



The University of Texas at Austin
Texas Education Review
College of Education

Journal Homepage: [Texas Education Review](#)

Published online: July 2022

[Submit your article to this journal](#)



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at www.review.education.texas.edu

Picking Blue Dawns: Community Epistemologies, Dreams, and (Re)Storying Indigenous Autoethnography

PABLO MONTES

Texas Christian University

To cite this article: Montes, P. (2022). Picking blue dawns: Community epistemologies, dreams, and (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography. *Texas Education Review*, 10(2), 1-15.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/41909>

Picking Blue Dawns: Community Epistemologies, Dreams, and (Re)Storying Indigenous Autoethnography

PABLO MONTES
Texas Christian University

Protocol

Before we begin, and as my elders have taught me, I must first follow Indigenous protocol and give rightful space to acknowledge the original peoples of where I write to you today and respectfully introduce myself. The Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Lipan Apache, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, and Tigua Pueblo are amongst the Indigenous tribes and communities in the territories colonially referred to as Texas. My name is Pablo Montes, and my community is from the valley of Huatzindeo (place of beautiful vegetation) in Guanajuato, Mexico. I am descendant of the Chichimeca Guamares and P'urhépecha people and I honor the Lands from which I migrated and the Lands and waters to where I am now a humble guest. Tza wan pupako is one of the Coahuiltecan place names of this region in Central Texas, and usually refers to the sacred spring colonially known as Barton Springs. I also take the time to introduce the waters, the lifeblood, that percolates through this region. Their name is Yana Wana, the spirit of the water or the water's spirit in the Coahuiltecan language. I start in this way because it is through these relations that I come into this work, and it highlights the importance that community is not only where you make it, but how you respect and honor them.

Acknowledgment is only the beginning of fostering an honorable relationship with the Land and Indigenous communities. Relationships take time, care, and patience, therefore honoring Indigenous Lands, and people, must move towards a praxis that centers Indigenous sovereignty and presences (Nxumalo, 2016). Inter-reflexive accountability (Yazzie & Risling Baldy, 2018) helps us realize the interdependent relations with everything around us and encourages us to envision more ethical futures. With this understanding, we see The Land and waters as first teachers that have guided us towards philosophies of being thankful, enacting reciprocity, and listening to our more-than-human kin that has been here for generations (Kimmerer, 2013). Being aware of our responsibility to the Land and the community is an inherently pedagogical endeavor (Tuck et al., 2014). It recognizes a living curriculum that has existed (and continues to exist) for millennia because it runs through our embodied memories, our dreams, and across generations.

Introduction

One day I was missing my grandma, *Mama Gino*, who is now an ancestor. It had been a couple years since her earthly departure, and for some reason, I was worried that one day I would forget what her voice sounded like. I thought about her all day and kept replaying her voice in my head to give myself the comfort of knowing that her voice is still etched into my memory. I remember chuckling at how she would always call me *mija* (daughter), which is a word of endearment, whenever she would talk to me. Although this may seem mundane, this simple act somehow made me feel validated as a Queer person even though she may have never known. That night, I dreamt of picking blue dawns. In my dream, I felt that I was drifting away from *Mama Gino*, and I asked her to guide me in remembering and to give me a sign that she was still here. Blurry with tears, I looked down and I saw blue dawns emerging from the green earth beneath my feet. In the most soothing way, I heard *Mama Gino* say “*ve a agarrarlas*” (go grab them). I picked the flowers as she instructed me and

as I held them near, I heard her say “si vez, nunca voy a estar lejos de ti porque yo estoy en todas las flores que te rodean. Cuando me extrañes, escoje una flor y habla con ella, y yo estare ahi para escucharte” (you see, I will never be far away from you because I am in all the flowers that surround you. When you miss me, choose a flower, and talk to it, and I will be there to listen to you). That year, I planted blue dawns in my backyard as a way to thank my now ancestor for what she taught me that night. *Mama Gino* spoke life into the lesson that ancestors will always be present, regardless of how much time has passed. She reminded me that picking blue dawns was an act of honoring ancestor epistemologies.

Figure 1

Mama Gino with her blue dawns



The dream with *Mama Gino* opens this paper as a way to honor the community and ancestral epistemologies and pedagogies that I carry. As Parter and Wilson (2021) mention, “I begin with story because I am story” (p. 1088). Stories are powerful as they embody our theories (Brayboy, 2005), allow us to form and sustain relationships to others and self (Archibald, 2008), and provide ways to interpret and make meaning of the world (Iseke, 2013). Thus, I am guided by Indigenous-based autoethnography which encourages researchers to critically assess how their relations with community, Land, and self, impact the research they engage with (Bishop, 2021; Lipe & Lipe, 2017; McIvor, 2010; Whitinui, 2014). The academy, however, is an unforgiving place. Many scholars have critically assessed how the academy has been and continues to be a structure that further reifies imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy (Bishop, 2021; Brayboy, 2005; Houston, 2007; Smith, 2013; Tuck, 2009). Although this is true, there has been deliberate contributions from Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people to unsettle the continued epistemic occupation of eurowestern theories and ideologies within research.

