"PARECE QUE ESTÁN DÁNDOTE UNA BIENVENIDA": *TESTIMONIOS* OF CHICANA/O FAMILIES' SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH NATURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT vi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1
- Defining Latine and Chicana/o 7
- Ontological Sense of Belonging 8
- Human Benefits of Place Attachment and Exposure to Nature 10
  - Studies of Latine in Green Spaces 11
- Researcher Reflexivity as an Educator and a Chicana 12
- *Testimonios* informed by LatCrit: Theoretical Lens and Methodology 15
- Counterstories 17

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 21
- "*El indio*" within Chicanas/os: Biocultural Heritage of the Nahua's in the Americas 22
- Chicanas/os Resistance 23
- Historical Racialization of Latinas/os in the U.S 24
- [Native] Immigrants and the "Immigration Experience" 27
  - Discrimination 29
  - Acculturation vs. Assimilation 31
  - Language 32
- Ecological whiteness 33
- Indigenous Ecological Leaders 35
- Historical Understanding of Colonization and Nature 36
- Latine Barriers to Green Spaces 38
- Sense of Belonging in Community: *La Cultura Cura* 41
- LatCrit: Theoretical Lens 43

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY & METHODS 46
- *Testimonios* as a Method and Methodology 46
- Participants: Latine Community Centers in Western North Carolina 49
- Data Collection 52
- Cultural Intuition 53
- Data Analysis Through Cultural Intuition 55
- Data Representation through *Antropoesía* 58
- Dear Reader, Each *Testimonio* Is a Gift. 61
- Decolonizing my Relationship with Nature 63

Manuscript 66

REFERENCES 56

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Backpack Installation, University of Michigan (Barnes, 2014). 5
Figure 2. The Families Interviewed. 49
Figure 3. Major Repeated Concepts and Curation Based on Landscapes. 57

ABSTRACT

"*PARECE QUE ESTÁN DÁNDOTE UNA BIENVENIDA"*: *TESTIMONIOS* OF CHICANA/O FAMILIES SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH NATURE

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Environmentalism and social structures are deeply intertwined; therefore, addressing racial disparities for communities of Color is crucial for attaining justice for our natural world *and* the people within. A white narrative heavily influences outdoor leisure in the U.S. with little insight from other racial groups. The purpose of this study is to explore how the natural world influences Chicana/o families' sense of belonging within their communities. I used *testimonios* (Silva et al., 2021) as a methodology coupled with a LatCrit (Solorzano et al., 2001) theoretical framework to collect counterstories (to white narratives). After intergenerational family interviews, including my own family, I curated excerpts that reflected core ideas of belonging, connection to the land, and experiences of injustice. These *testimonios* mirror messages of societal belonging or exclusion within the context of critical social issues for Latine people. The *testimonios* end with *consejos:* words of wisdom for future generations. I conclude the results with reflexive poems comprised of the *testimonios* shared using *antropoesía*. This study aims to deconstruct racialized hetero-normative narratives of the outdoors and "hold space" (Cairo, 2021) for Latine stories and perspectives.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Mirrored in these introductions are pieces that reflect answers to why I am doing this work. Why Nature? Why race? Why *testimonios*? Why poems? I open by offering three pieces for the reader to consider that provides a foundation for my thinking behind this research project. The first piece is a poem to reflect my story and positionality. The second and third pieces embody art forms that bring urgency to issues of human rights for Latinos. The purpose of this research is to explore how the natural world influences Chicanas/os families' sense of belonging through Nature in order to hold space for Latine voices within dominated white narratives.

For this first poem, I position myself as both researcher and community member, reflecting on my personal experiences with Nature as a Chicana. I was raised in a small border town of south Texas and lived in the Appalachians for the past five years. Throughout this research, I reflect and write about my encounters with racism (overt and covert), the search for belonging as a Brown woman found on the "white-side" of town, my ancestral history, and how I found (and continue to find) cultural healing and identity with the land.

El aire libre, me liberó
The Free Air, Freed Me
By: Joanna Orozco

I began expecting the worst when overhearing white lips say, "*Mexican…*"
My brown ears pierced with rattling bones we try to bury.
They screamed at my people, at me.
"You don't belong here; go back to where you came from!"

The same question that intended to keep our heads low,
and our hearts lower.
Where am I from?

Soy de la Madrecita Tierra.
Soy Americana.
Mexica.
Mexicana.
Chicana.
Fronteriza[1].
I come from the voices of buried Nahuatl by the Spanish
I come from the voices of buried Spanish by the English
No, this land was not ***made*** for you and me.

She never questioned my belonging,
so I never questioned her.
The Land grounded me.
Where,

El aire libre, me liberó
El agua me recuerda que todo pasa
La tierra me dice que pertenezco
El fuego incendió una lucha
El lugar donde me enseñó que todo esta conectado
Y no hay que dividir la identidad

The free air, freed me
The water reminds me that everything passes
The land told me I belonged
The fire lit a fight
The place that taught me everything is connected
And there is no need to divide our identity

[1] A woman from the border.

I intend the structure of this thesis to reflect my pedagogical and epistemological stance: knowledge creation is an individual *and* collective process (Yúdice, 1991). Our ancestral knowledge continues through the sharing of stories and oral traditions, an ancient human art form. To honor collective consciousness from (one of the many) iconic Chicana/o authors, I bring forward an excerpt from Gloria Anzaldua's poetry as the second piece.

(Excerpt from) El camino de la mestiza / The Mestiza Way

By: Gloria Anzaldúa (1987)

> Caught between the sudden contradiction, the breath sucked in and the endless space, the Brown woman stands still, looks at the sky. She decides to go down, digging her way along the roots of trees. Sifting through bones, she shakes them to see if there is any marrow in them. Then, touching the dirt to her forehead, to her tongue, she takes a few bones, leaves the rest in their burial place.
>
> She goes through her backpack, keeps her journal and address book, throws away the muni-bart metro-maps. The coins are heavy and they go next, then the green backs flutter through the air. She keeps her knife, can opener and eye-brow pencil. She puts bones, pieces of bark, hierbas, eagle feather, snakeskin, tape recorder, the rattle and drum in her pack and sets out to become the complete Tolteca. (p. 104)

In the second poetic piece, Anzaldúa, who self-identifies as a queer Chicana from a neighboring border city near where I also grew up, reflects, "when I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like I really existed as a people" (p. 82). I feel similar when I read Anzaluda's (1987) poetry and other work by Latina authors that fueled this thesis. These writers powerfully interweave language and culture; they artfully re-tell a narrative not defined by borders.

Anzaldua's poetic excerpt builds on her experiences addressing complexities of identities through symbolic items that the Brown woman chooses to leave or carry with her. Each item is carefully thought-out to represent parts of her heritage, her need for survival, her tools for healing, guidance, and direction as she ventures. She keeps her journal to write her story, her address book to keep close who she knows, a knife for a fight to come, a can opener for survival, and still space for an eye-brow pencil (an iconic Chicana item). The Brown woman carries all that was once buried of her ancestors. Anzaldua and I lived at different times, yet we journeyed through similar spaces, physically and socially, as Chicana women from border cities. This work equally reflects the vitality of sharing our lived experiences between generations. Although metaphorical in Anzaldua's poem, each statement reflects a version of reality, retold in the following art exhibit.

Holding Space Through Art: "State of Exception"

Figure 1. *Backpack Installation, University of Michigan (Barnes, 2014).*

Note. An installation of backpacks left by migrants crossing the Sonoran Desert in Arizona. The backpacks were exhibited in "State of Exception/Estado de Excepción." This project is an example of how public activism holds space for the stories of Latine people through art.

Archeologist Jason De Leon (2013) and his team (Institute for the Humanities, 2013) expose violence in the borderlands through an art exhibit titled "State of Exception," a play on words, highlighting the dual meaning behind the word "exception(al)." This art exhibit displays approximately 50 backpacks found in the landscape during border crossing attempts, with remnants of ephemera commemorating those lost and unidentified in transition. Besides backpacks, materials for survival (e.g., water jugs, empty cans of food, money) and other items that identify a migrant's sense of self (e.g., personal letters or diaries, photographs, rosaries,

telephone numbers) are commonly found (De La Garza, 2019). For an unidentified portion of the Latine race, harsh experiences in Nature at the demand of political social movements are a direct means of survival, and efforts such as those represented in this art exhibit work to humanize their lives by "holding space" (Cairo, 2021) for their stories.

I begin this thesis by naming my positionality within this study. As a first-generation Chicana, yet native to what we now call Texas, this research's outcomes are not intended to be neutral. I witness a constant and painful battle in many Latinas/os against intergenerational cultural erasure and silencing. Not all Latine have the same experience of the outdoors, but we all have stories about the land our ancestors traveled or inhabited and stewarded for centuries. My goal in this research is to create space for Latine experiences within academia and, most notably, stir a critical collective consciousness outside of it.

With this in mind, the purpose of this thesis is to explore how the natural world influences Latine sense of belonging in their communities. Importantly, the work is not just about discovering answers to my research question; equally central is my methodology or *how* I plan to explore the question. I find centering Latine voices in this research project of great importance to interrupt further marginalization of Latine communities, especially within academia. Ethnographedrs' and anthropologists' understanding of culture *could* provide tools for colonizers (Marshall et al., 2022). What better way to defer this than by turning to the voices of diverse perspectives and life experiences?

Lorde (2007) unforgettably reminds us, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 2). To dismantle systems of oppression (including those in academia guiding thesis research), knowledge must come from outside the resources that perpetuate it (Bowleg, 2021). In this introduction, I explain the need for the study and the specific methodological

approach (*testimonios* grounded in LatCrit theory) as a way for Latine experiences to be valued beyond academia. But first, I provide an overview of the terms *Latine* and *Chicana/o* used throughout the thesis.

Defining Latine and Chicana/o

Because language is not stagnant, and neither are terms we identify with, the origins of racial terms are challenging to trace back to a single person or article. When I attended an online national conference named Naturally Latinos (2022), I created an online forum titled "Latinos, Latine, Latinx, Latin@, or other?" It hit the top-most response forum of that year. Terms besides 'Latino' are new within the community, and there is an ongoing debate about which are best and why. Hearing from leaders in the community was one affirmation for using Latine over Latinx or Latino for now.

Many individuals primarily reject Latinx due to questionable white imposition of the term (Mochkofsky, 2020). According to the Pew Research Center (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020), about one in four U.S. Hispanics have heard of Latinx, but only 3% use it (most coming from academic circles). Within the forum, the term "Latine" was the most agreeable. It mirrors the use of the 'e' alongside other gender-neutral terms already found in Spanish (i.e., *Estudiante; student*). Furthermore, I chose to use Latine instead of Latinx because, linguistically, it makes sense for Spanish speakers (Salinas, 2020) while still acknowledging the power of gender in the Spanish language. I use "Latine" to describe people of or relate to Latin American origin or descent.

However, it is essential to note that not all Latine in the United States choose that term for themselves; in fact, *many* do not. Many strongly adhere to the traditional Latino or Latina or may prefer their specific region of the Americas (i.e., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Chilean, etc.).

Furthermore, some who wish to highlight their Mexican descent may initially identify as Chicana or Chicano (Chicana/o) before Latina/o/e. The term Chicana/o is used to denote a Latine person born in the United States of Mexican descent (Gallardo, 2021), whereas the "a" is also intentionally first in this wording to consider masculine dominance in language and society (a political move from writers like Yosso, 2006). As language and the implications of these terms evolve, I implore that the terms we choose do not further divide but unite our community.

Chicana/o, or interchangeably Xicana/o (the X holds the "sh" sound in Nahuatl), originated from the indigenous Mexica people *(pronounced Meh-she-ka)* of Mexico. The name "Mexico" comes from Náhuatl: metztli (moon), xictli (center), and co (place), or "the place in the center of the moon." Nahuatl is the second most spoken language in Mexico (Gomashie, 2021) and the native tongue of the Mexica (largest empire being the Aztecs).

According to Anzaldúa's Border Theory (1987), "we [Chicanas/os] are a synergy of two cultures within various degrees of Mexicaness or Angloness" (p. 85). I use the terms Chicana rather than Mexican-American in my position to not further split the two identities. Perhaps "Chicane" is to appear in later years for the question of gender, but for now, I used the term "Chicana/o."

I focused on U.S. Chicana/o families in this study. While I use Latine and Chicana/o in my writing, I ultimately used the terms with which my participants choose to self-identify for their testimonios. In the following section, I discuss the need for this study. Specifically, I begin by discussing an ontological sense of belonging, the intersection of Nature and race, and a critique of "ecological identity" (Thomashow, 1995).

Ontological Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is a popular topic in sociological research (Bennett, 2014; Mallet-García & García-Bedolla, 2021; Miller, 2003; Peters et al., 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006). A sense of belonging is defined as a subjective feeling of perceived inclusion within dynamic societal power structures (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Sense of belonging refers to internalized perceptions of membership to a group and external acknowledgment from the group that one belongs to it (Mallet-García & García-Bedolla, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2006). In addition, this self-identification or identification by others can be stable, contested, or transient (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

There are often three significant factors of sense of belonging that put it in context: 1) history, 2) people and 3) place (Bennett, 2014; Miller, 2003; Peters et al., 2016). Through these three interweaving factors, sense of belonging is created through multiple past, present, and future social relationships within a place. Bennett (2014) and Miller (2003) argue that people come to understand a social obligation through long-term relationships to place(s). Building off these contexts of history, people, and place, ontological belonging is defined as the way of being in the world as part of the mundane Nature of everyday life (Bennett, 2014).

Hence, the social realm undeniably influences place attachment (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001) and the implications of well-being within those places. For example, *school belonging* is defined as the "extent to which a student feels he or she [sic] is an important member of the school" and positively correlates to the educational success of Latina/o youth (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012, p. 64). Here, it is essential to note that a school is a localized place *and* its people (social connections). Ontological belonging intricately links one's places (whether natural or built environments) *and* who is in the place.

This concept of belonging is essential to understand how individuals function within a society. Since the origins of Chicana/o studies, concerns about just societal relationships among

humans and between humans and the land have been crucial (Holmes, 2016). Succinctly put in Holmes (2016) book on Ecological Borderlands, "[Chicanas/os] were forged out of forced displacements and efforts to reconceptualize a politics of belonging in an era that continues to be marked by colonialism's legacy" (p. 2). In other words, catalyzed by land displacement, colonialization internalized a vigorous chase to belong for non-white groups.

For this study, I explored how Chicanas/os within this study are/are not valued, deemed important, and included within society within colonial influences. I sought to understand how ontological belonging exists within a context of history, people, and place. In the following section, I examined how natural environments influence this sense of belonging as reflected in the everyday lives of individuals through place attachment.

Human Benefits of Place Attachment and Exposure to Nature

Although place attachment can host a variety of definitions for different researchers, place attachment is defined here as an affective bond or link between people and specific places (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001). Research indicates many benefits of developing an attachment to place for individuals and communities (Cheng & Kuo, 2015; Gosling & Williams, 2010; Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001; Peroff et al., 2020; Van der Maarel, 2013).

Natural environments inform people about their identity (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). For example, long-term interaction with an environment can result in *place bonding*, referring to the emotional attachment and particular identity formed in the environment (Cheng & Kuo, 2015). An emotional attachment to Nature leads to an expanded sense of self and a definitive value of non-human species (Gosling & Williams, 2010). Places where people have developed "place attachment" from secure environments often experience stress release and self-reflection (Peters

et al., 2016) and consequently are more likely to exhibit pro-environmental behaviors (Gosling & Williams, 2010).

Additionally, positive natural experiences supply various health benefits to individuals and their collective communities (Chawla, 2015; Hutchison, 1987; Kondo et al., 2018). According to Kondo et al. (2018), exposure to urban green spaces for participants resulted in lower mortality, heart rate, and violence, and increased attention, mood, and physical activities. Communities can experience better mental health with increased usage of neighborhood Nature leading to effective preventative health (Cox et al., 2017).

These benefits of Nature are essential for all. Especially underserved and exploited Black and Brown communities who suffer from disproportional exposure to environmental toxins and waste (Hockman, 1998), communal survival for basic resources (Rosenberg et al., 2019), and lack political agency in favor of the health of their communities and their local natural environments (Laduke, 2015). In the following section, I include studies addressing Latine accessibility to green spaces.

Studies of Latine in Green Spaces. In the last few decades, studies have pointed to issues surrounding accessibility for People of Color in outdoor spaces and Nature-related recreation in the United States (Winter et al., 2019). These racial trends have demanded organizational attention and action (O'Brien et al., 2020; Schneider & Kivel, 2016; Tandon et al., 2018). In a systemic review done by Tandon et al. (2018) over the last 30 years, only 16% of studies reporting Nature experiences of Latinos in the U.S. are from a descriptive angle (qualitative). In contrast, the overwhelming majority of studies are quantitative (i.e., surveys for park access). In questions about racial accesability, we know "what" is going on but not the "why". There is a clear gap in the literature around qualitative studies seeking to understand

Latine human-Nature relationships within the United States on sense of belonging. I stand behind the theory that a large hurdle to this qualitative research (in understanding the why) is the missing of community advocates that are willing to change the way in which research is done.

To address this gap, I considered how experiences in the natural world (positive, negative, or a mix of both) impact Latine immigrants and their family's sense of belonging. I built on the work of Peters et al. (2016), who found that immigrants who arrive in the United States and positively experience Nature are known to develop a sense of belonging in their inhabiting country. Notably, Peter et al.'s findings leave the question of how adverse experiences of the natural world may have social implications for individuals in their communities.

Negative experiences in natural spaces due to societal power structures have the potential to further degrade the well-being of immigrant families displaced by white society. Because many Latine youth are "burdened by discrimination concerns as they navigate their social worlds" (Herda, 2016, p. 57), it is essential to research descriptive perspectives of Latine experiences of the natural world and the implications for the social world through a critical lens. In the following section, I write about my reflexivity and the importance of how I approach this study as a Chicana woman researcher.

Researcher Reflexivity as an Educator and a Chicana

Researchers are often incorrectly taught that "good" social science research is objective, dispassionate, and compartmentalizes personal experiences, values, emotions, individuality, or creativity (Dupuis, 1999; Parry & Johnson, 2007). I am one of these researchers, academically trained in a colonized western world, to believe that for scientific research to be "valid," it must be neutral and free of researcher bias; this is not the case for all areas of research, especially towards the decolonization of the sciences (Lather, 2010). Much of this study involves a deep

awareness and response to how engrained patriarchal and often Eurocentric ideologies dominate the outdoor field and within educational systems. In the words of Patti Lather (2010), "efforts by the 'top' to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status bite back from a place where white masculinities are no longer at the center of the frame" (p. 33).

My reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) and positionality will largely influence how I interpret and understand the work I encounter or create. I approached this work through a critical qualitative paradigm, which aims to develop thinking, locate gaps in knowledge, and embrace the translation of culture and our relationship to it (Marshall et al., 2022). This type of qualitative work is not simply a byproduct of the researcher but also the investigator (Johnson, 2009). This research is as much of an intellectual endeavor as much as it is personal (Bennett, 2014; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Huber, 2010). I decided to include an interview with my own family.

I found it fundamental to understand how my experiences, along with intersections of my identity (race, religion, gender, class, ableism, etc.), have shaped and molded my educational philosophy and the power dynamics they entail. As a first-generation Chicana working in environmental education and community engagement, although I share language and cultural references/values, I benefit from privileges many of the participants I dialogued with did not. These privileges may have included English proficiency, citizenship status (along with mental security), socioeconomic status, and educational privileges. Even as a researcher who identifies as being within the population I am studying, I have not lived in anyone's identical path, yet I walk alongside their struggles and victories.

In this involved research process, I reject the idea that I 'contaminate the data' as an 'insider.' This ideology initially brought me immense worry when I first developed this topic (and there is a genuine awareness of my experiences vs. my participants). However, after much

pacing, I now welcome it. I welcome, and fight for, the space *between* two identities (Anzaldúa, 1987) where I am obligated to choose a side due to white supremacy: Latina (of the othered in academia) or researcher ("void" of bias but namely "color blind"). I welcome a space embodying both: researcher *and* Latina.

Cultural intuition is built from past experiences of the researcher. I use cultural intuition to think with theory and challenge static linear analysis methods. It allows for free exploration of the results, naming of power dynamics, and solidifies theories. This research is not about finding a bulleted answer but holistically involving readers and expanding our perspectives by listening to other human beings. This work is to create thought, dialogue, and action. I have found it nearly impossible to center communal health without first adopting a holistic view of myself (in self-actualization) followed by those around me. In short, this work changed my life.

Engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) is found in the "uncomfortable place where a space imbued with official academic discourses meets a space of testimony and witness" and where we recognize the power of our stories (Johnson, 2009, p. 488). This study's methodology of *testimonios* emphasizes just that: a recognition of the power of our stories that engages action for readers. For engaged pedagogy to occur, educators must not compromise holistic learning by compartmentalizing their own mind/body/spirit within education (hooks, 1994). This personal, intellectual, and professional process challenges me as a researcher to practice decolonization within my own life and practice, including research.

