and privilege, these same scholars would point to the

legacy of colonialism as the source of the problem (Duran & Duran, 1996; Laenui, 2000;

Smith, 1999). The above quote illustrates how history plays a key role in understanding

the maintenance of hegemony and systems that benefit the White dominant culture. One

of Smith's (1999) claims is that legislated identities (i.e., who is White, who is Native

American) were created systematically to serve the interests of the colonizing society,

which are based on racist ideology in order to exert social control over people. Therefore,

there is an immediate need to understand the complex ways in which people were

brought within this system, in order to understand how this occurred.

Historically, colonialism has been viewed as a political process where one country

occupies another and asserts governance and complete economic control over a people.

However, Laenui (2000) claims that governance over a people changes only when the

people have sufficiently changed, implying that a social process must occur with a

political one. Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005) contend that this social process is achieved

through both formal (institutions, policies) and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies)

that are designed to maintain the subjugation of the colonized people. It is these methods

and processes that permeate and penetrate every facet of society, systematically

colonizing subjugated and oppressed populations. Duran and Duran (1995) declare

"where there is an unequal distribution of resources and power, systems of domination exist which act symbolically or instrumentally to reinforce that domination" (p. 204). Hence, these systems of domination, with or without colonial administrators (Grosfoguel, 2008), lay the groundwork for perpetual colonization.

According to Shiva (2000), colonialism has "been a contest over the mind and the intellect", determining what counts as knowledge and who will count as expert (p. vii). Western systems of domination have been central to the project of colonizing diverse cultures and their knowledge systems globally. Shiva (2000) declares that the "biological and intellectual heritage of non-Western societies was devalued" by colonial knowledge systems transforming "the plurality of knowledge systems into a hierarchy of knowledge systems" (p. vii). It is the Western systems of domination that have invalidated and devalued the knowledge systems of indigenous people and people of color, privileging Western epistemologies over others. These colonial practices have been effective in domesticating the masses throughout history by re-educating colonial subjects via religious institutions, such as saving the native "savage" through Christianization, and educational policy and practices, such as the Americanization process during the segregation era where Mexicans received vocational training in order to be tracked into menial service occupations ensuring their low class status in U.S. society (Gonzales, 1990). Both of these colonial practices sought to "Americanize" the presumed inferior races by way of forced assimilation that demeaned and dehumanized them.

Several scholars have researched and documented the devastation of the original colonialist encounter on indigenous people globally (Duran & Duran, 1995; Grande, 2004; Shiva, 2000; Smith, 1999). For indigenous people, the legacy of colonialism is

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about genocide, persecution, exploitation, forced religious conversion, racial and cultural inequality, relations of economic and political dependence, loss of identity (cultural and spiritual), loss of land (sacred) and sovereignty (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). All of the aforementioned destructive forces are the subsequent effects of colonialism and their manifestations (psychological, physical, material, spiritual) continue to plague the oppressed.

Manifestations of internalized oppressions (also referred to as the colonial mentality) are found in many aspects of life, such as domestic violence, institutional violence and dysfunction, gang violence, spiritual abuse and violence, and epistemic violence (Duran, 2006; Gonzales, 2005). All of these internalized oppressions have infected the Latina/o community. Latina/os have endured centuries of marginality and alienation (Acuna, 2000) which has led to "heightened psychosomatic (of, relating to, involving, or concerned with bodily symptoms caused by mental or emotional disturbance) symptoms" and "stress behaviors that include anxiety, depression, and identity confusion" (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 32). Together they have diminished the physical, psychological and social health (Duran & Duran, 1995) of individuals and communities.

Dubois's (1903) concept of "double-consciousness" sheds light on the psychological implications of identity confusion. He eloquently and poetically explains:

>It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,

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two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose

dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

Dubois (1903) articulates the struggles African-Americans face in striving to create a singular consciousness out of an identity made up of dual perspectives. Double-consciousness is not only an awareness of one's self, but it is also as an awareness of how others perceive them. The potential harmful consequence of double-consciousness resides in conforming and/or changing one's identity to that of how others perceive them – that is, internalizing the labels and negative stereotypes of the colonist/dominant culture. The inherent challenge for people of double-consciousness is the maintenance of their cultural heritage, history, and roots as a means of preserving identity. If successful, those that are oppressed and marginalized can collectively resist conformity to the dominant society/colonial project, which only seeks to strip them of their very essence because of their presumed inferiority based on their race, hues, and accents.

Some scholars maintain that whenever individuals living in an oppressive environment have difficulty expressing/releasing their anger in a healthy and constructive manner that the anger becomes internalized (Duran & Duran, 1995; Freire, 1970; Gonzales, 2005). Freire (1970) asserts that one of the results of colonialism is the internalization of the oppressor. When the oppressed internalize the oppression they may become like the oppressor because the oppression cannot be purged. Duran and Duran (1995) state:

When the colonization process is perpetrated in such a savage fashion as

was done in the Western Hemisphere, there occurs a splitting of the

personality that is consistent with the level of trauma. The feelings of

helplessness and hopelessness are compounded to such a degree as to

make the choice complete psychosis or splitting of the ego into at least

two fragments. The split ego, then, will keep one aspect of the person in

touch with the pain and one aspect identifying with the aggressor. (p. 36)

Fanon (1963), who is considered to be one of the pre-eminent thinkers of the 20th

century on the issue of the psychopathology of colonization, asserts that the colonist

keeps the colonized in a state of rage, which he prevents from erupting by confounding

them with fear, amazement, and awe. However, this sense of control over the colonized is

artificial and the "muscular tension of the colonized periodically erupts into bloody

fighting between tribes, clans, and individuals" (p. 17). Consequently, the colonized

releases their "muscular tension" through self-destructive acts of violence. According to

Fanon (1963), this behavior merely reinforces the colonists' existence and domination,

reassuring them that the colonized are irrational.

The internalized oppression can manifest in ways where the oppressed believe

their power comes from oppressing and hurting others in their family and community

(Gonzales, 2005). The internalized oppressions often lead to "pathological patterns,"

which over time, can become difficult to discern to the individual and family "to the

extent that the dysfunction is seen as part of the culture" (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 35).

These dysfunctional behavioral patterns are passed on and learned and become the norm

for subsequent generations, often referred to as historical trauma or intergenerational

trauma (Brave Heart, 2005; Duran & Duran, 1995; Gonzales, 2005; Lambert, 2008).

Duran (2006) explains that when trauma is not dealt with in previous generations then it

must be dealt with in subsequent generations, if not it will become cumulative.

The colonial process goes beyond oppressive and violent forces that strip *raza* and other racialized minorities of their cultural legacies, such as educational institutions and their assimilationist practices and policies. Colonialism also occurs through the material via the media, where society is inundated daily by messages informing them that their every need can be satisfied by material consumption and accumulation (hooks, 2000). As a result, society is shaped to believe that they are what they possess. hooks (2000) postulates that when "the zeal to possess intensifies, so does the sense of spiritual emptiness" (p. 72). She asserts it is because people are spiritually empty that they try to fill this void with material goods (i.e., consumerism). When a people are spiritually empty they are disconnected from vital spiritual reparative practices (Shiva, 2000); thus, dominant cultural practices and traditions inevitably become the way of the colonized.

Through hooks' (2000) analysis it is evident how a people can be co-opted by the "powerful forces of materialism and hedonistic consumerism" (p. 71) even when they struggle against it. However, a people's resiliency and determination is not enough, at times, to overcome the powerful forces of colonialism. Indeed, Latina/os have survived continual discrimination, forced assimilation, marginality and alienation. Yet, the trauma they have experienced individually and collectively continue to manifest in pathological and dysfunctional ways destroying families and communities. Latina/os must heal from the pain and suffering in order to become decolonized; they must become acutely aware that historically it is through the oppressor that they receive their identity, worth, and place in society. Only then can the process of decolonization begin.

If the great popular masses are without a more critical understanding of

how society functions, it is not because they are naturally incapable of it –

to my view – but on account of the precarious conditions in which they

live and survive, where they are "forbidden to know." Thus, the way out is

not ideological propaganda and political "sloganizing," as the mechanists

say it is, but the critical effort through which men and women take

themselves in hand and become agents of curiosity, become investigators,

become subjects in an ongoing process of quest for revelation of the

"why" of things and facts (Freire, 1992, p. 105).

Those that have been Othered and marginalized, according to Smith (1999), have

been colonized. If we desire to develop a sense of "authentic humanity" (Smith, 1999)

then we must decolonize our minds in order to recover ourselves. This is where the

Other, which have been pushed to the farthest margins of society, can begin to use that

space and give voice to those that have historically been excluded. This is where the

marginalized and oppressed can create the oppositional discourse and move towards

liberation (Duran, 2006; hooks, 1989).

Decolonization is a phenomenon that has been researched and explored primarily

through the methodology of narratives (Hibbard, 2001; Strobel, 1996; Viramontes, 2006).

The purpose of these narratives were to share stories about individuals who have

experienced the process of decolonizing their minds to emancipate themselves from

Western ideologies that are believed to have infected their consciousness, disconnecting

them from their cultural legacies and history, and replacing their language and cultural

values and beliefs with those that reflect the dominant Western culture. These narratives described a process that demonstrated that when the threshold of critical consciousness is crossed a history of internalized oppression is revealed. As Hibbard (2001) explains in her dissertation, decolonization is "most often described on the level of culture and history, but when it is perceived and felt from the whole mind, collective cultural and societal events and memories surface as volatile and emotional, personal remembrance" (p. 125). Only when one reaches this point, can healing begin and true liberation be achieved.

In her dissertation on the process of decolonization amongst Filipino Americans, Strobel (1996) demonstrates the need for employing culturally-sensitive tools when conducting research with colonized populations. By placing an emphasis on Filipino cultural values, she validated their experiential knowledge, language, and identity. Through dialogue, participants reflected on past experiences recovering memories, naming the psychological and historical processes that cultivated the colonial mentality. This process facilitated, and made possible, "rewriting the self," where participants construct the reality of the present (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993) and re-construct one's world. And it is in the process of recovering memories where individuals can experience almost unbearable heartache and pain. Yet, it is this very process that is necessary in order to heal and move into critical consciousness. Smith (1999) explains the necessity for such a process to occur:

This form of remembering is painful because it involves remembering not just what colonization was about but what being dehumanized meant for our own cultural practices. Both healing and transformation become

crucial strategies in any approach which asks a community to remember

what they may have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget. (p.

146)

Laenui (2000) refers to this process as the "rediscovery and recovery" and it is the

first phase in beginning the process of decolonization. Following are his five phases of

decolonization, which he explains can be "experienced at the same time or in various

combinations" (p. 152):

1) Rediscovery and Recovery – This phase of rediscovering one's history and

   recovering one's culture, language, identity, and so on is fundamental to the

   movement for decolonization.

2) Mourning – An essential phase of healing. This phase may also be expressed in

   great anger and a lashing out at all symbols of the colonizer.

3) Dreaming – This phase includes the reevaluation of the political, social,

   economic, and judicial structures themselves and the development, if appropriate,

   of new structures that can hold and house the values and aspirations of the

   colonized people.

4) Commitment – This phase will culminate in people combining their voices in a

   clear statement of their desired direction. There is no single "way" or process for

   a people's expression of commitment. In fact, over time the commitment will

   become so clear that a formal process becomes merely a pro forma expression of

   the people's will.

5) Action – This phase of decolonization is not reactive, but proactive.

All five phases are essential in the process of decolonization, no one phase more critical than the others. However, although implied, there is the process of the colonized becoming cognizant of their oppression, a type of awakening where an awareness of how systems of domination affect and infect them psychologically and spiritually. While the rediscovery of one's history and recovery of one's cultural are paramount to decolonization, equally important is the *naming* of the context in which the oppressed and marginalized were wounded (hooks, 2000). For Latina/os and other colonized groups, they must be able to name and define the effects of colonialism and the phases of decolonization, taking ownership of the process in order to heal. Those who belittle such a process are guilty of "psychological terrorism" (hooks, 2000, p. 232).

Since abuse/oppression/trauma occur at the physical, psychological, and spiritual levels, then the issue must be addressed at all of these levels (Duran, 2006). The pain and suffering that the Latina/o community has endured for centuries has resulted in learned helplessness and hopelessness and few interventions have effectively treated the symptoms (Brave Heart, 2005; Duran 2006; Gonzales, 2005). Duran explains that "unless the victim is able to consciously explore the dynamics of the abuse and find meaning in the situation, that individual is doomed to repeat the abuse of someone or something else" (2006, p. 23). For this reason, it is vital for Latina/os to create a space which allows them to explore the reasons behind their pain and suffering. If not, as a consequence, the legacy of colonialism/historical trauma will be perpetuated affecting subsequent generations.

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In the five phases of decolonization Laenui (2000) emphasizes healing as essential to the Mourning phase. Healing from past pains cleanses the spirit and mind allowing for a critical analysis of the processes of colonization that have had a deep impact on the identity of the oppressed (Duran, 2006). For Latina/os the wounds of colonialism run deep and the trauma is shared collectively. Healing from "collective trauma" (Lambert, 2008) requires the individual to grieve and release the pain and experience the uncomfortable, confusing and, at times, conflicting emotions over time. Eventually, this will lead to a healthy individual that will in turn influence family, community, and culture. However, until Latina/os begin to heal from collective trauma they will continue to struggle to develop economically, socially, and politically (Lambert, 2008).

It is evident that trauma occurs at the personal, community, and collective level (Brave Heart, 2005; Duran & Duran, 1995; Gonzales, 2005; Lambert, 2008) and that a "preventive intervention that addresses these issues at the source" is needed (Duran, 2006, p. 23). Decolonizing the mind and spirit requires a multi-faceted approach to healing from the various forms of trauma. For example, even employing self-help exercises, such as speaking affirmations aloud that challenge "long-imprinted, toxic messages" can be useful in liberating the colonized on their journey to self-recovery (hooks, 2003, p. 38). The process of decolonization is about education, healing, and becoming Whole. It is about "empowerment, liberation, transcendence, renewing vitality of life" and about "finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world" (hooks, 2003, p. 43).

This study explored the process of decolonization of the mind and spirit by documenting the healing strategies employed by a select group of Latina/o educators. The research participants understand that in order to assist others in their quest to becoming decolonized that they must undergo the process themselves. They understand that one must completely immerse her/himself in the process, not resisting or suppressing emotions. Only when emotions are felt deeply and intently, and painful memories resurrected can the healing begin leading to the possibility of decolonization of the mind and spirit.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Restatement of the Purpose and Overview

This study sought to understand the process of decolonization of the mind and spirit by documenting the experiences of seven Latina/o educators that are members of MAESTR@S. Although critical ethnography was the primary method employed for this study, an aspect of indigenous research methods was also utilized. In particular, Wilson's (2008) notion of "relational accountability" which requires researchers to form reciprocal and respectful relationships within the community where they are conducting research was an integral component of the methodology (p. 40).

Grande (2004) describes colonization as "a multidimensional force underwritten by religious fundamentalism, defined by White supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism" (p. 8). Its antithesis is decolonization of the mind and spirit, which the research participants are seeking and striving towards. Having a critical awareness of how these multidimensional forces contribute to systems of domination is the first step towards decolonizing the mind. However, the path to healing, to becoming Whole, is a process which allows a people to recover and reconnect with cultural legacies and understand how they came to be marginalized, excluded and Othered (Smith, 1999) ultimately leading to critical consciousness.

Research Design and Methodology

For social change to be sustainable the oppressed need to participate in the process of knowledge production and seeking solutions to the problems adversely affecting their community for themselves. Cook (2005) asserts that critical ethnography

"articulates the often-unheard plight of the oppressed and confronts the ruling structure on such grounds as racism, sexism, and classism to enable all to enjoy the fruits of full and unhindered citizenship" (p. 132). This research process challenged the status quo by including the voices of the marginalized in the research process, validating their knowledge as legitimate, and "centering their concerns and world views" (Smith, 1999) to understand theory and research from their perspectives and for their own purposes.

It is vital when researching and advocating for marginalized and oppressed groups to include their perspectives of their world and their reality (Mohanty, 1986, 2003; Pizarro, 1998, 2005). Throughout this study, at retreats, *encuentros*, and research interviews, participants shared painful memories about experiences in the educational system (past and present) where they felt alienated and/or persecuted for their accents, hues, cultural traditions, and ethnicity. As stories were shared participants would also, at times, begin to excavate the deeper meaning behind the emotions assisting them in their understanding of how past experiences have affected and influenced their current reality. This poignant process has led to the development of several exercises by the members of MAESTR@S that are designed to assist members in their path to healing. For these reasons, the researcher and those being researched have to construct a comfortable context in which those being researched (or advocated for) can engage in preliminary discussions about their world.

In an insightful and personal account of "ethnographer as colonizer," Villenas (1996) shares her experiences with the research process where she was being "co-opted" by the dominant English-speaking community at the academy to legitimize their discourse of Latino family education and child-rearing practices as problem. She

discovered that by engaging in this discourse, she was becoming complicit in the manipulation of her own identities and participating in her own colonization and marginalization. According to Villenas (1996), the "native ethnographer" must come to terms with his/her own marginalizing experiences and identities in relation to dominant society. She declares that the "native ethnographer is potentially both the colonizer, in her university cloak, and the colonized, as a member of the very community that is made 'other' in her research" (p. 712).

Similarly, Cruz (2008) questions the legitimacy of our "decolonized praxis" when in order to do so requires the researcher to insert him/herself in colonial traditions, to locate oneself in "legitimized intellectual production" (i.e., in order to demonstrate where our thinking is located within our discipline that is, by and large, influenced and shaped by the dominant group's epistemologies). In her opinion, elaborating and grounding theory based on the reflections marginalized people make about social life "as they live it" is the essence of decolonizing knowledge. By questioning the legitimacy of our decolonized praxis, which is located within colonial traditions validated by the academy and people with the power and authority over others, Cruz forces us to reflect critically on our ideology, positionality, and application of our praxis.

By objectifying the subjects being researched, by assuming authority, and by not questioning their own privileged positions, ethnographers/researchers have participated as colonizers of the researched. In an attempt to avoid the aforementioned, I situated myself as a member of MAESTR@S foremost, which required me to fully engage in all communal practices and rituals. Whenever my role of researcher became primary, I clearly communicated my intentions and received permission from the group prior to

pursuing this role. Therefore, the starting point must be to acknowledge, attempt to understand, and build on the unique epistemology of those with whom we are working and being clear about researcher positionality and power dynamics.

Critical ethnography can help to understand not only the experiences of the research participants but also the socio-psychological and socio-historical factors (e.g., systemic racism, hegemony) that contribute to these experiences and, ultimately, their path to liberation. In addition, critical ethnography helps the research participants identify the issues affecting them and can assist them in developing strategies they wish to pursue (Cook, 2005). Without such a critical approach it would be difficult to address the underlying causes of social injustice that account for so much of the inequity we see in high school graduation rates, incarceration rates, unemployment rates, domestic violence, drug abuse, and other social ills that contribute to the destruction of *raza*.

