

**Confronting Colonial Representations**

**CONFRONTING COLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS  
OF LATINAS: RETHINKING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH  
AS LIBERATION PRAXIS**

**Lilia Monzo**

*Chapman University, California, USA.*

**ABSTRACT** This article explores Latina representation and questions the use of research for the purpose of rendering the Latina “knowable” in the benevolent hopes that her strengths and resources will be celebrated by the dominant group. Drawing on Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the author argues that traditional research may unwittingly parallel the coercive function of traditional theater. The author argues instead for a revolutionary performative research “for ourselves and each other” that disrupts Latina myths, recognizes how spectacles are created to support the interests of national and transnational capital, and aims at a pedagogy of liberation that involves participants as actors in the process of inquiry and where advocacy and intervention for equity are central components of reciprocal relationships.

**KEYWORDS** Latina, Revolutionary critical pedagogy, qualitative research, representation, performativity

Throughout United States history Latinas have made important contributions to the shaping of cultural activity and political shifts that most of the general population know little about (Ruíz & Sánchez Korrol, 2005). Rather than recognizing our histories of struggle and agency and our rich diversity, we have generally been homogenized to represent the colonized Other (Molina Guzmán, 2010; Peña Ovalle, 2011). The mainstream media typically creates spectacles of Latina bodies that signify us as unruly, hysterical, undereducated, hypersexual and in servitude to a racist, patriarchal order that sustains the capital accumulation of White men (and

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sometimes White women) through our labor in their factories and as their nannies and housekeepers or through some exotic but always temporary diversion for their sexual pleasure (Mendible, 2007; Saborío, 2011). Although the colonized Other as a symbol of representation may be dismissed today in mainstream circles as a relic of the past, critical theorists argue that past colonial and imperialist times have taken new and hyper forms under a transnational capitalist system (Darder & Torres, 2004; McLaren, 2012; Robinson, 2008).

While the majority of Latinas in the United States continue to fill the low-wage labor markets that support the capital accumulation of an entangled matrix of colonial power that is male, White, heterosexual, able bodied, and Christian (Grosfoguel, 2011), some of us have made social and economic gains, attained professional status, and now struggle to confront inequities from within the very system that supports the unequal relations of production (Chavez, 2011). Our success, however, is part of a master plan for maintaining that status quo, as Augusto Boal (1979) pointed out in his seminal work, *Theater of the Oppressed*, in capitalist societies "... the ruling classes pretend kindness and become reformist in critical moments; they give a little more meat and bread to the workers, in the belief that a social being will be less revolutionary to the extent that he is less hungry." (p. 97).

Rather than helping to reconceptualize the Latina as an embodied and socioculturally and historically situated and dynamically diverse subject, our positions of authority often serve to set us apart from the presumed "typical" Latina as an enlightened exception (Wise, 2010). Confronting the spectacle made of Latina bodies requires more than the inclusion of diversity in positions of power but rather a pedagogy of liberation (Freire, 1970, 1998; McLaren, 2009) that decolonizes and creates possibilities for revolutionary action on our own behalf and toward a socialist democracy.

As a Latina ethnographer and scholar, I have become weary of the humiliating attempts to "prove" our strengths and resources through our research that seem to resemble a futile begging for acceptance. I have come to recognize that although local changes are important and ethical, a system in which a small group controls the means of production will always require an exploited mass and that racial and gender

inequities exist to maintain these social relations of production. I have begun to question how our research may unwittingly contribute to the sense that we are “doing something” without tackling the harder and seemingly insurmountable process of changing the world capitalist system that functions to divest us of our humanity (Freire, 1970).

In this paper, I develop a conceptual argument for shifting the focus of research from one of learning about the Latina for the purpose of cultural inclusion to one of learning *with* Latinas as a means of building our (researcher and participants) resources, agency, and working towards a liberation praxis. I begin with a critique of Latina representation in the media as signifying colonial relations and follow with a theoretical grounding of this argument on the work of Augusto Boal (1979), who articulates a theory of performance as a tool of coercion but with the potential for transformation and liberation. Following this, I draw on critical pedagogy, specifically the work of Paulo Friere and Peter McLaren, to argue that research has a parallel function to theater in that it too can serve both as a tool of coercion and liberation. I end this paper by proposing participating in revolutionary performative research in service to our own growth and agency rather than conducting research that commodifies our bodies and our souls.