Nobel Prize winner Paulo Freire (1968/2014) states, "a deepened consciousness of [our] situation leads people to apprehend that situation as a historical reality susceptible of transformation" (Freire, 1968/2014, p. 85). Freire equates inhibition to inquiry and decision-

making to an act of violence (Freire, 1968/2014). When people become conscious of an unjust situation, change can occur through inquiry and decision-making.

Social injustices interventions for Latine in the United States are interrupted by critical means. In the next section, I introduced the methodology and theoretical framework used throughout my practice and studies that imply critical thinking within solutions for racial disparities. This project creates space for Chicana/o and Mexican immigrant's life stories (*testimonios*) through the critical LatCrit lens.

***Testimonios* informed by LatCrit: Theoretical Lens and Methodology**

Critical Race scholarship centralized the notions that racism still affects certain racial groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Huber, 2010, p. 54) in a society once considered "post-racial" (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). In other words, *racism is still prevalent in our current social, political, and interpersonal systems,* and the world is not "color-blind." Although it might sound progressive to say race has nothing to do with inequities, insisting on "color-blindness" is "to demand compulsory assimilation" (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). The very idea of "color blindness" is *not seeing color*. Meaning that the viewer inherently insists on not seeing a vital part of a person's identity and culture, nor do they acknowledge the oppressive power structures that go along with what skin color means in a society (and resulting experiences of these structures). This concept of race and sociology extends to natural places through social dynamics influencing leisure spaces.

Stemming as a branch of Critical Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), LatCrit is a subgroup of Critical Race Theory that involves intersections of language, immigration, citizenship, ethnicity, culture, phenotype, and gender (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Legal scholar Elizabeth Iglesias (1997) defined LatCrit as expanding "beyond the

limitations of the black/white paradigm to incorporate a richer, more contextualized analysis of the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of white supremacy, particularly as it impacts Latinas/os in their individual and collective struggles for self-understanding and social justice" (p. 178).

LatCrit raids on patterns of racism and white supremacy harming Latine groups in the realms of language, colorism, gender, and immigration, sometimes displayed by the internationalization of racism within our race or by external affirmations. LatCrit combats the deviously justifiable response: *"It's sad, but that's just how life is."* LatCrit is a tool designed to envision another way for marginalized groups to thrive.

This theoretical lens cultivates a social justice approach by shedding light on oppressive influences or demands in expectations to dismantle them. This act of "light shedding" is done beyond numbers and statistics (although necessary) and through humanizing the research approach; our life stories. Our stories are filled with pain, laughter, deep thought, and human connection. Likewise, to move beyond a deficit model and add balance, I aimed to capture Latine's joy and wisdom through *consejos*. LatCrit framework emboldens marginalized voices to create and define their lives toward a state of well-being (Solorazano & Yosso, 2001). LatCrit is used to explore how environmental programs can be improved to serve their Latine community better (i.e., use of native language, music, and storytelling) (Arreguín-Anderson & Kennedy, 2013). For a similar goal for outdoor educators, I use a LatCrit framework through qualitative means to build a sociological theory on how the natural world impacts Chicana/o sense of belonging in their communities.

Through *testimonios*, I aimed to create space for Chicana/o family's accounts that "challenge the historical, neutral image of social science, and its sometimes totalizing grand

narratives" (Marshall et al., 2022, p. 26) of the natural world. The telling of a life story that challenges the grand narrative is known as a counterstory (Solorazano & Yosso, 2001). *Testimonios* can be counterstories that enable "the mind, body, and spirit to be equally valuable sources of knowledge and embrace the engagement of social transformation" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). *Testimonios* are "guided by the will of the narrator to tell events as [they] see significant and is often an expression of a collective experience, rather than the individual" (Huber, 2010, p. 67). In the following section I detail how *testimonios* function as a form of counterstories and the power of stories.

Counterstories

Although this research's *outcomes* are not intended to be neutral, I desired for the voices behind the *testimonios* to speak for themselves. I invite readers to lean into the words of an experience [potentially] outside their own and find connections to our universal humanity. Collective experiences of Nature and social culture create knowledge and theory of lived experiences between generations; sharing generational wisdom creates a collective consciousness (Espino et al., 2012).

We understand the world we know and the people through the telling of overlapping stories. During her TED Talk, Novelist Chimamanda Adichie (2009) understands the danger of a "single story" and its potential to "rob people of their dignity" (Adichie, 2009, 13:49), particularly for oppressed groups. We see throughout history that telling a definite story *about* a group does not come without power (Adichie, 2009). She states, "start the story with the arrows of the Native American and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story" (Adichie, 2009, 10:25). The creation of culture lies behind the power of stories. For marginalized groups, stories are essential for survival and liberation (Delgado, 1989).

In the words of Adichie (2009), "stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories can dispossess and malign, but stories can also empower and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity" (17:29). For many African American, Chicana/o, and Native American communities, storytelling holds rich importance to continue traditions and relay messages of resistance (Solorzano, D. & Delgado Bernal, D., 2001). Storytelling is essential, particularly within oppressive upbringings for generational wealth and survival (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This work will aim to center powerful storytellers that do not get representation in everyday American life yet hold vast importance to combat "single stories" told against their racial group.

Counterstories are a methodological tool supplementary to CRT in its effectiveness in highlighting lived truths outside of racial-majority perspectives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Counterstories, in racial discourse, are used to counter white hegemonic ideals and expectations of the normative for POC (Marshall et al., 2022; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Seeking out Indigenous knowledge could contrast a white-dominated narrative of the outdoors (Roberts, 2012).

Within indigenous epistemology of the Apache, "knowledge or wisdom is generated inside the communities through individual's experiences in relation to particular geographic localities which legitimize the past and serve as the main historical evidence for the truthfulness of the stories happened in these places" (Grincheva, 2013, p. 156). In the process of decoloniality, I am learning many ways to deconstruct, involve, and trust indigenous practices. Indigenous knowledge's significant characteristics are personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language (Castellano, 2000). Integrating indigenous epistemology (such as rationality, holism, holistic learning, narrative traditions, experiential,

intergenerational, and place-based learning to name a few) are ways I have begun to incorporate diversity of thought in my practice.

Through the sharing of stories, there is the creation of community, the sharing of wisdom, the rendering of the past, and the imagination of what could be (Grincheva, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Puerto Rican author Jamie Figueroa (2021) wrote about her experience when she began to write her own stories, “I listened to what rose up to my awareness, touched my own lineage, getting at what was behind and beneath, to all those who dwelled within me, my constellation of origin. From here, story became my medicine as it narrated what I remembered and what I didn’t remember” (para. 23). Our medicine is within our own community.

In sharing my own story, I hope to support *nuestra gente* toward cultural healing throughout the process. I ultimately desire to empower people to dialogue about their stories for healing within themselves and for others. I acknowledge my educational, citizen status, and socio-economic privileges that many of my participants will unfortunately not hold. As a Latina pressed to build cultural wealth, I feel fortunate to have grown within a community of people encouraging me to stay focused, get to my dreams, whatever they may be, and not give up. However, in the process, to never forget where I come from. Humbly, this is my way to give back; at the same time, it has brought revelation into my life.

In capturing their stories, memories of pain or suffering can turn into ones of courage and strength. From here, I believe we can recognize and admire the resilience, bravery, sense of humor, and hope our Latine community embodies each day (Chaparro, 2020; Gallo, 2016; Love, 2019). It would involve centering moments of ongoing resistance and refinement so that their families and future generations can experience communal joy in a sense of belonging, regardless of where they call home.

Today, most counterstory *testimonios* call attention to a social and/or political urgency of injustice and oppression within formal education (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Huber, 2010). There is a gap in the literature on the influences of Nature on sense of belonging for Latine in the United States using *testimonios*. I used a LatCrit theoretical lens to understand the intersections of power and identities and how they impact daily life for my participants. In the following chapter, I present a literature review of various relevant topics, controversies, and issues surrounding Latine in the United States. This chapter ends not with a deficit moment, but instead with a discussion of strength and perseverance within the community. In chapter three, I explain my method, methodology, and framework for this project. Finally, chapter four presents the results of this thesis in the format of a full-length journal article. My research was guided by the following question: How does the natural world influence Chicanas/os families' sense of belonging in their communities?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will provide a review of the literature within five areas of research that will contextualize the participants and their *testimonios* within this study. First, I intentionally begin with Latine biocultural heritage to honor our indigenous lineage. Here, I briefly expand on the indigenous ecological identities of the Nahua on Aztlán. I then reviewed the historical racialization of Latina/os in the U.S. and its societal impact on Latinos within their communities. I overviewed three areas of how racism impacts Latinos in the U.S., including [native] immigration (alienation/border violence, economic and educational history), racial impacts on minorities (acculturation/assimilation and discrimination), and the historical gatekeeping of language.

Following this brief historical overview, I introduced the history of human-Nature relationships in the U.S. from a racialized perspective. This section will include generational trauma of colonization and the observed racialized human-Nature relationships today resulting from social-political movements in the U.S. I also highlighted studies pointing to Latine access barriers to green spaces and perceptions of Nature. To conclude the section, I write on ontological sense of belonging, the value of stories, and Latine cultural wealth.

Throughout my research, I prioritize thought from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color authors in their observations of racial community healing and culturally responsive educational programming. I mainly pull from other Chicana/o authors, educators, and academics in response to their absence in traditional schooling. I include what it means to incorporate and *celebrate* Latine values and raise intergenerational cultural wealth. I end my literature review by

restating the methodological approach for this study (*testimonios*) and the chosen theoretical framework (LatCrit).

"*El indio*" within Chicanas/os: Biocultural Heritage of the Nahua's in the Americas

Understanding our indigeneity is essential to understanding our identities as Chicanas/os *and* our relevance to the natural world. Ethnoecologists refer to "biocultural heritage" as all that native people have produced, reproduced, and preserved in their territories because of beliefs, knowledge, and practices emerging from their culture (Linares-Rosas et al., 2021). Bioculture emphasizes the development of culture around the natural world. Our biocultural includes the biological and non-biological components that *nurture life*: water, land, soil, and wind (Barrera-Bassols et al., 2006). I curated the *testimonios* with some of these elements in mind.

Natural elements, landscapes, and dynamics within Nature strongly influence culture, including indigenous Latine culture. Muñoz & Encina (2017) state, "the kind of culture that relates to the natural world by seeing vital energy flow through all its being is a 'bioculture'" (p. 187). Mexico is one of the most bioculturally diverse sites in the world, "where multiple social and natural elements and systems form complex networks of interactions in which both culture and Nature are mutually influenced" (Linares-Rosas et al., 2021, p. 1). Understanding ancient bioculture practices can help deepen the backstory of the families within this study and the regions they (or their family) resided in/from. Many show the continuation of these indigenous traditions, teachings, or mindsets, while others have veered from indigenous practices due to Latine diaspora and colonialization.

Additionally, most sacred places in Mexico are found within 'biocultural regions' (Muñoz & Encina, 2017). Sacred sites render ultimate respect towards natural environments and their inhabitants. Caves, valleys, islands, plants, animals, and mountains offer a variety of

meanings for different regional cultures. For example, the Lake of Pátzcuaro in Michoacán is a sacred place where locals take offerings to ask for a bountiful harvest, fishing, and hunting (Muñoz & Encina, 2017).

Mexico's indigenous identities are met with these areas' natural landscapes (Muñoz & Encina, 2017). While some sacred sites are kept secretive, millions of people visit others each year as expressions of gratitude, to offer candle-lights in memory of passed loved ones, to obtain renewed energy, or simply as leisure. Pilgrimage to these sacred sites is made on foot, a bike, by bus, on horseback, or in a personal vehicle (Mūnoz & Encina, 2017). Beyond this example, many traditions can be traced back to ancestral reciprocity with the land, our human need for survival, and the celebration of life.

Chicanas/os Resistance

The emic term Chicana/o rejects a label of dual identification as either Mexican or American (of the commonly white imposed term Mexican-American), along with the wounds of carrying the tension in the two identities while continuing to honor ancestorial pre-colonized roots and heritage. The term "Chicano" and "Chicana" arose in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement by Mexican American activists (Gutiérrez, 2010). "Chicano" stems from the indigenous Nahuatl language of the *Mexica* (Meh-Shee-Ka) peoples, also known as the Aztecs (Diaz, n.d.; Gutiérrez, 2010). After many years of oppression, labor exploitation, alienation, and cultural erasure in the U.S., *Mexica* descendants found power in the pre-colonized term of the Indigenous ancestors of the Americas and the emic term "Chicanos" (Gutiérrez, 2010).

Many Chicana/o authors (i.e., Alacón, Montoya, Cervantes, Anzaldúa) make statements on how our indigenous presence "affects the act of being Chican[o]" (Arteaga, 2009, p. 8). Our

history tells of our physical, mental, and societal resistance against colonization. Author Arteaga (2009) attests to the violent origins of Chicano/a bodies (the physical),

> Chicano subjectivity comes about because of Anglo-American conquest of Northern Mexico, the Chicano body comes about because of mestizaje. And the original birth of that body comes about in the Spanish conquest of the Indians and in the raping of Indian women. From that violent colonial encounter, Mexican-Indians mixed with Spaniards to produce the hybrid race, the mestizo.
>
> The Indian is thus for the Chicano, the indigenous, the antecedent, the maternal half of our racial double helix. And like the border, Indianness is at once a site of origin and of cultural interaction. At each reproduction of the Chicano body, the racial characteristics of European and indigenous American compete for presence. (p. 10)

Latinas/os came about as a byproduct of colonization, or as I have heard, the bastard children of the Americas. Unfortunately, due to white supremacy, the build of our Native blood is the part of our identity that for many Latinas/os is often seen in contempt, condemned, hidden, or forgotten altogether. I witness disassociation with our Native identities because of European impositions and dominations. To heal, I have found it essential to not further internalize hatred for what racism has already instilled. As Anzaldúa (1987) states, “my Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance” (p. 43); our race was built on a resistance to survive.

Historical Racialization of Latinas/os in the U.S.

Throughout U.S. history, Latinos have endured exploitation by federal and state laws that continuously racialize and exclude various non-white groups from integrating into American society (Huber, 2010). Programs such as “The Braceros Program” and “Operation Wetback”

willed anti-immigrant exclusionary legislation for Latinos living and working decades in the U.S. (Huber, 2010).

From 1942 to 1964, "The Braceros Program" (The Mexican Farm Labor Program) began after the great depression and during World War I, World War II, The Korean War, and Vietnam War (Urrieta & Quach, 2000). During the war, the U.S. suffered from a shortage of laborers in low-paying agricultural jobs. The Braceros Program mass recruited roughly 4.6 million Mexican workers on legal temporary contracts (Leon & Scheinfeldt, n.d.). Farm wages dropped, and conditions for workers were violated over the years as contractors preferred to underpay Mexican workers than hire U.S. citizens. Parallel to this time, civil rights labor leaders, such as Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, created momentum for labor unions in defense of farm workers (Gutiérrez, 2010).

In the summer of 1954, mass human rights were violated in efforts to destroy unionization in the fields and deport workers of Mexican descent (60% of whom were U.S. citizens) under "Operation Wetback" (Coard, 2018). During this national order, roughly 1.5 million Mexican migrants were raided out of the United States by demanding birth certificates of so-called "Mexican-looking" people (Coard, 2018). In 1954, these military raids were applauded for ridding white America of its "problems." Thus, after scapegoating the Mexicans, the "U.S. ensured its economic power upon the arms and backs of Mexican and other workers" (Urrieta & Quach, 2000, p. 31). Chicano history in America exposes injustices through the removal of Indigenous Mexica people from their ancestral land, then later exploitation of their labor for cheap in agriculture, and the deportation of bodies when no longer of use by oppressive contractors (Gutiérrez, 2010). Decades later, many historians named Donald Trump's Zero-Tolerance policy "Operation Wetback for Children" (Montini, 2018).

My mother worked as a bilingual elementary school teacher in the Rio Grande Valley for many years. As a reading specialist, she worked mainly with low-income and ELL (English Language Learners), some undocumented or Dreamers (children of undocumented parents). During the Trump election, her six-year-old students would write or draw their fears about someone coming to abduct their family.

Besides government raids, Chicana/o youth continuously fight for the right to knowledge within education. Schools serve as a place of opportunities to advance learning and integrate into a U.S. democracy. However, the school system can either become a gateway or a gatekeeper. Constructs of socioeconomic status, immigration status, language proficiency, and race/ethnicity pose challenges to Latino families (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). Mexican Americans were "othered," and school was no different (Urrieta & Quach, 2000).

Throughout the 1960s, English only was the expectation, and no other languages were to be spoken by students. Our elder generation of Chicanos lived in a time where "severe punishment awaited the bold who uttered their native Spanish language within earshot of school officials or Anglo students who also reported them" (Gutiérrez, 2010, p. 26). Many Hispanic students were turned down for course advancement simply based on English proficiency or their Spanish-sounding last name (Acre, 2022). These were just a few occurrences that rallied the Chicano school Walk-Out demonstrations in east L.A. and demanded nationwide change.

In 1998, Arizona state law forbade teaching Chicano studies (to mostly Mexican American students) at the Tucson Unified School District. These enthic studies increased school attendance exponentially, and students who took them reported higher graduation rates than those not enrolled (Love, 2019). Beyond this, many found ethnic solidarity in learning about the

injustices towards their communities; Chicana/o ancestral perspectives were validated in textbooks.

Yet some feared the students learning about this history would be 'divisive' and advocate resentment towards white people, so the courses were banned. After a decade of petitions, protests, and grassroots movements led by teachers, alums, and students, a federal judge deemed the banning of ethnic studies classes unconstitutional in 2017. He states, "the ban [on Mexican-American history and literature] was not for a legitimate educational purpose, but for an invidious discriminatory racial purpose and a politically partisan purpose" (Tashima, 2018).

By using a LatCrit framework, systemic, institutional, *and* individual acts of racism are not overlooked in their ill effects on the Latine community (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Ramírez-Escobar, 2019; Yosso, 2006). Since the beginning of time, human events and the land have been intertwined. Factors like immigration, racial interactions, and language play critical roles in relations with the land. The following section explores how themes of immigration, race, and language play a role in the holistic health of the Latine community.

[Native] Immigrants and the "Immigration Experience"

It is important to note that no racial group or culture is a monolith. Latinos are a heterogeneous group where differences in country of origin, years living in the U.S., class positionality, emic terms, and educational accessibility, are just some factors to acknowledge diversity and individuality (Tandon et al., 2018). Even among Chicanas/os, the community is heterogeneous, complex, and dynamic (Galindo, 1992). Similarly, not every Latina/o has an immigration story. Many families were already home in what is now known as the U.S., fought in wars, yet still considered foreign or "alien" (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010).

Various studies explore what it means for people to undergo immigration and the substantial impacts on individuals and their families (Chaparro, 2020; Stodolska, 2010; Peters, 2016; Lieberson, 1975; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). With so many necessary adaptations, immigration can be one of the most life-altering experiences a person can go through (Chaparro, 2020; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). To name a few challenges, there is competition for job security (especially non-abusive jobs), loss of family connection, and intensive adaptation to a language and culture that is not replicated at home. Disassociation of identity when mainstream Americans label southern immigrants as "invaders" and mental health repercussions resulting from social exclusion and racism can also occur. Not only is every aspect of immigrants' lives impacted, but their surrounding families and cultural wealth are at stake (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019).

The challenges above are not uncommon for many Mexican immigrants and Chicanas/os. Regardless of immigration status, parents, siblings, cousins, and friends work tirelessly to integrate into U.S. society. The external resistance of systemic barriers to integration in a white community is half of the equation. As Arteaga (2009) states, "to be Chicano in the borderlands is to make oneself from among the competing definition of nation, culture, language, race, ethnicity, and so on" (p.10). To be Chicana/o is to also wrestle internally between two identities (Anzaldua, 1987) that are in constant war with each other; The "American" and The Mexican. This tension leaves questioning belonging a prevalent issue for many.

The disputes on border security and immigration continue to be a politically charged topic today. De La Garza (2019) writes,

> Within this post-9/11 discursive economy of anti-immigration, fear, and terrorism, the borderlands are pivotal battlegrounds in the "War on Terror." Migrants are framed as unpredictable and imminent threats to a perceived normality in the "traditional American" way of life…the border operates as a

rhetorical weapon through which the state invites U.S. citizens to imagine migrants as threats to national security. (p. 4)

The complexity and beauty of our Latine identity soon reduced to 'an invasive threat to the good "American citizen."' The mere existence of a racial group made political, and a means for others to approve or disapprove of. This politicized overhaul of a racialized population does not happen without power dynamics, namely white supremacy. Devaluation of life is repeated by racist ideals and years of repetitive narratives created by political leaders, Eurocentric platforms of media and education, and eventually, even within the race itself (internalized racism).

I know Latinos who will vote in favor of racist legislation or echo hateful slurs against people of our race in hopes of earning loyalty points towards the same American 'dream' in the underlying approval of the white man. The danger to a single story is when we show a people as one thing, that is what they become (Adichie, 2009).

Bettina Love (2019) asks critical rhetorical questions in her book, *We Want To Do More Than Survive*, "how do you matter to a country that tears families apart because of arbitrary lines that instill terror, violence, and geographical separation? How do you matter to a country where the president calls immigrants' animals, particularly those from Mexico?" (p. 3). The following section will overview how discrimination (particularly the fear of discrimination), assimilation, and English proficiency play detrimental roles in the Latine communities' health.