The inherent limitation of critical ethnography is that it is situated in critical theory, which may perpetuate "neocolonial sentiments" turning the colonized person into an "essentialized other who is spoken for" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) contend that critical theory must be "localized, grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations" that operate in each unique setting (p. 6). For this reason situating myself as "community member" was paramount where I observed the group's behaviors and rituals followed with questions to the group in order to better understand the meaning behind the practices. This way I was not merely replicating group norms and behaviors but understood the history and meaning behind them. In addition, the community being researched must determine and define what

research practices are acceptable which is crucial in preventing the perpetuation of "neocolonial sentiments."

Although critical ethnography allows the researcher to participate in the day-to-day activities of a group and include his/her personal experiences in the research, it does not include or emphasize the importance of relationship building with group members that is vital in conducting research. This research study involved having individuals share in a group setting personal experiences with colonialism including its psychological, emotional, and spiritual impact which requires vulnerability, courage, and trust. For this reason, Wilson's (2008) Indigenous Research Method of "relational accountability" was utilized. This method required me to form reciprocal and respectful relationships within the community where I conducted my research. This was achieved by fully participating in exercises which included sharing my personal stories of pain and suffering, and revealing my vulnerabilities to the community. Wilson (2008) declares, "Through maintaining accountability to the relationships that have been built, an increased sense of sharing common interests can be established" (p. 86). Thus the relationships with the community are an equally valued component of the research methodology.

Entry Into the Community

The study was conducted in Northern California with a select group of seven participants that work throughout the Bay Area and Coastal Valley in the education sector. I met all of the participants as a result of my involvement with MAESTR@S – a group consisting primarily of educators and a few school administrators seeking to change and improve the educational experiences and outcomes of *raza*.

In 2008 after hearing my research interests Diego, founder of MAESTR@S, invited me to participate in one of their group sessions. After sitting in and listening to the challenges that these educators face working in urban and rural settings, I realized that what they were discussing was their path and often painful process to becoming decolonized. It was at that moment I realized why Diego asked me to join the community. I participated in sessions irregularly until mid-2009 when I began collecting data for this study.

Two years have come and gone and I have become heavily involved with the MAESTR@S community. I have developed bonds with the members and participated in their weekend retreat, where we discussed the impact of colonization on our communities and ourselves and the challenges and struggles we face daily in doing this type of work. Needless to say, I have created relationships with many of the members which are based on mutual trust, respect, and a passion for social justice. And, as a result of these relationships, the dialogues were fruitful and insightful; where painful memories surfaced and powerful experiences shared.

Research Setting

MAESTR@S describes itself as an educational movement founded on a politicized, anti-oppression analysis of the condition of *raza* and the powerful role of racism/White supremacy, patriarchy/sexism, homophobia/heterosexism and capitalism (hegemony) in shaping that condition. They attack institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression/colonization with a specific focus on dealing with self-oppression, which is internalized by way of both media and the schools. They strive to challenge oppression by focusing on helping youth and youth workers to understand this

reality. They bring their personal and professional experiences with schools and students to inform their discussions. They challenge the methods in which Latina/o youth are schooled and then develop alternatives methods to replace existing ones.

The research was carried out at various locations because the participants live and work throughout the Bay Area and Coastal Valley. The group meets six times per year, which includes an annual weekend retreat. Since a majority of the membership live outside of the South Bay (central location), the *encuentros* (encounters) are held at various sites, such as a member's home or place of work and last approximately 4 hours. A majority of the participants are educators and heavily involved in local community projects. The initial dialogues took take place during the MAESTR@S annual 3-day retreat where a majority of the membership was present.

Research Questions

As previously mentioned, Grande (2004) describes colonization as "a multidimensional force underwritten by religious fundamentalism, defined by White supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism" (p. 8). And some of the glaring manifestations of colonization are dramatic inequality and injustice in society. As I searched for answers about colonization – its historical and contemporary effects and its maintenance – I discovered just how incredibly complex this phenomenon is. This quest for answers led me to published works about decolonization, specifically decolonization of the mind and spirit, which includes a process of intellectual enlightenment (as to how the legacy of colonialism impacts *raza* today), healing from past pains (e.g., historical trauma), and recovery of the Self to become Whole (hooks, 1989).

As I continued on this path of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, I reconnected with a former instructor that brought together a group of Latina/o educators that were interested in developing healing strategies to become decolonized. The group became known as MAESTR@S and they believe that in order to teach and/or demonstrate to others how to become decolonized one must first walk the path of decolonization. Working and participating with MAESTR@S has helped me to understand and appreciate the complexities to decolonizing the mind and spirit.

The research questions were used to guide the researcher and participants in their quest to understand the process of decolonization of the mind and spirit. The research questions to be addressed in this study are:

1. Does a lived critique of contemporary colonization affect *raza* educators (mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually) and shape/influence their work?

2. What challenges and obstacles do they face? What are their needs?

3. What strategies are employed to meet those needs?

Data Collection and Analysis

The method employed in exploring decolonization of the mind and spirit was critical ethnography which uses a process of inquiry referred to as dialogue. A benefit of conducting critical ethnographic research is that it allows the researcher to study a setting in which he/she already is a member or becomes converted to genuine membership during the course of the research. According to Fine (2007), critical ethnographers have an "obligation" to be transparent, interrogating their writings as to how they depict themselves as they "coproduce the narratives" they presume to gather and report. With

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such an obligation lays the responsibility to discuss their identities, to disclose why they question what they do and what is reported and excluded (Fine, 2007). And it is this type of transparency that this research study attempted to equal.

In conducting the research, a modified version of Carspecken's (1996) critical ethnographic research process developed by Cook (2005) was used. Although discourse analysis is not explicitly included in Carspecken's approach to critical ethnography, Cook (2005) declares it is "essential in research projects that aim to explore the links between hegemonic and ideological discourses underlying social structures and the everyday actions and experiences of research participants" (p. 133). This process contains five stages:

1. Observation and description

2. Analysis of observational data

3. Dialogical data generation

4. Development of themes

5. Examining findings in relation to existing theories of society

Observation and Description

Prior to participating in this research study all participants received a letter of invitation and signed a consent form to be a research participant. This stage of the process required me to take written notes that contained behaviors, activities, and segments of dialogue between actors. MAESTR@S members meet on average five times per year in 4-hour sessions called "encuentros" (meeting or encounter) and at one 3-day retreat. These sessions are designed to provide a safe space for members to share personal stories and experiences, which often require members to resurrect painful memories (also

referred to as traumas) in order to begin and/or continue the healing process (a process that is integral to achieving a decolonized state). In addition, members utilize activities that require members not only to verbally share out but also to depict their traumas visually. These activities are used as reminders, models, and tools for decolonization of the mind and spirit, where members can pursue liberation from the legacy of colonialism and oppression via healing strategies in a safe and supportive environment.

During three *encuentros* (totaling 8-10 hours) and one retreat (totaling 12-14 hours) I observed behaviors, activities, and captured segments of dialogue in a notepad and a digital voice recorder. Specifically, during the *encuentros* (which occurred at different locales) I would participate in all activities and whenever possible I would take notes in my notepad documenting an activity and attempting to capture the behaviors of the participants/actors. This of course presented challenges because there were several moments when I was an actor and unable to take notes. However, immediately following an activity I would note what had transpired to the best of my ability. In addition, I collected and filed all materials that were distributed to group members consisting of philosophies, theories, stories, and activities.

During the retreat I also took written notes and documented activities in my notepad. During the initial group dialogue (2 hours) I used a digital voice recorder to capture the content and used my notepad for behavioral observations. The second group dialogue was originally scheduled to occur at an *encuentro* but due to time constraints was decided by the group to be conducted electronically via e-mail with follow-up phone calls (the next scheduled *encuentro* was two months out and did not fit within my research timeframe). The dialogues which occurred via phone calls were documented in a

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notepad. The three (3) individual dialogues each lasted approximately 1.5 hours, totaling 5.5 hours. The individual dialogues occurred at each participant's place of choice: a local coffee shop, a home, and a school (work) site.

Analysis of Observational Data

Analyzing observational data requires interpretation and reporting. Observers do not seek to remain neutral or objective about the phenomena being observed. Therefore, I strove to explicate and excavate the deeper meanings of the work being studied through my own lenses. In conducting critical ethnographic research, I included my own feelings and experiences in interpreting the observations. The observations allowed me to formulate my own version of what had occurred, independent of the participants.

Dialogical Data Generation

Critical ethnography uses a process of inquiry referred to as dialogue rather than using a rigid process of question and answer, which may undermine the development of a critical consciousness. This stage of the process gave participants a voice in the research process and a chance to challenge material that I produced. After the data was transcribed, each member reviewed the transcripts of the dialogues, checking for accuracy.

The initial group dialogue lasted approximately two hours. The first group dialogue took place during the annual MAESTR@S retreat at a retreat center located in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The location of the second group dialogue was scheduled to occur during a regularly scheduled *encuentro* but due to time constraints was conducted electronically via e-mail with follow-up phone calls. The third set of dialogues occurred at homes and community spaces and was based on the three participant's preference and

availability. It was imperative for the dialogues to take place in a location where the participants felt safe to express their opinions and beliefs, and open to reflect. Two group dialogues occurred:

- Dialogue 1: The purpose of the first group dialogue was to introduce the research topic and to begin an honest and open dialogue with the participants using pre-determined dialogue questions.

- Dialogue 2: The purpose of the second group dialogue was to follow-up with questions based on themes generated from data analysis.

- Dialogue 3: The purpose of the third set of individual dialogues was to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic and its effect on the participants.

Upon completing the two group dialogues, I arranged for a follow-up session with three participants. In addition, I arranged to shadow one of the members at their work site for the day to observe pedagogical style and teacher/student interaction.

Development of Generative Themes

After the observational and dialogical data was analyzed, I read through the text and identified quotes that seemed important and topics/issues that were repeatedly discussed. The quotes were copied and pasted into a new document. Making certain to maintain some of the context in which it occurred, each quote was highlighted (color-coded) with the quote's reference (who said it and where it appeared in the text). Then I sorted the quotes into sections of similar quotes. These quotes were then highlighted and color-coded (e.g., green highlight for Development of Consciousness) to match a particular theme. This process produced an abundance of themes.

The themes were then shared them with the group for feedback. After receiving feedback, I once again reviewed the dialogue transcripts in order to connect all of the various themes. Comparisons between individual and shared themes were made during this stage of the process attempting to ensure the themes were applicable to all participants. Themes that were not applicable to all participants were collapsed into a theme or were omitted altogether.

Examining Findings in Relation to Existing Theories of Society

After conducting a thorough analysis of all the data collected I connected the findings to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Indigenous Decolonization. The purpose was to explicate what had been discovered in earlier stages and to challenge or refine the theories themselves in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon studied.

Questions to Guide the Dialogue

Typically, in critical ethnography, research questions and the data collection process fall under the realm of the researcher, which follows traditional researcher and participant roles. However, research participants are active participants in that they can and should be engaged in negotiating findings with researchers and shaping emerging analyses (Cook, 2005). Dialogue encourages the researcher and participants to speak honestly and truthfully in order to develop a deeper sense of understanding. To achieve this, a set of questions were formulated that reflect the research questions:

1. How do you live/manage decolonization outside of MAESTR@S and what strategies do you employ? How do you live the work?

2. How did you recognize that colonialism/internalized oppression were issues that you needed to confront?

3. Prior to MAESTR@S, how did you address colonialism and with whom?

4. Has being involved with MAESTR@S helped you confront colonialism?

Participant Profiles

All the participants are members of MAESTR@S. They are all Latina/os and work in urban and rural settings as educators (elementary to university) or community workers throughout Northern California. There are seven participants in the age range 30 years through 50 years. Their years of experience in their professions vary from 4 years to 16 years. All of the participants believe we are living in a colonized state and they are working towards liberating themselves (becoming decolonized) and implementing lessons learned into their classroom curriculum and way of life.

Name	Gender	Age	B.A./B.S.	Credential	Graduate
Diego	Male	Early 40's	Stanford		UCLA, Ph.D.
Ana Maria	Female	30	UCSC	CSUMB	
Linda	Female	Early 40's	Pomona	CSULA	USC, M.S.W.
Joaquin	Male	Early 30's	SDSU	CSUMB	
Elida	Female	50	CSUH (Eastbay)	CSUH (Eastbay)	USF, Ed.D
Lucha	Female	Late 30's	Stanford	CSU Sacramento	Stanford, M.A.
Miguel	Male	40's	UC Irvine	CSULA	Harvard, M.A. Harvard, ABD

Diego:

Diego is the founder of MAESTR@S which was established in 2000 and self-identifies as Chicano. He is a sagacious, analytic, committed, and generous person. He is well-respected and endeared by the members of MAESTR@S. Indeed, one member affectionately refers to him as Morpheus (a popular character of the "Matrix trilogy" who aids others in becoming aware of the false reality they are immersed in). He is a professor at a local CSU and Chair and Graduate Coordinator of the Mexican American Studies Department. He has a total of 16 years teaching experience, which includes a stint at the elementary level. He grew up in the North Bay in a lower middle-class community with his parents and brother. He is married with two children.

Ana Maria:

Ana Maria is an enthusiastic, artistically creative, and caring person. Her youthful spirit adds a fun-loving element to the group. She describes herself as somewhat of a "hippie." She currently is a 7th grade English teacher. This is her first year as a full-time instructor but she has 4 years of experience as a substitute teacher. She grew up in a *barrio* located in the South Bay that continues to have high rates of gang activity and poverty. Her mom raised her and her two brothers. Ana Maria described her family as working-class poor and recalled being a recipient of "free" lunch as a child. As a teenager she became involved with gangs and abused drugs. She laid all of that to rest when she pursued her college career. She has been involved with MAESTR@S for 2 years.

Linda:

Linda is a compassionate, wise, and spiritually grounded person. She has a warm

demeanor and a calming voice. Currently, she is a teacher on special assignment for an

Office of Education in the East Bay for Student Programs and Services. She has 16 years

of teaching experience and has been involved with MAESTR@S for 4 years. Linda grew

up in East Los Angeles and lived in the Central Valley for a few years. She has seven

siblings: two brothers and five sisters. She grew up working-class poor and her parents

worked tirelessly to make ends meet. She currently resides in the East Bay with a

housemate.

Joaquin:

Joaquin is a gregarious, warm-hearted person with a good sense of humor. He is a

Resource Specialist-Special Education high school teacher and has been teaching for 8

years. He has been involved with MAESTR@S for five years. Joaquin grew up in a small

town located in the Coastal Valley with his parents and 4 siblings: 3 sisters and a brother.

They were low income and lived in a housing authority apartment complex. He has fond

memories growing up in the apartment complex with his friends. He has a daughter with

whom he spends every moment possible.

Elida:

Elida has a nurturing disposition. She is wise, insightful, and kindhearted. She is

an educational and diversity consultant for a local non-profit organization. She taught for

15 years at the elementary and university level. She still teaches on occasion, usually for

other non-profit organizations on issues related to social justice. Elida has been involved

with MAESTR@S since its inception. She grew up in the South Bay with her parents and

brother and sister. As a child, she grew up in a poor working class home but later became

middle class as her parents annual income increased. She is married with two daughters and a stepson.

Lucha:

Lucha is a compassionate, analytic, and witty person. Her commitment to her students and their development is unwavering. She teaches 9th grade/10th grade History/World History. She has 15 years of experience in education with 8 years of experience teaching full time. She has been with MAESTR@S for ten years. Lucha grew up in a working-class community in Southern California near Los Angeles and is the eldest of 4 children. She is married and an expectant mother.

Miguel:

Miguel is a wise, empathetic, and spiritually grounded person. He is the Director of the Institute of Community and Civic Engagement/Coordinator of the Office of Diversity at a local community college. He has been involved with MAESTR@S for seven years. He was raised in the *barrio* in East Los Angeles in a working class family. He has two sisters and two brothers. As a young boy, he lived next door to his grandparents and an aunt with several other relatives living nearby. He is an attentive father and has two sons.

Protection of Human Subjects

All participants signed a consent form prior to participation in the study. Since all participants are adults, a parent consent form was not be required. The anonymity of the participants must be protected; therefore, pseudonyms were assigned in the process of analyzing and reporting data. In order to maintain a trusting relationship with the participants they were informed of the purpose of the study.

Dialogues were conducted based on the participants' availability and location of choice. Whenever possible, dialogues were conducted in quiet and comfortable settings, such as a home, in order to reduce distractions and for quality audio-recording. If at any point during the study a participant felt uncomfortable, the participant was free to request time for reflection or to withdraw from the study without penalty. All steps were taken and considered in order to make the participant feel comfortable during the dialogues without jeopardizing the integrity of the study.

Once the dialogues were transcribed and documented, a member check was conducted where the results were shared with the participants. Sharing the results ensured that the participants' stories and my observations accurately represented what was observed and told. In addition, no parts of observations or dialogues were disclosed to anyone, aside from my dissertation committee, during the duration of the study without written permission from the participant.

Reliability and Validity

Until recently, the perception that ethnography was a method devoid of rigor led many to criticize its reliability and validity (Lecompte, 2002). However, this antiquated notion no longer "holds water." Indeed, this method has proved useful in numerous applied areas such as education, counseling, nursing, criminology, and law, to name a few. In every field that ethnography has been adopted and applied, it has produced an increased understanding about the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of the study's participants (Tedlock, 2000). As with any research study, its integrity relies heavily on its ability to produce reliable and valid results.

To achieve this, Carspecken (1996) delineates several ways critical ethnographic researchers can ensure reliable and valid results. The following steps were employed throughout the research process:

- Use interviews and group discussions with the participants themselves

- Conduct member checks to equalize power relations – have participants review transcripts of dialogues

- Use peer debriefing to check biases – have a peer review data

- Prolong engagement with group/participants to heighten researcher's capacity to assume the insider's perspective

- Check themes and segments of extracted data against primary data for consistency

Limitations of the Study

A glaring limitation of this study is its time frame. The time allotted to complete the data collection and analysis was not sufficient. A one year time frame would yield more rich data reflective of a multitude of experiences. Also, missing from this study is evidence that these decolonizing strategies increases the academic achievement of *raza* youth, while at the same time providing them with the tools to succeed in life.