Autoethnography is often viewed as a study of the self as mutually exclusive from context and others. Some researchers argue that autoethnography is “me-search” because it over-centralizes the self and is far too subjective for rigorous academic research (Gardner et al., 2017). I agree that research about the self, without interrogating systems of power, coloniality, and racism, does produce research that often reinscribes these oppressive systems and structures. Although this can be the case, Indigenous-based autoethnography encourages researchers to think about self through relationality and commitments to the community (Bishop, 2021; Iseke, 2013; Whitinui, 2014).

Therefore, Indigenous-based autoethnography is less interested in the self as understood in isolation, but the self as understood *through* and *with* relationships, kinships, and community. By sharing my own personal stories of collisions with colonial spaces, as well as my own community-based epistemologies, I demonstrate both the continued epistemic violence that transpires in academic spaces but more importantly, how community-based epistemologies transgress against and beyond these moments of coloniality.

In sharing my personal experiences about my journey in the academy, I highlight the persistence of settler coloniality that continues to transpire in almost all facets of the academy. Despite this ongoing truth, community epistemologies continue to ground and shape how I come to understand knowledge, learning, and self. Imperatively, community is necessary for Indigenous-based research and methodologies and in order to *know* community, the researcher must know both the researcher self as well as the self in relation to the community (Fast & Kovach, 2019). Through autoethnographic methods, I draw on stories (which include dreams) shared in my master's thesis and more recent experiences to situate how community epistemologies unsettle the colonial violence that I often faced within the academy. Some of the experiences I share are very personal, but I am compelled to share aspects of my journey that have been imperative to my continuation within research. My experiences, I argue, are best understood within Indigenous-based autoethnography because I do not exist without my relationships, my community, and my ancestors. Consequently, this paper is more so focused on how community-based epistemologies, in this case, my parents' and ancestors' epistemologies, have provided sustenance and endurance within the academy's unforgiving environment. I focus on envisioning futurities of desire (Tuck, 2009) and sharing the beauty of ancestral (Simpson, 2000) and community knowledges (Yosso, 2005) to foreground a desire of dream co-configuring.

Lastly, I introduce the conceptual framework that guides this research as *(re)storying Indigenous autoethnography* which builds on the long tradition of Indigenous-based methodologies and research. In short, (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography speaks to the traditions of storywork (Archibald, 2008) and restorying (Bang et al., 2014; Corntassel et al., 2009) and how they are interwoven throughout Indigenous-based autoethnographies. Indigenous scholars have noted the important work of autoethnographies through an Indigenous perspective and methodology (Bishop, 2021; Houston, 2007; Iseke, 2013; Whitinui, 2014), and in this respect, (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography explicitly names the impact and way that storying is imperative to Indigenous autoethnography. Ultimately, this conceptual framework also unsettles the rigid boundaries of academic writing, scholarship, and research by emplacing ontologies and epistemologies that are often silenced and erased from the literature, at the center.

Literature Review

(Re)Storying Ontologies

The heart of autoethnographic work is story-based epistemologies (Archibald, 2009; Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Although stories may be devalued or de-emphasized as simple anecdotes or unreliable subjective accounts of the past, in actuality “[stories] hold a greater purpose of teaching, learning, and, at times, creating new knowledge” (McIvor, 2010, p. 140). For Miguel and Francisco Guajardo (2017), they utilize the stories that their father shared with them to inform and shape their pedagogy and philosophy of life a move that they call *la universidad de la vida* (the university of life). For example, Guajardo and Guajardo (2017) conducted an oral history of their father five years

before his passing and during the oral history, they asked him “*como quieres ser recordado?*” (‘How do you want to be remembered?’). To which the father responded, he would like to be remembered as someone who was *cumplido* (fulfilled and in a heightened state of being). Additionally, their father encouraged others to strive to be *cumplidos* in their lives and how this advice, and the “parable of his stories serve as deep lessons on how to live, how to teach, how to learn” (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2017, p. 19). In this respect, stories do not only hold meaning, but they are also able to contextualize people’s cosmologies and philosophical orientations.

Educational research, amongst other disciplines, still values scholarship that creates a division between the researcher and the subjects in the name of objectivity. Minerva S. Chavez (2012) adamantly addresses that academic writing often creates an academic distance between personal experiences and the final scholarly piece of work. To Chavez, “distance... is meant to convey the deeply theoretical and intensely abstract papers that are characteristically valued in higher education in their objectivity and their distance from educational practices” (p. 334). This academic distance comes with consequences as this separation neglects the rich theoretical contributions of speaking and writing in relation with your work. As Lipe and Lipe (2017) argue, “there is great knowledge and power right where we are from and in our daily lives” (p. 34).