### **The Latina as Colonized Object**

The tremendous diversity among Latinas in the United States spans national origins, immigration status, and generations in the United States, language fluencies, racial and class differences, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations, among other differences. Despite the obvious heterogeneity that these overarching differences produce in our daily lives and subsequent worldviews, Latina women are homogenized and rendered “visible” and “knowable” (Mendible, 2007) through the lens of the dominant group in ways that sustain our positioning as laborers in the capitalist national and transnational world order. Although uniting as a community with shared experiences and interests may garner us greater strength at the polls and influence policy, Latinidad must be recognized as an embodied experience that is “situated,

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contingent, and [a] negotiable work in progress” (Mendible, 2007, p. 5).

The over-homogenizing of the Latino community serves to maintain the sociohistorically developed unequal social relations between Latinos and the dominant group within the United States and, at a transnational level, between Latin America and the United States. These unequal social relations stem from a history of United States imperialism and colonization that have remained to this day, albeit reinvented, through the exploitation of our low-wage labor within the United States and across Latin America, especially Mexico, through the United States maquila industry (Tuttle, 2012). This exploitation is made generally acceptable through the spectacles created by the media, including the print and visual news media, TV, film, and other media venues.

United States mainstream media disproportionately characterizes Latinas as either feeble, submissive, and self-sacrificing or as the hypersexual Other, what Ortiz Cofer (1995) more crudely and succinctly called rendering us as “whore, domestic, or criminal.” (p. 107). Common Latina roles in United States film and TV have been as housekeepers, nannies, and other service workers or as hot blooded, passionate, and sexually promiscuous vixens (Mendible, 2007; Molina Guzmán, 2010; Peña Ovalle, 2011; Saborío, 2011). Latina celebrities that have become national commodities, such as Jennifer Lopez and Salma Hayek, have carved out spaces in the national imagination through the performance of “ambiguous ethnic bodies” (neither White nor Black) that are shown as temporarily desirable sexual objects for men’s consumption (Peña Ovalle, 2010). Although historically almost absent from the media, the demand for the Latina in film and TV has increased as the globalized market demands a United States image that is multicultural, altruistic, and open to diversity, which obscures the very real material, racist and sexist conditions under which most Latinas in the United States live (Mendible, 2007).

News stories (in visual and print media) often frame us as illegal aliens, undereducated, and welfare mothers with “anchor babies,” and our bodies are made to perform and signify eccentricity, hysteria, and irrational behaviors (Ogaz, 2007; Molina-Guzmán, 2010). Consider the performativity of the few Latina figures who have in the past been given

considerable national news attention, such as *Lorena Bobbitt* who in a moment of *unusual* “temporary insanity” sliced off her husband’s penis in response to her experiences of the much more common domestic abuse (including marital rape) that plagues women’s existence; or the unusual case of the “surrogate mother” to Elián Gonzalez who became a pawn in a political game first by performing and signifying the virtues of motherhood (aligned to the interests of the ultra conservative, anti-Castro, Miami mafia) and later through more common Latina tropes as hysterical, irrational, and over-sexualized (McLaren & Pinkney-Patrana, 2001; Molina-Guzmán, 2011; ); or the more recent case of Judge Sonia Sotomayor whose “wise Latina” comment addressed to young aspiring Latinas was taken out of context and performed as an anti-American (read anti-White) act in the national arena. The spectacle of the Latina as an ideological tool is deployed as needed to protect capital interests.

This type casting has served to render Latinas as the Other while “Americanness” has been defined as White and middle class (Mendible, 2007). Latinas/os, regardless of national origin, are generally more closely associated to their “countries of origin” from the south. Indeed, note the public attacks of Mexican-American, Sebastian de la Cruz, age 11, and United States born–Puertorriqueño singer/songwriter, Marc Anthony, who sang the national anthem at sports events and were mistakenly assumed to be “Mexican” (Knowles, 2013; Moreno, 2013). Clearly, whether born here or immigrant, we continue to be seen as something other than “American” without the same rights and privileges of Whites.

The Latina, in particular, has served to authenticate White women’s purity of body and White men’s masculinity associated with intelligence (Mendible, 2007). She has been made to signify “lose morals” and “lesser intelligence,” rendering Latino communities and Latin America as “naturally” suited to low-wage labor, which positions the United States as the benevolent savior to Latin America. Whether depicted as undocumented servant or sex object, Latina representations have been used strategically by various interest groups to bring their agendas forward, whether it be for anti-immigration legislation or selling records and attracting viewers. In either case, the Latina is rendered an

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Other, temporary, easily discarded and dismissed – a conquest of the White man’s colonial and imperialist project.

