

PLÁTICAS~TESTIMONIOS: Practicing Methodological Borderlands for Solidarity and Resilience in Academia

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Abstract: *In this paper, the five co-authors expand on the contours of plática methodology by putting this method into practice. Drawing on the Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies of testimonio and plática we make a connection between the two methods, as both are used as feminista decolonizing methodologies on and of the borderlands. We—one Chicana, one Arabyyah, one Latina Muslimah, and two Mexicanas—share how we engaged in plática in a variety of ways: one on one, collectively and communally with conference attendees. As we began platicando, we engaged in reflexión and testimonio-telling. Through the process, we embraced our complex, overlapping and varied positionalities, knowledges, pedagogies and ways of surviving the colonial and imperial borders within the academy. We conclude by theorizing how pláticas and testimonios are a reflexión process that is built on trust, love, and solidarity. We argue that this process has a transformative potential that invites urgent action and new ways of sustaining resilience and enacting solidarity.*

Key Words: *arabyyah, borderlands Chicana/Latina, decolonizing, plática, reflexión, sumud, testimonio*

Four¹ of us traveled to Montreal on November 9, 2016, the day after the 45th US president was elected, to present at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference. We were going to present on our developing/evolving pláticas~testimonios work, which had started earlier that year. We began the presentation by expressing our gratitude to the people indigenous to the land where Montreal stands, and the peoples of the borderlands, where we live. We also introduced one another, including the platicadoras who could not be there. The room was packed, standing room

only. Briefly, we presented the project, our positionalities, a summary of each of our pláticas-testimonios, and three out of the twenty-five main themes that had emerged. We named our experiences and exposed our silences—we “translate[d] ourselves for each other” (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, 3) and for the audience. When we opened the floor for discussion, we were struck by the trust we had earned. The sharing from the audience was visceral, palpable. It was at this NWSA conference where we felt a sense of urgency to continue developing and practicing these methodologies that allow us to theorize how pláticas-testimonios necessitate reflexión throughout.

Both in higher education and in the borderlands, we face not only the actions of Islamophobic, racist, transphobic, Orientalist, and xenophobic perpetrators, but also the impunity with which their atrocities are committed. Backed by state-sponsored systems, power holders persist in inflicting distress in our communities without consequence. The Latina Feminist Group (2001, 263) writes about how the Latina body “re/members” the “agravios, the assaults—our bodies chronicle what they endure; they are marked by a history of raced-gendered violence, persecution, and subjugation,” and yet, “our bodies give testimony, our bodies awaken” and we begin to heal. Therefore, like the *mujer* scholars involved in the Intergenerational Latina Health Leadership Project (Ayala, Herrera, Jimenez, and Lara 2006) and the CuranderaScholarActivist Group (Gonzalez, Lara, Prado, Lujan Rivera, and Rodriguez 2015), we gathered on a college campus to enact a liberatory methodology—pláticas-testimonios²—to decolonize and begin healing ourselves in academia. In this paper, we³ (one Chicana, one Arabyyah, one Latina Muslimah, and two Mexicanas) present the use of pláticas (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016) and testimonios as *feminista*⁴ borderland methodologies, tools and processes of decolonizing knowledges about “what is missing, what is passed over, and what is avoided” (Pillow and Mayo 2012, 179) in academia. Herein, we elaborate

on the course of engaging our complex, overlapping, and varied positionalities and everyday knowledges, pedagogies and ways of surviving the colonial and imperial borders within the academy and on the borderlands (Anzaldúa 1999). Throughout, we draw on Chicana/Latina feminist traditions of theorizing from the body (The Latina Feminist Group 2001; Moraga 2002).

