Qualitative Inquiry

Retrospective Autoethnographies: A Call for Decolonial Imaginings for the New University

Journal:	*Qualitative Inquiry*
Manuscript ID	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Narrative
Date Submitted by the Author:	n/a
Complete List of Authors:	Bell, Deanne; Nottingham Trent University, Psychology Canham, Hugo; University of the Witwatersrand, Psychology Dutta, Urmitapa; University of Massachusetts Lowell, Psychology Fernández, Jesica; Santa Clara University, Ethnic Studies
Keywords:	Autoethnography < Ethnographies < Methodologies, Retrospective autoethnography, Neoliberal university, Coloniality, Decolonial
Abstract:	We present "retrospective autoethnographies" as a methodology for decolonial inquiry/intervention in neoliberal institutions of higher education. Instead of inserting the autobiographical past into the present, we write of our present and our desire for a utopian future in order to begin to create an image of the New University. Together, as people raised in the post-colony and within coloniality, we begin at the negative affect as neoliberal universities surveil, audit, and discipline, but strive to imagine a New University characterized by radical hope. This article is an invitation for a decolonial intervention of radically dreaming the New University into place.

Retrospective Autoethnographies: A Call for Decolonial Imaginings for the New University

Deanne Bell, Ph.D.

Nottingham Trent University, U.K.

Hugo Canham, Ph.D.

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Urmitapa Dutta, Ph.D.

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Jesica Siham Fernández

Santa Clara University

Author Note: This manuscript is the result of an ongoing collaboration among the authors, therefore we request that correspondence concerning the paper should be addressed to all authors. Author names are presented in alphabetical order and are not indicative of relative contribution. All authors have contributed equally to shaping the final paper.

Deanne Bell, Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham NG1 4FQ, UK. Email: deanne.bell@ntu.ac.uk

Hugo Canham, Department of Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue, Braamfontein 2000, Johannesburg, South Africa. Email: hugo.canham@wits.ac.za

Urmitapa Dutta, Department of Psychology, University of Massachusetts Lowell, 113 Wilder St., Ste 300, Lowell MA 01852. Email: urmitapa_dutta@uml.edu

Jesica Siham Fernández, Ethnic Studies Department, Santa Clara University 500 El Camino Real Santa Clara, CA 95053. Email: jsfernandez@scu.edu

Deanne Bell Deanne Bell is a critical community and liberation psychologist whose primary concern is the liberation of being. She attempts to understand the psychosocial effects of coloniality through engagement with collective trauma and social suffering in Jamaica, the US and the UK. Seized by the possibility of decoloniality she engages in praxes that that support this potential. These include the making of a reggae opera, co-producing a film the people of Tivoli Gardens in Jamaica requested to tell a story of structural violence they experience and revealing the ubiquity of indifference to colonially produced suffering. She teaches at Nottingham Trent University in the UK.

Hugo Canham is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. He studies social asymmetries in ways that seek to humanise African life in the context of ongoing colonial subjugation and an anti-black global order.

Urmitapa Dutta is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at University of Massachusetts Lowell. A feminist scholar activist, her program of research focuses on everyday violence, i.e., forms of direct, structural, and symbolic violence that become endemic to the social fabric. She uses critical qualitative methodologies to denaturalize oppressive conditions and to articulate experiences that are silenced by officially sanctioned narratives. Her recent scholarship uses decolonial and transnational feminist approaches to examine constructions of citizenship, migration, and gender-based violence in Northeast India.

Jesica Siham Fernández is an Assistant Professor in the Ethnic Studies Department at Santa Clara University. Trained as a social-community psychologist, she is commited to engaging in social justice research that decolonizes knowledge, theory, and methods by centering individual and community experiences through the use of community based participatory action

research (CBPAR) paradigms rooted in decolonial feminisms and critical race theory. Her recent scholarship has sought to trouble social constructions of citizenship, at the intersections of race, age and gender, as well as document the sociopolitical subjectivities and political engagement of Latinx communities and young people

Abstract

In this article, we present "retrospective autoethnographies" as a methodology for decolonial inquiry/intervention in the context of neoliberal settings, specifically the university. Autoethnography represents that epistemic and methodological space where the personal intersects with the political, historical, and cultural to critique everyday power structures. Instead of inserting the autobiographical past into the present, we write of our present *and* our desire for a utopian future in order to begin to create an image of the New University. Together, as people raised in the post-colony and within coloniality, we begin at the negative affect as neoliberal universities invisibilize, surveil, audit, and discipline – but then we strive to imagine a New University characterized by radical hope, doing so alongside student movements pushing for decolonizing the university. This article is envisioned as an exhortation for a decolonial intervention of radically dreaming the New University into place.