Butler (1990) argues that to be a woman is to have been made a woman,

to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of woman, to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (p. 404-405)

In like manner, to be Latina is to have been made such by the social relations and material conditions that support particular subjectivities (Mendible, 2007). There is no doubt that public perceptions of Latinas/os, and perhaps our own perceptions of ourselves, are often highly influenced through media images constructed through visual and print media. The deficit perspective that these representations in the media support is evidenced in schools through policies and practices that directly negatively impact Latino students and families (Villenas, 2009) and that ultimately secure an exploited workforce.

### **Theatre of Coercion**

The notion of the “free press” has long been exposed as a myth that serves to maintain the status quo. Antonia Darder (2002) notes, “Through its captivating influence and its fictitious representations of ‘difference,’ the media function effectively to sustain through commonsense approval the ideology of social and economic domination.” (p. 18). Latina performances in the media support ideologies of individual effort and skill, competition, and natural selection that create an acceptance of positioning the Latina and by extension, Latin America, as naturally and inevitably suited to live out their existence in servitude to White Americans, a perfect positioning for those who seek to maintain a self-righteous image of upholding “democracy” all the while seeking their own capital accumulation through massive exploitation of human and natural resources (Darder, 2002).

The media as a tool of domination was well theorized by Augusto Boal (1979) in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which made an important contrast between theatre as a state apparatus of

coercion and theatre “of and for the people.” How theatre is used and by whom has a profound effect on defining possibilities for societal transformation. According to Boal (1979), since Aristotelian times, theatre has been a tool of the powerful to neutralize dissent and to establish the ruling class’ social, economic, and political goals and secure their positions of power and wealth. Peter O’Connor (2010) compellingly demonstrates how the infamous September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center was made into a “spectacular theatre event” by mainstream media. This spectacle was so cunningly produced that it continues to serve as an ideological tool that signifies Muslims and other Arabs (including Arab-Americans and by extension all other racialized minorities here and abroad) to support numerous programs and policies to “protect” “Americans” from anyone who would presumably seek to destroy our way of life, which basically means protecting the interests of the White national and transnational capitalist class.

Theatre controlled by the state and/or the ruling class is commonly touted as a form of entertainment, a leisure activity, or in the case of the news as something to stay informed. News reports, documentaries, and story lines are, for the most part, presumed neutral and apolitical. Yet even the most seemingly apolitical and benign plots aimed at children contain multiple hidden messages that encourage the values and beliefs necessary to maintaining capital interests (Giroux and Pollock, 2010). In contemporary film, TV, news, and literature heroes and heroines in dramatic genres often initially perform flaws that are depicted as inherently attributed to the individual and eventually resolved within them – rather than depicting these flaws as part of the social relations of production and the conditions of oppression within which such flaws materialize.

Important concepts that Boal (1979) attributes to the theatre of coercion are empathy and catharsis, which he argues lead to passivity, inaction, and acceptance of existing social conditions. The audience is made to feel empathy for the characters as they identify with the same human flaws depicted and fear similar consequences to those performed within the spectacle. Such emotions, absent critical reflection and action, Boal argues, create a purging of any desire for revolutionary action, a “catharsis” that guarantees a docile

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spectator. Intense pain and fear can be paralyzing emotions, especially when the flaws are performed as individual deficits. Indeed theatre and other forms of media are cultural tools that have been sociohistorically constituted (Vygotsky, 1934/1987) as passive entertainment and information that comes to us pre-packaged by writers, performers, and/or other technicians who are themselves alienated by the fragmentation of their work. Such a highly structured format that leaves little opportunity for popular engagement in critique support the passivity needed to relinquish the possibilities of transformation. Further, the theatre of coercion presents stories as finished products, suggesting only one viable solution to the particular problem and almost always within the reality of the existing social structure (Boal, 1979).