As testimonios emerged from our pláticas, we relived the assaults, the intergenerational trauma, and the violence inflicted on our bodies and to our people. The Latina Feminist Group (2001) describe how our bodies endure aggressions—an onslaught of assaultive speech and actions that have a lasting impact on us (Delgado and Stefancic 2012). We routinely withstand the “ravages of institutionalized racism, by the patriarchal structures that accord privilege based on gender and class, and by the sexism and heterosexism that forbid love and silence desire” (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, 263). This is an intergenerational trauma we continue to name, bear, and resist—indeed by engaging in pláticas we are able to release, let it out—desahogarse. The literal translation for desahogarse is to “undrown” and it means that we are able to unload the weight of oppression we experience daily—at work, at home, and/or in society. Pláticas para desahogarse became our primary goal as we engaged this method in our offices, homes, or around the kitchen table—these gatherings were similar to “healing circles” (Ayala et al. 2006, 262) where we shared about our struggles and listened deeply and with intent. For us, desahogarse also became synonymous with healing and with solidarity. In academia, we are expected to be bien portadas/educadas and to not display emotions; pláticas para desahogarse, thus, allowed us to freely release “emotions that can be suffocating” (263) if unexpressed or unreleased, and at the same time, challenge this expectation.

In the following section, we begin by first situating pláticas and testimonio as feminista borderland methodologies. We then show how we put into practice

and expand the five principles of plática methodology as delineated by Cindy Fierros and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2016). A section will follow on how pláticas led to reflexión which led to testimonios. We then discuss how the process of reflexión became a tool for bridging pláticas-testimonios.⁵ Lastly, we discuss how both methods are used as tactical decolonizing tools to defy and transform borderland methodologies.

Methodological Borderlands: Pláticas and Testimonio

Pláticas

Pláticas are “informal conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces” (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016, 117). As Gonzalez (1998, 647) contends, they are a “way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations” (quoted in Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016, 117). The plática principles and process form an enacted feminista methodology that has been in use for many years by Chicana/Latina scholars (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016). Fierros and Delgado Bernal delineate five principles of plática methodology—the first being that this methodology draws from Chicana/Latina feminist theory. They assert that something is always learned from the pláticas as we bear witness and learn from shared “experiences, stories . . . and interpretations that impart us with the knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history” (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016, 99). The second relational principle of plática methodology is that the platicadoras are co-creators or “co-constructors of knowledge” (111). Collectively, platicadoras make sense of our experiences in academia and together we theorize as we engage in pláticas. The third principle describes a process that makes inevitable connections to research or scholarship, while analyzing the platicadoras’ interconnected and intersecting lives. Thus, this methodology aims to “prioritize everyday

experiences” (2016, 108). Principle four asserts that pláticas provide us with a “potential space for healing” (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016, 113), and the last contour of plática methodology “relies on relations of reciprocity, vulnerability, and reflexivity” (114). Therefore, plática methodology is a “reciprocal process” and the platicadoras must be “open and vulnerable” (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016, 107) to engage in reflexión. Vulnerability is a requisite when reciprocating individual and shared experiences of trauma and this serves as a cornerstone of pláticas-testimonios methodology. Vulnerability is also intrinsically connected to our reflexión process, which has continued throughout.

Testimonio

Testimonio is an anti-imperial and anti-militarist methodology rooted in Latin America with a collective aim to shape a “discourse of solidarity” (Reyes and Rodriguez 2012, 526). It is “not the speaking of truth, but rather, the telling of an account from an individual point of view whose conscious has led to an analysis of the experience as a shared component of oppression” (528). As such, testimonio “differs from oral history or autobiography in that it involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experience within particular sociopolitical realities” (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012, 364). Testimonios have “the unique characteristics of being a political and conscientized reflection that is often spoken” (Reyes and Rodriguez 2012, 525). It is a methodology in which researchers break silences and bear “witness to both injustices and social change” (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012, 364).

We initiated this solidarity pláticas project because “group marginalization continues to exist in academia even when one holds a relatively privileged

position” (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012, 366). Our pláticas-testimonios revealed our experiences with injustices and trauma at a university uniquely located near the US-Mexico borderlands. These methodologies also helped us recognize and validate our “lived experiences, and epistemologies [as members] of historically oppressed groups” (Flores Carmona 2014, 118) that foreground and center the mind-body-spirit cohesion—where our sources of knowledge allow us to create a “space of reclamation” (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012, 366).

The Road to Our Pláticas~Testimonios

We have fostered these methodologies since June 2016. Our initial pláticas-testimonios exposed the need to engage in deep reflexión about our experiences in academia, especially as we continually experience higher education as a place wrought with imperial, racist, colonizing practices—including the “Hispanic-serving” institution⁶ where we currently are or were students or faculty. Throughout this endeavor, we were at different phases in our academic journeys and we offered different “transborderly” (Trinidad Galván 2011, 6) experiences of value to the process. We initiated this collaborative work to learn from/with each other.