Keywords: autoethnography; retrospective autoethnography; neoliberal university; coloniality; decolonial

Retrospective Autoethnographies: A Call for Decolonial Imaginings for the New University

Part One | Writing as Resistance

> "Why am I compelled to write? Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and anger. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy, and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. Finally, I write because I'm scared of writing, but I'm more scared of not writing." – Gloria E. Anzaldúa (2015, p. 169)

We begin by locating our work within the autoethnographic tradition. We are four black, Indian, Chicanx scholar activists with transnational histories that span India, Jamaica, México, South Africa, North America. and the United Kingdom. We write from these identities. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 733) defined the term *auto- ethnography* as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural." Among the multiple ways of understanding autoethnography then, we align ourselves with Stacy Holman Jones (2005, p. 765) who defines the concept thus:

> Autoethnography is a blurred genre . . . a response to the call . . . it is setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections between life and art . . . making a text present . . . refusing categorization . . . believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when **the point of creating autoethnographic texts is to change the world**. (emphasis added)

Our utopian desires demand a break from the imprisonment of categorization, the

centering of the personal in relation to the social, and the desire to change the world. As minoritized and marginalized beings in the world, we find little resonance with ameliorative change and methodological approaches that valorize the old. Brutalized in the past and present, our hope can only be in a radically altered future where our full humanity can find expression and affirmation. Autoethnography therefore suits our purpose for radical dreaming in the traditions of Sylvia Wynter and Audre Lorde. It allows us to center ourselves, not as marginal and fractured but as whole and important. As a methodological approach for telling stories, refusal, and creative expression, autoethnography is a viable time machine that we can fashion for our needs for a different future.

In this paper, we propose retrospective autoethnography as a methodology for decolonial moves, in critical solidarity with student movements around the globe pushing for decolonizing the university. While we are inspired by autoethnography, our proposed methodology is distinct. Instead of situating the autobiographical past into the present, we insert ourselves into a utopian future to create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing the present. We do not ask whether there is a place for us in the neoliberal academy where knowledge is instrumentalized in the pursuit of capital accumulation. Instead, we engage in a mindful and intentional exercise of militant utopianism (Denzin, 2009) – struggling to visualize ourselves in the New University, and writing from a place of emotional and intellectual emancipation. We engage in a politics of militant utopianism through the daring, defiant act of not only writing our lived experience into ongoing conversations about the academy, but also decolonially dreaming and reimagining the university-as-public-good (Santos, 2010). We ask, *what will it mean to be part of an academy that does not demand unwavering institutional and disciplinary allegiance, that does not invisibilize at the same time as it surveils, audits, and disciplines us?* Together, as people raised

in the post-colony and within coloniality (the neoliberal university as an iteration of colonialism), our decolonial intervention begins at this negative affect but then strives to imagine a New University characterized by radical hope.

We recognize that the desire to heal from the wounds of the neoliberal university via radical imaginings is a collective project. Therefore, rather than enumerating guidelines or prescribing solutions, we exhort readers to join us in our aspiration to dream a New University into place. Together, we hope to build our capacities to listen and to think with our stories, to envision, imagine, and enact alternatives to oppressive paradigms that reduce human life and meaning to economic transactions. We endeavor to step outside the parameters of what and who is valued and counted. We refuse to be restrained by colonial anchors of what is "practical" (for whom?) and to be assuaged by the ameliorative politics of incremental progress.

Even as we allow ourselves to imagine the New University, radical hope and decolonial dreamings are difficult in the face of our fraught everyday lives and liminal existence in neoliberal institutions and disciplines. We ask, *is it possible to reclaim what the neoliberal university has wrenched away from us? What would it mean to rewrite ourselves and the academic spaces we inhabit, however precariously?* The productive tension between experiential "problems" and the imagined utopian university, mirrored in the ebb and flow of this paper, is integral to radical imagination.

In the section that follows, we journey back to autoethnography, to further detail its implications for the radical dreaming that defines our proposed methodology – retrospective autoethnography. We then share our stories: fleeting images of the New University and the desire it sparks; the pain of being "the other" even as we resist and leverage our liminality; naming "private" pain in a deliberate move towards healing and imagining a decolonial reality.