Examples of the theater of coercion abound in our contemporary world of theater, film, and other performance venues within which stories are presented as fait accompli and the audience is expected to sit as passive observers, removing from them the sense of agency, hope, and impetus for action that can come about through an ethical and relational dialogic critique that presents diverse perspectives, alternative responses to authentic human experiences. Even among films that exemplify important social concerns and critique performance and audience rituals preclude subsequent dialogue that may lead to challenging structures. For example, in a recent documentary, "Paycheck to Paycheck," that depicts the struggles of working class women, a young single mother of three children attempts to survive and move ahead in a world that offers little support for working mothers and pays less than living wages without medical insurance for some of the most important jobs of our society (in her case, caring for the elderly). In this film we learn to empathize for the young woman and her children and to recognize the systemic difficulties she faces in getting ahead. However, we also see multiple images and dialogue that suggests that her low-income predicament results from her "poor choices." Without a venue for discussing the character's experiences as a result of a class-based society and women's vulnerable position within it, the audience internalizes the need to make the "right choices" without the opportunity to explore the more systemic changes that would support greater opportunities for working class single mothers in our society, much less farther reaching critiques related to



the structure of society. The audience passivity inherent in the spectator role that characterizes contemporary performance, unwittingly and sometimes purposely, supports the status quo.

Such framing is inconsistent with the role of human beings as social actors in the making of our history (Freire, 1970, 1995, 1998; McLaren, 2009, 2012). In this way, contemporary theatre creates apathy and the conditions for cynicism and fatalism that Paulo Freire (1998) denounced as the antithesis of human freedom and liberation. Indeed, Freire insisted that any movement toward liberation needed to be led by the Oppressed in the total assurance of their own capacity to dream and act on their own behalf. Fear, Freire argued, comes from a position of false consciousness, a consciousness rooted in the existing social structure of unequal relations and aligned to the worldviews of the oppressors, in which the oppressed cannot find and enlist hope toward their own liberation. Hope is an essential aspect of liberation but this is not an idealized hope that springs from nowhere but rather hope in the realization that we are makers of our own history and in the concrete cracks and crevices that show the proof of our possibilities (Freire, 1970, 1995, 1998).

### **Radical Performance Pedagogy**

A theatre of and for the oppressed, as outlined by Augusto Boal (1979) is one that involves both actors and spectators in transforming social concerns as felt and expressed by the people. It is a theatre that engages all participants as equal contributors to a process of inquiry and exploration for a spectacle that can take many turns, such that plots and characters unfold in varying ways depending on the participants and their unique and collective realities and imaginations. It is a theatre that is context-specific, open to interpretation, and directed by multiple actors through their particular positioning in society, their histories, and personal proclivities. This is a theatre popularly conceived that serves the interests of the masses and seeks to transform their social conditions not through a false or misled “benevolence”, but through a re-positioning of the people as actors in and on their world. Heathcote (2006) noted that in this way, we “move from holding the information and doling it out like charity, to

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creating circumstances where it is imperative to inquire, search out and interrogate the information we locate” (quoted in O’Connor, 2013, p. 306-307).

In contrast to a theatre of coercion, theatre of the oppressed, or radical theatre is based off of a Brechtinian theatre in which the performances are for the performers and participants themselves rather than for an audience (Boal, 1979). Believing empathy to be antithetical to critique, Brecht argued for creating distance between the spectator and the character as well as between the actor and the person she portrayed. Following Brecht, Boal (1979) argued that empathy was a “powerful system of intimidation” (p. 46) and introduced metaxis, a distancing that is created through a process of simultaneously participating in action and critique. Within this tradition lies process drama that aims to disrupt our notions of what is “real” by making the familiar strange and in this way exposing our “truths” to its subjective and politically-charged constructions (O’Connor, 2010). Here, critique enters the arena of action and interrupts the emotional engagement to allow for thoughtful reflection, dialogue, and the consideration of alternate possibilities. It involves participating while simultaneously observing. It is not that empathy is to be avoided. Empathy is an important aspect of radical theatre but it must be continuously tempered with critical analysis. O’Connor (2013) explains that in his work with child earthquake victims, distancing for the purposes of critical reflection allowed for the possibility of imagining transformation without “overloading their emotional engagement in the work” (p. 319).

Boal (1979) acknowledges that while theatre does not, in and of itself, change social or material conditions, it provides the social space to interrogate the status quo and conceive of alternate possibilities. It is “rehearsal” for revolutionary action. In Boal’s (1979) words:

Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case a “catharsis” occurs; in the second an awakening of critical consciousness. But the *poetics of the oppressed* focuses on the action itself: the

spectator delegates no power to the character (actor) either to act or think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short trains himself for real action. In this case perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. (p. 122).