In the following section, we briefly share our diverse and intersecting positionalities as the platicadoras and testimonialistas committed to this work. We narrate the process that opened the road to our pláticas-testimonios presenting constant opportunities for our reflexiones. Our pláticas led us to constant reflexión as we divulged our testimonios (pláticas reflexión testimonios), thus becoming closer as friends, colleagues and as allies. During this time, one of us was still a doctoral student, one had recently moved to a tenure-track faculty position, and there was one assistant, one associate and one full professor in the group.

The Platicadoras

Judith Flores Carmona is the daughter of Josefina and Vicente, first granddaughter of Carmen. She is a Méxicana border crosser, born in Veracruz, México on September 15. She is the daughter and granddaughter of a murdered papá y abuelo—dispossessed of the land, el rancho where she was born. She is a testimonialista who once did not have papeles, the first to cross the language border in the US, the first to enter and navigate academia. She cannot explain to her mom what she does at the university—“escribo libros”—she writes about injustice and oppression, as well as her comunidad’s sabiduría.

Manal Hamzeh is an arabyah queer feminist born east of the Jordan River between two traumatizing losses of Palestine, al Nakba⁷ of 1948 and al Naksa⁸ of 1967, the catastrophic loss of Palestine, the dispossession of the Palestinians, and the loss of their historic land and way of life. Her life was shaped by crossing el jiser (the bridge) physically, emotionally, and mentally. It is the arbitrary colonizing border that is the essence of every Palestinian who has been traumatized and lives in/by their sumud,⁹ sheer existence and persistence. Since 2003, when the US army invaded Iraq via Jordan, her life was dominated by imperial borders from Palestine and Jordan, to Europe, to the United States, and to Canada.

Cynthia Bejarano is a Mexicana/Chicana/fronteriza, the daughter of Felix and Elvira, who grew up in a colonia, the daughter of homespun accountants and social workers. She is a second-generation college student from a humble background. She grew up at the US-Mexico border, one block from the Texas-New Mexico frontera, where crossing borders is visceral. The borders of the haves and have-nots are always evident to her. Access to quality education, healthcare, and security and safety are burgeoning issues that point to systemic racism, sexism, and classism within institutions that shape her worldview.

Ma. Eugenia Hernández Sánchez is a daughter from the borderlands and the youngest of Refugio and Rafael. She has lived all her life in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, frequently crossing “to the other side” to meet family, friends and to study. She refuses to limit herself geographically or limit her friendships according to the nation-state written in her passport. She believes that pláticas can help her enter new possibilities by transforming the policing of the border into an encounter with *feminista amigas*.

Yvonne Pilar El Ashmawi is a Chicana Muslim from California; the daughter of Delia Davila, who blessed her with her middle name Pilar, after her mother’s mother. She loves her middle name because it carries the life and dreams of the abuelita who died long before she was born and because it means pillar. She strives to be a pillar of her home and community. She was raised in a conservative Muslim community. Once she entered school and work, she realized there had to be many of her selves to carve out safe spaces of belonging in the mosque, at home, and at school where there were virtually no other Muslims.

Phases of Our Pláticas

We put into practice Fierros and Delgado Bernal’s (2016) plática methodology, but specifically drew on the need to rely “on relations of reciprocity, vulnerability, and reflexivity,” (114). We enacted “la entrada” and “amistad interview” phases of plática methodology (Fierros and Delgado Bernal, 2016). The first two phases sparked our initial pláticas; however, we have yet to arrive at “la despedida” (Fierros and Delgado Bernal, 2016) because our pláticas continue.