Discrimination. Not all Latinas/os face the same level of discrimination. Floyd and Gramanns' (1995) study assessed perceptions of bias in recreation settings and found that [Mexican-Americans] of low economic status, those with less education, and those with greater Spanish maintenance reported higher perceived discrimination. Afro-Latino Americans face

more significant effects of colorism than their lighter-skinned brothers and sisters (Love, 2019). Over half of Black and Brown adolescents experienced fear of discrimination in 2015 (Herda, 2016). Herda (2016) summarizes the outcomes of interpersonal discrimination for minorities to lead to several mental, physical, and behavioral consequences (including increased anxiety and depression, decreased self-esteem, poor perceived physical health, increased hypertension, indicators of coronary heart disease, negative racial attitudes, increased cigarette smoking and drug use, and delinquency).

Additionally, there is a lower rate of racial socializing (the parent-child support to maneuver and prepare for racism in life) for Hispanics compared to Black people (Herda, 2016). Herda's (2016) research points to an association between mental health problems and experiencing discrimination. Researchers found that mental health problems were weaker among Black people who reported racial socialization from their parents. This trend is concerning, considering both races experience similar levels of discrimination in this study, leaving Hispanic adolescents to cope with discrimination in greater racial isolation from their parents (Herda, 2016). According to a recent Pew Research survey last year, just over one in three (38%) Latinos indicated they experienced discrimination in the past year (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2020). For many, it was in the form of being called an offensive name (28%), being criticized for speaking Spanish in public (20%), or being told to return to their birth country (19%).

Depending on who is in the community, these fears are relevant to how a minority individual shows up in green spaces, neighborhoods, or schools. Fear of discrimination is maximized in areas where one's racial group is relatively small, resulting in the outgroup (or the majority) leaning heavily on racial stereotypes and implicit biases (Herda, 2016). Low diversity in areas is therefore crucial to how an individual of a racial minority will maneuver the

inconsistencies of self-identity and approach, or chooses not to approach, outdoor recreation/green spaces. Interethnic user conflict is a significant problem for minorities who use the park (Gobster, 2002). According to Gobster's (2002) research, participants observed racial discrimination. While riding a bike, some participants were told by white people they were in the 'wrong area' or felt like they were being watched.

Acculturation vs. Assimilation. Not all Latinos assimilate or resist assimilation at the same rate. In this study, all participants had at least one family member who immigrated and one native-born family member (within different generations). Even within my own story and experiences, I continue to think about the different responses to a white-American culture within generations. I wanted to start by noting the difference between acculturation and assimilation and that both forms are present in Latine adaptation.

Acculturation is defined as the process of change in culture that occurs according to a dominant culture (Christenson et al., 2006). It is a *fusion* of two cultures. Acculturation varies between individuals, families, and communities and is not simply the length of time in a country or generational status (Dumka et al., 1997). Acculturation measures immigrants' first-hand contact and interactions with services, schools, media, people, and the community in the influential culture (Christenson et al., 2006). While acculturation may be more prominent within recent immigrants and their interactions with the dominant society, it may not typically apply to ethnic groups that have lived multiple generations in the U.S. or were born in the states. Commonly, what is seen in Latine minorities who reside within a white culture or had many years of exposure to it, would have further experienced assimilation (or 'whitewashing').

To combat loss despite assimilation, a central value in Hispanic groups is the attachment to extended kinship (Keefe & Padilla, 1987). In this study, I reflected on how assimilation and cultural preservation appear in the lives of the participant's stories. I pondered how preserving Latine culture within the community led to their sense of belonging in the land they currently reside in.

Language. Language loss and linguistic assimilation are common phenomena around the world. However, the U.S. is known to be the quickest in losing an individual's mother tongue to English compared to 35 other countries (Lieberson et al., 1975). This trend is so prominent several linguistic studies have confirmed the reputation of the U.S. as a "graveyard" for foreign languages (Tran, 2010). Immigrant children in the U.S. must adapt to English-only societal norms and systems at the expense of the child's first language or their family's primary language (Merino, 1983). Merino (1983) states the most common form of language loss is the gradual replacement of one language over the other. School settings can influence children above their home environment, hence where children are likely to experience language loss (Merino, 1983). Marino (1983) argues that "speakers who are able to resist that influence are less likely to exhibit loss" (p. 193).

Language provides the structure of our economic, political, and educational life. Hooks (1994) argues, "English is not the speech of exile. It is the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides so many tongues, all those sounds of diverse, native communities we will never hear" (p. 168). English-only approaches are used as a weapon to silence and censor, as well as perpetuate cultural imperialism that suggests who is worthy of being heard (hooks, 1994).

Opportunities for advanced classes (advanced placement courses or honors programs) hinder students who are not proficient in English (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019) while not reflecting the child's intelligence. Because “language, motivation, culture, cognition, and environment are crucial to ensuring educational access” (Arreguín-Anderson & Kennedy, 2013, p. 13), for many Latino parents, language was an insurmountable barrier to participation in their children’s academic tasks (Zarate, 2007). In the following section, I introduce a racialized overview of human-Nature relationships.

Ecological whiteness

A study by Grincheva (2013) compared white (Austrian) scientific epistemic traditions and approaches in comparison to Western Apache wisdom. Both are convinced natural places are never culturally vacant. However, in Apache indigenous epistemology, “knowledge or wisdom is generated inside the communities through individual’ experiences in relation to particular geographic localities which legitimize the past and serve as the main historical evidence for the truthfulness of the stories happened in these places” (Grincheva, 2013, p. 156). Landscapes transform knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another and reflect how people and Nature are intrinsically linked. There is a vast opportunity to examine these issues within a U.S. context due to similar waves of European colonial epistemologies that contradict indigenous reciprocity in the Americas.

Initially, I was eager to have found the term “ecological identity,” a term in academia that I believed could have the potential to center indigenous ideology in Nature relations. Ecological identity is defined by Thomashow (1995) as the “[extension of] our sense of self in relationship to nature” (p. 3). However, I continued to read about its response to adaptable and equitable environmentalism. A section titled “Roots: Thoreau, Muir, and Carson as Environmental

Archetypes" glorifies these white (and not surprisingly affluent) names as the archetypes and role models for American environmentalism and ecological identity, even stating their essays and books as "holy texts" (p. 30). The whiteness of this scholarship is worth further investigation. Unfortunately, this is where many environmental authors mark conservation pioneers without mention of Traditional Ecological Knowledge or Indigenous Wisdom, a practice *thousands* of years old in the Americas. The field has historically denied indigenous perspectives and, at times, appropriated culture or ideologies origination from indigenous people without crediting these communities for their Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Gauthier et al., 2021; Roberts, 2012; Sherri, 2020).

A study by Gauthier et al. (2021) sought to explore whiteness, racialization, and Indigenous erasure in Outdoor Experiential Education within higher education. Three main findings included 1) imagined students of the program are wealthy and white, 2) students both assimilate to and resist codes of whiteness, 3) curricular documents and practices promote Eurocentricity and erase Indigeneity (Gauthier et al., 2021). It is without question the outdoor and experiential education field is overwhelmingly white and affluent (Gress & Hall, 2017), and consequently, a need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and training (Schneider & Kivel, 2016). The absence of Indigeneity in the content and pedagogy of outdoor and environmental education "continually perpetuates anti-Indigenous harm and ignores settler-colonial responsibilities for reconciliation and anti-oppression" (Gauthier et al., 2021, p. 421).

While education systems undeniably played a role in upholding white supremacy and anti-immigrate hate (i.e., boarding schools and segregation), education also has the transformative power to create "ethnic solidarity" and a "homeplace" (Love, 2009) for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) youth. I believe it is not just an instrument for academic

success and economic opportunities but a place to learn how "beautiful their culture is and how their culture is an aspect of their lives that shows them they matter" (Love, 2019, p. 105). The next portion shifts away from white voices to make space for Indigenous Latine leaders of the Americas, the ancestral half of many Latinos (Arteaga, 2009).

Indigenous Ecological Leaders

Centering indigenous voices in experiential and outdoor education can aid all educators in understanding the complexity of language and culture apart from a white homogeny and restore means for inclusive practice (hooks, 1994). It is considering the deep cultural wounds of the past (hooks, 1994) and the restless maneuvering of difficult life circumstances that we can approach a "space of liberation" for the oppressed (Freire, 2000) or the "othered." We must hear from people affected the most by environmental racism: Black and Brown communities (Hockman & Morris, 1998) but not simply *because* of environmental racism.

There is an entire world of powerful words and messages unmatched by Indigenous writers, scholars, and artists. In the following section, I hold space to name indigenous authors, poets, activists, and artists of the Americas in regions once known as Aztlán (what is now Mexico and the Southwestern United States). Curation is made by the "Siwar Mayu Project" (2019), where people from different countries and backgrounds can dialogue through art, poetry, short stories, plays, testimony, oral history, and essays to diversify thought and perceptions of the natural world outside of a white narrative:

Marga B. Aguilar Montejo	Maya; Yucatan, Mexico
Ruperta Bautista Vasquez	Maya Tsotsil; Mexico
Joy Harjo	Mvskoke; Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA
Rosa Maqueda Vicente	Hñahñü; Valle del Mezquital, Mexico
Hubert Matiúwàa	Mè'phàà; Mountains of the State of Guerrero, Mexico
Nila Northsun	Shoshone-Anishinaabe descent; Nevada, USA

Judith Santopietro	Nahuatl, Mexico
Margo Tamez	Ndé Dene/Lipan Apache; Kónitsaaííg‌okíyaa/US-Mexico
Tanaya Winder	Duckwater Shoshone; USA

By limiting our reference pool to Thoreau and Muir, we are guaranteed to miss an immense richness of knowledge from Indigenous ecological leaders of the Americas.

Historical Understanding of Colonization and Nature

To address environmental justice for marginalized racial groups, educators must understand how society defines 'nature' (Schmidt, 2022) *and* the arrival of that definition. These definitions are carefully examined and weighed from marginalized perspectives, historical events, and social associations. In this section, I briefly overview the damaging effects of colonization on indigenous knowledge, followed by commonly interpreted human-Nature relationships within society today. I initiated conversations and informal interviews with scholars to address outdoor education and conservation issues. I came across an essential and overlooked conclusion: colonization had much more to do with how racial groups understand and interact with the natural world. This section reflects how colonial history (tagged with Latine generational trauma) created a ripple effect on our relationship with Nature.

During an informal interview with a professor of indigenous literature, Dr. Juan Sanchez shared with me a critical historical observation,

> [white settlers] always imagined Nature as anarchy, as primitive. It's almost like that became an argument to colonize people, so people that were close to Nature were less… so the value of humans based on their connection to Nature *is* colonization. (Dr. J. Sanchez-Martinez, personal communications, January 24, 2022)

People closest to Nature and in reciprocity with the land were seen as "uncivilized savages" in the brutality of colonization. Europeans burned their own "pagan witches" and willed to do the

same in the "new" world. 'Convert or kill' was imposed on millions of lives already thriving in Abya Yala and Turtle Island (collectively known as the Americas). The imperialism of urbanization shifted humans apart from Nature. Nature became a 'resource' to be conquered, which equaled power.

Sherri Mitchell (2020) of the Penawahpskek Nation reminds us that during the 14th and 15th centuries, "because Indigenous peoples didn't share European ideas about land ownership, we were considered as primitive. Because we had no desire to place the sources of our survival ("natural resources") into the stream of commerce, we were viewed as ignorant. And because we believed to lack the capacity to live "civilized" lives" (p. 17). For centuries, people assumed that the advancement of civilization was in opposition to Nature (Louv, 2013). Along with this, colonization brought about the devaluation of indigenous human life and knowledge. Colonization became a reason *and* the consequence of the division of human-Nature relationships.

The scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries further drove a wedge by promoting an anthropocentric mindset that created a disconnect between humans and Nature (Merchant, 2006). Centuries later, mass commercialization and extractivist developed alongside large metropolitan cities and further alienated views of Nature today. "By 1900, urban dwellers experienced a growing fondness for mountains, forests, and wilderness landscapes" (Harvey, 1996, p. 6). Ironically at this pivotal point, the privileged Americans often had the means of traveling to and advocating for such "pristine" landscapes. The romantic movement came with transcendentally sublime white writers (Harvey, 1996) setting up foundational organizations such as The National Park Service for and by white people.

A contrast in the mindset of human-Nature relationships within racial groups presents trends in perceptions today, but it all depends on who you are asking. For example, most Latinos mentioned that older generations do not typically support outdoor jobs for their kin. The way "up," societally, is continuously moving away from these experiences that resemble poverty or indigeneity. For many immigrant parents working outdoors in the U.S. (for example, in agriculture or construction), their paths are a means of survival, not a choice. Jobs taken up on the shoulders of immigrants are usually long hours, degrading their bodies, and with minimal pay or means for advancement. For their children, many work for them to have that choice.

First-generation children are generally encouraged to become doctors, lawyers, business owners, and anything to progress in financial stability and health; a chance at "The American Dream" in a high-pressure sink-or-swim situation. Through this research, I wanted to share the reality of outdoor work, its contrast on leisure, and the dilemma of generational survival. Or, as I have heard, '*we didn't come to this country for you to be sleeping on the floor*.'

Ironically, escapism and adventure in Nature are sold to the privileged. In the contrasting words of a white author reflecting on their outdoor use: "in the everyday working lives [of an affluent white society], much of what we pursue may seem meaningless and mundane, so we seek to re-engage with Nature … in order to do this we are increasingly turning to commercial adventure activity providers who can give us a packaged format" (Pike & Beams, 2013, pp. 14-15). We witness disproportional negative impacts for marginalized racial communities (Hockman, 1998), all while the elite are sold escapism and adventure packages in Nature (Roberts, 2018).

Latine Barriers to Green Spaces

Race as a social construct is essential because of the stratification implications (Floyd, 1998) and advancing our further understanding of how people intersect with outdoor space. Understanding Latine culture, values, and worldviews are significant factors in addressing outdoor access and improving Nature participation (Tandon et al., 2018). Tandon et al. (2018) reveals that most studies examining Latine barriers to access in Nature participation have tended to emphasize proximity (36%), while discrimination and acculturation are investigated least often (less than 20% of studies). Yet, over half of Black and Brown adolescents experienced fear of discrimination in 2015 (Herda, 2016).

According to Beyer et al. (2014), the availability and quality of neighborhood green spaces are associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and general well-being. People in the U.S. use a variety of green spaces to evoke positive emotions that contribute to lessened stress levels and a sense of relaxation (Peters et al., 2016). Cox et al. (2017) implores preventative health approaches that lead to better mental health even through low levels of critical components of neighborhood Nature. Outdoor and Nature-related preferences vary in active and passive activities within diverse demographics of Latinas/os (Gobster, 2002; Stodolska et al., 2010). Ramos (2020) states that people living in rural settings have more contact with Nature and are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors (PEB). Ramos (2020) specifically sought to understand children's pro-environmental behaviors in rural and urban areas to note differences in attitudes. Place of residence was directly and positively linked to their PEBs, and this relationship mediates children's connection to Nature (Duron-Ramos et al., 2020).

Poverty disproportionately impacts racial minority groups and their access to basic physical needs, food security, and a clean environment free of toxic waste (Hockman & Morris,

1998; Potochnick et al., 2019). A study documenting the location of a hazardous waste landfill found that 75% of the residents were poor, Latine, or Black (Hofrichter & Gelobter, 1993). These findings express that race matters "not just as an economic issue, but of public health and a civil rights issue as well" (Hockman & Morris, 1998).

The field of environmental justice calls attention to issues surrounding the lack of cultural relevance in outdoor education. How are educators responding when outdoor programs do not consider Latine culture, comfortability in the outdoors, or language? Or when Black and Brown youth continuously express, *'isn't the outdoors a white person thing?'* Arreguín-Anderson and Kennedy (2013) identified a strong positive correlation between the development of environmental literacy and the influence of Latine participants' cultural background within the program. This study by Arreguín and Kennedy was the only one I have found (so far) to use LatCrit in the outdoor/environmental education field. *Confianza* is central to working with and empowering Latine communities that historically suffer exploitation. *Confianza* is defined as trust in relationship building that reinforces mutuality and reciprocity (Valle, 1982, p.116). *Testimonios* are not to be at demand of field researchers but must take time to develop *confianza* and seen as a gift (Urrieta et al., 2015).

Furthermore, many researchers emphasize that park managers consider the Latino culture's family-centered values when planning programming (Christenson et al., 2006; Floyd, 1998; Gobster, 2002; Shaull & Gramann, 1998; Stodolska et al., 2010). Latine visitors tend to visit in large, multi-generation groups (Hutchison, 1987) and tend to be more socially motivated in the outdoors. Leisure patterns in Chicana/o youth point to feelings of closeness and family cohesion (Freeman et al., 2003), suggesting that bicultural youth are once again of solid family values (Christenson et al., 2006). Consequently, leisure activities in an environment where Latine

families can associate with members of their ethnic group are essential to provide a healing space for expressing subcultural identity (Shaull & Gramann, 1998).

Stodolska (2010) suggests programming that allows Latino parents to be physically active and bond with their families (i.e., soccer, dances, and mother-children walks). According to Hutchison (1987) and (Gobster, 2002), Latinos were more likely to engage in passive activities that involve multigenerational groups (i.e., picnics, fishing, and watching soccer games). They emphasized multisensory activities ("fresh air" and "lake effect"). Studies show that Latinos considered the presence of wildlife and water availability (lakes, streams, rivers) more critical than other groups (Gobster, 2002; Stodolska et al., 2010).

A critical study by Peters et al. (2016) sought to understand the role of natural environments in developing a sense of belonging. This comparative study examines immigrants in the U.S., Poland, the Netherlands, and Germany. Within Peter's (2016) study, I focused on the experiences of Latinas/os according to socio-economic status and urban or rural settings. The researchers concluded that for most participants, the natural environment helped shape, solidify, and build social relationships, family, and community bonds; all leading to a sense of belonging in their host countries (Peters et al., 2016). Moreover, perceptions of Nature within a variety of generational status of immigration has not been identified in the literature thus far (i.e., Nature perceptions of the first generation vs. the second generation). The following section follows the thread of a sense of belonging within the community of our Latine culture.

Sense of Belonging in Community: *La Cultura Cura*

Knowing how the natural environment enhances community identity and attachment (Hull, 1992) is vital once one understands the value of kin-based communities for many Chicanas/os (Keef, 1984) and vice-versa. Communities are a geographical location of close

social networking and interpersonal face-to-face interactions (Keefe, 1984). In the battle against racism, we must recognize this work is not simply intellectual, but as Love (2019) states, "the real work is personal, emotional, spiritual, and communal" (p. 51). There's a saying in Spanish that says *la cultura cura* (culture heals), and much evidence points to how Nature can be an effective means in the process. Families adapting to a new environment (including the social environment) and spending time in the natural world can develop a sense of welcome in their host country. At the same time, spending time in Nature can "spark comparison and often nostalgic feelings towards the environment of the home they left behind" (Peters et al., 2016).

Our communities house powerful stories and a dwelling place to amplify and defend the Latine culture. Sense of place and belonging is arguably one of the most critical factors in equitable understanding toward People of Color in the outdoors (van der Maarel, 2013). This is especially true when the anti-Latine sentiment is coined by the phrases, *"go back to where we came from"* or *"you don't belong here."* These racist phrases are the antithesis of belonging and are well known to our Latine community amid white rage.

These phrases are the toxic fruit from hundreds of years of systemic exploitation and blame. Lack of belonging hits the core behind hundreds of years of imposition and detriment to our communities since the country's conception. Human experiences with the land can evoke an emotional recognition of place. Particularly within generational immigration, experiences are created to develop into a sense of belonging or sense of exclusion. Even symbolic features of natural places can contribute to a sense of community, place identity, and ultimately self-identity (Hull, 1992). Communal healing is intergenerational through cultural wisdom and essential to continue fighting racism through love, compassion, and freedom-dreaming (Love, 2019). Love

(2019) states, "dark children cannot thrive without a community of love, refusal, protection, knowledge, and resource-sharing" (p. 53).

A meta-analysis of Latinos in Nature (in the last 30 years) revealed variables of visitation, barriers, adults, and urban locations (Tandon et al., 2018); However, minimal covers intersections of social, historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. These factors are all centered using LatCrit and within this thesis. Topics related to intergenerational sense of belonging for Latine youth and elders in relation to natural environments are yet to be explored. Therefore, considering the complexities of race, I aim to capture *testimonios* of Chicana/o families of Western North Carolina in relation to the natural world and its consequences on their ontological sense of belonging in their social communities.

The land we stand on is more than dirt below our feet. It tells stories of the past, affirms our belonging and a sense of purpose, and is a refuge for cultural healing. It is a vessel for our *gente* to thrive and share the joy with the incoming generations learning how to belong. I use a LatCrit theoretical framework to center social justice and to acknowledge racism is still prevalent in our communities. I write on the methodologies chosen in the following section.