Chapter IV

Generative Themes and Analysis

MAESTR@S Space

MAESTR@S was founded in 2000 for the purpose of uniting educators throughout the Bay Area to support *raza* youth. Social justice is a central theme of the group's work and MAESTR@S aims to address the dismal success rates of Latina/os in school. Initially this was done by sharing strategies and developing new ones that could aid educators in their attempts to improve the educational condition of *raza*. However, as the group diminished in size from dozens to about a dozen, the focus altered slightly from learning and/or developing social justice curriculum/strategies to including "walking" social justice. For example, the group had been working on Life Maps where they "map out" a vision of themselves and the work (as it relates to social change) they want to do across the medicine wheel (Appendix A). They achieve this through free-writing, poetry, pictures and other creative ways that work for them and then share it with the group. The members continue to work on these Life Maps to this day because life is not stagnant; indeed, it is fluid. In short, the members of MAESTR@S recognized that they needed to commit to starting the social change process with themselves.

In the early 2000's when the MAESTR@S group was much larger, Diego (founder and group facilitator) had secured space large enough to accommodate the group size. However, the group eventually lost that space and needed to move to a new location. Group members responded by offering their work sites and opening their homes for working sessions. Whether or not this led to the reduction in group size because of the nomadic movement of group sessions is not clear. According to Diego, the change from

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large spaces to members' homes and work sites "became more comfortable and felt familial and natural." This exposed members to one another at a more intimate level – they were invited to see where group member's work and reside and gained a better understanding of how they live.

Encuentros

When I first reconnected with MAESTR@S in 2008 (I participated in sessions in its inception) I was surprised to see such a small group in comparison to the number of participants during its first year. The *encuentro* was held at a work site in the East Bay and there were ten people present, including myself. As I entered the site I was greeted by Diego and was introduced to members individually. They were all pleasant, warm and friendly and I immediately felt comfortable. Every member brought food to share so several members were seated (the chairs were arranged in a circle which is symbolic and represents the equality of all members) enjoying their snacks and catching up with one another. The conversations revolved around family, community engagement and activism, and personal well-being. I was under the impression that members, despite the physical distances between them (one member drove a distance of 90 minutes), had developed strong bonds over time.

As the session commenced all members were asked to walk outside and form a circle. Once the circle was formed a female member brought out a white sage smudge stick and lit it with a lighter (the sage is a Native American spiritual tradition and is used to cleanse and drive away negative energies). She used her free hand to wave the smoke toward her body and then waved her hand over her body and head as if washing herself with water. Afterwards, she recited a prayer and gave thanks for the many things she had

been blessed with in life and then passed the sage to the next member. One by one each member repeated the ritual, each with their own unique way of cleansing themselves with the sage and giving thanks.

After the cleansing ritual we took our seats inside and Diego (the founder and group facilitator) started the group off by reviewing the agenda. And in a playful tone, he remarked that he created the agenda despite the fact the group never follows it, and all of the members begin chuckling. At the time I didn't quite understand what was humorous about his remarks but over time I realized that the agendas created for every meeting are never followed because the group's needs are primary. For instance, if the group feels that there is a need to defragment their minds then meditation exercises and activities designed to achieve this would be utilized. Also, the group responds to the needs of individuals as they stand out and require attention. An example of this is if a member shares a poignant story about a past experience and he/she requires support from the group then they would work with that individual as long as necessary and forgo other scheduled activities.

The day began with check-ins, where members would either update the group on the progress they were making with a particular situation they had previously shared with the group or share a challenge they had encountered at work or home (challenges could be emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual or a combination of several) and express their needs in their struggles to overcome these challenges. The challenges ranged from difficulty with a colleague to past abuses that were being confronted. As one shared his/her story regarding the challenges faced in confronting his/her issue the members listened attentively. All members directed their attention to the speaker, making eye

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contact and inquiring about his/her experience. The purpose of inquiry is to assist the speaker with process of grieving and to bring clarity as to his/her needs. After each member completed sharing his/her story, the group members would respond with empathetic responses about how the story/experience resonated with them or emotionally affected them.

One member, in particular, stood out that day. She entered the space a little late and appeared frustrated. I cautiously observed her, not wanting to bring attention to myself. As she entered she apologized to the group for being late and all the members paused for a moment to greet her and the group continued with their discussion. I unconsciously continued to glance in her direction although someone was sharing a story that required my undivided attention. For some reason she was tense, rubbing her hands on occasion and unable to settle into her seat like the other members. I thought to myself, "This woman appears to be angry and upset" but I could not understand why. When the time came for her to check-in she shared her pain and disappointment with a male colleague departing the school. She voiced her concern about its impact on the students and the teaching community. As she continued, the sound of her voice intensified and she appeared to be on the verge of tears (however, she never cried). Then suddenly she questioned one of the male members (a close friend) as to the reason males leave the teaching occupation. Surprised and unprepared he attempted to answer to no avail.

I looked around the circle and noticed that the members were surprisingly calm. It is as if they had experienced something similar in the past and were anticipating such a reaction from a member (I would soon discover that these types of situations occur regularly). I suspected that there was more to this purging of emotional pain, but as a new

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member and novice to the process I did not dare attempt to engage her. As the members engaged her in dialogue she became increasingly calm. Yet the dialogue went only as far as she was comfortable. They would have to wait for another day to pursue this issue in-depth.

After wrapping up the activity and summarizing the day all the members walked outside and formed a circle in preparation for the closing ceremony. The sage was lit and passed to each member to share words of gratitude. During the closing ceremony members shared how the day affected them and gave thanks for a space that allows them to slow down and envision their needs and then act on them. Afterwards, one member enters the circle and begins embracing every member one at a time with each succeeding member following suit.

Retreats

The retreats occur once per year near the end of summer over a 3-day period which begins on a Friday evening and ends Sunday afternoon. They are designed for the group to take what they have been working on throughout the year (such as the LifeMaps) at *encuentros* but to a much deeper level. Because reflection is an ongoing part of the process the group is constantly rebuilding their work through their discussions. Their goal is to help one another develop the skills to live the life they envision individually and collectively, and then apply this to the work they do with their youth/students. They first create a vision and then make a commitment to that vision with discipline and daily action that's in harmony with the vision. This includes a commitment to work regularly as a collective.

To date, MAESTR@S has hosted two annual retreats. The retreat site is located in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The cabins are nestled in the mountainside among the majestic redwoods, providing divine inspiration for group members. After placing their bags and sleeping gear in their cabins, the members made their way to the lodge for snacks, conversation, and laughs. The atmosphere was filled with optimism and positive energy. Every member was greeted with a warm embrace. After filling themselves with food and conversation, Diego requested the group to exit outdoors to begin the ceremonial ritual of burning the sage marking the commencement of the retreat.

That evening a special guest of Diego's arrived to perform a specific Native American ritual called "drum speak." The beating drum is compared to the beating of a human heart and is said to represent the heartbeat of the earth which is a Native American belief. Drums in this way become the platform to connect one's spirit with that of the earth. This ritual reminded the members about the purpose of the weekend and to prepare them mentally and spiritually for the work ahead. The group was asked to lie down, close their eyes, and listen to the sounds of the drum while focusing on their breathing and connecting to the energies around them. The drumming began slowly and every member remained completely silent. As the drumming increased in repetition I began to see silhouette images of animals appear in my mind with the beat of every drum – first a rabbit, and then a dog or wolf, and then something that resembled a bear. The images appeared as quickly as they disappeared and I had little time to identify and determine what I saw. Each member shared what they had seen or not seen in many instances. All described a sense of peace and serenity and for some a connection to the naturally developed life that surrounded us.

The following morning the group gathered in the lodge for breakfast. Members brought plenty of food to share and we sat outside eating breakfast, sipping on coffee, and enjoying the morning sunshine and fresh air of the wilderness. Inside the lodge personal pillows and blankets (members sat on pillows, not on chairs) were arranged in a circle with a colorfully striped Mexican blanket lying in the center. On this blanket lied pictures, books, and artifacts (e.g., a photo of their class) brought by members. Each item had a meaning of significance to the owner and served as a reminder and inspiration as to the reason they were present.

Many of the activities scheduled for the day revolved around reflection of the process regarding social change and identifying our needs individually and collectively and building on our Life Maps (previously described) and Trauma Maps (described later in this chapter). These activities elicited emotional responses where members reflected deeply, divulging painful memories and experiences that had been suppressed and seldom shared. In addition, the group, through actively participating and modeling the process created a space where members could speak from their hearts.

It was apparent, through my observations and participation, that the group was committed to work with and support members in their individual goals to live social change. One intriguing aspect of the group process was that any person can join (or rejoin) at any time and the group would adjust to support that individual. MAESTR@S recognizes that not everyone will be at the same level of understanding or stage of doing the work, so they must adjust to meet the needs of others.

At the last retreat a female member that, for the most part, had been inconsistent in her participation and involvement with the group up to this point shared that her

principal suggested she consider modeling her pedagogical style after other teachers that have been successful in improving their students' test scores. Those remarks troubled her because she felt that she was an effective teacher and had developed great rapport with her students and connected with them beyond the academics. As a critically conscious Chicana (self-identified) she understood the population she was working with (majority Latina/o) and recognized the importance of also meeting their emotional needs. The principal's remarks were deeply hurtful and she felt that all of the work she has done over the years with her students was devalued and entirely dismissed. The group responded with compassion and shared similar challenges they faced and how they overcame them. This dialogue ensued for more than an hour. In typical MAESTR@S fashion, other activities were postponed and the need to support a member with her struggle took precedence.

Many of the exercises utilized at the retreat required deep introspection and, by nature, were time consuming. Recognizing that this type of work can be emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausting opportunities for fun were also incorporated into the weekend agenda. During a lengthy lunch break the group decided to walk to a nearby meadow to relax and play games. A volleyball net was erected and the group played an entertaining and somewhat competitive game. They playfully teased one another and enjoyed a few laughs at the expense of some of their athletically challenged comrades. Participating in the games allowed members to release physically while simultaneously bonding with the group.

As the weekend came to a close, the members gathered in the lodge and took their seats around the circle. Each member shared how the weekend retreat affected them,

what they got out of it and their intentions as they continue the path of "walking" social change. The day ended with the ritual of burning sage and giving thanks, marking the end to an exhausting, yet emotionally liberating and spiritually uplifting weekend. Many departed after the closing ceremony, eager to return to loved ones to share their experiences.

I left feeling spiritually connected to nature and the members of MAESTR@S. Through participation in exercises designed to slow me down to reflect deeply about my needs and to critically analyze forces which interfere with this process (e.g., capitalistic seduction, the media), I felt empowered with a renewed sense of purpose. Like other members, I knew I would have opportunities to put these newly acquired skills to practice and would be expected to share my journey and struggles at a future *encuentro*.

My involvement with MAESTR@S and active participation in *encuentros* and retreats offered me insight into the inherent challenges of healing and creating the space to confront them. Through exercises that work to connect my mind, body, and soul, such as the Life Map Grid (Appendix B), I am forced to sit, contemplate and envision a life for myself that includes nurturing and feeding my spirit. This has brought balance to my life and I use these exercises to remind myself of my intentions and purpose causing me to take the time to reflect. The space that has been created by the group is a safe haven for members from our chaotic, rapacious and hyper-competitive capitalistic society. It is a space where members can be Whole.

Contradictions and Tension

Throughout my participation and observation of MAESTR@S activities there were moments where tension arose due to conflict caused by misunderstandings.

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Whenever any group of individuals unites for a purpose and cause there will, more than likely, be instances where tensions arise and it is their response (or lack of one) that ultimately defines them. Over the course of this study I either witnessed these tensions or heard about them from other members through casual conversation.

When MAESTR@S initially formed the meetings drew a much larger audience. According to Diego, several *veteranos* (literal translation is "veterans" but the term is used to describe older Chicanos that fought in the "struggle" [i.e., Chicano Movement]) attended meetings but they had a tendency to "take over" the sessions by asserting themselves and imparting their wisdom. This became a concern for several group members because the experiences of others (women and younger participants) were dismissed. Unconscious or not, the *veteranos* were perpetuating an oppressive and colonial element which had been used for generations – devaluing the knowledge systems of presumed inferior groups thereby silencing them.

Tensions mounted over time and the issue of *veteranos* (specifically males) asserting themselves was addressed in a group dialogue. Some of the *veteranos* took exception to this and did not return. Nonetheless, it was addressed and from that point forward the group facilitator made a conscious effort to include the voices of all by implementing small group work, using artistic expression (painting, poetry, etc.) to share stories and using the medium of e-mail for feedback. It was around this time where gender imbalance occurred and the group shifted to predominately female.

This shift forced the group to begin looking at issues affecting *raza* with a feminist lens. More women began sharing their stories about the negative and sometimes violent impact of *machismo* (excessive masculinity) and patriarchy in their lives and the

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effects of multilayered social exclusion. As the space became safe for emotional

vulnerability, long-suppressed painful memories were resurrected where personal stories

of physical abuse and molestation began to surface. Stories of heartache and survival

became more common as the group size decreased.

Having women as the majority in any group does not necessarily guarantee

women's issues to be a focus or included. Elida, a longtime member, shared that she feels

a sense of ownership of the group process, including defining the group's purpose and

direction. At an *encuentro* that occurred in a member's home Elida questioned an agenda

item that focused on supporting Latino males in school. As a valued and respected

member, she did not hesitate to challenge the group as to their decision to focus on *raza*

males in education. The group responded that they had decided to focus on males because

of their lack of academic success and high incarceration rates. Elida countered, "Women

face similar issues too and should be included" and spoke about other oppressive

elements, such as patriarchy/sexism that Latinas encounter daily. Ultimately the group

decided to include both genders. After all, part of their purpose is to "attack institutional,

interpersonal and internalized oppression/colonization" and to do otherwise would be

hypocritical.

Becoming involved with MAESTR@S typically involves an invitation from a

member. Prior to bringing a guest, members inform the facilitator as a courtesy. Group

members entrust one another and believe that guests would have an understanding of the

group's purpose prior to attending a session. Trust is critical to the quality of

relationships and is a MAESTR@S cornerstone. Without it the group dynamics would be

superficial and the activities intended to develop profound connections would be cursory at best.

At an *encuentro* that occurred at a member's home Elida invited Alexis, a colleague of hers, to participate. However, she did not inform Diego herself but asked Alexis to contact him. Unbeknownst to Elida and the rest of MAESTR@S members, Diego informed Alexis that it was not a good time to participate because the group was preparing for a conference which required full participation from current membership and suggested she attend a future session. Despite that communication, Alexis arrived with Elida to the *encuentro* which was an unexpected surprise to Diego. His stoic disposition did not suggest anything otherwise and most of the group members were unaware of the dynamics. Yet, Elida sensed something immediately and explained, "The minute we arrived I sensed tension but didn't know what it was about."

The *encuentro* continued as planned and the group welcomed Alexis and included her in dialogues by asking her for input. I was immediately intrigued by her presence because from my knowledge of MAESTR@S history a few years have elapsed since a White female last participated in a session. I watched her with curiosity wondering how she would react as we delved deeper into the work. I wondered to myself, "Will she resist participating in some of the spiritual rituals or will she overcompensate for her whiteness by awkwardly and uncomfortably immersing herself in the work with little passion?" Acknowledging my judgments and assumptions, I suspended those thoughts and returned to observing the group and on the surface nobody seemed to be as enamored with our guest as I was. It also appeared that others had no knowledge of the existing tension between the guest and facilitator.

As the group continued planning for the Critical Race Theory conference, Diego requested that members share personal stories or classroom experiences with the healing and grieving process. After a few group members shared their stories one of the members asked Alexis to share an experience. In hindsight, although the request was made with the best intention it placed Alexis in an uncomfortable position. She arose from a relaxed posture in her seat wide-eyed, paused for a moment and responded matter-of-factly that we need to stick with standards because if "we get into personal stories than we get away from teaching to the standard."

I was appalled by her remarks and tried to conceal my emotions and awaited responses from other members. Miguel calmly and respectfully disagreed with her remarks and talked about the importance of knowing and connecting with students. Others followed suit and shared personal stories on how you can achieve this and still meet the standards. After hearing responses from several members Alexis appeared unsettled and somewhat distraught. Shortly thereafter she began crying and most of the membership appeared concerned while others were emotionally unaffected. Perhaps with a sense of guilt Diego attempted solace by acknowledging that the group should not have "singled her out." After checking-in with her to make certain that she was emotionally well, the group continued with their work in preparation for the CRT conference. The day came to an end and that was the last the group saw of Alexis.

Still disturbed and unsettled by the events of that day I followed-up with Diego a few days later to inquire about what transpired and why a member would bring a guest that was acutely unaware of the issues affecting *raza* youth. Equally baffled, he had no sound explanation but mentioned that he was surprised be Alexis' presence and suggested

I contact Elida (he did not disclose that he had contact with Alexis prior to the *encuentro* and suggested that she attend a future one). Recalling the event, Elida was flabbergasted by her response and exclaimed, "I thought she was different because she is lesbian and had talked about incidents regarding sexuality in the classroom with me…She brought it to the attention of the Dean and was very upset about his insensitivity and lack of support." Although she was confused about her colleague's remarks she never discussed the events of that day with her. However, she did explain that Alexis informed her that she contacted Diego and Elida assumed this meant she was welcome to attend.

Taking on the role of intermediary, I informed Diego about the conversation I had with Elida and he said that he would discuss this issue at the next *encuentro* to resolve any group conflict or concerns. I was unable to attend that session but discovered that the issue never came up in discussion. Rather, it was at another *encuentro* (four months after the incident) where the issue surfaced and Diego disclosed that he had contact with Alexis the day prior and told her that it was not a good time to attend. The group responded with a collective gasp bringing clarity to what had transpired that warm and sunny spring day.

As a result, the group discussed what type of approval process is required when bringing guests to ensure that this incident is not repeated. Unanimously the group remained unwavering of their trust in members to bring whomever they choose. As facilitator Diego asked that they inform him that a guest will be joining the group for purposes of agenda preparation. Since this incident members have brought guests with them (all Latina/os) and a few continue to attend MAESTR@S events.

Analysis of Themes

This chapter provides an analysis of the data generated from the dialogues with the seven members of MAESTR@S that were invited to participate in this study. The research questions and the questions to guide the dialogues elicited several generative themes, such as Development of Consciousness, Overcoming Internalized Oppression, and The Role of Healing. This chapter explores the following themes (list them) and seeks to (and give a brief description of some of the main arguments your data makes)

One unique aspect of this study is that the participants did not come together for the purpose of this research study but in fact have been engaged in the decolonization process for years. As mentioned in the previous chapter, MAESTR@S has been engaged in an on-going process of reflection and dialogue, in essence practicing decolonization in a real sense. In order to provide a genuine portrayal of their work, I also became a member of the group and was involved in every aspect of the group. This point is vital because in order to develop authentic relationships and understand their work I had to embark in the process of decolonization. This required me to immerse myself in their group process which is action-based; the work is lived and not simply theory.