Throughout the literature, the utilization of autoethnography varies from study to study depending on the goals and context of each scholar. However, one key component that is prevalent across the literature is critical self-reflexivity (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2017; King, 2015; Lipe & Lipe, 2017; Sykes, 2014; Woods, 2011). Critical reflexivity urges scholars to analyze personal experience through introspection and to examine how one’s own experience can relate to, complicate, or transform understandings. In other words, critical reflexivity amplifies the ability to examine transformative experiences (Skyles, 2014) and to co-construct cultural worlds (Woods, 2011). Locating storytelling as central to autoethnography urges scholars that “might live on the margins to find themselves within these spaces of resistance, resilience, and struggle as we collectively develop a pedagogy and epistemology of the self within our ecology” (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2017, p.7). Therefore, learning and re-storying (Cornthassel et al., 2009) oneself creates generative opportunities for transformative learning that can contribute to community-based epistemologies. Simultaneously, engaging in story work can also offer opportunities for ontological reconfiguring in the wake of collisions between ideology, culture, and self.

Autoethnography as Indigenous Methodology

Autoethnography has been a methodological inquiry for at least three decades, however, the specificity of autoethnography within Indigenous methodologies has not necessarily been a point of consideration within earlier autoethnographic scholarship (Houston, 2007; Iseke, 2013; Whitinui, 2014). Earlier scholarship describing autoethnography lacked contextual understandings of Indigenous realities, even though storytelling and oral/aural traditions are common in many Indigenous communities (McIvor, 2010; Whitinui, 2014). As new waves of Indigenous research emerged, autoethnography was reconceptualized not simply as learning about oneself, but as an intentional and relational research method about self-determination, decolonization, and community epistemologies (Lipe & Lipe, 2017; McIvor 2010).

Moreover, there are distinct synergies between Indigenous research paradigms and autoethnography. McIvor (2010) illustrates this relationship by attending to this notion of the “self” within research “without a sharp separation between the researcher and the subject” and the idea of “shared

modality and intentional use of storytelling as method” (p. 141). That is to say, autoethnography’s key components such as critical self-reflexivity, co-constructing and storytelling, are closely aligned with Indigenous learning practices (Woods, 2011). These practices are then viewed within Indigenous frameworks and paradigms where the relationship between story and knowing, as well as the interrelationship between narrative and research, are inseparable (Francis & Munson, 2017).

This inseparability is best seen between the passing of stories and narratives intergenerationally. For Gonzales (2015), grandmothers or *abuelitas* embody ancestral knowledge and often take on the role of educator, cultural warrior, and a keeper of traditions. Thus, *abuelitas* employ their cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), or the abundant skills, networks, abilities, and knowledges that are embedded within racialized communities that are often disregarded by larger society, to encourage pride in their community’s epistemologies. These *abuelita* epistemologies, or grandmother knowledges, remind Gonzalez (2015) of the epistemological abundance of her family, which in turn, serves as a transgression against the subtractive schooling practices she often faced (Valenzuela, 2010). For example, Lipe and Lipe (2017) view intergenerational epistemology as encouraging their children to participate in their community’s Native Hawaiian language classes even though the primary participants were Hawaiian elders who were eager to engage in language revitalization. Children who attended the classes ushered in an intergenerational curriculum for language revitalization where the interactions between children, parents, and elders became a part of a curricular and pedagogical tapestry. Therefore, community epistemologies, and our own relationality to these knowledges, “strengthens our spirit, informs our research, and guides our teaching” (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2017, p. 20). By centering Indigenous people, stories, and knowledge, Indigenous autoethnography shifts the gaze of research from studying about Indigenous communities to interrogating structures and institutions of colonial power (Bishop, 2021).

(Re)Storying Indigenous Autoethnography (Conceptual Framework)

In weaving together the literature, what transpired was how Indigenous scholars are rearticulating autoethnography as a powerful and necessary method and methodology. What was evident is the way that autoethnography has been re-stored and restoried (Bang et al., 2014; Corntassel et al., 2009) through Indigenous methodologies and story-based epistemologies (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2021). Therefore, the guiding theories of this paper are (re)storying (Corntassel et al., 2009; Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014) and storywork (Archibald, 2008) which when woven together with Indigenous autoethnographies as methodology (Houston, 2007; McIvor, 2010; Whitiwhi, 2014), brings forth what I situate in this paper as *(re)storying Indigenous autoethnographies*.

(Re)storying is best understood as a “process for Indigenous people [which] entails questioning the imposition of colonial histories in our community” (Corntassel et al., 2009, p. 139). In this respect, (re)storying is not only about the act of storying, or the act of story sharing as shaped through space and time (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016), but also a purposeful *restoration* of Indigenous knowledges (Corntassel et al., 2009). Marissa Muñoz (2018) details that restor(y)ation is a grammatical reminder that there is a mutual process of restoring Indigenous knowledge, lifeways, and ways of life through the restorying process. Storywork (Archibald, 2008) is crucial to the process of (re)storying, because storywork positions stories as intimately interwoven with community, self, ancestors, and life. Stories transform, create meaning, and further enmesh people into the larger communal fabric. For example, Urrieta (2013) demonstrates how *saberes* (knowings or understandings) were imperative for youth in Nocutzepo, Michoacán because it was through intimate familial and communal knowledge sharing, that youth learned their Indigenous heritage epistemologies and larger conceptual

understandings of life. Storywork, then, is key to the restor(y)ation (Muñoz, 2018) process of community knowledges because it is through the epistemological depth of stories where critiques of coloniality are evident and, more importantly, the lessons that are necessary for future generations (Iseke, 2013).