LatCrit: Theoretical Lens

Many scholars and authors examine social justice issues through a critical race theory (CRT) lens (Arreguín-Anderson & Kennedy, 2013; hooks, 1994; Parker, 2019; Ramírez-Escobar, 2019; Yosso, 2006). CRT is an intersectional societal phenomenon that considers the positionality of individuals (i.e., socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion, (dis)ability, etc.) and the power dynamics that occur between them. Within this framework, there is an understanding that power dynamics affect how certain groups may be othered by the

dominant (Cairo, 2021). These relationships are dynamic and hardly stagnant. CRT works to expose factors involved in the marginalization of race (Pizarro, 1998).

As a subset of CRT, Latino/a/e Critical Theory (LatCrit) is a theoretical lens that critically analyzes how racism functions concerning immigration status, language, and the culture of Latinas/os (Love, 2019; Ramírez-Escobar, 2019; Yosso, 2006). LatCrit uses a distinct blend of intergenerational, international, and interdisciplinary factors to address injustices against Latinos. LatCrit challenges “the historical antecedents that gave violence against Indigenous Peoples and the present hierarchies that seek to either perpetuate or re-install policies of violence, dispossession, and injustice” (Harris, 2012, p. 2). This is the theoretical lens used for this thesis.

A distinct characteristic of LatCrit theory and praxis is the emphasis on community-building based on shared ethics, practices, and ambitions (Valdes, 2005). Scholarship and activism build the community, and reciprocally, the community builds scholarship and activism (Valdes, 2005). LatCrit calls attention to racism embedded in systems and institutions beyond individual racist acts (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019). LatCrit and CRT rely on coalitional praxis in that outgroups are unlikely to dismantle the hegemony of Euro-heteropatriarchy unless there are collective efforts to disrupt oppressive systems (Valdes, 2005). There is a joint call for active efforts from coconspirators (Love, 2019) behind the marginalized in the long-term fight against injustice.

As outlined by Valdes (2005), LatCrit help to generate a theoretical blueprint and praxis of four functions:

1. The production of knowledge
2. The advancement of social transformation

3. The expansion and connection of anti-subordination struggles; and
4. The cultivation of community and coalition, both within and beyond the confines of legal academia in the United States. (p. 158)

LatCrit is a pragmatic approach that aims to dismantle forms of injustice within many intersections by producing knowledge within the community through coalition and activism. Due to the relatively recent wave of examining environmental justice through a racial lens, limited academic studies use LatCrit within an ecological context (Arreguín-Anderson & Kennedy, 2013; Ontiveros, 2015). However, LatCrit is increasingly implemented for critical methodologies such as *testimonios*, which I write about in the next section.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY & METHODS

A white narrative heavily influences outdoor leisure in the U.S. with little insight from other racial groups (Gress & Hall, 2017). The purpose of this study is to explore how the natural world influences Chicana/o families' sense of belonging within their communities. I used *testimonios* (Silva et al., 2021) as a methodology coupled with a LatCrit theoretical framework (Solorzano et al., 2001) to collect counterstories of Chicana/o families. I was guided by the following research question: how does the natural world influence chicana/o sense of belonging in their communities?

After five intergenerational family interviews, including my own family, I curated excerpts that reflected core ideas of belonging, connection to the land, and experiences of injustice. These *testimonios* mirror messages of societal belonging or exclusion within the context of critical social issues for Latine people. To derail the deficit model, each *testimonios* ends with *consejos:* advise and cultural wealth for future generations. I conclude the results with reflexive poems comprised of the *testimonios* shared using *antropoesía*. Below I will detail my methodology, methods, participants, and analysis method using cultural intuition (Delgado, 1998).

***Testimonios* as a Method and Methodology**

Testimonios are segments of life stories told by witnesses willing to raise awareness of experiences of oppression and attest to a social and/or political injustice; giving witness to social injustices (Huber, 2010; Marshall et al., 2022). Testimonios strongly connect to "history, culture, social, and political lived experiences" (Silva et al., 2021, p. 5) and are supported by LatCrit. Originating from indigenous practices and oral traditions of Central and South America (Yúdice, 1991), *testimonios* as a methodology can be used as a decolonial praxis (Silva et al., 2021). This

decolonial praxis shifts the focus away from meta-narratives told by positionalities of power (white narratives).

Within Traditional Indigenous Knowledge, there is a celebration of "the pluralism in 'truths' because it is dependent upon individual experiences and relationships with living and non-living beings and entities" (Grincheva, 2013, p. 159). *Testimonios* are a means to create space for stories not typically rendered, even silenced. In this case, within an environmental and immigration context, this methodology is driven by the telling of powerful life experiences of the natural world and racial injustices in white-dominated communities. *Testimonios* follow injustices voiced by participants rather than imposed by the researcher to exercise reciprocity.

Functioning as pragmatic methodology, *testimonios* evolved in Latin America during the civil revolution to expose exploitation and oppressive conditions (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Yúdice, 1991). *Testimonios* were popularized in the U.S. by Latinas/Chicanas in academia (Pérez Huber, 2010) and increasingly used within a LatCrit theoretical framework. Within a LatCrit framework, as Perez Huber (2010) outlines, *testimonios* function to:

1) validate and honor the knowledge and lived experiences of oppressed groups by becoming a part of the research process;
2) challenge dominant ideologies that shape traditional forms of epistemology and methodology;
3) operate within a collective memory that transcends a single experience to that of multiple communities;
4) move towards racial justice by offering a space within the academy for the stories of People of Color to be heard. (p. 69)

Understanding race as a social construct is essential to counteract racial superiority and dominance (i.e., white supremacy) and validate POC's experiences in a racialized society (Floyd, 1998; Ramírez-Escobar, 2019). No singular story will tell of everyone's experience within a community lest we erase the complexity of individuality and the fluidity of experiences within a

racial group; however, many stories can testify to acts of resistance and agents towards equitable action within unjust systems. I ask readers to refrain from generalization as they read participant testimonios. I did not ask my participants to speak for their entire racial demographic but rather as an "act of identity-formation which is simultaneously personal and collective" (Yúdice, 1991, p. 15).

Huber (2010) defines *testimonios* as "a way to create knowledge and theory through personal experiences, highlighting the significance of the process of *testimonio* theorizing our own realities as [People] of Color" (p. 66). This methodology (and method) creates an opportunity to develop collective consciousness toward experiences of injustice and oppression. *Testimonios* can be counterstories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006) used to amplify lived experiences of marginalized groups in contrast to a dominant group. The goal of *testimonios* is to move knowledge towards social justice interventions that aid in compelling political action and change (Huber, 2010). Additionally, Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) encourages *testimonios* to "help transcend pain toward a space for healing and societal transformation" (p. 368). Many of these interviews involved heavy narrations about painful or traumatic racial experiences. Concluding the interviews, many participants expressed gratitude for the space to share a portion of their life experiences.

According to Huber (2010), there are five measures of how *testimonios* overlap with elements of a LatCrit framework:

1) Revealing injustices caused by oppression

2) Challenging dominant Eurocentric ideologies

3) Validating experiential knowledge

4) Acknowledging the power of human collectivity

5) Commitment to racial and social justice. (p. 69)

These factors play instrumental roles in efforts towards anti-racist work. Through *testimonios*, we can draw upon the cultural wealth and knowledge of the multiple voices of our communities and uplift encounters of struggle, survival, and resistance (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ramírez-Escobar, 2019). In the following section, I share the specific community centers I worked with for this thesis.

Participants: Latine Community Centers in Western North Carolina

For the scope of this thesis, I recruited five families from two local Latine organizations I have ongoing partnerships along with my own family (outside of these centers). Each family contained two to three members (grandparent, parent, or child). I interviewed a mixture of Mexican immigrants and first-generation Chicanas/os in each household. Below is a table introducing the five families, their names, ages (respectively), and the center they are members of.

Figure 2. *The Families Interviewed.*

FAMILY	MEMBERS	AGES	CENTER
1 (FOREST)	Paola, Lorena	19, 50	Todos Unidos
2 (RIVER)	Carlos, Maria, Joseph, Julissa	22, 42, 9, 18	Todos Unidos
3 (LAND)	Daniela, Alex, Dulce	16, 11, 37	Nuestros Niños
4 (DESERT)	Cesar, Lupita, Jeffery, Jonathan	41, 41, 16, 13	Todos Unidos
5 (SPIRITUALITY)	Ana, Idalia, Joanna	90, 57, 27	My family

To reduce the researcher/participant binary (unproductive in racial justice work), I chose to research in my own settings and community (Marshall et al., 2022). I obtained willing participants from circles I became familiar with throughout the last year (participants of *Nuestros Niños* and from *Todos Unidos*). In both locations, I am a well know attendee, mentor, or instructor that built trust and reciprocity over the past year. Below I have outlined the organizations and my involvement with each. I have chosen to use pseudonyms for the organizations to protect participant identities.

Todos Unidos is a non-profit community organization initiated and led by Latinas/os in Western Carolina. They serve all ages by organizing the distribution of food, clothes, furniture, toys, and home utilizes for anyone in need. They host community events and support groups that include gardening, mental health, physical health programs, youth programming, legal services, and foreign affairs aid. I organized and led a creek program, lake hike, picnic, and bonfire with the families of *Todos Unidos*.

Nuestros Niños is a non-profit organization initiated and led by immigrant mothers who needed to see a space for their children where they could grow in community, culture, and their home language. Most participants and instructors are family members, neighbors, or schoolmates from the local elementary and middle school. Additionally, most participants and their families identify as low-income and hold first-generation/immigrant status. Today, they serve more than 75 elementary, middle, and high school Spanish-speaking students of Central and South American descent.

I began working with the youth of *Nuestros Niños* about a year ago. I volunteered in their afterschool program as part of community engagement as an environmental educator and

currently initiated/lead a new Latine in Music program. Moving from South Texas to North Carolina, I found myself in an overwhelmingly white profession and area. I knew I needed to be involved in Latine spaces and not just talk about it.

In a listening session for potential projects for community engagement, the leaders of *Nuestros Niños* expressed to me their desire to introduce music into their program (they currently run art and traditional dance). Music plays a significant role in my life as a self-taught musician and songwriter. After months of planning and coordinating, I initiated a new pilot music program as an extension of communal labor for and by the community. If goals are social change, a scholar's work is not just intellectual but for application. Similarly we empower youth to collect their family *testimonios* that are relevant to their lives, mirroring the process of this study. In conjunction with LatCrit's commitment to praxis to maximize social relevance (Valdes, 2005), the goals for my music afterschool program are outlined below:

1. *Identity and Cultural Healing:*
    a. *Increasing participant sense of belonging, sense of place, and cultural identity. Creating poetry and lyrics based on personal family history and resistance to colonialism as a means of a liberatory practice of healing.*
2. *Connect to Nature:*
    a. *Increase Latine youth's connection to Nature by means that are responsive to their interests, culture, and needs while increasing opportunities for green spaces.*
3. *Learn the music:*
    a. *Learn different traditional music styles and instrumentation of participants' families' regions of origin (I.e., Central America, South America, Indigenous). This includes inviting local Latine musicians for guest presentations, making traditional instrumentation from naturally sourced materials, and learning techniques/skills necessary to play instruments of choice.*

For my last interview, I interviewed my own mother and grandmother. I traveled to Mexico (the first time in about 10 years) to see my grandmother. If I was a bringing in my holistic positionality to the forefront, studying generational wealth and involving my connection

to Nature in this project as well, what better way to be let readers into my own life and family? Although vulnerability is intimidating, I did not expect how revolutionary it was to involve myself in the same conversations as my participants with my own family. In holding space for my family, it shattered the color-blind hovering researcher mentality and revolutionized a personal experience in generational wealth through my family's heritage.

Data Collection

I conducted five family interviews (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019) to gather *testiomnios*. I chose a group interview because collective experiences can be used to create knowledge and theory of lived experiences between generations (Delgado, 1989). Creating space for these conversations were part of the praxis (Cairo, 2021). I interviewed participants in locations that embrace the everydayness of their lives (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019), such as their homes or community centers. For *Todos Unidos*, the organization's leaders offered assistance to help me locate families that might be of interest to this project. For *Nuestros Niños*, I spoke to families directly at program meetings to gauge interest.

I submitted IRB approval to interview participants through verbal/implied consent and assent (given if they are under 18). I requested a waiver of written consent/assent to further protect my participants' identities and ensure it does not defer recruits. All participants were given the option to use pseudonyms of their choosing. Before the interviews proceeded, families were read the verbal consent/assent for verbal approval. No monetary incentives were used for participating or consequences for not participating in the study. Interviewees were at will to opt out during the interview or may choose not to disclose information at any point in the study.

Given participant verbal/implied consent, interviews lasted approximately one to two hours, dependent on the number of family members present. All interviews occurred in person

except for one video call. I asked open-ended questions in their preferred language or a mixture of English and Spanish (Anzaldúa, 1987; Casielles-Suárez, 2017). *Testimonio* questions included:

1. Share a story about how you experience(d) the natural world.
2. Can you tell me what Nature is to you?
3. How has, if any, racism/assimilation appeared in your life? In your family's life?
4. How has, if any, Nature had an impact on how you feel like you belong to an area? *(What does belonging mean to you?)*
5. What is advice (*consejo*) that you would like to carry to the next generation of Chicanas and Chicanos?

I transcribed all interviews verbatim and then translated portions to English for presentation in this thesis. Once completing analysis (as outlined in the following section), I followed up with all the families to share the final representations, excerpts, and quotes. During the follow-up, I thanked the families for sharing their *testimonios,* confirmed the accuracy of the presentation, and allowing change in the final product for their representation. To challenge dominant Eurocentric ideologies and validating knowledge of my own racialized experience, I leaned into cultural intuition (Delgado, 1998). I elaborate on this process as a researcher and Woman of Color in the following section.

Cultural Intuition

When considering this topic on Chicana/o environmental justice, I asked my professor, "-but won't people discredit everything because they think I'm biased?" She responded, "Oh, it's totally biased. But that's the point." I paused to understand how bringing my knowledge on my

own culture to the research is not a weakness but a strength. However, in developing this thesis, I still carried an internal conflict created by dual identities. Similar to Anzaldua's (1987) writing on borders, I found myself in a new borderland amidst a white culture in education where I am demanded to choose a side: researcher (free of bias) or Chicana (along with my participants). Anzaldua (1987) describes two identities competing for existence until they cancel out unless there is synergy of both. This is where the revolution happened for Chicanas/os; why some defiantly speak Spanglish, why I identify as "Chicana" instead of "Mexican-American," and why I can bring cultural intuition as a Chicana researching within and for my community.

Schmidt's (2022) words encouraged me, "there are things you can understand that an outsider looking in, or a researcher claiming to be 'free of bias,' cannot. You can *create dialogue*, while others can only hope to observe and label well" (Alayna Schmidt, personal communications, October 11, 2022). Regardless of whether one belongs to the identity in study, humans carry various degrees of experiences that are going to be reflected in the analysis and conclusions. Especially when working with marginalized perspectives, it is imperative to acknowledge the identities of the researcher and positionality upfront. Therefore, researcher reflexivity is essential in this work.

In fact, attempting to "clear the slate" as a good ethnographer further permits Eurocentricity in assumption that one is a white researcher hovering over a "foreign" ethnicity. Should only white people study Latinos in fear of Latino bias? Has color-blind hovering guaranteed "accuracy" in the past or perpetuated white supremacy? I strongly argue the latter. In my case, I am both researcher *and* Latina. I acknowledge the intersectionality of power in higher education and other privileges, however, that does not make me less of a Chicana or a researcher, and the belief that it does is a misshaped racist ideology.

Our education systems (especially in the sciences) purposefully labels our cultural intuition as People of Color invalid, yet white culture is hardly ever in question. As People of Color, we know our own stories *and* the white story (Cairo, 2021). Cultural intuition (Delgado, 1998) extends "theoretical sensitivity" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) by the involvement of one's personal experience to include collective experiences and community memory. It is a complex process that is "experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective and dynamic" (Delgado, 1989, p. 568; Pérez Huber, 2010). According to Huber (2010), cultural intuition propels these deeply personal societal concerns and understandings unique to an "insider" in a community. In trusting (and healing) cultural intuition, Chicana scholars can "move beyond traditional areas of research situated in existing paradigms that overlook the particular experiences of Chicanas and Chicanos" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 574).

Data Analysis Through Cultural Intuition

After the interview transcription, I re-read and reflected on the stories. I noted my reflections on the interviews and highlighted the similarities and contrasts between interviews. I kept in mind questions outlined for Chicana/o epistemology and methodology (Pizarro, 1998): "who are the parties involved in/affected by the context we will be exploring? Who is experiencing "difficulties" or "problems," who is being exploited/victimized/oppressed, who is seeking change out of sheer necessity, whose knowledge is being ignored and drowned out by hegemonic ideology and epistemology?" (p. 66). These questions exposed factors of marginalization in a white society (Pizarro, 1998). However, equally as necessary, I created space for the rich values and *consejos* gifted to derail the deficient model—Porque *la cultura cura* (because culture heals) and built on generational cultural wealth.

Contrary to "traditional" data analysis (coding or theming), I did not inhibit emotional responses or compartmentalized cultural intuition, nor did I attempt to flatten or shrink the stories into boxed "themes" or "categories." Instead, I reflected on events that evoked emotions to racial socialization, politics, socioeconomic status, and historical factors within the *testimonios*. Not inhibiting emotional responses is an anti-linear strategy consistent with Chicana feminism and ecofeminism (Holmes, 2016). Many excerpts in the results are intended to create points of dialogue from the literature and for readers (more on this in the section titled "Dear Reader, Each Testimonio is a Gift").

During the data analysis process, I used Cultural Intuition (Delgado, 1998) to pull one *testimonios* per family that reflected 1) everyday life for Latinos, 2) a significant life event 3) a sense of urgency of the teller or 4) painted a vibrant picture of their belonging through Nature. I curated excerpts of the interviews with careful language translation, meaning-making, and context. Extracted were events that oriented context from history, people, and place within an ontological sense of belonging. This process held careful attention to identities, intersectionality, and level of engagement among multiple members.

Repeated concepts in each family interview were those of our roots, work (and lack of leisure), and the land. Other concepts of gender experiences, language, political tensions of immigration, and intraracial competition emerged. These patterns were largely present between interviews and often appear interwoven in the *testimonios*. Honoring Indigenous epistemology, I curated the excerpts of the first four families on natural landscapes they mentioned in their *testimonios*: the forest, river, land, and desert. These *testimonios* respond to physical landscapes and the experiences created in those places.

The fifth *testimonio* traversed into a concept of life, death, and cyclical dependence on the natural world (as seen in figure 3). Contrary to white-dominated narratives of Nature, indigenous and Chicana epistemology repeatedly teaches how spirituality is inseparable from the physical landscapes we walk (Holmes, 2016). Holmes (2016) explore ideologies of Chicana scholars, artists, and activists working in ecological borderlands, "a concept that expands body/landscape relations" to "body/landscape/spirit relations" (p. 19). I purposefully curated this concept alongside "landscapes" to honor this ontology.

Figure 3. *Major Repeated Concepts and Curation Based on Landscapes.*

CONCEPTS	**CURATION OF LANDSCAPES**
Roots Work / lack of leisure Land Gender Language Political tensions of immigration Intraracial competition	Forest River Land Desert Spirituality

After each *testimonio*, I write my gratitude for what I learned from their stories. Once again, this research was led by the interweaving of epistemology that I am *both* an individual and a collective being of this community. In moments such as the final poems and researcher reflexivity, I purposefully did not "get myself out of the way" (hence, the involvement of my own family as participants), nor did I inhibit emotions. This was heavy emotional labor many do not see behind the thesis. This praxis demands real relationships to the ability that we can offer.

Through dialogue (the interview) and in continuous relationship building (outside of the interviews in community programing) we catalyze cultural healing. Because I am a part of the community I am interviewing, I took the liberty to create alongside my participants with their

permission. In the next section, I explain what data representation using *antropoesía* (the poems) entails as a conclusion.

Data Representation through *Antropoesía*

After synthesizing the testimonios for the manuscript, I sat down to create poems representing each *testimonio* as a collective performance. It is without question that the arts (Holmes, 2016; Love, 2019) are powerful tools used in activism to influence social movements for marginalized communities. For example, relicts of Mechica/Nahua identity and stories survived through art carved on temples and oral traditions.

Today, due to substantial indigenous erasure and hybridization in the Americas, Chicana feminists (including Anzaldúa's work found in the introduction), beautifully rework elements of hybridized Aztec and Toltec culture. It is in these resistance art forms we revitalize the lost identity of our ancestry within their kin. This performative work by Chicanas/os functions to "draw the audience to see beyond the immediate, material world and to vision it as it *could* be in ways that put spirituality and spiritual healing at the center of one's life and struggles against oppression" (Holmes, 2016, p. 19). This creation process was equally as healing for me to reconcile myself into their words.

These ethnographic poems are known as *antropoesía*. Ethnographers use *antropoesía* as an anthropological product stemming from the inspiration of Latine communities (Chaparro, 2020; Rodríguez Gutiérrez, 2019). The poems created in this research are not intended to replace the *testimonios*, rather create space on these pages for the intensity of the words spoken within them. These poems retain the participant's direct language and extraction of the cultural context spoken, hence, "evocative content for arts-based interpretations of the data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 94).