Contemporarily, theatre of the oppressed forms part of a larger set of applied theatre that include prison theatre and theatre in education. This theatre is grounded in performances that aim at a criticality that exposes injustice and aims to heal and promote social change (Jackson & Vine, 2013). One example of this type of theatre includes work with child earthquake victims in New Zealand and China helping them to learn to have hope and construct new dreams for the future after the devastating experience of literally watching their world crumble around them and losing their families and loved ones (O'Connor, 2013). A second example can be found in The Radical Gender Based Theater (RGBT) project that takes place as part of a Community Action Center in the Palestinian university situated in Jerusalem/Al- Quds. This theater project brings together young women to explore and critique the experiences of Palestinian women in society through dramatic presentation that involve both actors and audience. Silwadi and Mayo (2014) explain:

The aim of the RGBT, composed solely of women, is to stimulate and implement social awareness, development, emancipation and change within the Palestinian community through the medium of drama. The RGBT targets women and the predicament of women exposed to the oppression of a military occupation as well as to the constraints experienced as a result of living in an often restrictive community, with heavy family and religious traditions.

The actors and audience were to become leaders for change by learning the language of dialogue and using the tools of theatre to break down barriers. (p. 79)

Cultural studies and postcolonial scholars argue that the concepts of performativity and representation tied to theater and more broadly to all forms of media, are present in our everyday interactions. This work draws heavily on Erving Goffman's (1959) seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in*

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*Everyday Life*, which argued that social interactions are always performances in context. Goffman argued that human beings present ourselves in specific ways, sometimes but not always strategically, depending on the audience and how we seek to be perceived. He also argued that performances are always political and pedagogical, whether intended to be or not. Postcolonial scholars come to this field with a particular eye for the ways in which otherness is performed. An important aspect of performativity is that the body carries meanings through its arrangement and the way it moves within the frame of the spectator. The assemblage of context, language, and clothing create meanings associated with the particular body. Importantly, certain bodies become spectacles of otherness as the varying performances they display in varying contexts begin to provide similar messages about the self and its relation to others in specific contexts and in the world.

Here, I move this discussion to consider how performances that enable the development of hope and the possibility of liberation must be always dialogic, open to critique and transformation, recognizing social and material conditions as historically constituted and politically motivated. Freire (1970) argued for interactions where meanings validated the epistemological and ontological foundation of the subaltern and denounced the practice of “cultural invasion” in favor of “cultural synthesis.” In his words:

In cultural invasion the actors (who need not even go personally to the invaded culture; increasingly, their action is carried out by technological instruments) superimpose themselves on the people, who are assigned the role of spectators, of objects. In cultural synthesis, the actors become integrated with the people, who are co-authors of the action that both perform upon the world. (p. 180)

In cultural invasion, the assemblages of bodies and their performativity is judged on the bases of the prescribed meanings of those in power. To continue in Freire’s words:

In cultural invasion, both the spectators and the reality to be preserved are objects of the actors’ action. In cultural synthesis, there are no spectators; the object of the actors is the reality to be transformed for the liberation of men. (p. 181-182)

Applying this argument to the spectacle that the media creates of the Latina, we recognize the violence of cultural invasion as Latina bodies are assembled, performed, and interpreted through the dominant gaze. The spectacle of the Latina is further sustained through a “politics of erasure” (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2006) that attempts to leave us without the right to speak our language, to enact our ways of being, and to deploy our bodies for our own signification and toward our own liberation.

### **Knowing the Other: Research that Commodifies**

Research often parallels the theatre of coercion. Traditional research, particularly in the field of anthropology, has been recognized as a colonizing project that served the imperialist aim of conquest and exploitation (Smith, 2012). Through the discourse of objectivity, the colonized became the object of the dominant White man’s gaze and were depicted as subhuman, justifying their forced free labor and exploitation. Lidchi (2013) points out that researchers and anthropological museum curators “did not so much reflect the world through objects as use them to mobilize representations of the world...” (p. 160). Rather, Lidchi (2013) argues, the “collection,” organization, and display of Others, “... cease to be neutral or innocent activities but emerge as an instrumental means of knowing and possessing the ‘culture’ of others” (p. 154). An important caveat is that the researcher determines what is seen and not seen and how it is signified, abstracted, and displayed as a commodity for consumption. Lidchi (2013) further argues that research

is not primarily a science of discovery, but a science of invention. It is not reflective of the essential nature of cultural difference, but classifies and constitutes this difference systematically and coherently, in accordance with a particular view of the world that emerges in a specific place, at a distinct historical moment, and within a specific body of knowledge. (p. 161-162)

An important caution, however, is that we not be seduced into the postmodern perspective that our subjectivities are the primordial focus of social relations. Such a position reduces material conditions to the realm of perception and ideology

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alone, a position that leaves little room for the articulation of the actual condition of exploitation that service the current transnational capitalist class and, therefore, limits the possibility of action toward liberation.