(Re)storying Indigenous autoethnographies is thus interested in how storywork and restorying fortify Indigenous autoethnographies. Whereby stories are both an attempt to restore and restory community epistemologies, and in doing so, they highlight how colonial violence remains embedded in the structures that one must navigate. In this respect, (re)storying Indigenous autoethnographies is additive in nature to the work that Indigenous scholars have already done but it does name explicitly the connection between how storywork and (re)storying are synergetic forces within Indigenous autoethnography. Lastly, (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography is also an unwavering transgression against how academic research is “traditionally” done and, consequently, that is why (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography is also an act of refusal against the positivist nature of much educational research (Tynan & Bishop, 2019). That is why I began with a land acknowledgement and a story as the introduction to this paper. Not only to situate an ethics of Indigenous protocol, but to introduce why stories do more than just create imagery, they create worlds.

On How to Live Freely: Autoethnographic Tensions in the Academy

My family comes from a small rancho of about 1200 people by the name of La Luz at the foot of a *cerro* (hill) in Guanajuato, Mexico, which are the ancestral Lands of the Chichimeca Guamares and the P'urhépecha people. According to specific sources, the valley that forms much of my rancho, the nearby ranchos, and the pueblo (town) of Salvatierra, is called Guatzindeo (Huatzindeo) or closely translated to “the place of beautiful vegetation” (Canabal Garcia, 2018). My family no longer holds established ties with a tribal nation from Mexico, given the complex history of colonialism, mestizaje, and Mexican hegemony (Saldaña-Portillo, 2001, 2016). I foremost acknowledge that as someone who is a descendant from these Indigenous peoples, it would be a disservice to say I belong to these tribal nations, as the Chichimeca Guamares and the P'urhépecha have real and ongoing struggles for Land rights, language revitalization, and anti-indigeneity.

In acknowledging that my ancestors have deep ties to the Lands, it is a responsibility to continuously stand in solidarity with the tribal nations fighting for their rightful recognition. However, what I do know is that my family has lived at the foot of this *cerro* for centuries. The Land has cared for so many generations of my family and the relationship that we have are with our homelands is sacred, real, and intergenerational. Part of my journey, my multiple migrations, has led me to be welcomed by the Coahuiltecan community in Central Texas. It is through their teachings that I have been invited to think about who I am, who my ancestors are, and what ancestor I want to be. I present myself in this way because it provides context on how I enter academic spaces but also how I configure my cosmologies (Bishop, 2021).

Who is Without Theory?

It was Fall 2019 and I was taking a required methods course for the Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. The class itself was full of great colleagues, people I had met throughout my years at the University of Texas. I have always struggled with introductory courses because it seems to me that we always begin with white theoretical contributions to what we are learning. To me, where you

begin is of huge importance. It signals not only where we believe we should commence, but also in what trajectory we will be going. A professor once told me that we must learn the theoretical “basics” so that we are able to critique them. However, what is left unquestioned is this underlying assumption that racialized communities have never been theorists, scholars, or epistemologists prior to the foundations of a certain discipline or school of thought. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013) articulates this very precisely by delineating how western theories and ideologies have long been self-legitimized as the only truth within research, or what Smith calls “regimes of truth.” Going further, Smith (2013) makes visible the violent relationship between imperialism, knowledge, and research and how this relationship has structured our ways of knowing.

In this respect, once we start re-centering euro western theories and ideologies as foundational, what does scholarship from racialized communities become? Does the scholarship from our communities only exist as oppositional or as a defiance of whiteness, western thought, and imperial ideologies? What is our scholarship without white traditionality? This is not to say that our work is not generative when it comes to interrogating systems of power and colonial knowledge empires. On the contrary, our work is necessary to further unsettle the continued attempt of epistemicide (Santos, 2016), or the murder of knowledge, that undergirds much of academic discourse. However, our scholarship always starting from a place of critique, as an obstruction or reminder of the unfinished business of colonial empires, I believe, creates an understanding that non-white and non-eurowestern scholarship is more of a service to interrogating whiteness and white supremacy, than it is for BIPOC communities.