Chaparro (2020) uses *antropoesía* as a humanizing analysis to carry immigrant words in their experiences within the education system in their testimonios. She sought to give their words "the necessary space, both literal and metaphorical, for readers to take in the immensity, and intensity, of these human encounters and experiences" (p. 621). In addition, with poetry as a representation method of the data, I can share these findings with the community and not simply for an academic circle. Chicano poet Arteaga (2009) states, "[poems] manifest poet's task and yokes together the personal and the public of the craft, there where the voice of one touches others and multiplies" (p. 5). These poems aids in the versatility to share outside academia and for representation of a personal reflection (as a researcher) on a collective experience.

As mentioned, racial experiences are personal yet collective (Yúdice, 1991). This ideology is essential to not further push white supremacy within ethnographic research. Research comes with power, and I acknowledge the weight of responsibility in carrying forward what families share with me with *confianza* (trust), even in being Latina myself. I do not claim to know exactly what it means to live in the shoes of my participants. Yet, simultaneously at times, participants shared experiences so deeply personal to my own, I felt relief to not feel isolation.

I request readers of the final products not to judge the poems based on "scientific validity" but through what Parry & Johnson (2007) called Creative Analytic Practice or CAP. The goal of CAP is to "reflect experiences in ways that represent their personal and social meanings rather than simplifying and reducing to generalize" (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 120). CAP allows readers to judge these poems based on five criteria of evaluation (Parry & Johnson, 2007):

1. Does the text contribute to a deeper understanding of social life, including being grounded or embedded in a human perspective? The human perspective must then inform the ways in which the text itself is constructed.

2. Is the text complex, interesting, and engaging? Is it aesthetically pleasing?
3. Was the text clear in how the author's reflexivity played a role in the creation of the text?
4. Does the text affect the reader on an emotional and intellectual level? Does it motivate or create new questions for the reader towards social action or change?
5. Does the text provided an expression of a (social) reality and convey an embodied sense of lived experience? Is it "believable and convey a credible account of cultural, social, individual or communal sense of "real"? (Richardson, 2000, p. 125-126)

Using CAP, I presented my results and discussion to challenge viewers not to normalize white experiences within or towards the natural world. This first comes with an awareness of how much white culture has dominated the framing of the natural world. These decolonial methods demand researcher reflexivity and invite cultural intuition (Holmes, 2016). These methods capture an embodied sense of a collective lived experience on a sense of belonging through individual *testimonios* from families and will "freedom dreaming" (Love, 2019).

All the parents of the interviews grew up in the *ranchos* (rural parts of Mexico) except Idalia (my mother), who grew up in a large city in Mexico. The first two families spoke vividly about their experiences crossing the U.S.-Mexico border roughly twenty years ago. The river and the desert are politically charged environments in the south. These family members give these environments a unique perspective on their need for change as refugees from poverty or violence in Mexico and a right as human beings to be heard and valued in society.

However, not all immigrant families traverse these paths. The following two families focused their interviews on Nature as a state of belonging and the experiences of immigration (racism and assimilation) on U.S. soil. These families expressed their state of belonging and roots in the forest and on the land. I end with the *testimonio* of my 90-year-old grandmother, who resides in Mexico. My grandmother explains brings in an element of spirituality; she does this through storytelling of her childhood memories in Nature.

In lieu of traditional analysis, I placed footnotes connecting to the body of literature as I reflected on their experiences. These notes allow the reader to subversively be in these stories and form their own connections while I simultaneously note literature connections. At the end of each set of family *testimonios*, I express my gratitude for their permission to share stories and what they individually taught me. Each *testimonio* housed rich and complex experiences well beyond what I could capture on paper, but I hope I have done justice in words.

Dear Reader, Each *Testimonio* Is a Gift.

I am intentionally doing the work of decolonizing the academy with the way I chose to present my “data” and how I ask you [the reader] to engage with it. I approached each *testimonio* as a gift (Urrieta et al., 2015) and I ask you to do the same. Take time to consider the depth of these experiences, the uncovered trauma that arose, and the vulnerability it took to sit in this space to begin with. Our first mistake as readers would be to overlook this emotional sacrifice and to analyze it for academic “validity” (at worst) or as a transaction to seek a prescription for action (at best). Although well intentioned, this could overlook the work we are trying to accomplish and the voices we are trying to uplift.

Many equity and diversity trainings in the leisure and outdoor field will advise practitioners/scholars to listen to People of Color’s stories. These are some of those stories. The stories presented here stand alone in this thesis, to teach us all to listen first. I invite you (the reader) to sit with these voices, as they invite you in. As you read, engage with the voices.

- How does your culture influence the ways in which you see or interact with Nature?
- How is it different from other racial groups? How is it similar?
- Do you know other racial group’s perspectives? Why is this?

As you read these *testimonios*, I suggest a few prompts to consider. Think about…

- How Maria describes being in Nature in the context of her pain.
- Think how Dulce and Daniela describe "space" in Nature versus "spaces" in society.
- Cesar's relationship with working in agriculture/outdoors as a farmer and landscaper.
- Dulce's critical consciousness of her identity and its influence on how she sees the Land.
- The way Abuelita Ana uses childhood memories to relate earthenware, and the earth to herself.
- Abuelita Ana's languages choices to personify Nature.

You will find the end of these pages do not house a traditional conclusion. This is intentional in lieu of the theoretical lens mentioned above and for the humanization of these stories. Instead, I end with a collection of poems that aid in the reconciliation of shared experiences and new insights. A co-creation inspired by and blessed by my participants/community. These poems reflect a mixture of direct quotes, paraphrased lines, and even a poem written by a participant in totality. I chose to be antilinear in these poems because they reflect how we gather and share information every day that inspires and orchestrates us.

In a healthy community, we listen, find courage to speak up, cry, laugh, hold silence, inspire, connect, disagree, and create. It is my hope to conduct research in ways we naturally connect, with dignity and respect. Our Latine diversity is both immensely variant and unifying; to give power to the individual *and* collective. Not only is this project to honor the space of the unheard stories *and* the crippling normalized injustices of the Latine community, but it is also a space to celebrate Latine strength and innate beauty. I continue to stand as a Chicana friend,

sister, daughter, community member, artist, student, and teacher believing our medicine is within our community. I end this section to relay part of a poetic conclusion by (Brown et al., 2020) as Woman of Colors' writings on racial equity in academia,

> Tomorrow, we teach each other to listen even clearer to stories of exclusion just to listen just to build again and again a practice of bringing in the person most outside. Tomorrow, we learn to listen humbly and bravely as our own teachers modeled. Tomorrow, we read to open ourselves to transformation and action. We want tomorrow today. (p. 268)

Decolonizing my Relationship with Nature

Over the last two years, I developed this thesis to fill a need, embarked on critical internal reflections, explored the current research/authors (along with their identities), and connected with local families. Each day adding, shifting, and creating new paths of learning and knowing. I celebrate my courage to step into a holistic way of learning and teaching. My epistemology continues to evolve in how I embody praxis.

One form of praxis is the work to bring forward *testimonios* themselves. These *testimonios* work against racism in their acts as counter-stories against the dominant eurocentric views of Nature. The stories shared here move to decolonize Nature for Latinos/as/e. Please note that not all respondents had a "indigenous response", nor were representatives of an indigenous worldview recruited in the build of this research. However, during this process this question surfaced for me, "how do Latine retain their indigeneity in view of or relation to Nature?" It is a challenging question because of *mestizaje's* spectrum in Latine. I recommend future researchers, to take time to talk about specific racial identities of participants if there is the privilege to this knowledge.

I do not claim I have acquired a full decolonial lens to view Nature (and wonder if I ever will), but I am in this humbling process. Progressing to decolonize my relationship with Nature, the sciences, and educational programing is not an on/off switch. Decolonization is a process done by consistently holding space (Cairo, 2021) for the voices of People of Color, particularly those of indigenous affinity around the world.

I noted a change in how I now share the reverence of Nature as a living being (hence capitalization), as healer (thank you Maria) and as the greatest mother (thank you Dulce). Nature feeds us and grounds us in the reminders of the world around us (thank you Cesar). I think critically about when we are mindlessly, regardless of intention, recreating on the land that holds us, our ancestors, and the non-human life. I create dialogue around colonization's effect on using Nature as a "resource" and the domination of this mindset in our leisure/outdoor field. I challenge the dangerous mindset of consumption without reciprocity. This can be in large scale society but also in our immediate everyday life. Even when we can/do immense harm as a human race, we are not enemies to Nature. We belong as an extension of her body.

It is a beautiful thing to be human and be enjoyed by Nature herself; a welcoming and embrace (thank you Abuelita Ana). Nature can create space to grow, let go, play, and share our essence of belonging in being merely human (thank you Daniella). Nature is a space where we can connect on a deeper level to our families, our ancestors, and heal from the disconnect or the exclusion (thank you Paola). Even as our ancestors and their descendants embody movement, as our ancient right as a people, the landscapes we inhabit shares wisdom and familiarity (thank you Lorena).

Nature does after all teach us how everything is connected. Perhaps in the result of this healing from Nature we can heal in the re-evaluation of life of each other today. If we sit long

enough and listen intently to the heartbeat of the forest, the sea, the desert, and the land, even within our human built cities, we will find belonging connecting everything we know and chose to love.

Manuscript Thesis Option

Per the Western Carolina University Experiential and Outdoor Education Handbook, I have chosen to complete the manuscript thesis format option. This option requires Chapters One, Two, and Three plus a full-length journal manuscript formatted to the requirements of a specific journal. The following chapter contains my complete manuscript, which I have chosen to submit to the Journal of International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure. This journal requires authors to submit a manuscript of up to 12,000 words and written in APA format. Please note that the journal requests images are placed within the document where referenced.

"PARECE QUE ESTÁN DÁNDOTE UNA BIENVENIDA": *TESTIMONIOS* OF CHICANA/O FAMILIES SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH NATURE

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"PARECE QUE ESTÁN DÁNDOTE UNA BIENVENIDA": *TESTIMONIOS* OF CHICANA/O SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH NATURE

Environmentalism and social structures are deeply intertwined; therefore, addressing racial disparities for communities of Color is crucial for attaining justice for our natural world *and* the people within (Ybarra, 2016). The purpose of this study is to explore how the natural world influences Chicana/o families' sense of belonging within their communities. In order to collect Chicana/o counterstories from dominating white narratives of Nature, I used *testimonios* (Silva et al., 2021) as a methodology coupled with a LatCrit (Solorzano et al., 2001) theoretical framework. After intergenerational family interviews, including my own family, I curated excerpts that reflected core ideas of belonging, connection to the land, and experiences of injustice. These *testimonios* mirror messages of societal belonging or exclusion within the context of critical social issues for Latine people. The *testimonios* end with *consejos:* words of wisdom for future generations. I conclude the results with reflexive poems comprised of the *testimonios* shared using *antropoesía*. This study aims to deconstruct racialized hetero-normative narratives of the outdoors and "hold space" (Cairo, 2021) for Latine stories and perspectives.

Introduction

El aire libre, me liberó
The Free Air, Freed Me
By: Joanna Orozco

I began expecting the worst when I overheard white lips say, "*Mexican…*"
My brown ears pierced with rattling bones we try to bury.
They screamed at my people, at me.
"You don't belong here, go back to where you came from!"

The same question that was intended to keep our heads low,
and our hearts lower.
Where am I from?

Soy de la Madrecita Tierra.
Mexica.
Mexicana.
Chicana.
Fronteriza.[2]

I come from the voices of buried Nahuatl by the Spanish.
I come from the voices of buried Spanish by the English.
Americana but
No, this land was not ***made*** for you and me.

El aire libre, me liberó
El agua me recuerda que todo pasa
La tierra me dice que pertenezco
El fuego incendió una lucha
El lugar donde me enseñó como
todo esta conectado

The free air, freed me
The water reminds me that everything passes
The land told me I belonged
The fire lit a fight
The place that taught me how
everything is connected

[2] A woman from the border.

I am a first-generation Chicana, native to what we now call Texas. In *The Free Air, Freed Me,* I share my story through a poem of how Nature interwoven with my Latine culture, has influenced my own sense of belonging to my community. I ask my readers to ponder these questions: 1) What role does your culture play in the ways you experience Nature? 2) How do stories about Nature impact your answer? 3) Whose stories are these and whose cultures are represented in them?

Stories hold power. Adichie shares, "Stories matter. *Many* stories matter. Stories can dispossess and malign, but stories can also empower and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity" (Adichie, 2009, 17:29). For Black, Chicana/o, and Native communities, storytelling holds rich importance to continue traditions and relay messages of resistance (Solorzano, D. & Delgado Bernal, D., 2001). For marginalized racial groups, stories are essential for survival and liberation (Delgado, 1989). However, in the leisure literature, we are often funneled into a "single story" about human/Nature relationships or these racialized groups. Adichie (2009) similarly warns people of the danger of a "single story" because stories can create culture.

Within the field of leisure (McDonald, 2009) and sciences (Walls, 2016), the majority of studies on human/Nature relationships center narratives shaped by white participants and white researchers (Pinckney, 2019). Latine and Black voices are only represented in a handful of leisure studies (Fernandez et al., 2023; Flores & Kuhn, 2018; Pinckney et al., 2019). Pinckney (2019) stresses, leisure has yet to dialogue *contextual* "race scholarship" as much as it is studying factors of participation, preferences, and constraints under a racial variable.

In examining context, we know that natural elements, landscapes, and interconnectivity within Nature strongly influence human culture, especially indigenous Latine culture (Holmes,

2016). Mūnoz & Encina (2017) explain, "the kind of culture that relates to the natural world by seeing vital energy flow through all its being is a 'bioculture'" (p. 187). Bioculture emphasizes the development of culture around the natural world. For Chicana/o populations, factors like immigration, racial interactions, and language play critical roles in relations with the land. Since environmentalism and social structures are deeply intertwined, addressing racial disparities for communities of Color is crucial for attaining justice for our natural world *and* the people within.

Sense of Belonging in Community: *La cultura cura*

Sense of place and belonging (van der Maarel, 2013) is arguably one of the most prominent factors in working toward equity for People of Color in the U.S. Especially for immigrants (Peters et al., 2016) adapting to new environments where the anti-immigrant/Latine sentiment is embodied by phrases like, *"go back to where we came from"* or *"you don't belong here."* These racist phrases are the antithesis of belonging and are well known to our Latine community amid white rage. There's a saying in Spanish that says *la cultura cura* (culture heals), and intergenerational storytelling can be a powerful medium in the healing process. Our communities house powerful stories to amplify and defend the Latine culture.

A white narrative heavily influences outdoor leisure in the U.S., with little insight from other racial groups. Therefore, in this research, I aim to "hold space" (Cairo, 2021) for Latine stories in the leisure literature. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore how the natural world influences Chicana/o families' sense of belonging within their communities. I used *testimonios* (Silva et al., 2021) as a methodology coupled with a LatCrit (Solorzano et al., 2001) theoretical framework to collect and share Chicanas/os families' experiences in Nature.

Notably, the work is not just about discovering answers to my research question; equally central is my methodology or *how* I plan to explore the question. Centering Latine voices in this

research project is of great importance to interrupt further marginalization of Latine communities, especially within academia. Lorde (2007) unforgettably reminds us, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 2). To dismantle systems of oppression (including those in academia guiding thesis research), knowledge must come from outside the resources that perpetuate it (Bowleg, 2021).

As my research evolved outside mainstream resources, I found myself amidst new borderlands. The first border was the personal and the academic (or the “unbiased”). This project is deeply personal for me as a Chicana sister/daughter/friend/community member *and* scholar. Creating “neutral” research was not an option; some might even say *political*. To some, politicization might be off-putting, yet I argue our racialized existence was made political by colonization. I witness a painfully continuous battle against intergenerational cultural erasure and silencing in the U.S. amidst whiteness. Not all Latine have the same outdoor experience or social contradictions (based on levels of assimilation). Still, we all have stories to uncover about the land our ancestors traveled, inhabited, and stewarded for centuries. Additionally, my methodological and theoretical choices (LatCrit coupled with testimonios) work to push back against opposition of whose voice “counts” in academia.

The second border was critically considering epistemologies told from positionalities of power (white archetypes, e.g. Thoreau, Muir, and Carson along with the overwhelming white literature) defining the human-nature narrative (and the existing border within that hyphenation). I consider what are pre-Hispanic (pre-colonized) epistemologies for the indigenous peoples of the Americas in their connection to Nature? How much survived in Latine collective consciousness and continues to be held sacred? Holmes (2016) book on ecofeminism and ecological borderlands states how “performative subversions that disrupt binaries between

human/nature and culture/nature can serve decolonizing efforts" (p. 15). Indigenous epistemology and acknowledgment of the wealth of "bioculture" in our indigenous ancestral lineage became significant in order to move forward. Afterall, our *mestizaje* as Chicanas/os is grounded "in the Indian woman's history of resistance" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 43).

Literature Review

Who are Chicanas/os?

The terms Chicana or Chicano denote a Latine person born in the United States of Mexican descent or Mexican American (Gallardo, 2021). Whereas the "a" in Chicana/o is also intentionally first in this wording to consider masculine dominance in language and society (a feminist move from writers like Yosso, 2006). As language and the implications of these terms evolve (i.e., adoption or rejection of the term Latinx), I implore the terms we choose do not further divide but unite our community.

With sixty-eight indigenous languages originating from Mexico, Nahuatl is the second most spoken language (Gomashie, 2021) and the indigenous language of the Mexica (Aztec). The term Chicana/o, or interchangeably Xicana/o (the X holds the "sh" sound in Nahuatl), pays homage to Nahuatl and the indigenous Mexica people *(*pronounced *Meh-she-ka)* of Mexico, the indigenous ancestry of Chicanas/os. The term "Chicano" and "Chicana" arose in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement by Mexican American activists (Gutiérrez, 2010). The emic term Chicana/o rejects a label of dual identification as either Mexican or American (of the commonly white imposed term Mexican-American), along with the wounds of carrying the tension in the two identities while continuing to honor ancestorial pre-colonized roots and heritage.

As Arteaga (2009) states, “to be Chicano in the borderlands is to make oneself from among the competing definition of nation, culture, language, race, ethnicity, and so on” (p.10). To be Chicana/o is to wrestle and find belonging between two identities (Anzaldúa, 1987) that are at constant war with each other: The “American” and The Mexican. This tension leaves questions of belonging a prevalent challenge for many.

Chicanas/os Define Nature

Rather than looking to literature to define Nature, I asked my participants to share with me their definitions of Nature. Putting the right to define one’s relationship to Nature into the hands of the individual and not the academy, or governing body, enabling insight into one’s interest and care for the environment (Ybarra, 2016). Below are their responses and how I wish readers to view my participant's perceptions of the natural world as they continue to read their *testimonios*.

Maria:
“Nature como sanador.”
Nature like the healer.

Carlos:
“Nature as a pathway to get to know yourself.”

Daniela:
“Nature is a space to grow, and how it’s not just as space to grow but to connect.”

Dulce:
“It’s the greatest mother. Es la mamita. And for me, it’s like, la que te da todo. Immensa y abundante.
She’s *the greatest mother. She’s the beloved mother. And for me, it’s like, the one that gives you everything. Immense and abundant.*

Lorena:
"Me hace sentir libre".
It makes me feel free.

Paola:
“To Nature, we’re a part of already, it’s like-innate.”

"*El Indio*" within Chicanas/os: Biocultural Heritage

In practice of decoloniality, understanding Mexican indigeneity is essential to understanding our identities as Chicanas/os *and* our relevance to the natural world. However, the process of connecting with indigenous ancestry was purposefully made difficult due to colonization. In central and south America, the Spanish burned down and stole much of central America's indigenous traditions. Survival of these ancient traditions meant concealment, conversion, or a hybridized version. In addition, white supremacy took power to write the narrative. Although generational trauma remains in our people, resistance continues.

Ethnoecologists refer to "biocultural heritage" as all that native people have produced, reproduced, and preserved in their territories because of beliefs, knowledge, and practices emerging from their culture (Linares-Rosas et al., 2021). Bioculture emphasizes the development of culture *around* the natural world. Our bioculture includes the biological and non-biological components that nurture life: water, land, soil, and wind (Barrera-Bassols et al., 2006).

Mexico is one of the most bioculturally diverse sites in the world, "where multiple social and natural elements and systems form complex networks of interactions in which both culture and Nature are mutually influenced" (Linares-Rosas et al., 2021, p. 1). Mexico's indigenous identities are met with these areas' natural landscapes (Mūnoz & Encina, 2017). Some Latine show the continuation of these indigenous traditions, teachings, or mindsets, while others have veered from indigenous practices due to Latin diaspora and colonization.

[Native] Immigrants and the "Immigration Experience"

Various studies explore what it means for people to undergo immigration and the substantial impacts on individuals and their families (Chaparro, 2020; Stodolska, 2018; Peters, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). With so many necessary adaptations, immigration can be one

of the most life-altering experiences a person can go through. Immigrants today commonly face high competition for job security (especially non-abusive jobs), loss of family connection, and intensive adaptation to a language and culture that is not replicated at home. Disassociation of identity when mainstream Americans label southern immigrants as “invaders” and mental health repercussions resulting from social exclusion and racism can also occur. Not only is every aspect of immigrants' lives impacted, but their surrounding families and cultural wealth are at stake (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019).