Included in this section is data collected from *encuentros* and retreats. To enhance this data, three participants were selected for individual dialogues. Their selection was based on length of time and level of engagement with MAESTR@S and years of teaching experience. Since MAESTR@S has more female members actively engaged in the work, two females and one male were selected. They were:

Linda:

She brings many talents to the MAESTR@S group and is typically asked to facilitate meditation exercises to help ground members spiritually at *encuentros* and retreats. When she was asked initially to lead some of the group sessions she claimed that she was afraid, but now has obviously overcome that fear. She has come to trust herself and her wisdom, which has benefited the group tremendously.

Ana Maria:

With such a youthful and fun-loving spirit, it is difficult to imagine that she was once a gang member. Although she has grown substantially and no longer lives in the community where she grew up, she remains connected with friends from her *barrio* and recognizes and celebrates the significant role they played in her life. She has a passion for social justice and participates in numerous events throughout the Bay Area that promote equality and value diversity.

Joaquin:

He resides and works in the community where he grew up and has a profound love and pride for his town. Indeed, he is an alumnus of the high school where he teaches. He is actively involved in Aztec dancing and in connecting spiritually to Native American practices and traditions.

The Latina/os that participated in this study recognize that decolonization of the mind and spirit is a continual process. They are acutely aware that the multidimensional forces of colonialism are ubiquitous, permeating all facets of society. The group and individual dialogues revealed that decolonization of the mind and spirit is a process that includes seeking knowledge and theories to explain colonialism and decolonization; recalling painful memories and confronting them in a constructive and proactive manner

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in order to heal to become Whole; and the development of strategies that allow members to explore emotional aspects of this process. The process was affective, empirical, and excavational; one must "learn to name one's experiences and the historical and political context that constructed their experience" (Strobel, 1996, p. 170).

The following are the themes that were developed based on the dialogues and interviews. Each theme is discussed in more detail later in this chapter:

1. Development of Consciousness

2. Overcoming Internalized Oppression

3. The Role of Healing

4. Seeking Authentic Connections

5. Strategies to Maintain Continuity

6. Integrating/Teaching Decolonizing Practices

Dialogues with the Participants: Development of Consciousness

One of the fundamental phases in decolonization is the recovery of one's history, culture, and language that has been systematically stripped via assimilationist educational policies and practices. Just as education is paramount to the colonial project, it is also essential in developing a critical consciousness in order to decolonize the mind. Several of the participants have been on this journey for years.

For many of the participants, the awareness of the process of colonialism came to them in college. Ana Maria and Joaquin, in particular, remember the class they took in college where an "awakening" occurred.

Ana Maria: My first Sociology and Intercultural Studies class really changed my thinking. It really challenged so many beliefs; I read all of these books and got

really hooked. I wanted to learn more about racism, classism, and environmental racism…I had never known that these type of oppressions existed because I was never told for the most part.

Joaquin: The form of knowing about colonization was when I began my Chicana/o studies class at San Diego State University. Our class studied the *conquista* (conquest) and the implications of institutional racism and cultural dominance the Spaniards left us. I was raised Catholic and knowing I spoke Spanish and was Roman Catholic I began to study in depth the horrible treatment of the indigenous peoples by the Spanish and the system of oppression they have left us with for the last 500 years.

And for some, the awareness of oppression and inequity came at an earlier age.

Elida: My family moved from a Spanish-speaking neighborhood in San Jose to an all-White neighborhood in Santa Clara when I was seven years old. When we moved into the neighborhood a WASP neighbor came over and said that she was glad that we moved into the neighborhood instead of the Black family that was looking at the house. That day I realized that our neighbors thought we were better than a Black family, but not as good as them. When I started school that September the students made fun of the food I brought in my brown paper bag and asked me to say words in Spanish. When I began high school there were more Latino/as and I gravitated toward that culture. However, we seemed to be more singled out and we were not expected to succeed. I was bored and cut a lot of classes yet I was always on the honor roll. Counselors never spoke to Latinos

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about prep courses for college or encouraged us to go to college. However, we knew that the White students already had their SAT scores and colleges chosen.

A shared experience by the participants was a sense of not belonging and feeling unwelcomed in college. For Linda, it was her older sister that introduced her to the systems of oppressions (racism, sexism, hegemony, etc.), becoming more aware of colonialism in college as she experienced its effects.

Linda: My older sister was a big part of my awakening early on and she also studied history and inspired me to study history. She went away to the East Coast and was hit right away with racism…She was always struggling with identity and how she belonged and feelings of who has power and who doesn't. So, even before college I was starting to understand the different -isms at an earlier age…I was starting to understand colonialism, but the actual historical part was learned when I was in college. But understanding what the dominant culture has over people of color I experienced in college. It was predominately White and I didn't feel that I belonged. I got really good grades in high school and when I attended college I struggled. I remember our Chicano mentors and leaders saying look around freshman year on a retreat because you might be one of the few who makes it.

Reflecting on a particular college experience, Ana Maria expressed her frustration and anger with the colonial mentality that exists at the university level.

Ana Maria: When a White male instructor teaches an entire class that Chicano Theater, which he called Community Theater, isn't real theater what awful damage is he doing to my cultural pride? What message was he giving the entire

class about grassroots Chicano Theater? Not a fair message at all. The power of a racist, unfair teacher, instilling and further colonizing us with what my junior high friend said, "White is Right". These types of incidents happened all the time.

As Ana Maria and Joaquin began to explore the effects of colonialism in college, they became aware of its manifestations and how it has affected family, friends, and their communities.

Ana Maria: Because of all the classes I took I became aware of all of the inequities and helped me understand why people from the *barrio* (Spanish slang for neighborhood) never went on to college and helped me understand gangs better. It helped me understand why my homegirls and I never thought about applying to college when we were in high school and why none of our teachers cared. And with this knowledge I wanted to change the world a little bit.

Joaquin: When I was introduced to the idea of internalized oppression and a deep study of the outcomes was when I had conversations with some *compañeros* (companions) from the San Diego Brown Berets. Gangs plague my community of the Central Coast. I come from a town where there is a big community of first generation Mexican-Americans. The internalized oppression I witnessed and continue to witness is Chicanos/as who dislike immigrants who have just arrived, this *sureño* versus *norteño* mentality. This is and continues to be the biggest challenge in my community as well as many parts of California.

These experiences are reflective of many shared by the participants. As the participants told their stories, feelings of inferiority, grief, anger, loneliness, and pain

were expressed. The participants gave examples of how these feelings manifest in themselves and other Latina/os. Typically, feelings such as inferiority and shame will result in anger, a secondary emotion that can manifest in acts of violence. Consequently, the targets of these violent acts are often family and community members. Ana Maria disclosed a personal story of how she became conscious of the violent manifestations of colonialism in her family.

> Ana Maria: And my feminist studies course helped. It helped me understand rape, sexual harassment. I had a cousin that tried to have sex with me but we didn't have sex. It helped me understand my hatred towards my cousin and why nothing was ever done about it. It made me feel strong with how I felt and validated me on so many levels. And it helped me understand my mom and how she fed this machismo crap and how she enabled his abusive behavior towards her. It helped me understand domestic violence and the need to confront my cousin. It changed me and I didn't want to go back to that dysfunction. Knowing what I did I couldn't go back to the domestic violence and not call the cops when my uncle beat my aunt just because my mom told me not to…I couldn't do it anymore. I was in a place where I was required by law, by Ana Maria's law to do it. I could now *name* [emphasis mine] the abuse and injustice.

Part of becoming decolonized is having the vocabulary to name the injustices and oppressions that have plagued urban communities and communities of color. Elida explained that although she was aware of the injustices that affected her and other Latina/os prior to college, she did not possess the language early on to name them.

Elida: It was when I began attending community college that I learned the correct vocabulary for what I had been experiencing. I learned about the colonialism and the internalized oppressions that I had been suffering from. When I began taking courses I was not sure what I would major in, but after learning about the racism that was aimed at people of color I decided to become a bilingual teacher. I was angry about the education I had received, and I decided that I would make sure that my students did not have the same experience. I continued my education at CSU Hayward and my minor was Ethnic Studies. I continued to learn about the oppressions of minorities.

The awareness of the legacy of colonialism came to a majority of the participants in college. Yet, it is well documented that a small percentage of Latina/os make it to college. For the majority of Latina/os that do not enroll in college the probability that they will receive an education to counter the negative stereotypes that are internalized appears to be minute. However, other spaces do exist for Latina/os to begin the path of decolonization. Joaquin spoke about the education that he did not receive in high school regarding the various forms of oppression. Aside from college, some of this education was received from members of civil rights and social justice organizations that he became involved with, such as the Brown Berets.

Joaquin: The conversations I had with the Brown Berets were about getting the education that we need, but don't get in school. For example, we talked about gender oppression. I'll never know what it is like to walk in a parking lot at night by myself as a woman or how it feels to get flashed by a man. I just read in the newspaper yesterday about a young man exposed his genitals to a mom and her

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daughter and the mom tackled this 19-year old kid and he got arrested. It
reminded me about the world I do not live in.

Joaquin's awareness of male privilege and how he was indoctrinated into the
system of dominance signified the emergence of critical consciousness. As the
participants' transitioned from naïve consciousness to critical consciousness it enabled
them to relive painful memories and understand that they were working toward
decolonizing their minds.

Overcoming Internalized Oppression

Throughout the dialogues, several of the participants shared experiences relevant
to their identity formation and internalization of oppressions as they discussed the impact
of colonialism in their lives. Despite overcoming obstacles, such as growing up in gang-
infested neighborhoods riddled with crime and poverty and still managing to make it to
college, they still questioned their intellectual capacity. The psychological wound of
inferiority was deeply internalized and the systemic racism they experienced daily at the
college and university level presented, at times, seemingly unscalable obstacles.

One example of this is shown in the following incident: A member of
MAESTR@S that participated in sessions infrequently stopped attending. When a
member contacted her to inquire as to the reason why she stopped participating she
explained that she felt group members were intelligent and she did not feel "smart
enough" to comprehend all of the concepts and did not feel comfortable participating in
group dialogues. When this was reported to the group there was some concern but little
discussion about it with the exception of two members that volunteered to follow-up with
her. Despite their efforts, she has not returned. However, it is this individual that

introduced Ana Maria to MAESTR@S and she has immersed herself in the work, eager to learn.

Initially confused by what I presumed to be a lack of empathic action by the group I eventually realized that this is a journey which an individual must be willing to embark upon (Later, I learned that this was a behavioral pattern from another member. Ana Maria validated this by mentioning that this was an ongoing struggle for her friend). Freire asserts that the oppressed must become "agents of curiosity" and strive to understand their current condition in order to begin the path of liberation (1992, p. 105). Embarking on this journey includes healing from past pains which cleanses the mind and spirit. Duran (2006) believes that this will allow for one to critically analyze the profound impact colonization had on one's identity. A challenge for individuals overcoming internalized oppressions is the willingness to being vulnerable and to confront fears proactively.

As Ana Maria, Linda, and Joaquin reflected on past experiences, they revealed numerous events that contributed to their struggles with overcoming internalized oppressions.

> Ana Maria: So, when I was trying to go to UC Santa Cruz as a transfer student I had a lot of trouble because my college counselor didn't think I should attend that school. She looked at my grades and saw me as someone who should transfer to a local CSU. And I noticed that none of my friends were applying to UC Santa Cruz. Their big ambition was to go to the local CSU and when I got deeper with them I realized that they thought they weren't smart enough. And so, I started really asking those questions like "Am I not smart enough?" or wondering if it

was because we don't apply ourselves. I think that's what we grew up thinking why none of us got into college. I think we just thought we weren't smart enough because we goofed around in high school therefore we didn't deserve to go to college because that was reserved for those that tried harder.

A similar sentiment was shared by Linda.

Linda: Then my internal stuff came through during my college years like, "I don't belong here" and "they don't get me." The connection with the Chicano Center and Chicano history was awakening me and I recognized that there was oppression that I am carrying with me. So I started breaking down things like why I doubted myself and my capacities and why weren't there more of us in college. I didn't understand why I believed what others thought about my capacity when I knew I was smart enough.

After completing the Sociology and Intercultural Studies classes, Ana Maria's understanding of the issues surrounding colonialism and various forms of oppressions motivated her to succeed in college.

Ana Maria: After that class my mind had been altered, it made me want to go to UC Santa Cruz even more. I tried to convince my girlfriends because we attended community college together so we should all go to the university together and that's where it ended with them. They were very adamant about not attending a UC or even trying the application process because they believed they were not smart enough and possibly feared the rejection. I felt like they placed themselves in the role of what the college counselor expected of us. And nobody really encouraged us or supported us, we encouraged ourselves. There was no help.

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This was Ana Maria's turning point. She clearly understood the challenges she faced and was determined to transfer to UC Santa Cruz. She connected with other students working towards critical consciousness. By surrounding herself with other like-minded students, her awareness of the systems of domination and oppression increased further aiding her ability to overcome internalized oppressions.

Ana Maria: In my last year in community college I joined a club called "Students for Justice" because these two guys from class asked me to come. I followed these two guys and joined Students for Justice because I thought that if I wanted to go to UC Santa Cruz I better follow these guys and figure out what they are doing. And once I joined that club everything changed… This group of students met every week and fought injustice, we worked on the Nike boycott and I attended my first indigenous ceremony, which I knew nothing about at the time. So, it wasn't just the teachers that provoked me to have a different idea about colonialism, but the connections I made with the students.

Attending a private college that was predominately White presented numerous challenges for Linda who came from an impoverished neighborhood in East Los Angeles. Messages of racial inferiority were rampant, as were class and gender. She often became angry when she witnessed injustices or heard about them. Yet, she feared being mistreated if she expressed herself. And then there was the lingering uncertainty as to whether or not she would succeed. In spite of all this, Linda began to realize the effects of the internalized oppressions and recognized change was needed.

Linda: I thought, "People come to college and this is the best time in the world" but it was not the best time for me. Learning should be enjoyable but for me it

was scary. I was constantly thinking that I might fail. That's when I realized it was all stress and no enjoyment. I started feeling real despair about this because I saw others partying and having a good time. I just thought something was wrong with me because I was always studying twice as hard to prove myself and to others that I belonged there. That's when I realized there was something wrong with this picture.

As the participants shared their experiences with the decolonization process, some of them spoke about their attempts to share their decolonizing journey with others. The participants talked about their frustration with their peers because they appeared either disinterested or unwilling to embark on this journey.

Ana Maria: But when I tried to share this with friends I came to the realization that they didn't care or didn't want to hear about it. They want to believe that gangs are there because people are inherently bad and that the reasons Mexicans have a high dropout rate is because they are stupid and lazy. Yet, they are the ones that are perpetuating colonialism and racism and instead of fighting it they buy into it.

Ana Maria shared a story about a recent visit with a friend in the neighborhood where she grew up. This succinctly captures her transformation.

Ana Maria: I went to an old school friend's daughter's birthday recently and I saw her mom there and she came up to me and my friend said, "Mom, remember Ana Maria from elementary school? Remember, you didn't let me hang out with her. She's a teacher now." And her mom looks at me and says, "Wow girl, when did you straighten up?" It was wild to see a parent there that didn't want their kids

hanging out with me when I was young. And then my friend said to her mom, "Maybe if you would have let me hang out with her I would have gone to college too."

The process of reliving painful memories helped participants share and comes to terms with feelings of inferiority, shame, loneliness, anger, and fear that were once so prevalent in their lives. As the participants strive to purge residual internalized oppressions, their awareness of colonialism's impact on them individually and collectively is increased. In addition, they recognized the importance of deconstructing this abstract concept as they progress on their journeys.

> Joaquin: As we had those discussions, I realized internally that I began to deconstruct what had started at home because "*yo soy macho*" (I'm a masculine male) and "*yo soy hombre, yo no lloro*" (I'm a man, I don't cry) and all that shit…you think you're okay but you're not. I thought I was cool because I was tough. I wanted to be a warrior on the weekend and defend the barrio and leave the girls with the kids and go die for the barrio. I was just young and ignorant. So those were the discussions we started to have. I was always the type of guy that would say that I am okay and good, but in reality I was not okay.

The Role of Healing

Although possessing the knowledge of how one was brought within the system of dominance is essential to decolonization, the process cannot be complete without healing. Without it, one may be capable of offering a critical analysis of the condition of *raza* and the role that colonialism has played in shaping that condition, but their spirit will remain shackled by pain, incapable of progressing.

Much of the work MAESTR@S does is centered on healing. Their goal is to aid *raza* in exploring and uncovering the complexity of their condition in order to find solutions to that condition. Their manifesto specifically states:

This work is based on the understanding that the contemporary oppression of *raza* has its foundation in the soul wound (Duran, 2006) inflicted on our spirits and communities through the conquest and the on-going measures taken to disconnect us from our stories – from our spirits…Our work is an effort to disrupt the continued colonization and conquest of our bodies, which now takes place through the occupation of our spirits. It is an effort to awaken our spirits and in so doing to build a movement through daily action.

Duran's (2006) concept of the "soul wound" plays an integral role in healing because it is related to mental health and trauma. According to Duran (2006), the soul wound relates to the important interconnections that indigenous peoples believe exist between a person's mind, body and spirit, as well as one's connections with the community and environment. This concept emphasizes the need to focus on the effects of traumatic events and how they disrupt a person's mental, physical and spiritual life forces. Duran directs particular attention to the ways in which traumatic events inflict "a wounding on the soul" (p. 46). Historical and intergenerational traumas are another important concept related to the soul wound. It involves the recognition that violent experiences inflicted on individuals in the past manifest in future generations. This suggests that the disproportionately high levels of substance abuse, domestic violence and gang violence among Latina/os can be attributed to a failure to heal the soul wound. For

these reasons, members of MAESTR@S firmly believe that before teaching decolonizing practices, one must undergo the process him/herself first to reconnect those facets necessary to heal the soul wound.

While teaching at an elementary school in East Los Angeles, Linda realized that healing needed to be integrated into her teaching practices. She shared a powerful classroom experience that started her on the path of healing – it was an epiphany that transformed her life, ultimately leading her to MAESTR@S.

> Linda: One of the reasons I decided to leave education for a time to do some social work was because I knew there was a need for me to learn how to support children in healing. When I was a third grade teacher in East LA I was reading this story called "Sadako" to my students. Sadako dies after the bombing in Hiroshima. As we read this book aloud, my god, the floodgates opened up. We started discussing what had happened and applied it to themselves. I asked, "Has anyone in your family died?" and we started talking about grief and loss. I had four to five kids pouring open their hearts. One student talked about her cousin that died who had been mistreated and abused. I had another young boy who sobbed and sobbed and shared that he had lost his father. I couldn't stop him from crying. I had another young boy that hardly spoke and he started pouring out how in Mexico he witnessed his sister die in front of him and his mother never knew. A large can had fallen on her head from the pantry and had killed her and no one ever knew. He grieved alone. I could not stop all of them from crying. Before you knew it, all of us were crying, we were all holding each other, hugging each other. I thought to myself, "Oh my god, what have I done?" One boy couldn't stop

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crying…they were all in grief and in so much pain. I called the office and they

were only able to take one. I thought, "This isn't enough!" Teachers need to know

how to help students with their grief. Look at all the grief they are carrying, that's

why they can't learn! This is all in the way and prevents them from focusing on

learning. There's so much going on and we are so disconnected from who they

are, from who is in our classroom. That's when I realized that I needed more

skills to work with my students so when these things come up I can help them and

not freak out or shut them down.