Our work began in early 2016, when Hamzeh and Bejarano invited Flores Carmona to work on submitting a proposal to the NWSA annual conference, on its theme of decoloniality. Flores Carmona then invited Hernández Sánchez,

El Ashmawi, and a sixth participant who has since withdrawn from this project. This step was the *entrada*. At our first meeting in February 2016, we gathered to write the conference proposal and abstracts and decided on how to proceed with *pláticas* as our methodology. Each *mujer* drew two different names and met with their pair for an hour-long, one-on-one *plática*. The *pláticas* began in June 2016. We met at different homes, cafes, and university offices. We used the abstracts of our individual NWSA conference presentations as informal prompts. We audio-recorded our hour-long two-person *pláticas* and made them available to the other *platicadoras* on a secure Google Drive file. We each listened to all the recordings and took reflexive notes.

In July and November, we held two group *pláticas*, or what Gonzalez identifies as “*encuentros*” (2006, 30) using our *reflexiones* as prompts. We sat around kitchen tables and shared meals, laughed, cried, and discussed each other’s analyses of the pair *pláticas*. Again, the group *pláticas* were audio-recorded and shared on a Google Drive. This group engagement and shaped additional *pláticas-testimonios* and these became our tool and our unit of analysis as we, “learn[ed] firsthand about the aches and pains, fears and hopes” (Chabram-Dernersesian and de la Torre 2008, 4) and much more about and from each other. Moving from the private to the public, we then continued our *pláticas-testimonios* at three different conferences to enact/practice the methodology and to continue doing analysis.

At our first presentation at the NWSA conference in Montreal, we asked for the attendees’ consent to audio-record the session. In this unorthodox manner of presenting at academic conferences, we, the *platicadoras*, had time for spontaneous *pláticas-testimonios*. As we shared our *papelitos guardados* (The Latina Feminist Group 2001), intimate and authentic opportunities shaped moments of solidarity, at the conference and thereafter. Our experience with the live *pláticas*, including the way the audience engaged with us, heightened our sense of urgency to write about our methodological process.

Our second presentation was at the *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) Summer Institute* in 2017, a conference mostly attended by Chicanas/Latinas and Indigenous scholar-activists who constantly struggle to legitimize our epistemologies, methodologies, and pedagogies in academia and in society. Hernández Sánchez, Bejarano, and Flores Carmona presented in plática-style and elaborated on their activist work/research as part of the testimonio genre. Again, the audience joined us, expressing their cravings for methodological shifts and asking for consejos/advice on employing testimonio in educational research. Our last conference, where Flores Carmona, Bejarano, and Hamzeh presented in Minneapolis, was the inaugural *Abolish Imperial Borders Convergence (AIBC)* in 2017. This gathering was attended and organized by a mix of political activists and academics from the United States and Canada.

We engaged with the audience by sharing how pláticas and testimonio have allowed us to share our stories and our reflections about the imperial borders of US-Mexico and Palestine-Israel-Jordan. Flores Carmona and Bejarano both had a spontaneous and cathartic experience as they shared more of their personal stories of crossing international borders, made more painful by US customs interrogations and the grind of racist overtones. We were vulnerable as we shared our plática-testimonio process and border crossing experiences. We engaged the session attendees in the process of moving these pláticas toward praxis—a plática-testimonio practica of sorts.

Indeed, our process became a healing balm for us and for the audience. As we employed reflexión before, during, and after our conference presentations, it became evident that a methodological and relational shift was occurring. As testimonios began to emerge through our pláticas—shared in public spaces rather than just with each other—we knew that our reflexiones (reflexive notes and emerged themes) were an essential component of our work. It became essential to map out the role of reflexión as an urgent part of the process when engaging pláticas-testimonios that sprung from these enacted methodologies.

Spiraling into Reflexión

Each *plática*, planned or spontaneous, took us in various directions and helped us make sense of the data, and how the *pláticas* impacted our mind, body, and spirit. We constantly delved into deep/critical *reflexión* as our process continued to generate deeper trust leading to the sharing of *testimonios*, thus “bridging *testimonios* across [our] lived experience... enhance[ing] the level of knowledge construction that *testimonio* offers in formulating a collective consciousness” (Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, and Muñiz 2012, 444). The deep *confianza* embedded in these shared interactions flattened power-dynamics, and this allowed for *reflexión* to pivot our relationships into spaces of sharing and collective theorizing. The *pláticas* and *testimonios* sharing allowed each of us to reflect individually away from the collective, but also to contribute to theory making together when we realized how our experiences converged and diverged from each other. Whether expressed verbally or in writing, our *reflexiones* moved us “to analyze and interpret our individual *testimonios* as part of a collective experience that reflects our past, present, and future” (Espino et al. 2012, 445). Indeed, our process was organic and fluid, leading us to our *pláticas* from which *testimonios* emerged, then spiraling into *reflexión* of our *testimonios*, then back to *reflexión* for further *pláticas*.