Although the notion of representing reality and knowing the Other have been highly problematized and research is now recognized as a highly subjective process of generating data, research is often still assumed to be a politically neutral form of knowing. Hence many of us who do ethnographies of Latinos attempt to highlight our resources in an attempt to make those strengths recognized by the dominant group, including educators. However, an important concern is whether our persistence in making the Latina presumed knowable to the dominant group in order to dispel deficit perspectives serves to legitimize the notion that we must be *made* knowable. This is particularly troubling as we consider that the dominant group need not be known through research – they simply are accepted for being.

The notion that our actions are always politicized performances and that politics are always pedagogical suggests that research must be rethought in light of its political ramifications to participants, communities, researchers, and the academy (Denzin, 2007). I question whether knowing the Other in and of itself is a worthy project, whose interests it serves, whether we can ever adequately represent people in research, and what the political implications of coming to know the Other are. In writing about Others' lives we inscribe into "reality" representations that would only, *could* only, capture a sliver of who the Other is and only as we have come to know them. I wonder about the ethics of studying human beings who ought not to be cut up into pieces of themselves for the consumption of those who would wish to "learn" about them but would inevitable see them through their own lenses in ways that sustain their worldviews and interests. Indeed there is no way to capture the full complexity of people's lives or to represent them as whole people. The task of categorizing and constructing patterns and themes becomes often a reductive process that fixes the meanings of particular people or phenomena by defining it through essentializing characteristics that are legitimized through the academy (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 1999).

Indeed if the goal of displaying the Latina for the consumption of the dominant group has been to illicit empathy, then the discussion above lays out the error of this approach. As discussed above, empathy, sans critical reflection, rids the spectator of any impetus for action. Further, if the Latina can only be seen as she has been made to be seen through the dominant White, male gaze then the display of the Latina exposes her body politic to curiosity – tantamount to zoo watching that momentarily fascinates but holds little opportunity for critical reflection. Even knowing the Other for the purposes of providing culturally responsive instruction serves a “false generosity” (Freire, 1979) if it does not articulate a vision in favor of alterity – the incorporation of diverse ontologies and epistemologies – and provide a means for transforming structural inequalities.

### **Revolutionary Performative Research: A Praxis of Liberation**

Following in the tradition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) and *Theatre of the Oppressed* and invoking, specifically, Peter McLaren’s Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy and his ideas on revolutionary ethnography (1999), I propose a performative research whose central aim is liberation praxis – a mutual engagement between researchers and participants with theory and action that has as its central aim the transformation of social relations.

Peter McLaren’s (Marxist) revolutionary critical pedagogy (McLaren 2012, 2009, 2006) conceptualizes a utopian philosophy of praxis whereby human beings as the authors of history can imagine and create a socialist democracy whereby labor power ceases to be the unit of value in society, thus, eliminating the exploitation of labor in service of the transnational capitalist class and relieving society of the violent assaults on humanity known as racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, abilism and other antagonisms that are dialectically conceived with and through capitalism.

McLaren posits a philosophy of praxis – theory informing action informing theory – for transforming the existing social relations of exploitation by creating conditions for collective struggle, such that we may be able to develop the awareness of our position in a capitalist world, the ability to

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imagine new, more equal or equitable relations, and the will to self-actualize toward this transformation. In McLaren's words, "Praxis... is the ontological process of becoming human...denouncing oppression and dialectically inaugurating new forms of social, educational, and political relationships." (2009, no. 2). This utopian vision is not created out of thin air but is rooted in the concrete historically developed relations of production that currently exist and in the experiences of individuals and communities who actively transform their current conditions towards a humanity built on love and respect for all life forms and the earth that sustains us and that fosters the creative and intellectual development of every individual and community (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2010).