The disconnection that Linda described is a shared experience by participants.

The participants recognize that not only are their students suffering, they are as well. This

recognition has led them on a journey to reconnect to those things that nurtures their

spirits, such as indigenous ceremonial practices. As Wilson (2008) purports, "an exercise

that increases connection or builds relationship is spiritual in nature" (p. 91). And as the

participants heal individually and collectively, they develop profound relationships with

group members. The exercises employed by MAESTR@S are designed to allow

members to be themselves and give them the space to slow down and envision their

needs and then act on those needs rather than dismissing them. The participants are

keenly aware that living in a capitalistic society and working as educators in this age of

accountability and data driven focus of No Child Left Behind keeps them preoccupied,

preventing them from fulfilling spiritual needs.

MAESTR@S focus has been on integrating specific models that are

transformative. One area of their work includes using Nonviolent Communication as a

way of suspending judgment, manifesting empathy, and building connections as they

support one another. Another aspect of their work has been the emphasis on the power of story and language. The process of creating language for their work, developing their voices, and re-creating their stories allows them the vision to truly see and know themselves, their world, and their relationships to all living things.

An example of such an exercise is the Trauma Map. Following is a description of the exercise:

Trauma Map

- Create a visual map of the trauma/pain that you carry (can be done as a group so that each person has a poster in the size of a puzzle piece and they are all brought together and connected)

- Identify, Reflect on and Write about an area of Grief, Despair, or Mourning in your life, the impact it has had on you, and the feelings you may have internalized or tried to hide in the process. After 10 – 15 minutes, try to link this experience to a dream or prayer that moves you toward where you want to be. Finally, share this with the group and ask for feedback. Those that respond should share what the story/person, the personal connections that they made, etc.

- Connecting our current traumas to each others' and to historical traumas of our people.

Joaquin shared a moment when he recognized that he needed to heal and how participating in MAESTR@S exercises helped him on his path.

Joaquin: As a conscious Chicano that I think I am, before MAESTR@S, I thought I knew what liberation was. Being conscious, being part of the cause…but being truly liberated is not only being liberated in the mind, but it is

through the spirit…and when you reach deep down inside, the way I did with MAESTR@S, I felt like I was on top of the world. For example, I use to tell my little girl to be quiet when she cried. I would tell her "Okay, that's enough crying, go to sleep." And then she would say she misses her mom and then she would just cry and that would make me angry because she was visiting me and she would just cry. Then I realized I was angry because I was hurt, I was shutting out my emotions. I was unable to express my need, my need to release my pain. That's what MAESTR@S provided for me. I lived in a perfect world because I believed I was liberated. Deep down inside I had a wound that didn't allow me to make that connection with my daughter. MAESTR@S showed me how to express my needs. I never knew that I needed that space.

With the support of MAESTR@S, Joaquin has been able to express his needs and have them met. During an *encuentro*, Joaquin shared his struggles and pain and the group responded by inquiring about his trauma and pushing him to connect to his feelings/emotions. Joaquin recalled the event:

Joaquin: We were focusing on a dream exercise and forming our medicine wheels. I was cutting out pictures and words from a magazine to represent my "perfect" dream. When I shared my dream Diego said that it seemed very positive but that I mentioned I had anger. I told the group that I didn't want to focus on it and Diego said "let's explore it," but I was in denial and skirted the issue. That's when another member reassured me that it is okay to talk about what's angering me. I decided to open up and told them about how I want a family and I was angry at my ex because she took away my daughter, she took away my "spirit."

And then I started to cry. You know, I went to church and seldom got in trouble. Out of my five siblings I thought I would be the one with the ideal family. Society says that a functional family is a nuclear family and I felt like a failure as a father and provider. When I went out to party I drank heavily because I couldn't cope with my loss. I always kept busy…The group asked me questions like: "How did that make you feel?" and "Tell me more about that feeling?" I left my anger and pain in the circle. That was the first time I was able to express myself. I left MAESTR@S as a new man…Weeks after that day I took my daughter home and she didn't want to leave. For the first time I hugged her and told her that it would be okay and that I would see her in a couple of weeks. Before then I used to just walk away and cry in the bathroom alone.

This process consumed most of the time allotted for the *encuentro* but the breakthrough led Joaquin on his path to healing and led to developing a much deeper connection with his daughter. The power of the group lies in the support they provide to members, regardless of the issues or challenges they are facing and by encouraging them to push the boundaries needed to heal. By the nature of their work, MAESTR@S creates a space where vulnerability is the norm, providing healthy outlets to deal with the effects of trauma.

Seeking Authentic Connections

An underlying theme that was repeated throughout the dialogues by the participants was a yearning for authentic connections. At the MAESTR@S retreats and *encuentros*, group members expressed that MAESTR@S is a space where they feel safe, respected, and honored for who they are and what they bring to the group. At the last

encuentro, group members had the opportunity to describe MAESTR@S with two visitors. Members described it as:

- "A nurturing space, allowing us to shed tears and release pain"

- "A place to learn how to deal with our trauma"

- "To learn strategies for healing"

- "A place that fills the spirit and shows how to 'walk' social justice"

- "It's an opportunity to be heard. An investment for future generations by modeling the work"

Although the members' descriptions of MAESTR@S varied, its essence was understood by the guests after participating in the day's activities. One guest, in particular, sat quietly listening attentively to members during "check-in" as they described their mood/feelings with the group. When she spoke she expressed gratitude that such a group existed and explained that the safe space to share everyday struggles with working within the educational system with peers was precisely what she had been seeking. She spoke eloquently and emotionally about her experiences as a student and how, over the years, she lost her identity (cultural, linguistic). The guilt and embarrassment were evident in her tears and trembling voice. She also expressed that she does not have a similar space to MAESTR@S where like-minded individuals could support her in her journey.

Clearly, MAESTR@S provides space for individuals to divulge their deepest fears while also developing profound interpersonal relationships. However, these connections are not easily replicable outside that space. There are challenges in living this

work outside MAESTR@S, but group members still strive to create them in their daily lives.

> Diego: Right now at work we're having a struggle/situation where it's really challenging because folks have lost jobs or parts of their jobs and then for the people that are working they are suppose to work less because they are getting paid less. So, it's a real hostile work environment. I've been trying to remind myself to stay kind, slow it down, to take time with people, things like that. I'm not saying that I'm doing it, I'm just saying that it is one of the things that I am thinking about. I'm just trying to be thoughtful and remind myself….So, the thing for me about the retreat that was helpful was just that reminder about paying attention and being authentic. Yeah, because those are two things I got and that was a nice reminder for me because that's what I want to do.

Miguel suggested to the group that one possible way to replicate this work outside of the space is to intentionally create the day.

> Miguel: We made the conscious decision to be here and to hang here and to develop these connections that is totally a creative act. We came together in this creative way and created this experience that is often in love and it is a powerful thing for me. It's a reminder that in other places I can be in touch with that within myself. I don't want this to be the only place where I have this. I really like this, I really want this, I value it and I want to contribute to it and I want to keep it going. I want to create that within my family to the greatest extent possible. I want to try to create it within whomever it is that I'm working for. I want to create all of you in as many pockets as I can in my world where it has the same feel that

there are some connections that I can come back too. Both that I can take from

here to contribute to those places and whatever it is that I get over there I can

bring back to this group. So there is a conscious intention about wanting to take

what's here and live it in other places.

Miguel's conscious intention to live the work in other aspects of his life is his

attempt to lead a congruent life. This is one strategy employed to replicate the positive

space of MAESTR@S, developing profound connections with others is another strategy.

Although developing authentic connections with others outside of MAESTR@S can be

challenging, several members have succeeded to an extent.

A common element that emerged from the dialogues was that participants do not

want to spend the time explaining the work to people that cannot or choose not to

understand the complexity of the condition facing *raza*. This, for many of the

participants, is a prerequisite for a profound connection and is non-negotiable. Therefore,

many seek out connections with people that already possess the critical understanding of

how to work with *raza* youth and other colonized populations. Participants are unwilling

to invest the time to convert others or invest the time and energy educating them. For

Elida, it meant leaving her place of employment and finding employment with other like-

minded people.

Elida: I try to surround myself with people who are walking social justice. I am

part of a group of Latina Consultants and their mission includes walking social

justice. That's actually how I got my last consultant job working with these

mujeres (women). A friend who is a part of the Latina Consultants Network

referred me. We were hired to work with *Mujures Unidas* (Women United), a

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grassroots organization of Latina immigrant women with a dual mission of

personal transformation and community power. I also have been a diversity

consultant for different districts in the Bay Area. I live the work by seeking work

that helps me to remain focused on the social injustices and keep up with the

latest materials on social justice.

As participants expressed their desire for authentic connections, it became evident

that they do not necessarily have to be strictly with other individuals. These connections,

at times, came in the forms of prayers and dreams. However, these types of connections

are not intended to replace the need for deep interpersonal connections. Linda shares how

MAESTR@S has helped her connect with constituencies (students, teachers,

administrators) at work.

Linda: Because of the inspiration and consistent group processing what and how

to decolonize the mind and spirit along with the connections of trust and intimate

support from this group alongside my personal support system, these have helped

me move and connect to my peers at work individually, their students and their

struggles in a more personal way. I have essentially challenged the initial isolation

I have experienced. I have tried to be a bridge to connect their perspective to the

central office even when administrators have not been able to understand teacher

needs. Still, my spirit sometimes tires and instead of giving up and getting

frustrated or settling for less and going with the status quo and becoming lost, I

have sought to live in integrity and connect with grief and dreams and passion for

working for the love and justice of our children.

Whereas, connecting to nature was a method Ana Maria used to nurture her spirit.

Ana Maria: It was incredibly therapeutic (referring to hiking). It was calming and stress releasing…there was something about smelling the trees and seeing wild animals and being connected to the earth…I don't know if you are aware of this but UCSC is built on a Native American burial ground. So I would walk on the land knowing that this is a Native American burial ground where my ancestors have been buried and they are speaking to me through the trees. I felt a connection on every single hike I went on….to the Native American burial grounds which I learned about and honored it even more.

Although Linda and Ana Maria used different methods to connect to their spirits the experiences and results were similar – deeply penetrating and reinvigorating giving them a renewed sense of Self. As each one reflected on their experiences calmness set in as if reliving the experience at that moment. In particular Ana Maria, who is an enthusiastic and energetic person, comfortably reclined into the sofa as if preparing for a long restful reprieve. Nestled into the sofa she gently cupped her coffee with both hands and in a composed manner recalled her experiences walking through the woods once inhabited by her ancestors.

The dialogues demonstrate that replicating the authentic connections that they have experienced through MAESTR@S requires creative and innovative strategies. In addition, participants recognize that in order to achieve this they must "walk" and "live" the MAESTR@S principles of love, empathy, compassion, honesty, respect, and commitment in their lives; for these are the very values that drew them to MAESTR@S.

Maintaining continuity outside of MAESTR@S to the work of decolonization is problematic. Participants are aware that the multidimensional forces of colonialism distract and seek to control and shape desires in an attempt to fill the spiritual void through capitalistic seduction and mass consumerism. To counter this, participants employ strategies, such as developing relationships with other like-minded people and study materials that assist them in their endeavors. However, some participants have developed unique strategies to keep them connected to the work of decolonizing their minds and spirits.

> Ana Maria: The activities that I do and the places that help me decolonize my body and spirit are many. I try to stretch every day. I go salsa dancing once a week to help myself with stress release and creating healthy boundaries with men. It's great for me socially and I absolutely love listening to salsa music, it uplifts my spirit. Salsa dancing in the bay area draws in a diverse, multicultural crowd. I try to go to multicultural events where people of color are valued and celebrated. I also try to go hiking or spend time in nature once a week. Due to my busy schedule I usually go by myself but prefer to spend this time with a friend.
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> Miguel: Sometimes I'll go to meditation temples and just spend the whole morning there doing meditation. It's been great, but I haven't done it for a while. But sometimes I go to church. There's a whole range of different people who are there for different reasons and consciousness. There is a need and I can connect with their need for wanting to have a spiritual connection even if they might find

other things problematic. So that's a strategy that I use to try to stay connected with my spirit.

Ana Maria's approach is resourceful. She utilizes spaces that exist in abundance and activities that are accessible and available year-round, as does Miguel. These strategies have helped keep them in balance and are helpful reminders that becoming decolonized is an ongoing process. Miguel also mentioned his need for solitary time as an opportunity to reflect and remember the things that are important to him. Other participants use New Age methods (many of these methods are based on Eastern and Indigenous traditions and practices that have been in existence for hundreds of years, labeling them as "new" is a misnomer and another example of how Western culture has appropriated non-Western practices and colonized them to make it their own) to ground themselves.

> Linda: When I have fallen out of balance, a variety of practices help me integrate the work. Along with developing mindfulness practices and asking myself what is my intention and what is my purpose on a daily basis. Such questioning focuses me on how I desire to walk for the day. Meditation is a practice too that sometimes I do. I find this practice helps ground me and brings me to being present and it brings me back to the work we do...it slows me down. I revisit some of the exercises we've done, such as Life Maps, etc., as a way to check myself and see where I am in my progress to decolonize myself and live a life with intentionality and with more connection.

And sometimes, the strategy for maintaining continuity is simply expressing a need and putting it into a form of a request to the members of MAESTR@S.

Diego: And there was a request made that folks that were with me or know about my work situation might follow up with me and checks in and say, "Hey, what happened?" or "How's that going?" You know, just as a reminder. We don't want to forget because I think that that's part of the issue, right? Kind of forgetting about it; putting it in the back of your mind and not being as focused and putting everything into it…So that's one of the things that I would say. In terms of next steps, mine would be to just maintain the continuity. Someone was just talking about how we don't get together outside of the circle, but that's understandable too. But can we check in? Can people follow up to see what they're doing?

The dialogues illustrate challenges inherent in the venture of attempting to do this work in isolation. The teachings of MAESTR@S and the space they provide is the one constant that participants can rely on. Linda declared, "I am accountable to this group, knowing that we will be meeting in about six weeks. The connection to the group helps remind me that I want to grow." Knowing that the group will be meeting provides participants an opportunity to practice integrating decolonizing methods into their daily lives and reporting back to the group the challenges they face in doing that and receive feedback from the group.

Lucha: So, I've been consciously thinking about how to use the lessons that we learn here about communication and addressing conflict. I try to be mindful about that, like if I feel myself in a situation I try to go back to observations, feelings, needs, request (a Nonviolent Communication strategy) and I think for the most part I do a good job. I think where I struggle the most is when I get into a situation where I feel that the person doesn't deserve me doing NVC (Nonviolent

Communication) with them. And then I feel bad about myself for judging the person in that way. Everybody deserves compassion. That's why I wanted to borrow those books on the power of language and other meanings because I do think that I tend to put people in categories. I'm finding ways through MAESTR@S to be able to do that for everybody so I can be at peace with myself because I don't want to leave this earth being that kind of person who selects who deserves compassion or who doesn't. I think that's what the colonizer did to us, right? So that's my specific challenge…So I'm just working on stretching myself in terms of conflict and language and words I choose and attitudes I choose.

Lucha's recognition that her tendency to reactively judge others lacks compassion indicates awareness that her beliefs (everyone deserves compassion) and actions (they don't deserve NVC) are not aligned. Applying NVC with colleagues and students demonstrates her willingness to confront this contradiction. Eventually the continual application of NVC will help Lucha overcome the contradiction, leading to congruent arrangement of beliefs and actions.

Teaching/Sharing Decolonizing Practices

The participant's efforts in integrating the exercises and lessons used to decolonize the mind and spirit have resulted in more meaningful connections with colleagues and students. The participants that are classroom teachers share the work via exploratory activities and exercises designed for introspection and connecting with trauma. Those that are not teachers share their experiences with colleagues/friends/family members that are interested in learning about the decolonization process. However, the

participants do not share the work with everyone; they are cautious and selective with whom they share it with.

> Linda: It's just what we experience and the work we do here is unfamiliar to, let's say, my supervisors/colleagues and I imagine it would require them to be most vulnerable. I have not shared the work we do because of this. I've shared the visual activities with my sisters and have talked with them about it. I have not shared the whole decolonization piece, but let's say when I do share I am reaching to make some connections to our work. Maybe this is the area where I need to stretch to give them more background of what we do here. Still I do share different activities that we do here.

Linda explained that she has shared the decolonization work with friends and colleagues that express interest and show consciousness. She clarified, "I am willing to go further with them if they are in a vulnerable place where I can meet them." In regards to her family, she shows similar trepidation. Although she has shared the entire process with one sister that she considers "progressive" and "receptive" to the work, she has been selective with how much to share with other siblings. Linda admitted "I have shared some of the visual pieces with siblings because they are safer." Being "safer" does not require Linda to explore the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings (i.e., indigenous spiritual influences) with her family whom she described as "Catholic and reserved." However, due to the physical distance between her and her family (they reside in Southern California) many of these issues have not been discussed and confronted.

The fear of judgment from her family that may think she has "gone down the wrong path" prevents Linda from sharing her profound spiritual experiences. Although

she has not received direct criticism from her family about her work with MAESTR@S, she has experienced criticism and judgment from family due to her lack of church attendance and was questioned about the potential for promiscuity by her father after her divorce, cultural telltale signs of a "bad" Catholic. Many of these cultural indicators of a "good" Latina have been influenced by a religion that was violently imposed on *raza*, paving the way for colonial domination. Religious persecution by the Catholic Church was a common practice in the Americas and its cumulative effect is still being felt today. Fanon believes that through religion the colonized have lost sight of causes of oppression because fatalism "relieves the oppressor of all responsibility" thereby internalizing all wrong-doing as the will of God (1963, p. 18).

A reservation about sharing the MAESTR@S work was a shared sentiment for other participants as well. Although Lucha does not share with family she has had success sharing the work with a colleague.

> Lucha: Well I don't share with my brothers and sister but I've shared MAESTR@S with a few colleagues. I have a friend that I've talked a lot to about the work and actually I got into a big conflict with her last year and we worked through it using observations, feelings, needs, request (NVC model) and now we are really close friends. So she's the one that will ask, "Why aren't you doing this with that person?" And I'll respond. "Well I don't think they deserve it!" And she says, "You don't get to determine that." She holds me accountable but only because I've told her about this, right? I've shared with her the process and she's been able to call me on it when I'm not living up to it.