Circling back to the introductory methods class, it was the middle of the semester and the professor mentioned that in order to be knowledgeable and understand theory, one must be well read. Immediately, I thought of my parents, two of the most deeply theoretical and intellectual people I know. Both of which received little “formal education” and were, as many may believe, not very well read. A classmate answered back and suggested to the class that reading is not the only way people understand the world; experience is crucial to epistemologies. I then also contributed and mentioned that the irony of the statement of being “well read” is that we are not only within a graduate classroom, which is inherently inaccessible to so many, but the research that many people do are of communities that are not “well read”. Additionally, I mentioned that it is extremely violent to say that someone can only reason and conceptualize if they have been exposed to literature. Can you be literary without reading or writing? My parents started working before they could read or write because of the realities of their familial situations. Yet, they could read the Land in ways that Bourdieu or Freire would be unable to. Two people who can write literacies of care by the way they take care of our home, who have etched stories of survival when they transgressed the border as undocumented people, who have philosophized what it means to live a life of worth devoid of material riches. If we were to begin elsewhere, to imagine the foundations as being always already in our community, are my parents not the first intellectuals I knew? I told my class that I refuse to believe my parents are theory-less people because they are not well read. My dad once said “tienes que poner tus pies en la tierra y ser orgulloso de donde vienes” (you have to put your feet in the earth and be proud of where you come from). If one cannot see the wisdom embedded within this saying, I ask, who really are the ones without theory?

Que libre éramos (How Free we Were)

Consejos can often be translated to “nurturing advice” that many people from Latin America often provide to their families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Although *consejos* can be embedded with traces of

patriarchy, racism, and homophobia, *consejos* can also offer potentials to unsettle systems of power (Espino, 2016). In Michelle Espino's study (2016), she demonstrated how Mexican-American women navigating doctoral studies used *consejos* that were given to them when they were young to help them navigate the liminality of higher education. Likewise, both of my parents have provided *consejos*, not necessarily about higher education, but on how to live a life that is fulfilling. These *consejos* have in turn shaped how and in what way I do my work in the academy and to remind me that there is more beyond the ivory tower. I share a personal anecdote from my mom that has grounded my arduous journey in higher education:

Cuando era joven y vivíamos en el rancho, no teníamos mucho económicamente. Ni zapatos teníamos para todos. Pero lo que si teníamos de más era libertad. Éramos tan libres en esos entonces porque aprendimos como apreciar la vida. Lo que faltaba de lo material, lo teníamos en vivir libre. (When we lived in our small town when I was young, we didn't have much financially. We didn't even have shoes for everyone. But what we did have in excess was freedom. We were so free back then because we learned how to appreciate life. What was missing in the material, we had in living freely.)

In this particular *consejo*, my mom is referring to a freedom not bounded by materiality, but an affectual freedom of connecting to life through joy, laughter, and family. My parents never had books in their lives, however, this absence meant that they were free to think with literacies of the Land (Styres, 2018), dreams (Shawanda, 2020), and the riches of their everyday lives (Lipe & Lipe, 2017). These embodied experiences configure their worlds (Urrieta, 2007) and thus our stories transform into our theories (Brayboy, 2005). How my parents were able to theorize their worlds allowed me to see that the academy as a place that exists, not as an existence that makes my being.

Dreaming with Ancestor Epistemologies

Dreams have been a particular important part of my academic journey because they help recenter my focus by reminding me of my ancestors, and therefore of the knowledge that exists beyond the structurality of higher education. Dream work is a method (Cardinal, 2001). Dreams are powerful, as they often communicate and enunciate particular lessons, messages, and important moments (Simpson, 2000). As Cardinal (2001) exemplifies, when elders talk about their dreams they compare stories, understandings, and visions to uncover what the dream is conveying. Dreams are ancestral epistemologies because we often are given dreams with ancestors we have never met and lessons we will need later in the future. As Shawanda (2020) shares, dreams are our connection to the spirit world so sharing dreams is both an intimate and sacred experience. However, the question then becomes does the academy deserve such knowledge (Tuck & Yang, 2014). As Tuck and Yang (2014) explain, the university is a "colonial collector of knowledge" that perpetuates a continued epistemic violence through territoriality and dominance over stories and experiences. At the same time, dreams are powerful epistemological and methodological tools that Indigenous people have used for millennia that can be helpful within academic contexts (Shawanda, 2020). In the following section, I share a short story that is also connected to a dream I had some years ago while I was on a sacred water pilgrimage throughout Mexico. In learning with my dreams, I am reminded that knowledge and lessons are embedded within the interdependence of everything.

Lessons from the Dream World

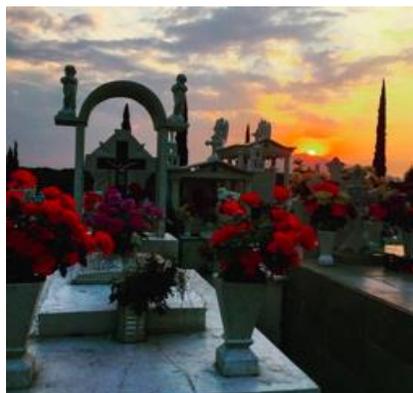
We ended up visiting *el rancho* where I am from and later was gifted a dream where my grandma, now ancestor, visited me. My grandma, like many other matriarchs of families in *el rancho*, was the thread that held our family together. Her presence was both infectious and made you feel at ease. I remember how she would walk down her gravel driveway, with a thunderous voice, eager to open her *zaguán* (gate) to let us in every year my family would go and visit. When my family's time came to an end and we had to make our way back to the states, she would wait outside that little blue *zaguán* until our car was out of sight.