A critical study by Peters et al. (2016) sought to understand the role of natural environments in developing a sense of belonging. This comparative study examines immigrants in the U.S., Poland, the Netherlands, and Germany. The researchers concluded that for most participants, the natural environment helped shape, solidify, and build social relationships, family, and community bonds; all leading to a sense of belonging in their host countries (Peters et al., 2016). Moreover, sense of belonging specifically for Chicana/o families through the natural world has not been addressed in the literature thus far.

In Apache indigenous epistemology, “knowledge or wisdom is generated inside the communities through individual’ experiences in relation to particular geographic localities which legitimize the past and serve as the main historical evidence for the truthfulness of the stories happened in these places” (Grincheva, 2013, p. 156). Landscapes become how knowledge and wisdom are transferred from one generation to another and reflect how people and Nature are intrinsically linked. It is considering the deep cultural wounds of the past (hooks, 1994) and the restless maneuvering of difficult life circumstances that we can approach a space of liberation for the oppressed (Freire, 2000) or the othered (Adichi, 2009).

Historical Understanding of Colonization and Nature

To address environmental justice for marginalized racial groups, educators must understand how society defines 'Nature' (Schmidt, 2022) *and* the arrival of that definition. For centuries, colonization equated the advancement of civilization in opposition to Nature (Louv, 2013). Alongside this thought, colonization brought about the devaluation of indigenous human life and ontology. Colonization became a reason *and* the consequence of the division of human-Nature relationships (Dr. J. Sanchez-Martinez, personal communications, January 24, 2022).

Society viewed "civil" humans as separate from Nature and its "wilderness." During immense urbanization of the 1900s, urban dwellers experienced a growing fondness for mountains, forests, and wilderness landscapes" (Harvey, 1996, p. 6). Out of the romantic movement emerged transcendentally sublime white writers (Harvey, 1996) setting up land conservation agencies (i.e., The National Park Service) for and by white people. Ironically, at this pivotal point, only a majority of privileged white Americans had the means of traveling to and advocating for such "pristine" landscapes.

Leisure in Nature vs. *El Sueño Americano (The American Dream)*

Existing literature within leisure presents various physical and psychological benefits of Nature exposure for immigrant communities in the U.S. and the U.K. (Peters et al., 2016, Powell & Rishbeth, 2011). Immigrant families adapting to a new physical and social, spending time in the natural world can develop a sense of welcome in their host country (Peters el al., 2016). At the same time, spending time in Nature can "spark comparison and often nostalgic feelings towards the environment of the home they left behind" (Peters et al., 2016; Powell & Rishbeth, 2011). However, Latine populations suffer inequalities in access and exposure to Nature-base participatory activities (Tandon et al., 2018) in the U.S.

Lived experiences can expose the reality of outdoor work for Latinos in its contrast with outdoor leisure activities. Simpkins and Delgado (2013) examined four significant factors for Mexican-American youth in leisure/organized activity participation: Socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, and immigration. For many immigrant parents working outdoors in the U.S. (for example, in agriculture or construction), their paths are a means of survival. The jobs taken up on the shoulders of immigrants are usually long hours, taxing on their bodies, and with minimal pay, means for advancement, or limited time and energy to devote to their families (Simpkin & Delgado, 2013). Many Mexican parents work for their children to have that *choice*; a chance at the "American Dream." Or, as I have commonly heard, *'we didn't come to this country for you to be sleeping on the floor.'*

Tirelessly working to achieve the "The American Dream" generationally distances leisure in Nature for Latine families, a distancing from a source of healing and belonging (Hull, 1992). In the effects of capitalistic colonization (Ybarra, 2016), the way "up" is continuously moving away from experiences that resemble poverty or indigeneity (i.e. like sleeping in the woods). A meta-analysis conducted examining Latine activities in Nature in the last 30 years revealed variables of visitation and barriers to greenspace locations (Tandon et al., 2018). However, scarce research is conducted concerning qualitative *testimonios* of social, historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors for Chicanas/os in Nature. These factors are examined using a LatCrit framework, as outlined in the following section.

LatCrit: Theoretical Lens

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intersectional societal phenomenon that considers the positionality of individuals (i.e., socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion, (dis)ability, etc.) and the power dynamics that occur between them. Within this framework, there

is an understanding that power dynamics play a role in how certain groups, at times or places, may be oppressed or "othered" by the dominant (Cairo, 2021). These relationships are dynamic and hardly stagnant. CRT works to expose factors involved in the marginalization of race (Pizarro, 1998).

As a subset of CRT, Latino/a/e Critical Theory (LatCrit) is a theoretical lens that critically analyzes how racism functions concerning immigration status, language, and the culture of Latinas/os (Love, 2019; Ramírez-Escobar, 2019; Yosso, 2006). LatCrit uses a distinct blend of intergenerational, international, and interdisciplinary factors to address injustices against Latinos. In addition, LatCrit challenges both "the historical antecedents that gave violence against Indigenous Peoples and the present hierarchies that seek to either perpetuate or re-install policies of violence, dispossession, and injustice" (Harris, 2012, p. 2).

A distinct characteristic of LatCrit theory and praxis is the emphasis on community-building based on shared ethics, practices, and ambitions (Valdes, 2005). Scholarship and activism build the community, and reciprocally, the community builds scholarship and activism (Valdes, 2005). By using this framework, racist systems and institutions are examined beyond individual racist acts (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019).

Literature on intergenerational sense of belonging for Chicana/o families in their relations to natural environments is yet to be explored. Therefore, considering the complexities of race, I aim to capture *testimonios* of Chicana/o families of Western North Carolina in relation to the natural world and its effects on an ontological sense of belonging in their social communities. The following section elaborates on what *testimonios* are and how I curated the data to create space for the participant's voices.

Methods and Methodology

A white narrative heavily influences outdoor leisure in the U.S. with little insight from other racial groups (Gress & Hall, 2017). As People of Color, we know our own story *and* the white story (Cairo, 2021). In this study, I explore life stories of Chicana/o families' sense of belonging through Nature. I used *testimonios* (Silva et al., 2021) as a methodology coupled with a LatCrit theoretical framework (Solorzano et al., 2001) to collect counterstories of Chicana/o families. I was guided by the following research question: how does the natural world influence chicana/o sense of belonging in their communities?

After five intergenerational family interviews, including my own family, I curated excerpts that reflected core ideas of belonging, connection to the land, and experiences of injustice. These *testimonios* mirror messages of societal belonging or exclusion within the context of critical social issues for Latine people. To derail the deficit model, each *testimonios* ends with *consejos:* advise and cultural wealth for future generations. I conclude the results with reflexive poems comprised of the *testimonios* shared using *antropoesía*. Below I will detail my methodology, methods, participants, and analysis techniques through cultural intuition (Delgado, 1998).

***Testimonios* as Methodology & Method:**

Testimonios are segments of life stories told by witnesses willing to raise awareness to experiences of oppression and attest to a social and/or political injustice; giving witness to social injustices (Huber, 2010; Marshall et al., 2022). *Testimonios* strongly connect to "history, culture, social, and political lived experiences" (Silva et al., 2021, p. 5), supported by LatCrit. *Testimonios* originated in indigenous practices and oral traditions of Central and South America (Yúdice, 1991). This decolonial praxis (Silva et al., 2021) shifts the focus away from meta-narratives told by positionalities of power (white narratives).

Within Traditional Indigenous Knowledge, there is a celebration of "the pluralism in 'truths' because it is dependent upon individual experiences and relationships with living and non-living beings and entities" (Grincheva, 2013, p. 159). *Testimonios* are a means to create space for histories not typically rendered, even silenced. In this case, within an environmental and immigration context, this methodology is driven by the telling of powerful life experiences of the natural world and racial injustices in white-dominated areas.

I did not ask for participants to speak for their entire racial demographic but rather as an "act of identity-formation which is simultaneously personal and collective" (Yúdice, 1991, p. 15). Huber (2010) defines *testimonios* as "a way to create knowledge and theory through personal experiences.… theorizing our own realities as [People] of Color" (p. 66); a collective consciousness. This research centers life stories that are socially maligned, overlooked, or hidden by their tellers out of fear of persecution from social injustices.

The land we stand on is more than dirt below our feet. It tells stories of the past, affirms our belonging and a sense of purpose, and is a refuge for cultural healing. It is a vessel for our *gente* to thrive and share the joy with the incoming generations learning how to belong. I use a LatCrit theoretical framework to center social justice and to acknowledge how racism is prevalent in our communities.

Participants: Latine Community Centers in Western North Carolina

To reduce the researcher/participant binary (unproductive in racial justice), I researched in my own setting/community (Marshall et al., 2022) by recruiting willing participants from community groups I grew familiar with throughout the year. I chose to use pseudonyms for the organizations to protect participant identities.

1. *Todos Unidos* is a non-profit community organization initiated and led by Latinas/os in Western Carolina. I organized and led a creek program, lake hike, picnic, and bonfire with the families of *Todos Unidos*.
2. *Nuestros Niños* is a non-profit organization initiated and led by immigrant mothers who wanted to see a space for their children to grow in community, culture, and their home language. I volunteered in their afterschool program as part of community engagement as an environmental educator and currently initiated/lead a Music in Nature program with their teens.

In the fifth interview, I hold space for my family. I traveled to Mexico for the first time in about ten years to see my grandmother. In holding space for my family, it shattered the color-blind hovering researcher mentality and revolutionized a personal experience in generational wealth through my family's heritage.

Data Collection

After gaining IRB approval for participant verbal/implied consent, I interviewed participants in locations that embrace the everydayness of their lives (Ramírez-Escobar, 2019), such as their homes or community centers. For *Todos Unidos*, the organization's leaders offered assistance to help me locate families that might be of interest to this project. For *Nuestros Niños*, I spoke to families directly at program meetings to gauge interest.

Family interviews lasted approximately one to two hours, dependent on the number of members present. I conducted all interviews in-person except for one that took place on a video call. I asked the families open-ended questions in their preferred language or a mixture of English and Spanish (Anzaldúa, 1987; Casielles-Suárez, 2017). Interview questions included:

1. Share a story about how you experience(d) the natural world.

2. Can you tell me what Nature is to you?
3. How has, if any, racism/assimilation appeared in your life? In your family's life?
4. How has, if any, Nature had an impact on how you feel like you belong to an area?
5. What is wisdom (a message of lived experience) that you would like to carry to the next generation of Chicanas and Chicanos?

Testimonios are not to be at demand of field researchers but must take time to develop *confianza* and seen as a gift (Urrieta et al., 2015). I used open-ended follow-up questions, avoided leading questions, and aimed to let the families lead the conversation. After analysis and curation of data (as outlined in the following section), I followed up with families to ensure the representation of their *testimonios* is accurate.

Data Analysis Through Cultural Intuition

Since I identify as a researcher of the racial group I am centering, I intentionally used cultural intuition (Delgado, 1998). Cultural intuition extends "theoretical sensitivity" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) by the involvement of one's personal experience to include collective experiences and community memory. It is a complex process that is "experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective and dynamic" (Delgado, 1989, p. 568; Pérez Huber, 2010). According to Huber (2010), cultural intuition propels these deeply personal societal concerns and understandings unique to an "insider" in a marginalized community. In trusting (and healing) cultural intuition, Chicana scholars can "move beyond traditional areas of research situated in existing paradigms that overlook the particular experiences of Chicanas and Chicanos" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 574).

As I analyzed the interviews, I kept in mind questions outlined for Chicana/o epistemology and methodology by Pizarro (1998): "who are the parties involved in/affected by

the context we will be exploring, who is experiencing “difficulties” or “problems,” who is being exploited/victimized/oppressed, who is seeking change out of sheer necessity, whose knowledge is being ignored and drowned out by hegemonic ideology and epistemology” (p. 66). During curation, these questions exposed factors of marginalization (Pizarro, 1998). However, equally as necessary, I created space for the rich values and *consejos* gifted to derail the deficient model—*Porque la cultura cura* (because culture heals) and our medicine is with our own community. wealth.

Contrary to “traditional” data analysis (coding or theming), I did not inhibit emotional responses or compartmentalized cultural intuition, nor did I attempt to flatten or shrink the stories into boxed “themes” or “categories.” Not inhibiting emotional responses is an anti-linear strategy consistent with Chicana feminism and ecofeminism (Holmes, 2016). Instead, I reflected on events that evoked emotions to racial socialization, politics, socioeconomic status, and historical factors within the *testimonios*. Many excerpts in the results are intended to create dialogue from the literature and for readers.

During the data analysis process, I used Cultural Intuition (Delgado, 1998) to pull one *testimonios* per family that reflected 1) everyday life for Latinos, 2) a significant life event 3) a sense of urgency of the teller or 4) painted a vibrant picture of their belonging through Nature. I curated excerpts of the interviews with careful language translation, meaning-making, and context. Extracted were events that oriented context from history, people, and place within an ontological sense of belonging. This process held careful attention to identities, intersectionality, and level of engagement among multiple members.

Repeated concepts in each family interview were those of our roots, work (and lack of leisure), and the land. Other concepts of gender experiences, language, political tensions of

immigration, and intraracial competition emerged. These patterns were largely present between interviews and often appear interwoven in the *testimonios*. Honoring Indigenous epistemology, I curated the excerpts of the first four families on natural landscapes they mentioned in their *testimonios*: the forest, river, land, and desert. With indigenous Latine biocultural in mind, these *testimonios* respond to physical landscapes and the experiences created in those places.

The fifth *testimonio* traversed into a concept of the spirituality of life, death, and cyclical dependence on the natural world consistent with indigenous knowledge (Grincheva, 2013). Contrary to white-dominated narratives of Nature, indigenous and Chicana epistemology repeatedly teaches how spirituality is inseparable from the physical landscapes we walk (Holmes, 2016). Holmes (2016) explore ideologies of Chicana scholars, artists, and activists working in ecological borderlands, "a concept that expands body/landscape relations" to "body/landscape/spirit relations" (p. 19). I purposefully curated this concept alongside "landscapes" to honor this ontology.

Figure 1. *Major repeated concepts of interviews and curation based on landscapes.*

Concepts	***Curation of Landscapes***
Roots	
Work / lack of leisure	*Forest*
Land	*River*
Gender	*Land*
Language	*Desert*
Political tensions of immigration	*Spirituality*
Intraracial competition	

Dear Reader, Each Testimonio Is a Gift.

I am intentionally decolonizing the academy with the way I chose to present my "data" and how I ask you [the reader] to engage with it. I approached each testimonio as a gift (Urrieta

et al., 2015) and I ask you to do the same. Take time to consider the depth of these experiences, the uncovered trauma that arose, and the vulnerability it took to sit in this space to begin with. Our first mistake as readers would be to overlook this emotional sacrifice and to analyze it for academic "validity" (at worst) or as a transaction to seek a prescription for action (at best). Although well intentioned, this could overlook the work we are trying to accomplish and the voices we are trying to uplift.

Many equity and diversity trainings in the leisure and outdoor field will advise practitioners/scholars to listen to People of Color's stories. These are some of those stories. The stories presented here stand alone in this thesis, to teach us all to listen first. I invite you (the reader) to sit with these voices, as they invite you in. As you read, engage with the voices.

- How does your culture influence the ways in which you see or interact with Nature?
- How is it different from other racial groups?
- Do you know other racial group's perspectives? Why is this?

When reading these testimonios, a few things to think about…

- How Maria describes being in Nature in the context of her pain.
- Think how Dulce and Daniela describe "space" in Nature versus "spaces" in society.
- Cesar's relationship with working in agriculture/outdoors as a farmer and landscaper.
- Dulce's critical consciousness of her identity and its influence on how she sees the Land.
- The way Abuelita Ana uses childhood memories to relate earthenware, and the earth to herself.
- Abuelita Ana's languages choices to personify Nature.

I placed footnotes connecting to the body of literature as I reflected on their experiences. These notes are meant to not distract the reader from the *testimonios* themselves but allow the reader to subversively be in these stories and form their connections and emotions. At the end of each set of family *testimonios*, I express my gratitude for their permission to share stories and what they individually taught me. Each *testimonio* housed rich and complex experiences well beyond what I could capture on paper, but I hope I have done justice in words.

Results

El bosque | The Forest
"No puedes competir con los árboles"
"You can't compete with the trees"

Lorena y Paola
This *testimonio* follows the story of Lorena and her daughter, Paola.

Lorena immigrated to the U.S. with her husband in 1997. The first time they encountered racism was in 1998 in Queens, New York, on vacation. Before they could enter the hotel, the owner yelled, "No Mexicans!" and ran the couple out. A few blocks down was a luxury Sheraton hotel that charged $150 night. They only earned $125 a week. Lorena didn't understand the racist encounter then, but they had no other choice.

Later in life, Lorena and her family attended a Catholic church in North Carolina, where she and her daughter were active members. Paola was an altar server. During a local ICE raid, a father was deported. It still pains the church community to this day. When the white priest crudely joked about the deportation during a sermon, "Hey! Who wants a free trip to Mexico?" Lorena and her family stopped attending.

Shortly after Trump won the presidential election, Paola felt afraid of what could happen in her High School. That week she remembers another Latina friend crying from racist comments that were said to her by her peers. Paula felt a racist tension at school. During her theater class, a white boy stands up and starts pointing to all the brown kids, including Paola, saying, "you should be deported, you should be deported, and you should be deported." When a group of her friends gathered the courage to report these occurrences to the principal's office, the principal did nothing. Paola remembers feeling like she did not matter to her principal or teachers.

Paola just began her first year of college away from home in a big city. She says she loves to take walks through a graveyard surrounded by many trees. She's overcome by a bitter-sweet feeling of nostalgia for home and says,

"Me gusta caminar por ahí, pero también siento que estoy en mi casa. Porque hay árboles..."
"I like to walk through there, but I also feel like I am at my house because there are trees…"

Paola and her mother, Lorena, begin to dialogue about the trees near their small trailer in the woods in North Carolina, where Paola grew up. Paola remembers playing in the woods day and night by the creek with her cousins. They recall these nights…

Lorena: Habian árborles, si. **Paola:** …Había árboles. Entonces, por tanto árbol, ya está fresco, pero en la noche, mi mamá prende su fogata. ¿De dónde sacas la leña? **Lorena:** ¡Me la voy robando! (se rie) Cuando cae una ramita la voy cortando.	**Lorena:** There were trees, yes. **Paola:** … There were trees. So then, with so many trees, it's already cold, but at night, my mom turns on her bonfire. Where do you get the wood from? **Lorena:** I steal it! (she jokes). When a small branch falls over I cut some as I go.

Lorena grew up in the ranchos de Mexico, where her most treasured memories of home were around a nightly bonfire with her family. She shares that as an immigrant in the U.S., she sees a culture that is not hers. Her humble trailer in the woods in the U.S. reminds her of home growing up in su tierra, Mexico (her land, Mexico)[3]*. Nature gives her that space to make her feel free, accepted, and secure. Nature taught her lessons in life, "en lugar de haber una pérdida, hay una ganacia" (instead of a lose, there is a gain). She explains,*

Lorena: Si se cayó un árbol, estás viendo que hay posibilidad de tener leña para hacer una buena fogata y de ahí sacar historias, estar en familia y tener un tiempo quizás de gozo, de recordar a tus ancestros por medio de el elemento que sería el fuego. Entonces, para mí el hecho de estar reunidos es algo bien bonito y solamente se puede hacer en la naturaleza. … Entonces yo diría que la naturaleza es una buena oportunidad para unirnos más como familia, como personas. Y a veces uno abre su corazón y cuenta cosas que le salen del alma… Ahí eres único, ahí no estás compitiendo con nadie. Tú puedes ser tú mismo. Es en la naturaleza, porque no puedes competir con los árboles… La naturaleza nos une a todos de la misma manera.	**Lorena:** Like if a tree falls, you are seeing that there is firewood to make a bonfire and from there comes stories, being with family, and having time to perhaps share joy, to remember your ancestor through the element that is fire. So for me, the act of being together is something really beautiful and can only be done in Nature. … So I would say that Nature is a good opportunity to unite ourselves more as family, as people. And sometimes one opens their heart and shares things that come from the soul. There, you are unique. There, you are not competing with anyone. You can be yourself. It is in Nature, because you can't compete with the trees… Nature unites us all in that same way.

Paola responds to her mother,

"¡Ahora yo entiendo por que te gusta tanto [las fogatas], hasta en el frio con tus cobijas! Yo tambien, extraño estar en tu presencia, aunque no digamos nada, para estar alli bien frío" se ríe. *"Now I understand why you like [bonfires] so much, even in the cold with your blankets! Me too, I miss being in your presence, although we don't say anything, and are just there really cold!" she laughs.*

[3] For families adapting to a new environment (including social environment), spending time in the natural world can develop a sense of welcome in their host country. At the same time, spending time in Nature can "spark comparison and often nostalgic feelings towards the environment of the home they left behind" (Peters et al., 2016).