Flores Carmona. The process for me was about including the voices of a recent graduate and a doctoral student, hence, building on the mentoring practices that feminists enact as part of the necessary work to decolonize academia. Collaborating and undoing hierarchies is a way of purposefully including voices from the margins (hooks, 1984). The process was cathartic for me. It was painful and yet, empowering to be able to relate to and with El Ashmawi and Hernández Sánchez on a deeper, personal level. Our relationship blurred the lines between professor-student to that of *colegas*-friends, co-conspirators.

We also blurred the lines between researcher-researched and from an objective-subjective methodological approach to one where

We were able to challenge each other . . . a sign that *confianza* remained, necessary to overcome the borders between us. It was not an intellectual or academic space, but rather one where kin and love were at the center and generated new knowledge and critical consciousness. This challenges the idea that real knowledge can only come from academic circles. . . . It validates *mujerista* knowledge (Cervantes-Soon 2014, 110).

Indeed, this *mujerista*¹⁰ praxis had been enacted by Hamzeh and Bejarano, both reputable and internationally recognized *feminista* scholars, who reached out to me (Flores Carmona) to breach the gap that can exist among junior and senior scholars. The *pláticas* were reciprocal and allowed me to divulge my struggles and stories of survival. For me, this process has been transformative and empowering.

Hamzeh. The process of *plática* was crucial for me; it opened a space to use my Arabic language without fear. I drew on the trust built with the *platicadoras*. I listened to their *pláticas* with my heart as I trusted my voice and entrusted my *plática-testimonio* to/with them. The *plática* with Bejarano became the bridge and the space that empowered and brought me a feeling of home in exile. I realized that *plática* to me is *hikaya*, which means both weaving and crafting a story in Arabic. To me now *hikaya* is *plática* and *plática* is *hikaya*. Until this collaboration, I had not shared—in public or in private—my border crossing names, family history, and exile locations. I had a safe space where I could share and make sense of the connections between my border-crossing-self and history, and to my colleagues' border-crossing-selves as *feminista* scholars. Trusting my

complex border stories was about going beyond my academic known self. This trust is not new; it is a trust that is built on the academic solidarity tradition started with *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* between Chicanas and Arab feminists (Abdelhadi and Abdulhadi 2002). This trust is about surviving exile and crossing the colonial borders of the United States and so-called Israel. The individual pláticas were about me as a feminist who lived her life “growing up transborderly” (Trinidad Galván 2011, 6) crossing to and between the United States, Jordan, and Palestine while living the stories and the history of my family traumatized by the realities of loss with the hundred-year-old Sykes-Picot¹¹ borders’ drawing and the seventy-years-old settler colonial Israeli theft of Palestinian land.¹² The group pláticas sustained a solidarity and trust I have long needed throughout my years in the academy.

Bejarano. The plática with Manal was familiar and visceral, a bonding across historical legacies of violence and survival, of crossing international land and sea borders, with a shared testament of mourning and sadness, survivability, and hope. Our plática took place in the sanctity safe space of a home, surrounded by the familiar and comforting landscapes of desert, adobe, and blue sky. The plática centered our realities of life negotiating borders and boundaries, while actively and urgently resisting the dictates of colonial oppression and legacies of violence that profoundly impact us. Hamzeh and I shared our evocative and overlapping yet distinct lived experiences, but still, came to conclude that although we read as culturally, socially, linguistically, and sexually distinct, our plática signaled our deep connection to each other, and the commitment to threading and weaving together our work, our families, and our activism, into tapestries of resistance at the borderlands.