As we drove away, we would turn back and look as she grew smaller while you saw the full outline of the *cerro* behind her taking shape. Her departure from the physical world was sudden, as was my grandpa's two years later. The summer of 2017 was the first time I had visited my mom's *rancho* of La Estancia without any immediate family. It was also the first time to be in my mom's childhood home since both of my grandparents had been received back to mother earth. I drive up that same path to *el cerro* and her home greets me with the purple camelina flowers that you can see way down the road. I parked the car and immediately was taken over by an intense feeling of grief and loss as two rivers flowed down my cheeks. In this moment, I fully realized that both my grandparents have become my ancestors.

That same day, I kept having an urge to go and see them at the cemetery and it felt as if they were calling me so that they could present themselves as new ancestors. I was with six other friends and my aunt and uncle agreed to take us. My friends and I then asked permission from the spirits, offered tobacco, and prayed by singing to my ancestors as the sun began to rest behind *el cerro* de Culiacan. A friend offered this song to my ancestors, *nace la vida en esta tierra sagrada, nace la vida en esta tierra de amor... son flores, son piedras, son plumas preciosas que traen los regalos de los abuelos... son flores, son piedras, son plumas preciosas que traen la memoria de los abuelos* (Life is born on this sacred land, life is born on this land of love... They are flowers, they are stones, they are precious feathers that bring the gifts of the grandparents... They are flowers, they are stones, they are precious feathers that bring the memory of the grandparents). As I stood there, looking at the flowers that we brought them, the sun filled this moment with bright orange as it made its descent - signaling a cycle that closed and welcoming in a new journey.

Figure 2

Nace la Vida



That night, my grandma visited me. Upright in her casket, I noticed that behind her was a huge flame - the sun. But in that flame, a mountain of flowers emerged. A cascade of different hues poured all around her, amongst them the camelina's that greeted me every year at the entrance of her home. I stay fixed, hoping that her visit isn't too short but she looks at me, with her eyes closed, and gives me a smile as I come back to the physical plane. A certain type of calmness rushed over me as I woke up and realized that my dream was both a reflection of what had just happened the day before but also a reminder of the knowledge that is carried when dreaming with the ancestors. Dream data (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2017) allows for ongoing interpretations, but they also authorize "a complexity of meaning that science prohibits" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 183). I knew my grandma was visiting me. I knew it because I felt it. I knew that she was grateful for the songs we sang to them and that we paid homage to the beauty that was ancestor medicine. She reminded me that although her physical being is no longer here, life is born on this sacred Land.

Discussion

A (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography framework has permitted me to make sense of stories with the epistemologies of my community and let the stories *do* the work of restorying instead of being defined by violence and damage (Tuck, 2009). In other words, stories have the capacity to not only be tools for remembering ancestral practices, family histories, and oral traditions but they are an active force against epistemicide (Santos, 2016) and the coloniality of eurowestern knowledge (Smith, 2013). I position my earlier question of "who is without theory?" as both a reproach of institutionalizing "knowledge" but more so as an authentication that knowledge has always already been embedded within my family's stories. I have invited the reader into very vulnerable and sacred aspects of my life and about my family, but even so, I have not divulged the inner workings of my community and my ancestral practices. That is also why a (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography is a powerful way to think with research; the academy does not deserve all of our stories (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

I have shared intimate moments within this paper, but I also leave particular aspects hidden from the reader. Throughout I noticed that I was also participating in acts of refusal (McGranahan, 2016; Simpson, 2016) and was intentional on what aspects I would like to invite the reader to witness. To refuse is not a simple task of saying no (McGranahan, 2016), but agentic and generative in its usage and a way that social science can learn from the experiences of the peoples who have been/are dispossessed (Tuck & Yang, 2014). As Simpson (2016) mentions, "refusal holds on to truth, structures this truth as a stance through time" (p. 330) and encourages us to consider not only the truths that are shared but those that are protected. I began by sharing a moment in the academy that has stayed with me over the years, not necessarily because I want to highlight that particular colonial conjuncture, but to pivot towards futurities of desire. This paper is ultimately about epistemologies embedded within my family's stories and therefore I share these moments of desire to diverge away from painful and damaged narratives (Tuck, 2009). As Archibald (2008) states "I believe that Indigenous stories are at the core of our cultures. They have the power to make us think, feel, and be good human beings. They have the power to bring storied life back to us" (p. 139). That is at the core of (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography "to bring storied life back to us".