Finally, we share some fledgling ideas on how to invent the New University. We honor our stories and struggles and recognize the time and labor this project entails. Therefore, we envision this article as part one – an invitation to come together in critical solidarity, armed with compassion, care, love, and the desire to heal from the wounds of the neoliberal academy. Our hope is that we will return with part two – where we would not only share our utopian imaginations of the new university but also elaborate, illustrate, and simultaneously trouble retrospective autoethnographies as a method of utopian imagining and decolonial action.

Autoethnography for the Authorization of Radical Dreaming: Toward Retrospective Autoethnographies

In autoethnography, the self becomes the subject of critical inquiry, and a reflexive and ongoing narrative unravels in discerning contrapuntal voices and experiences (Chavez, 2012; Cervantes-Soon, 2014). It strives to make sense of past and present conditions, experiences and ways of being in context, as well as in relation to cultural phenomena that operate under systems of power, oppression and dispossession (Denzin, 2003). Autoethnography renders experience as a source of knowledge, liberation and power because it is anchored in undoing the hegemonic logics of knowledge and being, along with the discourses and mechanisms of a disembodied research practice. Thus, it is within this complexity that autoethnography strives to lift up what has been muddled or left unexamined. By engaging personal stories and reflections, as these arise within and through the body and soul, as well as social realities of lived experience, new imagination and radical wit can be forged to heal open wounds – and thread revolutionary dreams of possibilities and liberation yet to materialize (Cruz, 2013; Silva, 2017; Sandoval, 2000).

We are conscious of the different ends to which autoethnography can be used. We

eschew the Chicago School approach that avoids the political, and steers away from vulnerability, messiness and tears (Denzin, 2006; Holt, 2003). Because our bodies are implicated in our dreaming, we embrace black, Chicanx, and "third world"[1] feminist approaches to autoethnography. We do not have the luxury of detachment and our project is not to describe the world but to alter it in ways that render us visible and human. Inquiry is inseparable from who we are as researchers (Louis, 1991). Our methodological orientation centers the political, performative and pedagogical (Denzin, 2006). We are committed to deconstructing and disrupting the colonial and neoliberal university, and replacing it with the New University. These are our performative, moral and political commitments. They require an approach that enables radically dreaming new futurities into being. We therefore follow Pelias (2004) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) in our desire to write from the heart. We acknowledge that our bodies and hearts carry trauma and weariness with the daily struggles for survival and self-care, but they also carry defiant dreams. For us, autoethnography must of necessity be a generative and enabling frame for mining the possibilities borne of our defiant dreams.

In our dreaming, our personal histories matter. They are the place from which we dream. Jamaica, India, México, and South Africa—former British and Spanish colonies whose devastation and defiance follows us in the present and into the spaces we now occupy in the Unites States of America, Britain, and South Africa. Our methodological commitments must therefore take cognizance of these personal and colonial histories. Following Humphreys (2005) and Gray (2003), we are actors in our own life productions. As activist scholars who trace our stories to the "third world," to be true to ourselves, we have to bring our histories to our work

[1] We use the term "third world" in a positive rehabilitative manner that refers to those territories of the world that have survived the long history of colonial oppression and that continue to resist the neoliberal onslaught.

and longings. In writing from our desires, we bring life to research and consequently we aim to bring research to life (Ellis, 1998).

As writers using our experience and desires we utilize all the possibilities implicated in the word autoethnography. According to Reed-Danahay (1997), *graphy* refers to the focus on the research process, *ethnos* emphasizes culture, and *auto* is concerned with the self. Therefore, while we emphasize the *auto*, we are concerned with the research process, and the culture of which we dream to see possible. Autoethnography can be read as methodologies of resistance and solidarity, for the vast majority of us who are considered non-conforming and inadequate neoliberal subjects. Beyond this fundamental understanding, *retrospective autoethnographies,* our proposed methodology, is distinct in that we insert ourselves into a utopian future. Instead of inserting the autobiographical past into the present, we situate ourselves in futuristic radical dreaming to create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing the present. As we embark on this collective work, we are mindful of the possibilities as well as limitations of theory; as bell hooks (1994, p. 61) reminds us: "Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills that function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end." Through these retrospective autoethnographies, we hope to effect psychosocial transformation – to try to live "a critical life where issues of power and privilege are personally political and are written and rewritten daily with others in hope of utopia" (Spry, 2010, p. 272).