Revolutionary performative research engenders the conditions of possibility for transformation by engaging in the disavowal of entrenched ideologies used to keep the oppressed from uniting towards their liberation, by making visible the unequal material and social conditions that people experience within the existing transnational capitalist order, and by creating the conditions for hope in the act of deep engagement that touches people's lives and transforms the way they are signified, made seen, and displayed to themselves, to each other, and to the world. Here, performative research serves as a liminal space of possibility, where one embodies the transformation of our oppressive world and we begin to imagine our liberation (Denzin, 2007). Revolutionary performative research rejects the idea of research for the sake of knowing the Other or for the sake of making the Other more acceptable or brought into the mainstream within the existing system of social relations of production. The goal of celebrating difference without transforming the current transnational capitalist order maintains the invisibility of class struggle as the root cause of oppressions under the guise of an identity politics (McLaren, 2009; Darder & Torres 2004). Thus, attempting to educate the dominant group about the resources and strengths of the Latina is not only a futile effort but also one that serves to maintain existing social and material conditions that dehumanizes, marginalizes and kills our Latino sisters and brothers and other oppressed groups.

Revolutionary performative research draws on decolonizing research methods (1999) and other culturally



responsive and socially responsible methods (Berryman, Soohoo, & Nevin, 2013) that recognize participants as resourceful, creative, knowledgeable agents of their local contexts and requires researchers to be responsive to the cultural contexts of study and individual interests and attempt to engage in research practices that counter the effects of the historical legacy of exploitation at the hands of researchers, particularly anthropologists, who served to support and legitimize coloniality and imperialism.

Applied to research *with* Latinas, revolutionary performative research involves learning for *ourselves and each other*. It is research used for the purpose of strategizing toward our own individual and collective agency rather than for the commodification of our bodies. This calls for a critical research that helps us recapture our lost or submerged epistemes and provides opportunities to give our *testimonios* so that we may learn from each other (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). In the Freirian tradition, participants must have a say in the research process and be able to guide it and transform it as needed for their own and each others learning, questioning, and imagining. All in the research context would be actors (including researchers and participants) who in a reciprocal dance invoke a commitment to each other and to a transformed world where freedom from exploitation, racism, and patriarchy can be imagined. Research, then, becomes a context for performing advocacy and creating social and cultural networks that support the development of greater agency and increased opportunities.

Solidarity across ethnic and racialized difference can be established through a revolutionary praxis of research that honors our respective strengths and epistemes, where dominant frameworks and knowledge systems can be challenged and interrogated for their assumptions and the power it yields to signify the Other. Our research must provide the spaces to develop new ways of seeing that allow our subaltern voices to be recaptured, reimagined, and reinvented and where perhaps a new humanity can be forged that draws on the best of our respective ways of knowing. At the same time, we must remain cognizant that although we inhabit this liminal sea that takes us up as we learn together, that the waters will often be murky, filled with the pain, rage, and frustration of centuries of oppression and with the often

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contradictory discourses that we have learned to perform and that are evident within our bodies and in the spaces that mark our social interactions with the dominant group.

At the forefront is the recognition that research happens in the process of building relationships and that people ought to always come first (Author, 2013c). Rather than an *invasion* of how people experience their material and social conditions and the meanings they assign to these, revolutionary performative research becomes a reciprocal attempt to explore each others experiences, how these intersect and where they diverge, and how each trajectory has differed and for what reason – in short, research can and should be a context of mutual reflection, self-revelation, invention, advocacy, and when possible intervention that confronts existing social and material conditions, allowing for greater access and opportunities whenever possible.

It is an opportunity to touch another person's soul and to feel their pain and their anger and their fear and be humbled by their courage and their ability to still feel joy and love. The shifts that are produced when people come to feel, think, and learn together may provide the hope of being seen and authored, signified, in ways consistent to our own performativity, the hope for a humanity where people can and are willing to give up the masks of greed and self-interest and don those that represent a more humane aspect of themselves. Hope is revolutionary praxis in the making. As Peter McLaren (1999) notes:

Hope can be frustrated; it can be diminished, but it cannot be eliminated. For this reason we must always remain loyal to hope. (p. 276)