Some of the apprehension to share the work could be linked to accountability. For once it is disclosed and people become aware of your purpose and intent, then the expectation to fulfill it is known. There is an obligation and responsibility to hold oneself accountable for "walking" the path of decolonizing the mind and spirit. Yet, there are other possible reasons behind the decision to share and teach the work or not, such as the realization that family and friends possess the colonial mentality and will resist or speak disparagingly about the process. However, part of walking this path requires taking risks and being vulnerable. Miguel explained that it is a "fundamentally different way of operating in the world" and when it gets to the point that people begin to recognize that everyone's needs matter, then people begin to question it because it requires emotional vulnerability and investment, which will frighten some from embarking on the path of decolonization. Rather than seeing this as a potential obstacle, it should be viewed as an opportunity to further understand how far reaching the tentacles of colonialism are and how deeply ingrained it is.

As a teacher, Elida shared the work with colleagues by modeling it. She became an advocate for her Latina/o students and helped develop programs, such as Latina/o Career Day and events that honored the culture. After completing her Master's in Urban Teacher Leadership, she taught teachers how to work with English Language Learners (ELL) and how to teach Multicultural Literature. However, she took a very direct approach when it came to her family.

> Elida: My daughters believed that they had not experienced racism until I asked
> them how many teachers of color they had or whose face do they see in the
> service industry. They began to understand better when they took classes at the

university level. I work hard at helping them recognize all of the injustices. One way I exposed them to all of the injustices was by clipping articles and sharing them. I like to share articles that give examples of how our voices are not heard, or that demean our culture. I keep a journal with these kinds of articles.

The participants discussed their challenges and successes in integrating some of the MAESTR@S exercises into their curriculum, which at times required very creative solutions. For instance, Lucha shared how she attempted to use the "trauma map" exercise with her high school class that consisted of many Spanish-speaking students. She had difficulty because the students associated the word "trauma" with *tramado* (traumatized). Therefore, Lucha renamed the exercise to "What has hurt your heart." She had students write down the trauma on a piece of paper and then crumple it, share out, and then smooth the paper out to create a large heart with the rest of the papers. The purpose was to demonstrate to the students that the heart heals. Joaquin used a similar tactic with a select group of high school students.

> Joaquin: I've worked with a lot of emotionally disturbed kids and at-risk kids. That writing that I gave you (referring to an exercise he had one of his students complete about trauma), when I tutor her she tells me that I inspire her because of the way I talk, the way I teach. She felt comfortable enough to tell me what she needs and what is going on in her life. She's a 16 year old girl with so many responsibilities and she is overwhelmed. So what I try to do is create a space for students like her to share their trauma and vent because these students have so much pressure. Right now I have a group of four young women and I am trying to include young men to join this circle to heal. It feels good to see it working. I

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have them do writing exercises to express what they are experiencing and include

other exercises too. I had them do this puzzle where I ask them why their parents

or grandparents came to the U.S. and a time that they faced racism and what is a

symbol of strength for them. The other day, one of the girls said that she was okay

and she didn't know what to write about and then she just started crying. She said

that her parents do not express themselves and she shared that she is the same

way; she is the strong one with her friends. And her friends were shocked to hear

her share this because she is the one they go to for strength. So, what she was

sharing was that she needs to let it out because she can't do it with her parents.

And then when she is with her friends she is the supporter but she needs the

support as well. Her friends have never seen her like this. That's why I want to

create that space so they can do this.

Joaquin's story about his student is an all too familiar one. All the participants

have experienced similar situations with their students. Their students suppress painful

memories and develop defense mechanisms in order to survive in a world where they

experience various forms of oppression routinely. Unable to release the pain, it manifests

in harmful and unhealthy behaviors. Creating spaces where students can feel safe and

supported are vital in building trust. Only then will students share their traumas and begin

the healing process.

Another strategy to create such a space is to discuss current issues about social

injustices to begin a class dialogue. Ana Maria read a newspaper article to her class about

a man that was falsely accused of a murder and acquitted. This led to a student sharing a

story about his father being incarcerated. After that, another student shared an incident

with the class about how he and his friend were riding their bikes and were pulled over and harassed by a police officer. She provides them a space to talk about issues affecting their lives and has them think critically about them. Her students have become increasingly interested in learning about inequity and social justice. She brings in books about topics that her students can relate to. She also creates time for check-in to see how they are doing and understands the consequences of doing that rather than simply focusing on exam preparation in an era where high-stakes testing determines which school districts receive funding.

Living the work of decolonization presents as many challenges as it does rewards. A powerful aspect of the work is when the participants teach decolonizing and healing strategies they are also modeling their ethic (way of being) to their students. As critically conscious educators, they strive to create welcoming and supportive spaces where every student can contribute something for the benefit of the class and have their stories heard and honored, emphasizing compassion for each other. It is a space where students can be authentic, where they can become Whole.

Five Pillars of Effective Practice

Duncan-Andrade (2007) asserts that effective teachers in urban schools are bound by a set of common principles, which he refers to as the "five pillars of effective practice." Teachers that posses and utilize these principles are referred to as "Ridas" and are "consistently successful with a broad range of students" (p. 623). The five pillars are as follows:

1. Critically Conscious Purpose: Teachers understand the history of the communities where they work and have studied or lived the various forms of oppression that helped them formulate critical awareness and analyses of inequities.

2. Duty: Teachers see themselves as members of the community where they teach and their teaching reflects that belief.

3. Preparation: Regardless of their success with students, teachers continue to spend a tremendous amount of time preparing for their classes.

4. Socratic Sensibility: Teachers constantly reflect on their daily practice and their relationships with students in an effort to improve each day.

5. Trust: Teachers have a distinct commitment to building trust with their students.

As the dialogues demonstrate, the above "pillars of effective practice" describe the participants' teaching styles and approach to working with their students. They embody these pillars. And observing Joaquin for a day provided the researcher a glimpse into the daily life of a "Rida."

Joaquin teaches at a small town high school located in the Coastal Valley. He is an alumnus of the school where he teaches and a life-long resident of the town. The high school demographics are approximately 50% Latina/os and 47% White. According to Joaquin, some of the Latina/o students that he teaches or has taught come from farm-working families. In fact, he has observed students in the past working in the fields in the early morning prior to school. Being well aware of the population he is supporting and understanding their needs makes him well-respected and liked by the students.

On this particular day, the Student Government elections were occurring and the campus was filled with excitement. Several classes were cancelled due to their

participation. Fortunately, I was able to observe Joaquin co-teach two classes and shadow him throughout the day as he interacted with students and staff. Throughout the day I was introduced to staff, instructors and administrators. An intriguing fact was that aside from Joaquin being an alumnus of the school, four other employees were graduates of the high school. Through brief conversations with them it was evident that they all had an affinity for their school and strong bond to their town.

As Joaquin walked through the campus he took time to greet his students and spend some time checking-in and occasionally joking with them. For those students that were English Language Learners, he spoke Spanish with an empathic tone typically accompanied by placing his hand gently on their shoulders. The students received him with smiles and appeared genuinely interested in speaking with him. It was evident that Joaquin had invested time developing these relationships with his students and had gained their trust. He accomplished this by being authentic, sharing his passions, and practicing humility – spiritual qualities that resonate with the students he teaches.

Prior to arriving to school, Joaquin had spent the evening and morning in San Francisco celebrating the Aztec New Year with other performers and practitioners of indigenous rituals and ceremonies. This is a part of himself that he brings into the classroom, in particular to his Mexican-American Studies class. On this day, he scheduled an *elder* (a wise Native American that embodies cultural and spiritual traditions) to visit his classroom to share stories of struggle, resistance, and liberation to his class. This *elder* is also a mentor and spiritual guide to Joaquin. Asking him to present to his class was a gesture of love to his students for this part of Joaquin's life is his very essence.

In addition to having his *elder* share history and ritual artifacts with his students, Joaquin tied this presentation to his lesson plan of the Chicano Movement and other similar struggles for equality. His ability to reach out to students and develop authentic connections is a result of his own decolonization work with MAESTR@S where he was pushed and challenged to confront fears and realized his needs and then fulfilled them. Healed from past pains, Joaquin's heart and mind are no longer clouded by pain and anger bringing clarity to what's important in his life and that of his students. He made the connection to issues that are "relevant to the real and immediate conditions" of his students' lives (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 627). He makes his intentions clear with his students in hoping that they will one day assume the role of agents of change. Reflecting on Duncan-Andrade's five pillars of effective practice in Rida's classrooms, it is unmistakable that Joaquin lives these practices and has constructed a classroom/school culture that cultivates trust and respect between the students and him.

Summary

Effective work in urban communities requires tremendous commitment and effort, but we must avoid notions that only exceptional people and circumstances allow for success. Rather than putting the work of highly effective urban educators on a pedestal, implying through their stories that they have some mystical gift that allows them to reach the unreachable, we must work to understand their success. This happens by examining what they do, why they do it, and how they do it (the purpose and the process). Then, we can better recruit, prepare, and support others with similar commitments (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p.620).

There are six generative themes that were identified in this study. These themes emerged because of the relational accountability which helped form reciprocal and respectful relationships with the participants. Because of this, the participants brought a level of honesty, trust, and vulnerability that enriched the dialogical process. It is possible that with more reflection other themes could emerge because of the rich data generated from the dialogues.

Several of the participants have been on the path to decolonizing their minds and spirits for years before this research began. They shared inspirational stories of how they were able to reclaim cultural and historical knowledge and recover memories that empowered them to take the risks to be vulnerable in order to begin the path of healing. The liberation that comes from the process of decolonization has rejuvenated their spirits and brought emotional and intellectual clarity regarding the issues that continue to plague and infect Latina/o communities. Because of this, participants desire to share this knowledge and practices with *raza* youth and other like-minded individuals that seek the same results. They have demonstrated through their stories and experiences that as a collective they possess the ability to overcome oppressions (capitalism, hegemony, racism, classism, sexism, etc.) and challenge and resist the re-colonization of their minds and spirits.

In summary, the themes that were generated are interrelated. Decolonization of the mind and spirit is a process which requires one to recognize the forces that shape his/her life. It is a new way of being in the world and seeing the world; it is a way that offers hope. It is a way of healing from traumas passed on from past generations. It is a process that one must commit to starting within him/herself prior to working with others.

It is a model, an organic process, that other colonized peoples can adopt and tailor to fit their unique needs.

Chapter V

Conclusions, Reflection on the Process, and Directions of Future Research

Conclusions

In this section, the research questions will be referenced and how this study addressed the questions will be explored. The methodology employed and the themes both explicitly and implicitly answered the research questions. The application of "relational accountability" throughout the research process with the participants generated poignant and honest dialogic data. This allowed the researcher to engage in a more in-depth examination of the generative themes.

Research Question 1

This study is about a group of Latina/os that have come together to overcome internalized oppressions and decolonize their minds and spirits individually and collectively. The first research question asks: Does a lived critique of contemporary colonization affect *raza* educators and shape/influence their work? The literature review and dialogues reveal that the process of decolonization is a perpetual process. As outlined by Laenui (2000), the "rediscovery and recovery" phase is the first step to becoming decolonized. In this phase, one begins to recognize the forces that shape their lives, analyzing the history of conquest and colonization.

The generative themes of "Development of Consciousness" and "Overcoming Internalized Oppression" demonstrate that the participants' journeys began with an analysis of power and inequality via college educational experiences. During this juncture in their lives they became aware that legitimated epistemologies in college primarily reflected the social history of the White/Western Society (i.e., epistemological racism)

and that it is the Western system of domination that has invalidated the knowledge systems of people of color (Scheurich & Young, 1997a; Shiva, 2000). Participants began to seek alternative spaces where their experiences would be legitimated and their culture valued. Joaquin connected with the Brown Berets when he was in college, while Ana Maria and Linda joined student clubs on campus. As Linda recalls, "MEChA was a place that was very supportive, I felt like I could speak. I was able to share my struggles and I could be seen by members who I felt could relate to me socio-economically." These organizations provided a space for dialogue, reflection, and critical thinking where their cultural and social capital was valued and validated – functioning as a living counter narrative. These spaces provided complete confidentiality and as a result members feel safe to be authentic.

The marginality of Latina/os is a result of U.S. imperialistic policies and practices to assimilate and domesticate them (Freire, 1970; Gonzales, 1990). As Latina/os begin to understand the psychological, spiritual, epistemic, and physical effects of colonialism they will recover their sense of Self. The ability to *name* one's experience, to possess the vocabulary to describe it, changes one's perception of reality (hooks, 1989). For participants, *naming* the effects of colonialism and its direct impact on their lives led to profound introspection. They were able to recognize how their current positionality is linked to intergenerational experiences (e.g., historical trauma).

The development of a critical consciousness increased the participants understanding of the manifestations of internalized oppressions, such as domestic violence, institutional violence and dysfunction, and gang violence in their communities. For a majority of the participants this occurred in college through involvement with

social justice organizations and through courses and reading materials which prompted critical reflection about the presumed natural order of things. Through observations and interviews it became clear that members of MAESTR@S address these internalized oppressions by employing various strategies, such as:

- Meditation exercises designed to defragment the mind in order to connect all aspects of "being" (mind, body, and spirit)

- Activities developed by MAESTR@S (e.g., Life Map, Trauma Map, etc.) designed for critical reflection to help confront fears and past pains

- Developing authentic connections with like-minded individuals, normalizing the decolonization process

- Integrating Non Violent Communication (a language of compassion) as a tool for social change

- Implementing MAESTR@S activities and exercises in the classroom and refining them to meet student needs

- Healing by telling our stories, allowing for emotional release (e.g., laughter, tears, and raging) and liberating our minds to process the painful experiences

As Freire (1970) explains, one of the results of colonialism is the internalization of the oppressor where the oppressed internalize the oppression and become like the oppressor. To prevent the colonial process from consuming them, the colonized must confront the internalized oppressions and release them in a proactive and healthy manner. If not, the colonized may release their tension through "self-destructive" acts of violence (Fanon, 1963), which manifest through gang violence, domestic violence, and the like. The solution to preventing this cycle of violence from persisting is for the colonized "to

consciously explore the dynamics of the abuse and find meaning in the situation" (Duran, 2006, p. 23).

Ana Maria disclosed her own experiences with domestic violence and how her college education assisted in her understanding of the manifestations of internalized oppressions. After completing a feminist course, she applied this theoretical lens to understand why her mother allowed such violent acts to persist in the home and enabled the behavior. She explained, "Knowing what I did I couldn't go back to the domestic violence and not call the cops when my uncle beat my aunt just because my mom told me not to…I was in a place where I was required by law, by Ana Maria's law to do it." She was now conscious and possessed the language to name the abuse and the knowledge to disrupt it. Having access to the language is instrumental, for without it one is unable to name the context in which they were wounded, define its effects (hooks, 2000) and re-construct's one's world (Strobel, 1996). For Ana Maria, to allow such acts to persist unchallenged would undermine the integrity of her critical consciousness and be in conflict with her path to healing and becoming Whole.

However, possessing the awareness and language to name and define colonialism does not necessarily insulate one from its effects. One thing became evident as participants underwent the process of decolonization: Throughout our lives we can become re-stimulated by past pains and when an experience triggers an emotion, people tend to rely on patterns of behavior that have worked in the past (Reza, 2008). Both Linda and Ana Maria shared memories of their undergraduate years where an instructor made racist remarks in the classroom and they chose to remain silent to avoid embarrassment because they did not want to be perceived as unintelligent or belittled for their views. The

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behavioral pattern of remaining silent insured their survival and protected them from judgment (a topic explored in the previous chapter with Linda). The participants' stories demonstrated that we all need to heal from past pains. Without healing we will continue to be limited in our effectiveness around social justice work and in other areas of our lives. The accumulation of emotions left from hurtful experiences leads to distress and is the source of obtuse and heartless behavior. Physiologically expressing and releasing emotions contribute to recovery from the effects of distress, making sense of experiences and understanding their impact.

This critical awareness of colonialism and its legacy led the participants to commit to starting the social change process within themselves before teaching others. As Linda discovered after reading a story about grief and loss to her third grade class, several of her students had suppressed traumatic life experiences and her limited skill-set left her unprepared. She declared emphatically, "Teachers need to know how to help students with their grief. Look at all the grief they are carrying, that's why they can't learn!" Without emotional release we are unable to think clearly to process traumatic past experiences. As a result, our thinking remains rigid and we base our decisions on whatever helped us get through situations in the past, destined to repeat unhealthy patterns of behavior. This revelation led her to enroll in a graduate program in social work and on her own path of healing. Embarking on the journey to decolonize the mind and spirit is a source of courage and agency to take action in a way that empowers the Latina/o community.

All of the participants that are currently teaching shared examples of how they have integrated and adapted MAESTR@S exercises into their classroom curriculum to

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support their students in their struggles. For example, Lucha altered the trauma map to fit the needs of her predominately Spanish speaking students and renamed it "what hurt your heart" and Ana Maria used articles on contemporary social justice issues to create a classroom dialogue. Joaquin's story about one of his students having a breakthrough in his all female circle is an example of how the creation of a safe space can foster healing:

> I had them do this puzzle where I ask them why their parents or grandparents came to the U.S. and a time that they faced racism and what is a symbol of strength for them. The other day, one of the girls said that she was okay and she didn't know what to write about and then she just started crying. She said that her parents do not express themselves and she shared that she is the same way; she is the strong one with her friends. And her friends were shocked to hear her share this because she is the one they go to for strength. So, what she was sharing was that she needs to let it out because she can't do it with her parents. And then when she is with her friends she is the supporter but she needs the support as well. Her friends have never seen her like this. That's why I want to create that space so they can do this.

All of these examples demonstrate that as the participants confronted past pains and healed they were able to envision similar results for their students and teaching community. They understood the affects of intergenerational trauma and have witnessed it unfold in their students lives. Incorporating healing lessons into the class has helped their students formulate critical awareness and analyses of inequities; but most importantly, it has helped them release painful memories and emotions.

Research Question 2

The second research question is a two-part question. It asks: What challenges and

obstacles do they face? What are their needs? Through the dialogues, a shared challenge

became evident. Outside of MAESTR@S the participants struggled with living this work

in their daily lives, in particular within educational bureaucratic structures that lack

transparency and operate in a traditional "top-down" approach. As a result, a

"disconnect" between administrators and teachers typically develops, where teachers feel

that their "needs" are not being met. Unfortunately, this also results in the specific needs

of the students not being addressed. And the cycle of an inequitable education persists.

Other obstacles that present challenges are everyday aspects of U.S. society, such

as hegemony, capitalism/imperialism, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination

and oppression. In addition, the media which shapes and influences society to develop

consumer identities plays a significant role in further separating us from fulfilling

spiritual needs. hooks (2000) declares that when people are spiritually empty they attempt

to fill the void with material goods. Consequently, dominant cultural practices,

ideologies, and beliefs are adopted and the colonized pattern the behaviors of the

colonists.