We are not the first to desire a break with the colonial university. Indeed, almost all African, South American, Asian, and Caribbean universities were faced with the possibilities of doing things differently upon their political independence from their colonizers. For various reasons, radical breaks with the colonial university were not pursued. La Paperson (2017) sets

out a fascinating proposition in his provocation titled – *A third university is possible*. Paperson argues that the over determined portrayal of the colonial university as concerned with the colonizer's future, sublimates the ever present desires and assemblages of machinery invested in decolonizing the colonial structure. Where oppression is present, there is always an impulse for resistance. Assemblages of decolonial resistance are borne in the bodies of black, brown and indigenous peoples, and their alternative knowledges. These knowledges simultaneously bare the precolonial, colonial and decolonial timescale. Paperson terms those of us who desire change, "decolonizing dreamers." He contends: "These subversive beings wreck, scavenge, retool, and reassemble the colonizing university into decolonizing contraptions" (2017, xiii). As scholar-activists, we too identify as decolonizing dreamers desiring something different. But our desire requires a clean slate on which we can paint our radical dreams for the decolonized university that we term the New University. We do not seek to build on the old through sabotage and subversive tactics. In the New University, we must not just be teachers and scholars, we must be dissenters and transgressors in pursuit of racial justice, equity and transformative social change that allows for liberation and radical love to surface.

Utopia is derived from two Greek words: eutopia means "good place" and outopia means "no place" (Peters & Freeman-Moir, 2006). In our decolonial dreamings we aspire to a 'good place.' We are however unconstrained by geography, present realities, and limitations because utopia also signals 'no place.' Yet our utopia is not unhinged. We are reminded that a sign only exists in relation to its spatio-temporal localization, and relates to the users' disposition as it is always socio-historical (Suvin, 1990). For us, the utopian university is oriented towards our own socio-historical realities and decolonial dreamings. We dream for the 'good place' that takes our realities into account. The 'no place' is therefore constituted from our longings for a 'good place'

that validates the fullness of our humanity and enables pedagogic environs where future generations of black and brown people are centered in the curriculum. As we share our interweaved pain and longings, we refuse to be treated as a case or series of cases. Our narratives resist easy categorization – we write about critical theory but also about systemic suffering. Together and separate, we form a collective consciousness that aims to disrupt colonial, imperial, and neoliberal norms that assign predetermined values to our embodied scholarship (and our existence really).

Our Place in the (Academic) World, Imagining the New University

In search of "home:" Urmitapa's narrative.

> Hiraeth (Welsh) (n.) a homesickness for a home to which you cannot return, a home which maybe never was; the nostalgia, the yearning, the grief for the lost places of your past.

My (Urmitapa) long-term scholar activism on structural violence, citizenship, and belonging in Northeast India has always been about home – about reconciling the chasm between my affective and embodied experience of home with the politics of belonging that cast me in as "ethnic other" (see Dutta, 2015); or as author Siddharth Deb writes, "I want it to be home for everyone who lives there, for everyone to have a place in it that cannot be lost or stolen" (2002, p. 304). The loss of home is never reconciled, neither is the longing for it. I relived the loss during my last ever visit to my childhood home. At the peak of armed conflict, it lost any semblance of security as we lived in daily terror. I mourned the loss yet again when the conflict compelled my parents to leave their home of 35 years. The precarity of belonging and the unending longing is perfectly encapsulated in the word *Hiraeth*. I see the project of (re)imagining the New University as part of this longing – a longing to find a place where I can

belong, where my presence is normative, a place where my ways of being and knowing are not surveilled. Belonging, as Yuval-Davis (2006) notes, is a political, affective, and existential project. The politics of belonging is also about transgressing boundaries and practicing radical imagination—writing and rewriting the daily in the hopes of a different, more just reality.

Dreaming from the Third World: Hugo's narrative. I (Hugo) am a black middle-class man who lives in Johannesburg, South Africa, a former colonial outpost of the British Empire. Before that, the Afrikaaner descendants of the Dutch had ruled over the black people in the region. I live and think from this place. In the wake of devastation. When the idea for this collaboration was initiated by my US and UK based peers, I was in Rwanda in East Africa. I had needed to get away from South Africa where I live. But as Urmi recalls, even in Rwanda, I could not escape the haunting. I was in Kigali, a mortally wounded city of the dead where one million people were killed in the 1994 genocide. While there, I learned that 1994 was just the last iteration of a deep history of the felling of black life. It was preceded by two massacres and an earlier genocide. This is the aftermath of colonization by German and Belgium invaders. I do not recount the horrors of the actual colonial period. While in Kigali, I visited the national university where the president dictates what is to be studied. Everything in post-genocide Rwanda is geared towards peace and diffusing any forms of conflict. And the president sits on the lid of the bubbling pot.