Revolutionary performative research goes beyond approaches that respect and validate the Other. Revolutionary research must make visible the unequal social relations that exist between the world of the researcher and the researched. As difficult as it may be, revolutionary researchers must denounce the very acts that bring about the social conditions of exploitation, marginalization, poverty, fear, and pain, even at the cost of our own self-interests. We must be willing to stand in solidarity with and advocate for participants and to do what is necessary to bring about justice at any given moment where our intervention is warranted and also sought

by participants, without precluding their agency. We must be willing to mobilize our resources as researchers to transform in whatever ways possible the unequal realities that participants experience. No doubt this is risky business. We risk our data, our tenure possibilities, and most importantly we risk making mistakes – and make them, we will. Revolutionary research is research that involves engaging with participants with your heart exposed, learning to love participants and allowing yourself to be loved by them, and in these contexts mistakes help us all grow and learn about ourselves, each other, and revolutionary praxis. As the autobiographical account by Antonia Darder (2007) exemplifies, our histories of pain and oppression can be courageously taken up to support a dialogic relational praxis that teaches us to love, support, and take necessary risks for each other and wherein an active political agenda is set into motion for the broader goal of creating a better world.

An important aspect of this critical research is that research with Latinas are undertaken through and within complex “field relations” that involve researchers and participants who are discursively positioned through differential power relations. This phenomenon supports different conventions for interactions and tends to take up and are taken up by often different and sometimes competing subjectivities that are historically contingent and sociopolitically defined (McLaren, 1999). These field relations are grounded in what McLaren (1999) terms the politics of “enfleshment” where our bodies are inscribed with and made to carry, perform, and signify the colonized spectacle. Participants and researcher come to the context of inquiry and perform their rituals of Latinidad and/or Whiteness and other subjectivities on, within, and through the flesh and in the social spaces between them. Interrogating these performances, creating new performances, changing the inscriptions within our bodies, and making them bend and fold in new and transformative ways is a critical aspect of this revolutionary research.

In line with transforming social relations, revolutionary performative research searches for ways to challenge and disrupt disciplinary regimes that have sociohistorically served to represent and signify the Latina. This emphasizes the need to move beyond pre-determined methods that satisfy and

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prescriptive and westernized knowledge systems. Disrupting such disciplinary regimes suggest creating the conditions that support the development of what Antonia Darder (2012) has termed a critical bicultural identity. This is an identity rooted in a sense of value for our cultural practices, our histories, and our languages but extends beyond the mere support of success within dominant frames and instead seeks to empower Latinas to recognize their own ability to act collectively. While bilingual programs have supported a positive sense of biculturalism, they have rarely moved beyond traditional and deceiving meritocratic ideas to examine encourage critical understandings of our world and our own realities within it. Given the current neoliberal onslaught against education that has called into question the validity of bilingual programs and created schooling contexts that are more focused on producing technical knowledge rather than critical thinking, an important avenue for creating this critical bicultural identity is in the context of a revolutionary performative research.

Participatory action research (PAR), characterized by projects that are co-constructed among researchers and participants is an approach that may serve the ontological and epistemological goal of recognizing, validating, and empowering traditionally marginalized communities, as their views and ideas become legitimate sources of knowledge and knowing in the context of PAR. Although PAR has not always been applied toward the broader goals of transforming the social relations of domination that exist in the broader society and that function to maintain the capitalist mode of production, its democratic foundation, collaborative process, and action focus can be a fruitful starting point from which to build a revolutionary performative research that emphasizes praxis – action that results from theory and informs further action and is based upon the conscientization of the communities affected by social inequalities.

This epistemology of complexity draws on local knowledge systems, local contexts, and the participants' worldviews, interests, and engagement with the research process. The disavowal of traditional approaches and the encoded power among them frees the researcher and participant to find new ways of producing knowledge, ways that are mindful to existing unequal power relations and

grounded in a locally developed ethics of interaction and engagement.

This critical perspective is not an idealistic venture of pretty but empty words. For while we critique and work toward a more socially just world, we cannot step outside of the existing structure of society nor are we immune to the multiple ways in which we too are taken up by subjectivities that serve to alienate us and create a market of desire for commodities that serve the transnational capitalist class, White supremacy, and patriarchy. We, critical researchers, walk always a fine line, critiquing even as we live out our contradictions, knowing fully that we are in bed with the masters of manipulation while keeping a vigilant eye on the clock in hopes of liberation. Shame comes not in admitting our inability to eject the ideologies and fetishes that have been sold to us and that we have unwittingly and often even willingly bought but rather in the failure to hope or act within a pedagogy of liberation that is ours for the making.

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