Hernández Sánchez. The plática with both Flores Carmona and El Ashmawi involved a simultaneous sense of empathy and tension. Finally, we were able

to meet and share what was important in our lives as women with many intersecting borders. With El Ashmawi, I was able to share what it's like to be mothers, practicing a faith, about our relationships with our mothers and how they created generational knowledge by negotiating spaces. What is more, our shared *papelito guardado* (The Latina Feminist Group 2001) involved admitting that our partners play an important role in our educational aspirations, but that patriarchy oppresses everyone. Perhaps this fragmentation of the self is what was also the tone of the *plática* with Flores Carmona. Our *pláticas* centered around the idea of being able to be honest with one another, which included recognizing the moments where we did not question the contextual conditions that confronted us instead of uniting us. In both *pláticas* it was important to connect our personal experiences by reading the power systems around us.

The *pláticas* with El Ashmawi took place in a coffee shop, where we felt we were under the vigilance of social norms (and conformity) of the people who surrounded us. This is the cost of interrupting a space with personal testimonios. As we talked about our experiences and about the irrationality of Islamophobia, a couple who was near stared at us with discontent, their body movements were agitated and at one point I thought, "He is coming; he is gonna interrupt our *plática*." None of this happened, but we decided to leave the place as soon as we ended. Cindy Cruz (2001, 659) helps us explain this interrogation of the gaze. "The scholar in possession of a brown and lesbian body, or in this case, the body inscribed as 'messy text,' is not only disruptive to the canon, but is also excessive in its disorderly movements and conduct. Nothing provokes the custodians of normality and objectivity more than the excessiveness of a body."

In the second *plática* with Flores Carmona, the messy text and intensity can come from within a closed space, the university. We met at the place where the conflict we needed to address took place. I felt tense but ready to at least open

the possibilities to continuously re-elaborate our *trenza de identidades* (Delgado Bernal 2008); and we did. For ancient Mayans, randomness is the way of the world, so I was glad that randomness took me to this *plática* and to this place with Flores Carmona. I was able to understand the vulnerability that surrounded us and how being strong also requires support and companionship from friends.

El Ashmawi. I met with Flores Carmona after I defended my dissertation, and since she was my dissertation chair, it was a great moment to connect without the obligations other than to meet for our *plática*. Because of this, it was a relaxed experience that allowed me to be more open. This experience with my femtor felt wobbly at first as I grappled with how open is open, how informal is informal. However, she allowed herself to be vulnerable and this allowed me to be vulnerable. After that, our experience felt authentic in the flow of the conversation, in the trust we have in each other, and in our capacity to each be both wisdom holder and wisdom seeker. I left the *plática* feeling heard and seen and my experiences acknowledged, and also significantly less isolated in academia.

Group Reflexión. As a *platicadoras* group, having these *pláticas* informed by the principles outlined by Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) constantly led us toward individual *reflexión*, then to collective reflexivity about the *pláticas-testimonios* that were arising in the pair and group *encuentros*. Our *reflexiones* revealed how we began examining and sharing our inner selves with each other, moving beyond self-reflection and self-inquiry toward an engagement of our life journeys. Throughout, the act of *reflexión* showed its transformative potential and invited us to stay open to urgent action, to new ways of sustaining resistance, enacting collective solidarity, and to appreciate how *pláticas-testimonios* were/are reciprocated. Our *pláticas-testimonios* allowed us to divulge our struggles and stories of survival in languages that felt

safe with the other platicadoras. Individual and group reflexión took us toward a collective consciousness that returned us to the mind, body, spirit center that encourages community, which is rarely present in academia.

The group pláticas-testimonios made us feel a sense of belonging in academia and an urgency to be available for each other, as colleagues, friends, and teachers. However, deep reflexión about the personal and theoretical value of these methodologies (pláticas-testimonios) is needed, especially in academia, to untangle the contradictions and tensions (wrought from the academy) that we may shoulder. From this process emerge possibilities for growth and deeper healing, amistad/friendship and solidarity necessary to continue the project of decolonizing academia.