These challenges became apparent after many of the participants gained the

critical knowledge about the structures of domination in U.S. society and they are aware

that there is little that they can do to alter these systems. The true power of decolonization

comes from immersing oneself in the process and emerging Whole. To achieve

wholeness, one must be willing to be vulnerable and push the boundaries in order to heal.

The theme of "The Role of Healing" plays a critical role in the decolonization process. Healing from past pains brings about clarity and allows for critical analysis of the processes of colonization that have impacted the identity of the oppressed (Freire, 1970; Duran, 2006). However, without the willingness to be vulnerable one can never take the path of healing and the process of decolonizing the mind and spirit will be curtailed.

Although several of the participants are undergoing this phase of the decolonization process, some acknowledged the need to pursue it wholeheartedly and push the limits. Joaquin believed he was a liberated Chicano until he recognized that he was suppressing emotional pain and unable to express it in a healthy manner. He shared:

> I use to tell my little girl to be quiet when she cried. I would tell her, "Okay, that's enough crying, go to sleep." And then she would say she misses her mom and then she would just cry and that would make me angry because she was visiting me and she would just cry. Then I realized I was angry because I was hurt, I was shutting out my emotions. I was unable to express my need, my need to release my pain.

Joaquin's recognition for the need to purge pain and heal from contemporary and historical traumas was crucial. For there is a potential for trauma to become cumulative if not dealt with (Duran, 2006). If one is unable to realize that his/her own needs are not being met in a relationship it may result in anger, frustration, and resentment leading to a barrier in communication and potential conflict. Smith (1999) declares that "both healing and transformation become crucial strategies" in the process of decolonization (p. 146).

For Linda, the realization that her elementary students were all suffering from traumatic experiences placed her on the path of healing. As she pursued this path, she recognized that the wounds of colonialism ran deep and the trauma she was experiencing was historical. In her current attempts to impact the lives of students she has encountered challenges working in an amorphous system and has needed to find outside support in order to persevere and increase her capacity for walking social change. Linda explained:

> Typically, I will internally focus on whom I can trust, and who has skills or resources to share that can help me in concrete ways…and I need to look outside of the institution for support be it an individual or family. The support I speak of is many times concrete resources, ideas, etc., and guidance but many times it is support in the form of spirituality. I definitely need support so I can provide resources to help other educators when they are not getting the help from their peers or colleagues…When there are injustices that I encounter like English Language Learners not receiving appropriate services who are also Special Education students, I must have courage to engage in dialogues with those who have the power to improve the situation for our students. I am pushed to connect with my grief and dreams and then move into creative solutions or action plans instead of succumbing to being silenced or giving my spirit's longings up.

This illustrates the challenges Linda encounters in attempting to apply the work of MAESTR@S at the institutional level. To achieve this she relies on MAESTR@S which she describes as being her "base of strength," helping her remain grounded rather than "lost, hopeless, and helpless with work related challenges." MAESTR@S, along with her meditative and mindfulness practices, provides her with spiritual support in the form of

emotional release, deep connections with members, and the opportunity to be authentic. For the participants "healing" is attainable because the space that has been formed is safe, non-judgmental, embracing, and forgiving. MAESTR@S has created a space, modeled after Native American sacred circles, where spiritual ritual practices are performed, pain is shared, love is practiced, and the "liberatory voice" developed (hooks, 1989).

After listening to participants' stories it became clear that many would like to stay connected outside of MAESTR@S for the support, for that sense of belonging, and take the space with them to replicate it in other aspects of their lives allowing them to be authentic. However, several of the participants have families and this lack of connection among members outside of the MAESTR@S space is understandable. For this reason, connecting with like-minded people and sharing the work/process with them is essential for sustainability. Without the support from others the likelihood of progressing on the path of healing in isolation decreases substantially.

Yet many of the members selectively share the work with others. Lucha had experienced conflict with a colleague and decided to apply the Non Violent Communication method with her in hopes of resolving the conflict. She had success using this form of communication with her colleague and has since formed a respectful working relationship. Since sharing this process her colleague has, at times, confronted Lucha for not being consistent with the application of this method, ultimately holding her accountable.

> She's the one who reminds me and asks: "Why aren't you doing that with that
> person?" And I'll respond, "Well, I don't think they deserve it!" And she'll
> comment, "You don't get to determine that." So she holds me accountable but

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only because I've told her about this, right? I've shared with her the process and she's been able to call me on it when I'm not living up to it.

The choice to share the work or not can be attributed to the fear of judgment or the fear of being held accountable by others. However, for some of the participants choosing not to share the work with others is about avoiding potential conflict with those that are not critically conscious or make assumptions about the work without experiencing the process. Members fear the possibility of being unjustly persecuted by those that choose not to understand the work and prematurely judge the process, which may cause stress and anxiety.

These symptoms are similar to the effects caused by the toxic daily exposure to racist macro-aggressive and micro-aggressive language leading to Racial Battle Fatigue (Smith, et al., 2007). Racial Battle fatigue explains how the social environment (e.g., institutions, policies, practices, traditions, groups and individuals) perpetuates race-related stressors that adversely affect the health of People of Color. Whether it is from the constant stereotyping or the epistemological racism that People of Color endure in academia, People of Color are "chronically having race-related stress-responses in historically White institutions and environments that consume valuable time and energy" (Smith, et. al., 2007, p. 552). Hence, the apprehension to share the work with individuals working in historically White institutions is a justified response.

There are moments when these stressors reach a point of exhaustion and the individual lashes out in defense to a perceived threat or injustice. A common manifestation of colonialism is the emotional response of anger which erupts

periodically. Ana Maria described an incident where she reacted to a perceived racially unjust workplace event.

> I confronted the big boss at my job this summer, after somebody confronted her about why she's hiring another "blonde and blue eyed" person. I ended up not getting rehired for that very comment even if the big White boss denied the allegations. I'm trying to learn how to prove points in a diplomatic, NVC way so that people can hear me and so that I can feel heard. I just struggle with this because I get really heated because I should be able to say whatever I want, right? I should be able to check people and they should just hear what I have to say however I say it. But sometimes, for example this recent job situation, I had a lot to lose by standing up to the big boss. Normally keeping a bad job wouldn't be that big a deal but given the awful economic predicament that we're in forces us to take more shit or suffer the dire consequences of losing a job for walking social justice. And so I struggle with this because it sometimes prevents me from keeping a job or taking a class or staying in education.

It can be argued that what Ana Maria perceived as "walking social justice" was indeed economic suicide (i.e., the ruin of one's own economic interest). However, because she became "really heated" her need to express her frustration with perceived overt racist hiring practices took precedence over economic security. She acknowledged that her propensity for emotional and reactive outbursts are not conducive to personal well-being and recognized her need to express herself in a more "diplomatic" fashion via NVC. Although her actions might be perceived as irrational and ill-conceived, her "lashing out" was of necessity and is an essential phase of healing and part of the

decolonization process (Laenui, 2000). The pain and trauma that Ana Maria has witnessed and experienced over her lifetime must be purged proactively or she risks the internalization of these traumas which may result in dysfunctional behavioral patterns being passed on to subsequent generations (Duran & Duran, 1995; Lambert, 2008).

The participants' stories highlighted the challenges that many of them encounter daily working and living in U.S. society where micro-aggressive coded language such as, "What are you?" and "Where's your family from?" are constant reminders that they are perceived as perpetual foreigners. Overtime, covert and overt acts of racism can negatively impact one's self-concept, internalizing the oppressions and then manifesting in harmful self-destructive acts. Without spaces, such as the one created by MAESTR@S, to express pain and explore the dynamics of trauma in their lives the oppressed are doomed to repeat oppressive acts. These types of spaces are critical for people seeking to heal from the legacy of colonialism.

The reality for a majority of the participants is that they work in institutions that are not receptive to the work and historically have been used to assimilate and track Latina/os into the service industry maintaining their low-class status. With that knowledge and critical awareness, the participants have or are attempting to forge an identity out of two presumed dual perspectives – one of critically conscious and authentic educator and the other is bureaucrat and educator teaching to the standards. Dubois (1903) warns that there is a potential consequence when attempting to create a singular consciousness out of dual perspectives. The individual may change his/her identity according to the dominant culture's racist assumptions and labels. However, some have

achieved authenticity and are living the MAESTR@S work and are effective educators by mainstream educational bureaucratic standards.

The participants' needs were several: authentic relationships, spaces that allow for non-traditional approaches to working with students, like-minded individuals, and connecting with nature/environment and cultural/spiritual practices to name a few. By meeting these needs, the participants are able to continue their pursuit of decolonization. Equally important is the participants' ability to express their needs through the application of NVC, which will be explored in the next section.

In summary, through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the dominant cultural structures that maintain inequity based on racist assumptions that the participants encounter daily are evident. Participants work in schools that apply culturally irrelevant methods, such as the banking method, which emphasize "testing to the test" via traditional, assimilationist policies and practices which have presented challenges to some of the participants. However, through the application of Indigenous Decolonization theory, the participants have moved beyond simply the critique and analyses of dominant cultural structures and the application and integration of CRT pedagogical principles. Indeed, the participants have experienced in their decolonization journey an understanding of the history of their colonization and have reclaimed cultural legacies, fortifying an identity that can resist the toxic messages of racist assumptions encoded in their everyday landscape.

This study demonstrates that decolonization of the mind and spirit extends beyond the understanding of colonialism's legacy and the rediscovery of ancestral traditions and values. It is about intention, practice, and application. Having an awareness of the effects

of colonialism/oppression on one's life is merely the first step to a life-long process. The "consciousness" of its effects must be felt and experienced – it must penetrate every facet of one's being (mind, body, and soul). The participants' stories reveal that the decolonization process must be practiced through trial and error, for not every attempt or exercise/strategy employed will produce the desired result. It's about complete vulnerability and unconditional trust with a communal process that will indiscriminately bring about heartache and pain where "memories surface as volatile and emotional, personal remembrance" (Hibbard, 2001, p. 125). It is a *praxis* where the oppressed can reflect and act upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970). And in the end, one will recognize he/she is on the right path when these memories are confronted and emotions experienced.

Research Question 3

Throughout this study, participants articulated their journeys of decolonization. This study offered the participants an opportunity to revisit their journeys and recall how they arrived to their present-day position on this journey. The stories of personal growth and the struggles and challenges inherent in taking the path of healing to become decolonized were poignant and inspirational. The third research question relates to how they remain on this path. That is, it asks what strategies are employed to meet their needs in order to continue this journey.

One such strategy that is employed by all members is the NVC model, which contains four steps:

1. To *observe* and describe an incident without evaluation or judgment
2. To express *feelings* that observations evoke

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3. To express *needs* connected with these feelings

4. To make a specific *request* of another person to help meet an unmet need

The observation gives the recipient/listener a reference as to the subject/situation. Expressing a feeling typically increases connection between the parties. Also, expressing one's needs provides connection and meaning. Lastly, a request offers clarity as to potentially how the need can be met.

Several participants shared how this process helped them accurately express their needs and as a result having those same needs met. Related to the theme of "Integrating/Teaching Decolonizing Practices" a few shared stories about how NVC helped them prevent or resolve a conflict. For instance, Lucha applied NVC with a colleague which she had conflict with. By using this model her colleague clearly understood her needs and was able to fulfill Lucha's request. Since that incident they have become good friends and have developed a form of communication that inspires compassion and honesty. However, deficiencies exist in universal application of this communicative method, such as the incident between Diego and Alexis (described in Chapter 4). Yet I must declare that this was an exception and not the norm.

The theme of "Strategies to Maintain Continuity" also presented strategies used by participants in order to remain on the path of decolonization. A shared strategy used by Linda and Miguel to remain on the path of decolonization is meditation and mindfulness. Miguel frequents spiritual and religious institutions to meditate and connect with the energies of those around him, in addition to asking himself what is his intention and purpose on a daily basis. Linda employs a similar strategy and explains, "Mediation helps ground me and brings me to being present and it brings me back to the work we do.

It slows me down." This strategy connects the participants to those things that are important and rejuvenates their spirits, avoiding the temptations of a materialistic society and hedonistic consumerism to fill spiritual voids (hooks, 2000).

Outside of MAESTR@S, both Ana Maria and Joaquin connect to their cultural roots and heritage through dance; Ana Maria through *Baile Folklorico* (folk dancing) and Joaquin through *danza* (Aztec/Mixeca dances). *Danza* consists of a community of people dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the Mexica/Azteca culture, ceremonies, warrior dance, accurate history and traditions. *Baile Folklorico* dances emphasize local folk culture of Mexico. These dances tell stories and can be traced back to indigenous traditions and ancient cultures.

Through their involvement with these organizations, they have rediscovered and recovered cultural legacies and traditions. Laenui (2000) refers to this phase of the decolonization process as the "rediscovery and recovery." In this phase, the rediscovery and recovery of one's history, culture, language, and identity is fundamental to the movement for decolonization. Joaquin proclaimed that *danza* is "positive energy" that uplifts his "spirit." For Joaquin and Ana Maria, these cultural practices have deep spiritual implications, reconnecting them to their essence. These dance styles and traditions also act as "counter narratives" by offering an alternative to the negative portrayal of Latina/os in U.S. society. These dances help fortify strong cultural identities that challenge mainstream assumptions and notions about Latina/os as an inferior race.

Many of the strategies used to remain on the path of walking social justice are effective but they do not necessarily insulate participants from the racism and injustice that occurs daily in academic settings. Elida witnessed and experienced covert and

institutional racism as a school teacher and then as a university instructor. When teaching at the elementary level she addressed these issues by becoming an advocate for Latina/o students. She stated:

> I began all kinds of different programs for the bilingual students. I had intervention classes, Latino/a Career Day, Folklorico dance classes, and Fiestas to honor our culture. It was not popular with the monolingual teachers, but the Spanish-speaking teachers would participate.

Elida's understanding of the potential deleterious effects of the various forms of racism can have psychologically and emotionally on elementary aged children impelled her to create spaces for Latina/o students to celebrate their culture and heritage. These activities were designed to help Latina/o students counter the racially coded characteristics ascribed to them through their educational experiences while they struggled with self-perceptions that did not match the expectations of their White peers.

The lack of support Elida received from her "monolingual speaking" colleagues is a common experience for People of Color. Indeed, when People of Color are seen sitting together in groups they are chastised for separating themselves; however, when Whites gather in groups the same scrutinizing logic is not applied. More often than not, when People of Color are perceived to be retreating to their ethnic enclaves they are in fact attempting to find and create supportive spaces in environments that they often experience as racially hostile and exclusive.

As Elida entered the university system as an instructor she continued "carving out" spaces for Students of Color to be authentic and celebrate their culture and heritage. She recognized early on that at the university Students of Color faced a range of racist

stereotypes where they were constructed as "Other", excluded, and made to feel inferior (Smith, 1999; Smith, et. al., 2007). Students would often visit during office hours to discuss race-related issues they experienced on campus and with instructors. She attempted to address these concerns by speaking with colleagues but found many to be unsupportive and dismissive, accusing the students of being "reactive" or "too sensitive." These ongoing battles caused emotional distress, inevitably leading to her resignation. Shortly thereafter, Elida sought out a different occupation which led her to a group of like-minded Latina educational consultants. It is in this space where she thrives and lives social justice work regularly.

Similarly, Linda encountered difficulties integrating the work of MAESTR@S in the workplace. She admits it is challenging when trying "to speak up" and be visible when injustices occur. However, MAESTR@S is a source of strength which she draws from and it inspires her to take action. Referring to MAESTR@S she stated:

Knowing that I have support, knowing that if I encounter something that I can bring it back and share and you'll get is comforting. You'll understand where I am coming from and guide me and validate my struggles. It is also a place where I feel home. MAESTR@S is a place where I can be held emotionally, where I can be heard with respect, care, non-judgmentally…where there is inquiry about what's happening but its tender and there's also consciousness there. It is emotionally safe to speak my truth, even when it is hard.

Linda's feelings of safety and community can be attributed to the group's active engagement with its members, open and caring relations with group members, and to her individual contributions to the group process increasing her sense of ownership.

Community is fundamental to the decolonization process and it derives from an already existing cultural solidarity and tradition – family. For Latina/os, family is the strongest bond and is the source of strength and inspiration providing the impetus to achieve new heights. MAESTR@S's ability to capture and replicate the Latina/o family essence has led to transformational breakthroughs for personal healing enabling members to dream and envision a renewed life.

Laenui (2000) declares that "Dreaming" is an essential phase in the decolonization process, which includes reevaluating the political, social, economic, and judicial structures. This phase is paramount in envisioning a socially just world and is connected to agency. A potential outcome of this "reevaluation" is the development of new structures that reflect the values and aspirations of the colonized. Through the utilization of exercises and activities designed for reflection and critical analysis of oppressive/hegemonic structures and their impact, the colonized begin to identify values that are important to them. Through exploratory activities they are able to clarify those values while providing them with a tangible reminder of what they identified as important. That is, their "dreams" become the rudimentary stage of a plan for action.

Through playwriting Ana Maria has not only shared the effects of internalized oppressions on her life with others but has observed aspects of her life performed on stage. Recalling the first play she wrote for her theatre class Ana Maria spoke about the conflicting emotions:

It was incredible and petrifying at the same time. I was thinking to myself, "Oh my god, these people are going to know who I am. What are they going to think of me?" And then in the end it was so moving…I came to see how abusive and

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dysfunctional my family was and that it was not good for me to be around my

family. So, before graduation I struggled with where I was going to live in the

summer. It was really hard and I wrote about it in my playwriting. The class

allowed me to process things and seeing it acted out by others made me cry.

Writing a play about her life provided Ana Maria an opportunity to reflect on

those things that are important to her (values) and to envision a life absent of violence.

Her experience with playwriting demonstrated the power of artistic expression in aiding

the healing process and that various phases of decolonization can be experienced

simultaneously. Understanding that learning and teaching styles vary among their

members, MAESTR@S incorporated healing activities that can be expressed artistically.

As many of the participants stressed, "living the work" of decolonizing the mind

and spirit is problematic. Teaching the exercises developed by MAESTR@S to their

students has been a source of strength for many as they witness the transformation in

their students. These strategies and exercises for living the work can be used as a

framework for educators working with *raza* youth and communities. As educators, all the

participants have integrated some of the strategies and methods developed by

MAESTR@S into their classroom curriculum at all levels (K-16).

Through the dialogues, the participants have shown that teaching decolonization

modules requires risk and "deep emotional involvement" with their students (Duncan-

Andrade, 2007, p. 623). For education to be truly transformative and liberating, there is a

need to expose and destabilize colonialism. In order for this to impact a broader segment

of the community, other community institutions, such as political/civic associations and

theater and arts need to develop educational programs that integrate the framework for

decolonization. Only then can such an endeavor have the remote chance for sustainability.