I have been deeply wounded in the academy. However, through (re)storying Indigenous autoethnography, I decide to particularly depart from these violent realities, albeit temporarily, to highlight how community, self, and family collaborate in powerful ways to offset the colonial structures that permeates the academy. This departure ultimately demonstrates how we as

researchers are often bound to and with the community instead of acting as an individual researcher that makes meaning on behalf of the research(ed) (Francis & Munson, 2017). Therefore, this paper is as much about sharing my family's stories as a source of community epistemology, as it is also about how autoethnography, the study of ongoing kinships and relationships with self and community, can be understood.

Autoethnography is *not* the study of the isolated self and one's experiences as so often and narrowly understood. Indigenous autoethnography is about reclaiming and recentering one's voice with place, struggles, and people to understand the past and present, as well as, to envision the futures that must be (Whitinui, 2014). In this sense, Whitinui (2014) argues that "this can only be achieved successfully by understanding that learning about 'self' as an indigenous person relates to valuing relationships with the people and the environment" (p. 481). Autoethnography, within Indigenous paradigms, is the deep introspective work of understanding self as the relations and kinships that one creates with community, Land, waters, ancestors, creation, and ceremony. This is beyond the self because we do not exist as isolated individuals. We are because our relationships are (Wilson, 2008).

Conclusion

Autoethnography reorients research by positioning the researcher as always in relation to the work that they do. In other words, the autoethnographer centers their experiences with/in the complexities of social and political life, a type of scholarly resistance, to further argue that experiences do not need to be observed indirectly to be understood (Houston, 2007). Initially, I was hesitant to utilize autoethnography, but was ultimately encouraged as a means to position myself as a researcher and how and why I enter research. As mentioned earlier, this work draws on my master's thesis and incorporates where I am now in my scholarly work. I chose to do an autoethnography because I first and foremost wanted to dig deep into why I am called to do work with and for Indigenous communities. I felt as if I first owed my community, my family, and myself that opportunity to be vulnerable and to understand, to some degree, the relationships that have led me to where I am and envision those relations that can be (McIvor, 2010). Without a trace of doubt, utilizing autoethnographic methods in my master's thesis made me conscientious of the research I should do, the work that my community needs, and what it means to lead an honorable and dignified life.

Ultimately, I encourage researchers to take the time to engage with their own relationships and networks of kinships at the beginning of their research journey. Simpson (2017) asks "can I do this and still come home; what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why?" (p. 78). The answers to these questions may change through time, as they have for me. However, I know that because of these questions I have become a researcher that amplifies epistemologies that are often overlooked and undervalued. Although my parents are made illegible in the imperial and colonial regimes of truth (Smith, 2013), we come from a lineage of wisdom and ancestral knowledge that makes meaning beyond these empires; as we have always done (Simpson, 2017). No words or text can do their/our stories justice because we think and conceptualize beyond the academy's territory. We reason with the Land that embraces our ancestors. And that is the researcher I aspire to be.

Pablo Montes is an incoming Assistant Professor (Fall 2022) in the Curriculum Studies program at Texas Christian University's College of Education. They are a descendant of the Chichimeca Guamares and P'urépecha people from the valley of Huatzindeo, specifically from a small rancho called La Luz at the foot of the Culiacán mountain. They are a proud child of formally undocumented parents and are a Queer, first-generation scholar. Their main research interests are at the intersection of queer settler colonialism, indigeneity, and Land education. Specifically, the transformational learning spaces that Two-Spirit, Queer, and Trans Indigenous educators create alongside their Indigenous community, with Land, and other Queer Indigenous people in Central Texas.

References

- Archibald, J. A. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. UBC press.
- Bang, M., Curley, L., Kessel, A., Marin, A., Suzukovich III, E. S., & Strack, G. (2014). Muskrat theories, tobacco in the streets, and living Chicago as Indigenous Land. *Environmental Education Research*, 20(1), 37-55.
- Bishop, M. (2021). ‘Don’t tell me what to do’ Encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 34(5), 367-378.
- Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. *The Urban Review*, 37(5), 425-446.
- Cardinal, L. (2001). What is an Indigenous perspective? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 180.
- Canabal García, V. (2018). Firmeza, austeridad y belleza, la hacienda San José del Carmen, como eje rector de la ruta cultural de Salvatierra, Guanajuato: proyecto de intervención con enfoque agroturístico. [Unpublished Masters Thesis]. *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Azcapotzalco*.
- Chavez, M. S. (2012). Autoethnography, a Chicana's methodological research tool: The role of storytelling for those who have no choice but to do critical race theory. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(2), 334-348.
- Cornthassel, J., Chaw-win-is, & T’lakwadzi (2009). Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation. *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 35(1), 137-159.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1994). Consejos: The power of cultural narratives. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 25(3), 298-316.
- Espino, M. M. (2016). “Get an education in case he leaves you”: Consejos for Mexican American Women PhDs. *Harvard Educational Review*, 86(2), 183-205.
- Fast, E., & Kovach, M. (2019). Community relationships within Indigenous methodologies. In Windchief & San Pedro (Eds.), *Applying Indigenous Research Methods* (pp. 21-36). Routledge.
- Francis IV, L., & Munson, M. M. (2017). We help each other up: Indigenous scholarship, survivance, tribalography, and sovereign activism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(1), 48-57.
- Gardner, S. K., Hart, J., Ng, J., Ropers-Huilman, R., Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2017). “Me-search”: Challenges and opportunities regarding subjectivity in knowledge construction. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, 8(2), 88-108.
- Gonzales, S. M. (2015). Abuelita epistemologies: Counteracting subtractive schools in American education. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 14(1), 40-54.
- Guajardo, M. A., & Guajardo, F. J. (2017). La Universidad de la Vida: a pedagogy built to last. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(1), 6-21.
- Houston, J. (2007). Indigenous autoethnography: Formulating our knowledge, our way. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36(1), 45-50.
- Iseke, J. (2013). Indigenous storytelling as research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 559-577.
- King, A. E. (2015). Exploring identity and multiliteracies through graphic narratives. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 9(1), 3-20.
- Kinloch, V., & Pedro, T. (2014). The space between listening and storying: foundations for projects in humanization. In D. Paris & M. Winn (Eds.), *Humanizing research* (pp. 21-42). SAGE.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