Growing up in an adobe house in Mexico, Lorena was the youngest of all her siblings. The house had a kitchen, two rooms, and five beds. One bed was for her parents, the other for elders (her grandmother) or if someone was pregnant. The last three beds filled up too quickly every night for the rest of the kids. Lorena continued to reminisce about her youth in rural Mexico[4] *and wanted to share this memory she mentioned she carries in her soul. Lorena continues…*

Lorena: …Entonces mi papá hacía la fogata para mantenernos juntos y despiertos. Porque si ya no alcanzaste cama, te puedes dormir en el piso porque ya no hay espacio. Entonces él nos hacía bien, ameno esa estancia. No sentías a menos por ahí de las dos o tres de la mañana, que el frío calaba muy fuerte. Te dabas cuenta que ya eran las tres de la mañana y que tú estabas alrededor de una fogata escuchando historias, las mismas. La víbora de mi papá cada vez crecía más o el conejo pesaba más o el pescado más grande. Pero el punto era que nos entretenía para no dejarnos ir y estar juntos en esas zonas, porque es muy difícil ir a una casa y que no tengas cama. … Entonces, esa era una tradición que teníamos...Entonces lo traje conmigo y es parte- Lo que te digo es parte de mi cultura.	**Lorena:** … And so my father would start bonfires to keep us together and awake. Because if you did not get to claim a bed, you slept on the floor because there was no more room. So, he made that stay very enjoyable for us in this way. You wouldn't notice, there at two or three in the morning, that the cold was too strong. You would only notice that it was three in the morning and that you were around a bonfire listening to stories, the same ones. Each time, my father's snake in the story grew longer or the rabbit weighed more, or the fish was bigger. But the point was that he would entertain us to not let us go and keep us together in that zone, because it was very difficult to go to a home and not have a bed. … So, then that was a tradition that we had… and I brought that, I brought that with me and it's part- what I was saying is, it's part of my culture.

***Consejos* from Lorena y Paola:**

Lorena: "Algo que yo le dejaría a Lorena joven… Le dijera que siga sus sueños. Que sí se puede, sí se vale, se puede soñar y que sí se puede."
"Something I would say to young Lorena… I would say follow your dreams. It can be done, they are valid, you can dream it and you can do it."

Paola: "Yo le diría a Paulita que no tuviera miedo a ser ella misma; a ser diferente. Ser diferente en aspecto de ser orgullosa de dónde viene... de dónde son sus padres. De la manera en que estamos aprendiendo más de nuestra cultura. Es algo como que te pertenece a ti."

[4] Landscapes transform knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another and reflect how people and Nature are intrinsically linked (Grincheva, 2013).

"I would say to Paulita to not be afraid to be herself; to be different. Be different in the aspect of being proud of where she comes from… where her parents are from. Proud of the way that we are learning more about our culture. It's something that belongs to you."

Gracias Lorena y Paula for showing me how love travels through our families, their histories, and humanity *es una cadena de movimento* (a chain of movement).

El Rio | The River

"En ese momento no me dio miedo"

"In that moment I was not afraid"

Maria y Carlos

The first *testimonio* follows the story of Maria and her son, Carlos.

When Maria crossed the border through the river, her son Carlos was two years old. She came to the U.S. to work because, as she recalls, sometimes her family did not have money to eat in Mexico. On the way to the U.S. border, the group of refugees arrived at a small house, the men in one room and the woman and children in another. Maria claimed a spot on the bed, but Carlos needed to use the bathroom. When they returned to their bed, it was already taken. They found a corner of the room in the foreign house, and Carlos slept in his mother's arms.

When morning came, some people took Carlos and told Maria they would cross him separately. She was afraid because she didn't know who was taking care of him or where he was. For a week, she did not see her son and imagined the worst.

Arriving at the river's edge, the coyotes[5] *told everyone to undress quickly. They crossed people in pairs, and once on the other side, they commanded…*

[5] *Human smugglers*

Maria: “Tienen dos minutos para ponerse la ropa. A correr, a correr, hasta que yo les diga”, decía el señor (coyote)… Le tuve mucho miedo al agua. Y en ese momento no le tuve miedo. Lo que yo quería era pasar, y todo eso- como es, el agua, es peligrosa. Y luego el lodo o sea todo eso como que en ese rato uno no lo piensa pero ya después, estuvo malo… ¿Qué tal si hubiera pasado esto? …Tambien uno aprende, Y como que se hace un poquito mas fuerte tambien como que pierde miedo, por ejemplo, del agua. Si todo, [se quita el miedo a] todo en ese momento. Yo venía con una tos, pero tan fea que no podía- y luego iba corriendo, se me hizo más asi. No podía ni respirar. Pero decía, “no, tengo que ir. Tenemos que llegar. Lo único que quieres, es llegar al lugar donde tienes que llegar. Y uno se aventava así, entre la tierra, el lodo. Y no importa y no tenía miedo. Ya después,-ya ahora que cuenta uno ya dice ‘ay, si....’ Triste a veces para unas personas que pues se quedan por allí. Porque, los coyotes son malos. O sea no les importan si se quedan. ‘Ya no puede? A pues dejenla’. Si ya nadie le puede ayudar allí dejan las personas. Y si alguien las encuentran que bueno, y si no pos allí en el desierto.”	**Maria:** “You all have two minutes to put on your clothes. Run. Run until I tell you.” the man (coyote) would say… I was very afraid of water. In those moment, I was not afraid. What I wanted was to pass and all of that, like the water, is dangerous… and then the mud, all of that, it's like as if in that moment one doesn’t stop to think about it and then later ‘yeah it was bad’. What if something would have happened? … Also one learns, and becomes a little stronger, likes losing fear, for example, of the water. Yes everything. You lose fear of everything in that moment. I had a bad cough…. As I ran, it made things worse. I couldn’t breathe. But I said, ‘no, I have to go. We have to arrive.’ The only thing that you want is to arrive to the place where you have to arrive. And one throws themselves in the earth, the mud. It doesn’t matter, I wasn’t fearful. Then later you say ‘ah, yes…’ It's sad, sometimes people get left behind there. The cayotes are bad. Like, they don’t care if you get left behind. ‘They can’t anymore? Ah well, leave them’. If they can't find anyone to help them, they leave them there. And if someone finds them there, great. And if not? Well, they’re there in the desert.”

The border patrol helicopter hovered above. Maria's group walked miles of dense brush and made their way into a safe house in the U.S. They later arrived at an old hotel where Maria saw another mother with her infant baby. Men had to go out and buy baby formula. The mother had stopped breastfeeding her baby because she knew they might be separated.

Maria: "Ya entonces nos fijabamos que todas estabamos raspadas de la cara, de las manos, porque encontrábamos ramas y pos nomas asi ibamos yendo…"

Maria: "We then realized were all scratched from our faces and hands from the brush, and just like that we went on…"

Later in life, Maria worked as a kitchen staff and janitor for a North Carolina school. She recalls a memory of kids throwing trash in front of her. When she asked them to pick it up, they would say, "no, that's what you all are here to do, to clean."

When I asked what Nature means to her, Maria said, "es como sanador" (like a healer). She says her oldest son Carlos loves to take her on walks on local trails. Mara says:

Maria: "Pienso que [la naturaleza] ayuda mucho a uno cuando le quiere dar como depresión? Ayuda mucho la naturaleza. No se.. Aveces hasta a platicar. A veces ellos me ven que estoy yo platicando asi- viendo asi alli como flores bien bonitas y no sé me emociona."

Maria: "I think that [Nature] helps one a lot when you want to get like depression? Nature helps a lot. I don't know… Sometimes even to talk. Sometimes they see me talking like that to the flowers, they're beautiful and I get excited."

***Consejos* from her son, Carlos:**
"View your life as a story… all pages of a book make up a story, right? and so, every word also makes up the story. There's a lot of elements that make up your own story. There's characters that show up in your life that leave and come back. Some don't, and some do, and it's new people. Life is full of tragedy, it's full of comedy, full of laughs and sadness and twists, as a story is.

It's important for the younger generation to realize that their life is a story playing out and it's part of a bigger story that their generation is writing. And what makes you unique as you write this story is what you should keep alive…. Especially as you have roots that represent your culture, don't ever forget where you come from and always share that. Show up to the space, unapologetically but respectfully, and just like show up as you are."

Gracias Maria y Carlos for showing me our lives are a part of a bigger story and that our belonging comes from being able to hold the connectedness to others that share that with us.

La tierra | The Land

"I am grounded in where I'm at"

"Tengo los pies en la tierra"

Dulce y Daniela

This *testimonio* follows the story of Dulce and her teenage daughter, Daniela.

Dulce immigrated to the U.S. to help settle family debts. She came to work hard, own land as a woman, and pave her destiny for herself and her family.

When Dulce first arrived in the U.S. from Mexico, she started working in a textile factory where she witnessed supervisor abuses and Latine intraracial competition. She later began working for a restaurant for many years as a server where English was vital to her job. She used English in her job as a tool to navigate challenging dynamics and later on in life, as leverage for the Latine community.

English still feels foreign to Dulce and not a part of her. Yet she mentioned that she speaks it because it is necessary to get where she needs to.

Dulce lived in hacinamiento (overcrowded housing) before she had her two children. After having her own family, she declined to live in multiple-family homes for the wellbeing of her new family. She mentioned the terror when ICE raids stormed her trailer community for many years, preventing some from work or their kids from going to school.

She now works in community social justice work for the Latine community running cultural programs. She says, "no nomás entrábamos a hacer el programa cultural, pero nosotros estamos organizando para cambiar políticas dentro de la escuela" (we didn't just go in to do a cultural program, but we were organizing to change politics within the schools).

She shares with me the importance of having a space to call your own.

"En México y acá también, o sea, el que tiene tierra, tiene algo. Pero el que no tiene tierra no tiene nada…"
"*In Mexico and the U.S., the one that has land has something. But the one that does not have land has nothing".*

Dulce saw her family feuds and the pain it caused her mother not being inherited land. Dulce promised herself she would not wait or fight for her father's inheritance (as it was destined for her older brother). She would set out to get it herself. This was one of her goals when she immigrated to North America.

When she did acquire land, both in Mexico and a small lot in the U.S., something changed in her when she could finally say, "I am the owner of my own land, I alone, no one bought it for me, it was not inherited, I am the owner of this land." This made her feel a sort of freedom, especially as a woman. Yet, she also felt conflicted about the contradictions in her relationship with Nature and the process of decolonization.

Dulce: "Entonces te das cuenta que la naturaleza en realidad es muy abundante y si tu te enfocas en cuidarla te va a dar todo lo que tu quieres. Pero desgraciadamente nosotros todavía estamos enfocados en correr hacia donde nos dicen que es el éxito. Hacia dónde nos dicen que vamos a estar bien, pero en realidad lo único que estamos haciendo es perder nuestra vida tratando de ser unas máquinas de consumción de todo, de intelecto, de cosas, de emociones. Pero todavía estoy en esa carrera porque todavía no me he desenganchado del querer a ser exitosa en términos del hombre blanco… Pero todavía no he salido de ese sistema, entonces todos los días todavía tengo muchas contradicciones."	**Dulce: "**…And then you realize that Nature in reality is very abundant and if you focus on taking care of her, she will give you everything you want. But unfortunately, we are still focused on running after where they tell us there is success, where they tell us where we are going to be well off, but in reality the only thing we are doing is losing our life trying to be machines of consumption of everything, of intellect, of things, of emotions. But I am still in that race because I have not unhooked from wanting to be successful in the terms of the white man… But I have not left this system, and so every day I still have many contradictions."

[6]

We conversed about this contradiction of identity[7].

Dulce: "Es verdad, todos tenemos un mestizaje. Tenemos familia de raza blanca, familia de raza morena. Y no debe ser eso una constante reafirmación de quién es mejor que el otro… Eso viene desde la colonia. Entonces, cuando el blanco, deje de explotar, economizar y reconozca lo que vino a hacer aquí... Y cuando el indio recupere su autoestima y sane lo que le hicieron, podremos ser mejores seres humanos los dos. … Porque no se puede sostener por largo tiempo lo que están hacienda. Están acabando todo. Están acabando la naturaleza. Están acabando la humanidad y se están acabando ellos mismos."	**Dulce:** "It's true, we [Latinos] all have a mestizaje; we have family of white race, family of brown race. And that doesn't have to be a constant reaffirmation of who is better than the other. That comes from the colonization. So then, when the whites, stop exploiting, economizing, and recognizing what they came to do here… and when the Indian recovers their self-esteem and heals what they did to them, we can both be better humans. … Because they [white people] cannot sustain for very long what they are doing. They are finishing everything. They are finishing Nature. They are finishing humanity and they are finishing themselves."

[6] "By giving the land a spirit with which they connect, [Mexican-American] writers reject the colonial objectification of the Amerindian, the mestizo, and the natural environment" (Ybarra, 2016, p. 70).
[7] "Communication [dialogue] is intrinsic to the process of co-creation and re-creation of one's cultural identity" (Yep, 1998, pg. 79)

Dulce's teenage daughter Daniela shares covert experiences of language monitoring from her teachers that discouraged her and many others from speaking her native language[8].

Daniela: "So growing up, I always spoke Spanish with my friends, but at some point we stopped speaking Spanish- Like with each other. We would just speak in English and now I speak with English, with all my friends, even the ones that are like, we've been friends forever and we speak Spanish. We were just so used to speaking English around everyone else to make everyone feel comfortable, to make everyone feel like we're not talking about them…
You would hear like comments that they wouldn't direct to us, but to teachers with them themselves. Like you could hear a teacher talking to another teacher, like,

"Oh, these kids, they should be speaking English. This is not their house".

They weren't directed to me but just hearing them made you understand that it wasn't okay to speak Spanish or it wasn't professional.

Like it wasn't the space you were supposed to do it. I wasn't treated badly exactly. But just hearing comments like that was very disturbing. Like, I can't do this anymore…"

Afterwards Danila shared her memories of hiking with her father and brother on mountain trails, I asked what Nature means to her, and she responded.

"[Nature] reminds me of how big the space is and how much space there is to grow. Trees grow, you know? And when you think about it, it not just correlates with Nature's trees but also with myself—thinking about how Nature is a space to grow and how it's not just as space to grow, but to connect. Like I was connecting with my family or to connect with my brother or my dad. It's just a space for so many things to happen[9]. In my childhood, that's what I always saw that as a space to let things go, to grow, to connect, and to love. So for me, Nature has always been a space. A space to do those things."

I asked Daniella how she sees people and herself in those places.

"I guess every time I go hiking, I see people … different people. We're all looking for the same thing. We're all looking for that peace of mind, that relaxation, that moment when we connect once again.

[Nature] reminds me that I deserve to be here, because I'm a human just like everyone else.

That we're all striving for in life. It's not just money, not just school, not just work. Not everything that is put in our brain that we need to accomplish…

[8] English Learners are often denied opportunities by teachers to use their language to make meaning (Garza, 2020).
[9] "Knowledge or wisdom is generated inside the communities through individual experiences in relation to particular geographic localities which legitimize the past and serve as the main historical evidence for the truthfulness of the stories happened in these places" (Grincheva, 2013, p. 156).

It reminds me that I am grounded in where I'm at, and where I'm at,
I can complete those goals and accomplish everything by seeing it all around me."

***Consejos* from Dulce y Daniela:**

Daniela: "It's really hard to look at yourself when you're told by everyone that you are not worthy, not worthy of being successful of having land, of being the dream you want. So I feel like if I was looking at myself, I would say you are worthy… I did learn to love myself and understand that I deserve everything that [white people] do.

It's really like a thing that I challenged myself every day. Even though I need to look at myself and say I'm worthy of my features. Because every day, like you go online and you see what features are pretty and what are not. You know, like blue eyes, light skin. And I constantly have to look at myself and say, 'I love your nose Daniela, even though your nose is not like a button nose or like what people think is cute. Like you are that and you must love yourself.' And I just think about my ancestors sometimes and like, you know what? I'm here."

Dulce: "We had a civilization before they came. We had a spirituality before they came. We know how to take care of land. We actually are stewards of the land. We're not destroyers of the land.[10] So, whenever our indigenous part of ourselves wakes up and reclaims that, we're going to heal. We're going to heal the world too."

Gracias Dulce y Daniela for teaching me what love and empathy can do. We are healing and are healers.

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[10] "…[Chicanas and Chicanos] know that our culture maintains a unique relationship with, not dominance over, Nature. More radical than reclaiming lost title to lands, these writers [Gloria Anzaldua and Arturo Longoria] declare that our communion with Nature ranks higher than any legal document, even if we are the only ones who recognize it" (Ybarra, 2016, p. 117).

El desierto | The Desert

"Así. Ahora sí, ahí nos matamos."
"Now, there we worked ourselves to the ground."

Cesar y Lupita
I first met Cesar, Lupita, and their children when I led a bilingual family lake hike with *Todos Unidos*. We hiked in a group of about twenty (including a baby wrapped around a mother's back and a few elders). The group carried rolling coolers, chairs, and packed lunches. Cesar and Lupita were always in front of the group, chatting alongside me.

At one point, I asked if they go hiking often. I overheard chuckles as they joked, *"si, cruzado el desierto" (yeah, crossing the desert)*. Growing up in a border city, I was familiar with jokes like these among ourselves, so I didn't think much of it.

As we hiked, they began talking about their desert "hiking experiences". I quickly realized the memories of desert border crossings were real.

This *testimonio* follows the story of Cesar and his wife, Lupita.

The first time, Cesar crossed the border alone. Later in his life, he decided to return to Mexico and cross with his wife, Lupita. He knew he was not guaranteed his return, and the trek would be unpredictable. The pair walked roughly thirty-three hours through the unmarked desert in a group guided by Coyote.

Cesar: "No cualquiera tiene este corazón de remordimiento que uno se acuerda de- yo me acuerdo de todo lo que hemos pasado nosotros cruzando el desierto, todo. Que uno ve hasta cadáveres. Allá está muerta la gente que viene cruzando. Huesos, esqueletos, ahí todos. Botellas de agua tiradas, garrafones de agua ahí tirada. Y gente muerta, ropa tirada, todo. Dije, "no…. es muy feo así, pero pues ni modo…"

Lupita: "También cuando uno se duerme, se duerme en el desierto. Pero sí da miedo, porque aquí hay muchos animales- Y luego dicen, 'duermanse que por ahí esta la migra.'"

Cesar: "Y luego esta frío, frío. ¡Y luego está asi se ve la luna! (hace un gran gesto). Así la luna está bien bonita…Y no si, luego y ya en las mañana, "órale! A caminar, echenle, porque va a haber una tormenta!"

Cesar: "Not everyone has the heart to remember what one remembers. I remember everything that we have gone through crossing the desert. Everything. One even sees carcasses. There are dead people of those that come crossing. Bones, skeletons, everything is there. Water bottles trashed, gallon jugs on the floor. Dead people, clothes on the floor, everything. I said, 'no…. this is really ugly, but… no way (oh well)…'

Lupita: And also when one sleeps, they sleep in the desert. But yes, it's scary, because there are lots of animals- And then they say, "go to sleep because out there is *la migra*" (slang for the border patrol).

Cesar: And then it's cold, cold. And then the moon looks like this! (makes large gesture). The moon is really beautiful like that….And then in the morning, "Come on! To walk. Get to it, because there's a storm coming!"

After thirty-three grueling hours through the desert, the group walked past a small ranch, almost marking the end of their journey. Cesar assumes someone from that ranch had called the border patrol because shortly after, the raid began. In the panic, Cesar accidentally grabbed another woman, thinking it was Lupita. When he realized it was not his wife he was escaping with, he returned to the border patrol to be detained alongside Lupita. Men and women were placed on different trucks to be deported to another border.

Lupita and Cesar were unsure if they would find each other again or be released. Lupita says, "[la migra] te ponen pues por diferentes partes para que como que te pierdas". (The [border patrol] drops you in different places, so you get lost. Before border patrol released the group, they were warned of "la perrera[11]" the next time they were caught.

Cesar and Lupita paid another Coyote and set foot again. This time they remembered running through a field of lemon orchards being irrigated. They ran north. When arriving in the U.S., the Coyote hid their group in a building basement for three days. They would get food from others who volunteered to do grocery hauls, usually those who knew English already. The Coyotes told the group there would be one more shelter before they were free. Lupita and Cesar were transported from Los Angeles to North Carolina. They traveled by bus across the country with other migrants over the course of a week, dropping people off in different states.

Cesar has the knowledge of a seasoned farmer. He knows his way growing food, their seasons, and the soil. He grew up in Mexico and worked most of his life on U.S. land. When asked what he thought about Nature, he says,

"Pues el aire y los árboles son los que le dan vida a uno. Porque si no fueran los árboles, son los que hacen el aire. La tierra crece los árboles. Simplemente cuando uno va a sembrar un garden, un jitomate y un chile… no pues la tierra, verdad?....Pues tienes donde vive uno, no?"
"Well, the air and the trees are what give life to one. Because if there are no trees, they are the ones that give the air. The land grows the trees. Simply when one goes to grow a garden, a tomato, a chile…. Well, it's the land, right? …. And you have where to live, no?"[12]

[11] *Literal translation: the dog kennel; slang for jail*

[12] Ybarra (2016) argues "migrant farmworker literature shows this community's rejection of capital's attempt to alienate them from the land". Beyond romanticization, "when the farmworker appreciates natural beauty, he or she does so from the knowledge gained from daily effort and relationship, rather than from a trite imitation of a long dead poet or philosopher" (p. 122).