MAESTR@S has demonstrated that the work of decolonization is not a subversive process, but a transformative one bringing attention to the convergence of oppressions (sexism/patriarchy, racism/white supremacy, homophobia/heterosexism, classism/capitalism, and hegemony) and their intergenerational impact on the spirits and consciousness of the oppressed. Decolonization of the mind and spirit, as an active form of inquiry and introspection, requires bringing repressed traumatic experiences and socially invisible aspects and effects of colonialism into analysis. This process requires perpetual reexamination where the various phases of decolonization are revisited.

Throughout the years members have contributed work to the group by introducing Native American spiritual practices, social justice curriculum, meditative practices, and activities designed for healing via artistic expression. These concepts and activities have influenced and shaped the group's identity and purpose. As a result, the members of MAESTR@S have produced ethics for living the work. MAESTR@S recognizes the importance of its members "living" the values they constructed ensuring they are aligned with social transformation and justice. The rituals, exercises, readings, and group ethics/principles help them to not deviate from the path of walking social change. Although membership will change over time and new concepts and exercises for healing introduced, the one constant that will remain is the space. A sacred space produced by the members which allows the effects of colonialism to be analyzed and purged. A space to heal, to be authentic, in order to become Whole.

We unleashed blows on him. One of the boys stabbed his foot and he fell

down. He put his hands over his head as we kicked him relentlessly and

left him lying on the floor bleeding and unconscious…Several days later,

Poppay returned during lunchtime, limping but with a smile on his face.

"It is not your fault that you did such a thing to me," he said…they

returned smiling after we hurt them. It was if they had made a pact not to

give up on us (Beah, 2007, p.140).

The above quote is from Beah's national bestseller, *A long way gone: Memoirs of a boy soldier*. This book is an extraordinary and mesmerizing account about his childhood survival as a boy soldier in Africa. The purpose of citing the above was that it triggered a reactive thought when I read it. I was astounded by the fact that these boy soldiers that were forced into a system of violence and war were treated so lovingly and compassionately by staff regardless of their transgressions and violent acts committed against humanity. Of course, this was made possible because of the profound emotional investment and commitment by the staff to the children and the staffs' belief that the psychological, emotional, and physical trauma the boys suffered from could be remedied and their violent tendencies unlearned. I thought to myself, "What a concept?" If a presumed third world country, by Western (i.e., racist) standards, invest resources to help boy soldiers reclaim their sense of Self and heal from the trauma, then why can't our society do the same for *raza* youth that have suffered from historical trauma and internalized oppressions?

This, of course, is highly unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. The high school dropout rates for Latina/os appears to be on the rise and gang-related violence and domestic violence are still prevalent in many Latina/o communities, among several other societal ills. MAESTR@S clearly understands that it will take a committed and critically conscious group of people to undertake such an enormous endeavor. The participants, as members of this group, have created a space for agency and action – a strategy for living the work.

This section will focus on the researcher's reflections on the process and methodology employed to investigate the research topic. Originally, the focus of the research was on the process of healing and development of strategies to heal from trauma; hence, the title of the dissertation. However, as this study evolved, I realized that it transcended strategies for healing; it's about *living* the work. By living the work, they have developed strategies that meet their unique needs individually and collectively. For example, MAESTR@S has adopted the NVC model. As a result, all the members have either integrated this style of communication in their lives or are working towards that end. All members are presented with ample opportunities to practice NVC when they attend *encuentros* and retreats. However, not all participants choose to hike in the wilderness to connect to nature or practice meditation to ground them spiritually. These strategies are used to meet the specific needs of each participant in their quest to decolonize their minds and spirits.

As previously mentioned the participants are all members of MAESTR@S and have been working towards decolonizing their minds and spirits for some time. This presented a challenge because the participants did not come together for the purpose of

this study. The group has developed a manifesto and documents based on their ethics and principles. Unlike typical organizations, these are not merely protocols meant to encourage acceptable behavior and practices. These are communal practices that are internalized and embodied – it is a way of "being." I, as an outsider, could not simply enter the community to conduct research with the expectation of gathering data for the purpose of producing knowledge. Doing so would only perpetuate "neocolonial sentiments" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5) and be in conflict with the intent and methodology of this study.

I applied critical ethnography with an Indigenous research methodological approach by:

- Observing group dynamics and behaviors

- Taking field notes at group sessions

- Audio-recording interviews

- Participating in the day-to-day activities of the group

- Including the voices of the participants in the research process (e.g., reviewing field notes for accuracy)

- Including my personal experiences in the research

- Forming reciprocal and respectful relationships with the participants/group

Traditional ethnographic methods for collecting data are typically participant observation and interviewing, which may involve small talk to long interviews. The aim of participant observation is to gain a closeness or familiarity with a group through participating in day-to-day activities over an extended period of time. I was presented with challenges when attempting to situate myself as "researcher" and community

member. I was cognizant that the sharing of personal and painful recollections of trauma at *encuentros* and retreats required vulnerability by the speaker and required attentiveness and empathetic responses from the listeners (this is a communal norm of the group). In this process, group members sit in a circle that represents the equality of all members. Applying NVC, members speak from the heart and the group listens silently and non-judgmentally until the speaker is finished. Each member is given an opportunity to respond and then the next member shares. Gaining trust of the group members was paramount, without it authentic relationships cannot be formed and honest dialogue between me and the participants would not ensue. This realization eventually led me to immerse myself in the group process, and developing relationships with members took precedence over writing observational data in a notepad during MAESTR@S events.

Wilson's notion of relational accountability requires researchers to form reciprocal and respectful relationships within the communities where research is conducted. This methodology is in "contrast with observational techniques that attempt to be unobtrusive and not influence the environment studied" (Wilson, 2009, p. 40). Maintaining accountability to the relationships increased the likelihood of candid conversations between me and participants, further strengthening a sense of community. The Indigenous research model is "characterized by the absence of a need to be in control, by a desire to be connected to and to be a part of a moral community" where compassionate understanding of another's positionality in the world is primary (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 11). This process of relationship building was organic and spanned several months. Consequently, the process did not work within my original time frame.

The method employed to get MAESTR@S members to participate in the study was simple: accommodate their availability. This tactic proved to be both beneficial and unfavorable. MAESTR@S meets regularly throughout the year at *encuentros* which occur, on average, every eight weeks and at an annual retreat. However, member participation at these scheduled events is based on individual availability. The members that elected to participate in this study were not always present together at these sessions, neither was I available to attend every event. Further complicating matters was attempting to schedule dialogues outside of the MAESTR@S space. Indeed, a participant stated that she felt conducting dialogues with the group present would generate profoundly honest conversations because of the accountability among members, and others echoed this sentiment. Therefore, meeting outside this sacred space was not a primary goal.

The process of decolonization of the mind and spirit is deeply emotional causing participants to grieve loss (e.g., loss of culture, language, identity, self-worth, etc.) in their lives. The dialogues demonstrated that every participant was at a different phase in the process. This required me to be sensitive to their condition and needs, and to be cognizant of their emotional availability to participate. As time elapsed, it became increasingly evident that this study required more time than what was allotted to conduct the research. Due to its very nature, the topic under investigation warrants more time in order to produce a deeper and more comprehensive analysis.

In conclusion, the participants of this study possessed the critical awareness of how colonialism and its legacy impact everyday aspects of their lives and their communities. Throughout their lifetimes, they have experienced various forms of

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oppressions (e.g., racism, sexism, and classism) and internalized them, which affected them psychologically and emotionally, and infected them spiritually (i.e., disconnecting them from their essence). In addition, they witnessed the effects of internalizing these oppressions (colonialism) in their families and communities. These internalized oppressions often manifested in self-destructive acts of violence. They worked towards confronting the pain and suffering they have endured individually through a supportive group process where members demonstrated compassion and love while simultaneously pushing members to reach deep within to allow suppressed past traumatic events to surface.

The result of the group processes and dynamics was a spiritual one. The process to decolonize the mind and spirit led to the development of profound reciprocal relationships, which was paramount to the decolonial process. Relational accountability was a cornerstone, where people honor their word, respect one another, and validate the experiential knowledge of its members. Without the deep connections with one another, the participants might have created an intellectual space to decolonize the mind but the spirit would be lacking. In the end, it is the healing phase that is crucial to reconnecting and reclaiming cultural legacies and communal practices (i.e., the Self) to become Whole.

Directions of Future Research

This study focused on a select group of Latina/o educators from MAESTR@S that have embarked on the journey to decolonize their minds and spirits. There is a need for further study on the group process and their work as it relates to sustainability. From the affective sphere, it is vital that critically conscious educators develop a group and create a space similar to MAESTR@S where like-minded individuals can share their

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challenges and needs in becoming decolonized. This group can also act as a repository of knowledge for resistance, healing, and agency to be shared with other historically marginalized and oppressed populations seeking similar results.

Because no experience is the same on the path to decolonizing the mind and spirit, future studies should investigate variables such as class, gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. An in-depth study of these variables may illustrate how the decolonization process manifests differently among these groups. In addition, by taking these variables into account, such a study could contrast and compare generative themes to see if any similarities exist.

The educational implications of this study are many. Future studies should look into whether or not the strategies employed by educators to decolonize themselves have any effect when applied in the classroom. How did they determine which elements should be integrated in their curriculum to assist *raza* youth decolonize their minds and spirits? Do students that participate in this process become critically aware of the systems of domination in the U.S. and their impact on the oppressed? If so, does this lead to a more engaged student? How do they maintain such a state among peers that are critically naïve and mock such a process? Such a study should also investigate whether or not the development of decolonizing curriculum positively impacts students' academic ability.

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Appendix A

The Medicine Wheel
and the
Three Spheres of Integrated Work

MENTAL

Institutional

Interpersonal

Intra-personal

PHYSICAL

SPIRITUAL
CULTURAL
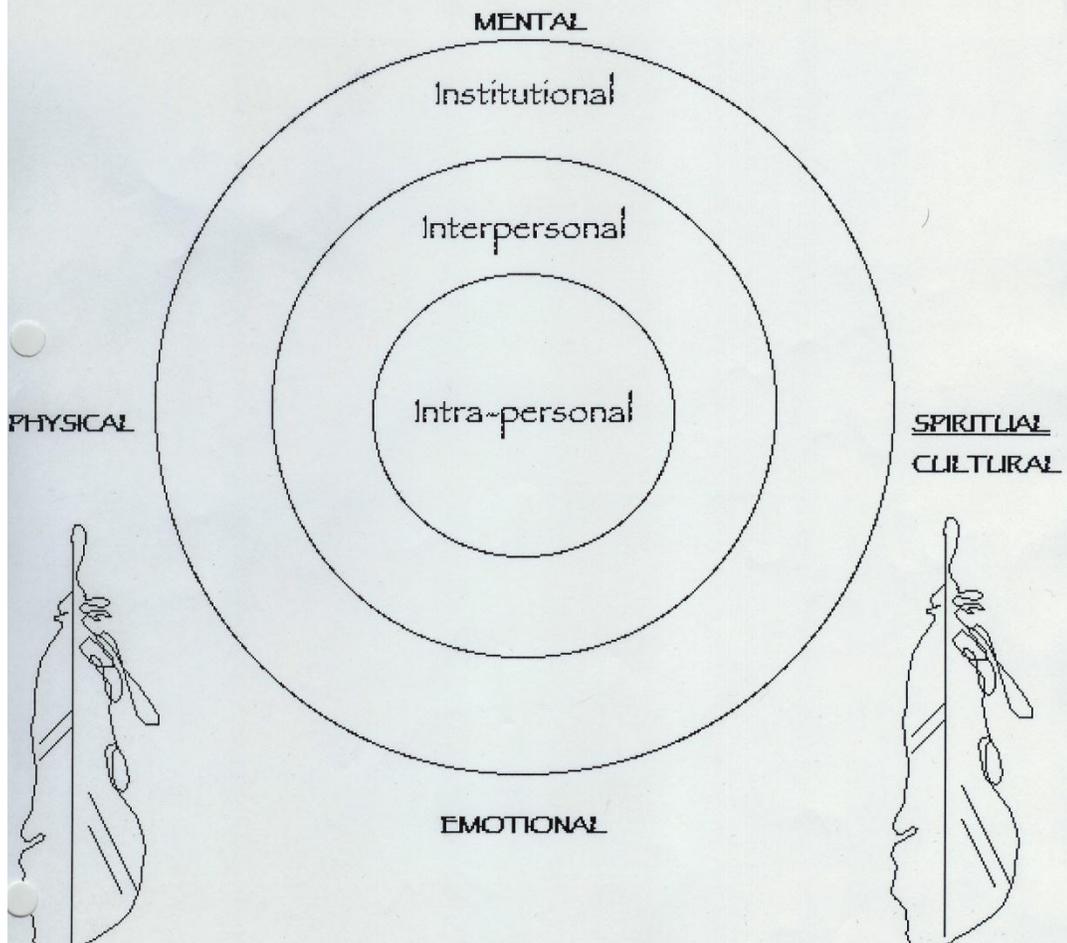
EMOTIONAL

Appendix B

Medicine Wheel Template for Walking Social Justice at the Intrapersonal Level

	Mindful Questions and Practices The _____ Domain of the Medicine Wheel (Physical, Mental, Spiritual/Cultural, Emotional)			
Ask yourself these questions:	Strategy/Focus Area*	Strategy/Focus Area*	Strategy/Focus Area*	Strategy/Focus Area*
Who do I want to be? (A Prayer for Self.)				
What will I do? (Specific, concrete actions or plans)				
When will I do it?				
Where will I do it?				
How will I do it?				
Why am I doing it? (Go back to who I want to be)				

TM E. Norte
*Strategies/Focus Areas are key things you need to work on related to achieving the overarching goal or prayer.

Appendix C

Letter of Invitation and Research Questions

Dear Prospective Research Participant:

I would like to invite you to take part in the research project I am conducting on behalf of my dissertation work at the University of San Francisco. I propose to investigate the legacy of colonialism (e.g., capitalist seduction, hegemony, systemic racism) and its impact on Chican@s as individuals and as a collective. I am inviting members from MAESTR@S to share their thoughts in a dialogue which will explore the process of decolonization.

The conversations will provide data for the analysis of this research topic. Once transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of our dialogues so that you may review its content and form. You can add to or delete any section of the conversation at that time; when I receive your approval, I will then use our conversation to support my analysis. The data that you contribute will not be held confidential, only your name and position will be held confidential.

While the conversations and transcripts in this research are collaborative, in that you will have the opportunity to edit, add to, or delete any section of the transcript of our conversation, the writing that comes from them will be the researcher's product. You will have been given complete and clear information about this research, and have complete authority and control at the outset and throughout the process about whether or not to participate. You can also withdraw at any time without adverse consequences.

Below you will find a series of proposed questions. These questions are primarily for use as guidelines to direct our dialogue. Dialogue encourages the researcher and participants to speak honestly and truthfully in order to develop a deeper sense of understanding. To achieve this, a set of questions were formulated that reflect the research questions.

Reflecting upon your experiences, please consider the following questions:

1. Colonization
   a. How do you see/view colonization?
   b. What is its impact on people?

2. Decolonization
   a. How do you see decolonization?
   b. What are its possibilities?

3. Challenges/Struggles
   a. What are the challenges/struggles you face in becoming decolonized/maintaining a decolonized state?

4. Addressing Needs

        a. How do you address those challenges/struggles?

        b. Where is the work on decolonization taking you (individually and as a group)?

I would like to thank you again for your willingness to meet with me. Please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email me at XXXXXX@XXX.com if you have any further questions. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Victor G. Garza
Researcher, Doctoral Candidate
University of San Francisco
International & Multicultural Education

Appendix D

Consent to Be a Research Participant

Purpose and Background

Mr. Victor Garza, a doctoral student at the University of San Francisco, School of Education, has asked me to participate in his research which seeks to explore the process of decolonization among a select group of Chicana/os.

Procedures

I agree to be a participant in this study. I am aware voluntarily conversations between this researcher and myself will occur. It is anticipated that most conversations will be in English. These conversations will reflect my insights and opinions about my personal experience with the process of decolonization, including struggles and challenges in achieving a decolonized state. I agree that Mr. Victor Garza may record our conversations on audiotape, which will be transcribed. A copy of the transcript will be returned to me for review, editing, and approved before it is subjected to analysis. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, that I may discontinue the conversation at any point, and request any changes or deletions. My participation in this research project is voluntary, and any data I contribute to this study will not be confidential. I agree that all data collected during the research process and my pseudonym may be used in the dissertation and subsequent publications.

Risks and/or Discomforts

I am free to decline to answer any questions or stop the conversations at any point. I may also withdraw my participation at any time. I understand that I may request to remove my entire transcript from the study. I also understand that I may be quoted in the dissertation and subsequent publications. While the conversations and transcripts in this research are collaborative, the writing that comes from them is the researcher's product, and may include some editing by the respondent. I acknowledge that I have been given complete and clear information about this research, and it is my option to make the decision at the outset about whether to participate or not, and can withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the topic of decolonization.

Costs/Financial Considerations
There will be no costs to me in taking this study.

Alternatives

I am free to elect not to participate in this study.

Questions

I have talked to Mr. Victor Garza about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may contact him at XXX-XXX-XXXX. I may also visit Mr. Victor Garza at XXX, San Jose, CA. His advisor, Dr. Emma Fuentes, can also be contacted at the University of San Francisco, at the following phone number: (415) 422-6878.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by FAX at (415) 422-5528, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the:

IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology
Education Building
University of San Francisco
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

Consent to Participate in Research

I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. I understand that my participation in this dissertation research conducted by Mr. Victor Garza is voluntary. My signature below indicates that I agree with the above procedures and conditions.

_____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____
Researcher's Signature   Date

_____
Researcher's Name (Print)   Date

Appendix E

Letter of Confirmation

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to converse with you about your experiences with the process of decolonization. I am confirming our meeting on _____ at _____ from ____ to ____. Please let me know if something requires you to change our arranged place, time, or date.

With your permission, I will record our conversation, transcribe the tapes into a written text, and submit it for your review. After you review the text, I would appreciate any corrections or follow up comments that you may have. I would also like to discuss the conversation we had and any follow-up comments. Please remember that data for this research are not considered confidential.

The exchange of ideas in conversation is the format for my critical ethnographic research. It allows you to comment, add, or delete to what the transcripts contain. This process will not only give you the opportunity to correct anything stated in our conversation, but allows you the opportunity to reflect on our conversation. Only after your approval, will I look at the text of the conversation that we had, gather new ideas, possibly even enlarging the area under investigation, and continue my research.

Once again, thank you and I look forward to meeting with you and to our conversation.

Sincerely,

Victor G. Garza
Researcher, Doctoral Candidate
University of San Francisco
International & Multicultural Education