- Koro-Ljungberg, M., MacLure, M., & Ulmer, J. (2018). D... a... t... a..., data++, data, and some problematics. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 462-484). SAGE.
- Kovach, M. (2021). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Lipe, K., & Lipe, D. B. (2017). Living the consciousness: navigating the academic pathway for our children and communities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(1), 32-47.
- McGranahan, C. (2016). Theorizing refusal: An introduction. *Cultural Anthropology*, 31(3), 319-325.
- McIvor, O. (2010). I am my subject: Blending Indigenous research methodology and autoethnography through integrity-based, spirit-based research. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 33(1), 137.
- Muñoz, M. I. (2018). *A pedagogy of water: Restorying the rio grande/rio bravo* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of British Columbia).
- Nxumalo, F. (2016). Towards 'refiguring presences' as an anti-colonial orientation to research in early childhood studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(5), 640-654.
- Parter, C., & Wilson, S. (2021). My research is my story: A methodological framework of inquiry told through storytelling by a doctor of philosophy student. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27(8-9), 1084-1094.
- Shawanda, A. (2020). Baawaajige: Exploring Dreams as Academic References. *Turtle Island Journal of Indigenous Health*, 1(1), 37-47.
- Saldaña-Portillo, M. J. (2016). *Indian given: Racial geographies across Mexico and the United States*. Duke University Press.
- Saldaña-Portillo, J. (2001). Who's the Indian in Aztlan? Re-writing mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandon. In I. Rodriguez (Ed.), *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (pp. 402-423). Duke University Press.
- Santos, B. D. S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the south: Justice against epistemicide*. Taylor & Francis.
- Simpson, A. (2016). Consent's Revenge. *Cultural Anthropology*, 31(3), 326-333.
- Simpson, A. (2007). On ethnographic refusal: indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship. *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, 9, 67-80.
- Simpson, L. (2000). Stories, Dreams, and Ceremonies—Anishinaabe Ways of Learning. *Tribal College*, 11(4), 26-29.
- Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury.
- Styres, S. (2018). Literacies of Land: Decolonizing narratives, storying, and literature. In L. Smith., E. Tuck, & K. W. Yang (Eds.), *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education* (pp. 24-37). Routledge.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (1997). Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10(2), 175-189.
- Sykes, B. E. (2014). Transformative autoethnography: An examination of cultural identity and its implications for learners. *Adult Learning*, 25(1), 3-10.
- Thomas, E. E., & Stornaiuolo, A. (2016). Restorying the self: Bending toward textual justice. *Harvard Educational Review*, 86(3), 313-338.
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-428.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2014). Unbecoming claims: Pedagogies of refusal in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 811-818.
- Tuck, E., McKenzie, M., & McCoy, K. (2014) Land education: Indigenous, post-colonial, and decolonizing perspectives on place and environmental education research, *Environmental Education Research*, 20(1), 1-23.

- Tynan, L., & Bishop, M. (2019). Disembodied experts, accountability and refusal: an autoethnography of two (ab)Original women. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 25(2), 217-231.
- Urrieta Jr, L. (2007). Identity production in figured worlds: How some Mexican Americans become Chicana/o activist educators. *The Urban Review*, 39(2), 117-144.
- Urrieta Jr, L. (2013). Familia and comunidad-based saberes: Learning in an Indigenous heritage community. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 44(3), 320-335.
- Whitinui, P. (2014). Indigenous autoethnography: Exploring, engaging, and experiencing “self” as a Native method of inquiry. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(4), 456-487.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood.
- Woods, C. (2011). Reflections on pedagogy: A journey of collaboration. *Journal of Management Education*, 35(1), 154-167.
- Yazzie, M. K., & Baldy, C. R. (2018). Introduction: Indigenous peoples and the politics of water. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 7(1), 1-18
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.