Cesar and Lupita reflect on their work life in the U.S.

Cesar: Cómo este país puede serte el más rico de todos los países que siempre nos anda buscando el sueño americano, el sueño americano.

Digo siempre este país, siempre este país y llegan aqui los Mexicanos, quieren el trabajo aqui todos los Mexicanos. ¿Ahorita quien anda trabajando de americanos aquí en este país?

Agarra el americano que anda trabajando por ahí, la construcción, levantando casas desde abajo hasta arriba. Quien va en el campo? Siempre el Mexicano.

De donde comen los Americanos? Cuando cosecha un jitomate o un Chile? ¿De dónde? ¿De dónde? ¿Quién come maíz? Comen de uno.

Porque si no fuera de uno que está en este país, la mera verdad, la mera realidad? A este país hubiera estar abajo. Este país está levantada por nosotros, los hispanos.

Cesar: How is it that this country can make you the riches out of all the countries and the American Dream is always looking for us, the American Dream.

I mean, always this country, this country… and the Mexicans arrive here, they all want jobs here. Who is American here working in this country now?

Grab the [white] American that is working out there, in construction, building houses from the bottom to the top. Who is in the field? Always the Mexican.

From where do [white] Americans eat from? When they harvest a tomato or a chile? From where? From where? Who eats corn? They eat from us.

Because if it wasn’t for us who is in this country, the truth? This country would be below. This country was lifted by us, the Hispanics.

Lupita: "Yo trabajé en un restaurant y siempre nos decían, como que ya sabían que uno no tenía papeles… y ya lo decían 'ponte a hacer este trabajo', luego si uno ya se defendía diciendo 'bueno y ellos por qué no los puedes hacerlo?' Y decía, decían 'hazlo tú!' O sea, como dando a entender si quieres conservar el trabajo? Hazlo. ..Yo sí me sentía mal porque yo decía 'cómo es posible que, o sea, siempre le sacamos todo el trabajo y todavía quieren más y más abusar de nosotros?' O sea, para mí ese sí fue como un cambio feo, porque yo dije eso no es justo y no te puedes defender al 100% porque en realidad te quedas sin trabajo. Y después si nos quedamos sin trabajo porque chequearon los papeles, ya cambiaron de dueño en ese restaurante y chequearon los papeles. Igual nos echaron para afuera. Así. Ahora sí, ahí nos matamos."	**Lupita**: "I worked at a restaurant, and they always told us like they already knew we didn't have our paper or anything… they would tell us, 'go do this job', and then if one defended themselves saying 'well, what about them? Why can't you make them do it?' and they would say, 'you do it!' Like as if to say, 'if you want to conserve the job? Do it.' … I would feel bad because I would say, 'how is it possible that, like, we always yield out all this work and they still want more, more to abuse of us?' Like for me it was an ugly change, because I would say this isn't fair and you can't defend yourself 100% because in reality you would be left without a job. And later they did check our papers when they switched owners, and we were left without a job. Either way, they threw us out. Like that. Now, *there* we worked ourselves to the ground."

Cesar, a father to four Chicana/o children, cares deeply about his family and how he is raising them. He says one day when he is long gone, his children will remember their father.

"Yo los quería por un camino derecho... Yo no quiero que ellos se vayan chuecos. La familia es como un arbolito. Hay que ir enderezandolo poco a poquito hasta que lo ves crecer".
"I wanted then on a straight path... I don't want them to go crooked. The family is like a little tree. You have to straighten it little by little until you watch it grow".

***Consejos* from Cesar:**
"…Aquí en este país venimos a truinfar. Venimos a buscar otra nueva vida. Como todos estos niños que están aquí, nacidos en este país, que le echen muchas ganas… hay que trabajar para poder sobrevivir…. Lo que se pueda. Comoquiera, tarde que temprano, ellos van a crecer y van a volar. Les van a salir alas, van saliendo, y van a volar…"

"…Here in this country, we come to triumph. We come to search for a new life. Like all the kids that are here, born in this country, give it your all. We need to work to survive…whatever we can do. Sooner or later, they are going to grow and fly. They will grow wings; they're coming out and going to fly…"

Gracias Cesar y Lupita for showing me honor in hard work, fearlessness in sharing your story, and power in making our dreams possible.

Huitzilli | The Hummingbird
"Parece Que Están Dándote Una Bienvenida"
"It Seems as If They Are Giving You a Welcome"

Ana, Idalia y Joanna
This *testimonio* follows the story of my abuelita Ana, my mother Idalia, and I.

I recently traveled to the house where my mother grew up in Guadalajara, Mexico (a large city) and where my grandmother currently lives. I had not seen my grandmother in about ten years. Mi Abuelita Ana just turned ninety this year.

My grandfather, an architect, built the house for his family of eight in the 1960s. It is a narrow house with six floors and a central patio with green metallic swings hanging down the middle of the house that is visible on most floors.

I watch my widowed grandmother water her patio plants every morning as hummingbirds circle the honeysuckle flowers on the balcony. She loves to gently shake the water off the leaves and swears it feels as if the plants respond with a 'thank you!'
She remains convinced,

"Le pasó la mano y parece que la planta se endereza y me toca. ¿Me toca la palma de la mano con sus hojas y digo 'No, [Ana] María, te estás volviendo loca, verdad?' Sí, yo sola me digo. Y es verdad!"
"I pass my hand, and it seems as if the plant extends to touch me. It touches the palm of my hand with its leaves, and I say, 'No [Ana] María, you're going crazy, right? Yes, I tell myself. It's true!"

Abuelita Ana says one can talk to horses or our pet dogs, and they'll respond. There is a response… And so must be true about the grass, the plants, and a response in Nature that has died too.
"Entonces hay una respuesta en el pasto, una respuesta en las plants, una respuesta de la naturaleza muerta…"

Ana was born in 1933 in a rural town in Mexico. As a child, she loved to play outside, swing off the Guamúchil trees, climb mountain trails, and protect frogs from the neighborhood boys using slingshots. The boys would also aim at birds for fun, enraging her.

During the interview, she recited a poem from memory that has stuck with her since she was a kid:

"Asomó la cabeza entre la fronda para iniciar el vuelo matutino.
Pero aquel niño lo hirió con la honda
y fue a caer el pájaro al camino
Y aleteaba en el pasto
Al descubrirme se picoteó la herida sobre el pecho, como diciendo,
'Mira! Lo que me han hecho'
Cuando se hizo de noche y estaba dormida
entre las mantas de mi humilde lecho
Cruzó en mis sueños el pajarito herido,
con la cabeza triste sobre el pecho." [13]

"He poked his head through the foliage to begin his morning flight.
But that boy hit it with the sling
And the bird fell to the road
And flapped in the grass.
When he discovered me, he pecked at the wound on his chest,
as if to say,
'Look! What they have done to me!'
When night fell, and I was asleep
In the blankets of my lowly bed,
crossed in my dreams the wounded little bird,
with its sad head on its breast."

Birds are special creatures to Ana; to this day, she refuses to own a bird in a bird cage. I sat down one evening with her and asked what belonging in Nature meant to her; she was ready to respond,

[13] "El pájaro herido" by Francisco Isernia

ANA: Déjame decirte. Déjame decirte. Difícilmente puedes encontrar lugar de pertenencia específicamente para ti, en la Tierra. Porque si vas al agua, sientes que perteneces al agua. Que el agua te gusta. Que disfrutas el agua, si vas al mar, por ejemplo, el agua te encanta. Te llama, te hace suya.Y eres feliz en el agua. ¿Sí o no? Ok.

Ahora, si vas a un lugar de un bosque y puedes estar en una contemplación de lo que es verdaderamente la naturaleza, árboles, plantas, flores, otras cosas que forman parte de la naturaleza, como *yo*. Por tanto las disfruto porque ellas *conmigo* formamos la naturaleza. Yo formo parte de esa naturaleza. Ellas forman parte también. Y todas juntas: árboles, plantas, animales, de todo tipo, aún el frío, el calor y el viento, forman parte de una naturaleza de la que yo soy parte también muy pequeñita.

Un árbol es mucho más fuerte que yo. Hay animales mucho más fuertes que yo. El mar es más fuerte que yo. El viento es más fuerte que yo. Entonces yo soy tan pequeñita para formar parte de esa naturaleza.

Tengo que aceptarlos como mis aliados, o mis partes extras que están ahí, o mis partes ajenas que están ahí. Que encuentro ahí, ahi es donde encuentro la pertenencia mía a la naturaleza.

¿Cómo puedes valorar la naturaleza cuando tú eres tan pequeña? Te sientes tan poca cosa para estar ahí, tan insignificante y que sin embargo, las cosas para las que parece que eres insignificante, también disfrutan de ti. También disfrutan de ti.

No todas las cosas que encuentras en el campo, en el mar, en el valle, en el cerro, no todas las cosas te hacen daño.

Parece que están dándote una bienvenida.

Entonces tú eres parte de esa naturaleza. Quizá llevamos dentro de nosotros ese sentimiento de arraigo por la tierra, por el mundo en el que vivimos, que lo forma el aire, el sol y el agua."

ANA: Let me tell you. Let me tell you. Difficultly enough, you can find a place of belonging specifically for you, on this land. Because if you go to the water, you'll feel that you belong to the water. You'll find that you like the water. You'll enjoy the water. If you go to the sea, for example, the water enchants you. It calls you, it makes you hers. And you are happy in the water. Yes or no? Okay.

Now, if you go to a place in a forest and are in contemplation of what exactly is that Nature of trees, plants, flowers, other things that form part of that Nature, like *me*. Therefore, I enjoy them because they form Nature *with me*. I form part of that Nature. They form part of it too. And all together, trees, animals, plants, of all kinds, even the cold, the heat, and the wind form part of Nature that I am a very small part of too.

A tree is much stronger than I. There are animals much stronger than I. The sea is much stronger than I. The wind is much stronger than I. So, I am so tiny to be part of that Nature.

I have to accept them like my allies, or my extra parts that are there, or my foreign parts. What I can find there, there is where I find my belonging in Nature.

How can you value Nature when you are so small? You feel so little to be there, so insignificant and yet, the things that you seem to be insignificant to, also enjoy you. They also enjoy you.

Not all things you find in the field, in the sea, in the valley, on the mountain, not all things hurt you.

It seems they are giving you a welcome.

So you are part of that Nature. Maybe we carry within us that feeling of rootedness for the earth, for the world in which we live, which is formed by the air, the sun and the water."

Ana: "¿Sabes cuáles eran mis juguetes cuando yo tenía esa edad? ¿Cinco años, tres años, cuatro años? Mis juguetes eran salir a los basureros que no eran como ahora, porque ahora eso es porquería de ver a los basureros. Pero los basureros que yo recuerdo es donde pues habia una cubeta de algo que iba a vaciar la gente. Y entre esa basura, encontraba yo pedacitos de jarro quebrado, pedacitos de plato quebrado, pedacitos de la loza que las mamás quebraban y tiraban a la basura. Y yo de repente la encontraba y para mí eran porcelana. ¡Fíjate! Porcelana finísima de China. ¿Quién me decía eso? Nadie, pero para mí valía mucho ese pedacito. Y las juntaba en una bolsita o en un calcetín, y andaba yo con mi tesoro de porcelana. ¡Hazme el favor!"	**Ana:** "Do you know what were my favorite toys when I was that age? Five years, three years, four years? My toys were to go out to the trash cans, which were not like now, because now it's a mess to go to the garbage. But the dumpsters that I remember were where there was a bucket of something that people would empty. And among that garbage, I would find bits of broken jug, bits of a broken plate, bits of earthenware that mothers broke and threw in the garbage. And all of a sudden I found it and to me it was porcelain. Look at that! Very fine porcelain from China. Who told me that? Nobody, but that little piece was worth a lot to me. And I would put them in a little bag or in a sock, and I would walk around with my porcelain treasure. Can you believe that?"

I asked abuelita what connection made her think of this memory. She responded,

Ana: "Porque, fue arcilla y primero fue barro, fue tierra, fue agua. Y formaron un cacharro, un plato, un vaso. Luego se rompe y yo tengo los pedazos. Igual que me va a pasar a mí. Ahorita soy un receptor de- no sé, tengo vida, soy un jarro. Soy un plato, soy una olla, soy algo. Pero un día me voy a desintegrar, me voy a desbaratar y formo parte de la tierra como ese cacharro. Entonces ese traste y yo formamos parte de la naturaleza. ¿Checaste? Cuando yo me muera, voy a dar como el plato quebrado."	**Ana:** "Because, it was clay and first it was mud, it was earth, it was water. And they formed a pot, a plate, a glass. Then it breaks and I have the pieces. Just like what's going to happen to me. Right now I'm a receiver of- I don't know, I have life, I'm a jar. I'm a dish, I'm a pot, I'm something. But one day I'm going to disintegrate, I'm going to fall apart and become part of the earth like that pot. So that pot and I are part of Nature. Did you check? When I die, I will give like the broken plate."

I paused to think about what she had said earlier, contrasting life that gives and death[14] that gives.

[14] Ybarra (2016) writes on Moraga's (Chicana) poetic piece "War Cry" in *The Last Generation* (1993): "…the colonized body never really lost its connection to the natural environment…. tierra completes the circle—for upon death, we are interred and eventually become one with the Earth" (p. 146-147).

We continue the conversation on broken earthware, how she loves to recycle pieces and create[15] *new things with them, but she doesn't know why. My mom interjected, "porque eres artista, mamá" (because you're an artist, mama).*

***Consejos* from Ana and Idalia:**

Idalia: "Que [los Chicanas/os] ocupen su lugar. Que sean ellos mismos, que disfruten de lo que tengan. Que luchen por sus objetivos, por sus metas, por sus intereses. Que estudien. Que aporten a la comunidad. Que perdonen a los que no les comprenden. Que sean ellos mismos. Que no dejen su cultura, sus antepasados, sus raíces. Y en cuanto a la naturaleza, pues que la disfruten también."
"Let [Chicanas/os] take their place. Let them be themselves, let them enjoy what they have. Let them fight for their objectives, for their goals, for their interests. Let them study. Let them contribute to the community. That they forgive those who do not understand them. To be themselves. That they do not leave their culture, their ancestors, their roots. And as for Nature, let them enjoy it also."

Abuelita responded:

Ana: "Pero en ese término es como que yo voy a disfrutar una pieza de pan y me la como. La disfruto. Y en el caso de la naturaleza, al decir que la disfrute, es como si puedes hacer un abuso de ella o puedes formar parte para cuidarla."
"In that, it's like, I go to enjoy a piece of bread, and I eat it. I'll enjoy it. But in the case of Nature, by saying enjoy it, it's like you can abuse it or you can ***form a part*** *of her to take care of her."*

Gracias mamá y abuelita for teaching me that we belong to more than what we see.

[15] "Creative practices and behaviors oriented towards rethinking relations with others and the landscape produced a change in the embodiments… [people are] more likely to articulate themselves in relation to the landscapes of their childhood and present, more likely to see relationships in general as constitutive of their being" (Holmes, 2016, p. 16).

Decolonizing my Relationship with Nature

I do not claim I have acquired a full decolonial lens to view Nature (and wonder if I ever will), but I am in this humbling process. Progressing to decolonize my relationship with Nature, the sciences, and education methods is not an on/off switch. Decolonization is a process done by consistently holding space (Cairo, 2021) for the voices of People of Color, particularly those of indigenous affinity around the world.

After this research, I noted a change in how I now share the reverence of Nature as a living being; as healer (thank you Maria) and as the greatest mother (thank you Dulce). It is the land that feeds and places reminders all around us (thank you Cesar). I think critically about when we are mindlessly, regardless of intention, recreating or working the land that holds us, our ancestors, and the non-human life. I create dialogue around colonization's effect on using Nature as a "resource" and the domination of this mindset in our leisure/outdoor field. I challenge the dangerous mindset of consumption without reciprocity. This can be in large scale society but also in our immediate everyday life. Even when we can/do immense harm as a human race, we are not enemies to Nature. We belong as an extension of her body.

It is a beautiful thing to be human and be enjoyed by Nature herself as she welcomes us with an embrace (thank you Abuelita Ana). Nature can create space to grow, let go, play and share our essence of belonging in being merely human (thank you Daniella). Nature is a space where we can connect on a deeper level to our families, our ancestors, and heal from disconnect or exclusion (thank you Paola). Our ancestors and their descendants embody movement, an ancient right as a people, the landscapes we travel shares wisdom and familiarity (thank you Lorena).

Nature does after all teach us how everything is connected. Perhaps as a result of healing in Nature we can heal in the re-evaluation of life of each other in today's politically charged society. If we sit long enough and listen intently to the heartbeat of the forest, the sea, the desert, and the land, even within our human built cities, we will find belonging connecting everything we know and chose to love.

This is Not a Conclusion: Data Representation Through Antropoesía

You will find the end of these pages do not house a traditional conclusion. This is intentional in lieu of the theoretical lens mentioned above and for the humanization of these stories. Instead, I end with a collection of poems that aid in the reconciliation of shared experiences and new insights. A co-creation inspired by and blessed by my participants/community. These poems reflect a mixture of direct quotes, paraphrased lines, and even a poem written by a participant in totality. I chose to be antilinear in these poems because they reflect how we gather and share information every day that inspires and orchestrates us.

Instead of a conclusion, I present five poems representing each *testimonios* as a collective performance. These poems retain the participant's direct language and extraction of the cultural context spoken, hence, "evocative content for arts-based interpretations of the data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 94). Due to substantial indigenous erasure and hybridization in the Americas, Chicana feminists (Anzaldua, 1987) rework elements of hybridized Aztec and Toltec culture to revitalize the lost identity of our ancestry through art. This performative work by Chicanas/os functions to "draw the audience to see beyond the immediate, material world and to vision it as it *could* be in ways that put spirituality and spiritual healing at the center of one's life and struggles against oppression" (Holmes, 2016, p. 19).

These ethnographic poems inspired by Latine communities are known as *antropoesía* (Rodríguez Gutiérrez, 2019). The poems created are not intended to replace the *testimonios*, rather "give [participant] words the necessary space, both literal and metaphorical, for readers to take in the immensity, and intensity, of these human encounters and experiences" (Chaparro, 2020, p. 621). This creation process was equally as healing for me in relation to synthesizing participants stories and *consejos*.

I request readers not to judge the testimonios/poems based on "scientific validity" but through what Parry & Johnson (2007) called Creative Analytic Practice or CAP. The goal of CAP is to "reflect experiences in ways that represent their personal and social meanings rather than simplifying and reducing to generalize" (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 120). CAP allows readers to judge these poems based on five criteria of evaluation (Parry & Johnson, 2007):

1. Does the text contribute to a deeper understanding of social life, including being grounded or embedded in a human perspective? The human perspective must then inform the ways in which the text itself is constructed.
2. Is the text complex, interesting, and engaging? Is it aesthetically pleasing?
3. Was the text clear in how the author's reflexivity played a role in the creation of the text?
4. Does the text affect the reader on an emotional and intellectual level? Does it motivate or create new questions for the reader towards social action or change?
5. Does the text provided an expression of a (social) reality and convey an embodied sense of lived experience? Is it "believable and convey a credible account of cultural, social, individual or communal sense of "real"? (Richardson, 2000, p. 125-126)

It is in this creation process, POC affirm "self-worth, autonomy, pride, and strength; for releasing stress and tensions; and [gain] community spirit" (Iwasaki, 2007; Wearing, 1998).

Forest

I walk by a grave through a lively forest.
The trees remind me of my mother's presence;
My mother's bonfire, by her father in a distant land.

I hear my grandfather's story
through the smell of burning wood;
A story of how I'm already home.

River
Written by: Carlos

A river runs through us, reminding us of life’s flow.
As cultures unite with diversity, adversity, in the night.

The river separates two lands, but love for each other, it never demands.
Chicano culture with roots so deep, and Hispanic heritage a soul to keep.

Adversity, it tests our might, but with strength, we stand up and fight
for our families, our communities,
and the love that flows through us, so free.

The river is a reminder, of where we come from.
A symbol of unity, and love that is strong.
For our cultures, our traditions, and our pride.
A river runs through us, side by side.

Land

"They should be speaking English. This is not their house,"
I hear my teachers whisper behind my back.
Yet, in school, we learned
this was never white people's land.

"Leave! But to your country, because you are not from here,"
Yelled the cop in my mother's face.
I am here, and I am there because I am obligated,
But I am here to take my space on both sides.

Rooted in the fact that
I'm human
And worthy of love.

Desert

They drop us off in new places
to get lost in the desert.
El Sol melts the empty water jugs
on the sandy footpath.
La Luna freezes the human bones in the dirt
"Pero ni modo."

We came to
Grow the food
Cook the food
Serve the food
And when they're done,
Clean up the food

The American Dream
is still trying to find us.

Huitzilli (The Hummingbird)

To the Aztecs
the hummingbird, el colibrí, huitzilli,
are resurrected warriors.
Beings transitioning worlds
of life and death.

Every morning
Abuelita waters the flowers,
The flowers feed the hummingbirds,
And together,
we watch them fly.

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