However, to initiate the pláticas that move us to testimonio sharing and to reflexión throughout, a personal connection between the platicadoras is essential and a level of trust among us is foundational. Indeed, through the pláticas, we began “a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective and dynamic . . . [and that] extends one’s personal experience to include collective experience and community memory” (Delgado Bernal 1998, 567–68). Our scholarship and theoretical praxis was and is inspired by communal-familial learning and lived experiences. Our pláticas and then the urgency with which we shared our testimonios made this methodology one that linked emotion with action—and action with the theoretical underpinnings of platicando. Pláticas allowed us to bridge the everyday realities of academe and “border inspection” (Lugo 2000) assaults to a praxis of theorizing from the body for decolonizing work—through a process of reflexión. Thus, we continually had to follow our process of engaging in pláticas, contemplating via reflexión, sharing testimonios, and once again, deliberating via reflexión in order to move to theorizing and to understanding these methodologies as decolonizing.

Decolonizing Methodologies of the Borderlands

Seeking to practice and expand on Fierros and Delgado Bernal's (2016) contours of *plática* methodology, our individual and collective reflexiones allowed us to understand that as we began to *platicar*, we were engaging in a decolonizing methodology that led us to *pláticas-testimonios*. While *platicando* about our painful experiences—such as the crossing of literal borders, as well as the colonial and racializing borders built around language and bodies in academia—our testimonios came out as unique “spoken accounts of oppression” (Reyes and Rodriguez 2012, 256).

As we divulged our testimonios via *pláticas*, we reclaimed our voices, hence decolonizing the rigid constructions of how to do research, how to femtor across ranks, how to collaborate and bridge our work, and how to teach. The process of coming together to share these painful and powerful stories then, is a decolonizing act that disrupts hierarchies and welcomes the type of vulnerability that is necessary for sharing our testimonios with confidence. The reflexiones we engaged and shared reaffirmed that the process of *pláticas-testimonios* legitimized our ways of resisting oppression in academia—no matter how quiet our resistance has been. Our *pláticas-testimonios* recreated our *trenza de identidades* (Delgado Bernal 2008), where “part of the work involved threading/weaving together our fragmented identities involve[d] having to speak up and speak back to those institutions of power that [attempt to] silence us” (Tellez, et 2017, 65). This reclamation and sharing of our voices made the process both transformative and decolonizing.

Academia has attempted to erase our experiences and identities as feministas of color surviving systems-based oppression. However, in the past two years, our reflexiones, during and after our *pláticas* and testimonio-sharing, have

made it clear that these methodologies have interrupted this attempt and opened the possibility to think together, write and boldly theorize together creating mechanisms of survival and hope. Indeed, with this project we created what Emma Pérez (1999, 47–48) terms *un sitio y lengua*, where “Our works emerge from *un sitio y una lengua* (a space and language) that rejects colonial ideology and the by-products of colonialism.” *Pláticas-testimonios*, then, are decolonizing methodologies because they serve to help us denounce, release, and *desahogar* as we share our realities and ways in which we have dealt with injustice and oppression in academia.

Therefore, *pláticas-testimonios* are powerful decolonizing methodologies because we “teach, learn and form alliances based on our personal stories that are very much communal” (Delgado Bernal 2009, 4). *Pláticas-testimonios* offer us a praxis that radically disrupts positivists and post-positivist research approaches in academia. These methodologies unhinged the isolation that typically accompanies academics and created a relational model of decolonizing our research methods, mentoring practices, and analysis. For Linda Tuhiwai Smith, this decolonizing praxis is the “risky business” of producing “knowledge that documents social injustice, that recovers subjugated knowledges, that help create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and ‘listened to’, and that challenges racism, colonialism, and oppression” (2012, 198). We drew from our lived experience and our epistemologies, and we centered *pláticas-testimonios* as a method and theory of the flesh (Moraga 2002) to merge the relation between our body memories/stories in and of place (Tuck and McKenzie 2015), in the borderlands. Indeed, our reflexiones throughout this process revealed how it was “the everyday—the flesh, the material realities and historical specificity” that allowed for our knowledges to be theorized (Sanchez 2001, 379) through *pláticas-testimonios*.

Furthermore, while Sanchez (2001) proposes we start with history, Pendleton Jiménez (2006, 222) urges us to “start with the land” as the site where the decolonizing groundwork must begin. This work requires that we have a clear sense of how our body is related to the “land” on which we reside and belong. Indeed, at our institution and borderlands community, we need to continually remind ourselves of Pendleton Jiménez’s (2006) words—that our bodies are situated in a “land,” a site, un sitio that serves to contextualize and analyze our bodily experience with oppression within a certain locality. The history of the land contextualizes and situates our body as the primary tool for sensing and connecting with the land/sitio, and for establishing intimacy and invoking memory of lived experiences, together with pláticas.

Hence, pláticas-testimonios are our decolonizing methodological tools because we found ourselves, “alienated from [our] mother culture, [and we are] ‘alien’ in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her ‘Self.’ Petrified, she can’t respond, her face caught between los intersticios (the interstices) the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits” (Anzaldúa 1999, 42). Our reflexiones about this process invited us to pay closer attention to place, to where we were exiled (Manal) or remained on the borderlands—with its conflicts and tensions, where we situated, negotiated, and straddled the knowledges that spring from our flesh, from our experiences (Anzaldúa 1999; Pendleton Jiménez 2006; Pérez 1999).

Eve Tuck also speaks of decolonizing praxis as “pausing and even a way to listen for the bulk of learning” (quoted in Patel 2016, xv). Pláticas-testimonios, then, allow us to do this deep decolonizing research/work that is answerable to the land and to colonized and marginalized peoples. Indeed, in Leigh Patel’s (2016, 95–96) words, decolonizing research methodologies are the processes in which we refuse to “capitulate oneself, one’s praxis, and one’s imagination

to coloniality.” Our pláticas-testimonios counter the “regimes of truths” (Said 1978) of colonial and Orientalist representations of border people, borderly subjects and imperial borders. We find ourselves at an important crossroads practicing decolonizing research methodologies that might break free of colonial logics in academia. We will continue platicando, testimoniando and reflexionando as a simultaneous process of decolonizing institutions of higher learning, in which our own mind-body-spirits must survive by employing our pláticas-testimonio methodology.

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Notes

¹ Manal, Cynthia, Judith, and the sixth author, who has since withdrawn from this project.

² The ~ (tilde) between pláticas-testimonios serves as a bridge, our process of reflexión, that allows us to "cross the spatial borders that often separate lo académico de lo personal" (Delgado Bernal,

2009, p. 5)—our pláticas allow us to desahogar our testimonios.

³ Originally, there was a sixth co-author who has since withdrawn from this project.

⁴ Feministas are Chicana/Latina feminists who reclaim the word in Spanish to accentuate our pedagogies and methodologies within and among other feminists and feminists of color. By writing the word in Spanish, a colonizer's language, we are naming ourselves in the lengua (Pérez, 1999) that we know.

⁵ The - (tilde) between pláticas-testimonios signifies the overarching process of reflexión—thus, the bridge between the two methodologies.

⁶ In reality, we are more of a Hispanic-enrolling/counting institution, where the majority of the administrators are not representative of the student demographics.

⁷ Al Nakba in Arabic means the catastrophe. It is the term used to represent what befell the Palestinians in 1947–1949 or when Zionist settler-colonial forces demolished over 500 Palestinian villages and expelled 700,000 Palestinians and as a result created the new state of Israel (Massad, 2018).

⁸ Al Naksa in Arabic is the setback day of June 5, 1967. It commemorates the loss of the rest of Palestine and the Palestinian people further dispossession and displacement from what is called now the West Bank and Gaza. Al Naksa resulted in the illegal occupation by the state of Israel.

⁹ Sumud in Arabic means steadfastness. It is a concept particular to the Palestinians' non-violent resistance to the Israeli colonization and the Palestinians' insistence to live and survive on their ancestral land (on the complex meanings and history of the concept see Rijke & van Teeffelen, 2014).

¹⁰ Muxerista is an alteration of the word mujerista, which literally translates into womanist. A Muxerista is a woman-identified Chicana/Latina who considers herself a feminist or womanist. The “x” replaces a “j” to signify a connection to the ancestry and languages of Mexico and Latin America” (Tijerina Revilla 2004, 82).

¹¹ By the end of WWI and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Mark Sykes (British) and François Georges-Picot (French) drew the arbitrary borders of what became Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. In 1916, Britain and France agreed to distribute their influence on the divided areas, which they essentially colonized. This vast area with its many native peoples and complex histories became what is normatively called “the middle east.”

¹² See footnote seven.