In South Africa, I am not a minority. I am part of the majority that was oppressed by colonial settlers and the demigods of apartheid. But in the colonial and recalcitrant university that has not changed, I am seen as somewhat of an imposter. Nirmal Puwar (2004) reminds us that the university was not meant for people like me. The university where I work was built a century ago for English speaking European youth living in the British colony while their parents

got rich from lording over the mining of gold from the African earth. The university was based on the logic of extractive economies. Based on the calculus of standards, the colonial university has retained its character because efforts to decolonize are associated with a drop in standards. Williams (2000) articulates my suspicion of standards in her contention that they limit the possibilities of experimentation and the discovery of new pathways.

But as African universities scramble for relevance and recognition, they join the race for validation on the world ranking tables. This is another iteration of the World Bank in the global knowledge economy. 'Level' mindedness, conservatism and financial prudence are valued above human wellbeing, joy, validation, recuperation, experimentation and local responsiveness. For those wanting to be fully human, this iteration of the long history of the university is not the place for realizing humanity. Fueled by this despair, I join my colleagues in thinking about a utopian New University unconstrained by the dream killer that is the current university.

Identities at the borderlands: Jesica's narrative. The cementing and construction of the México-U.S. border has informed my immigrant and naturalization status, as well as ways of being and moving through the *borderlands* – the physical, sociocultural and imagined borders. I (Jesica) was born to a transmigrant farm working family, who immigrated to California in the late 1980s from the southern state of Michoacán. I am a Chicana. This term reflects a critical sociohistorical consciousness of Mexican American sociopolitical subjectivities, positionalities and identities as descendants of the territories of Aztlán that were colonized and annexed by the United States at the turn of the 20th century.

The U.S. is where I, like most of my fellow Chicanx, reside. As trespassers with indigenous, mestizo, and mulatto roots, some of us are perceived as perpetual foreigners in the land of our ancestors. We are aggravated by the realities of having to occupy the status of

second-class citizens. We exist here, in spite of never quite achieving full citizenship, rights and belonging, because of how our bodies are racialized, and labeled on account of our language, culture and ways of being that differ from United Statesian practices of assimilation and constructions of what it means to be "American." Yet, I am a Mexican and an American. As a cis-gender woman raised in a cultural Catholic family, and educated in U.S. public schools, I exist and move between multiple worlds – I am a "world-traveler" (Lugones, 2010).

In holding on to these markers of who I am, I strive to disrupt white spaces or settings where institutionalized whiteness is deeply entrenched (Ahmed, 2012). The suffocation experienced within white spaces results from heightened visible differences of people's positionalities, whilst invisibilizing and silencing the histories of colonial race and gender violence that an immigrant woman of color might surface. The racialized, gendered and heteronormative neoliberalization of "white spaces" is depleting, but abounds. Settings of higher education in the U.S. were created as and continue to be "white spaces" – neocolonial structures that were not made, as my students remind me, "for Black and Brown bodies like ours." Thus, I envision the New University as a place where I, along with my "Black and Brown," and institutionally marginalized colleagues and students, can be seen and heard, and feel that we do belong because we are respected, accepted, and honored in our whole humanity and beautiful complexity. These reflections underscore my experiences from inside the neoliberal university – as well as my radical hope and dreams for the New University –a space where the unequal forces of power, and the disjuncture of being is troubled and transformed.

Inventing a new university: Deanne's narrative.

Call me utopian, but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds

us. – Robin D.G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, 2002, p. 2.

I (Deanne) am a Jamaican woman with African, Indian, Scottish, Irish and English blood. I teach and do research with liberatory aims from within the neoliberal university[2]. Daily, I see and feel how the university grinds some *Other's* lives into oblivion and how colonialists turn a blind eye to this reality.

In solidarity with Urmitapa, Hugo, Jesica and others, I choose to build a new university that has yet to be invented. At this moment in the history of our struggle to become people who thrive in the university, we cannot rely on critiques of the plantation university to lead us forward. On their own, evaluations of what is wrong with the university will not produce its transformation. But radical movements of consciousness, borne of the imagination and our imperatives, are forces, readily available to us, for building a university we desire.

Part Two | Resisting the Privatization of Systemic Pain: Speaking Our Dreams into Existence

The struggles we name are systemic and yet the resultant suffering is seen as a form of private weakness, a mark of personal failure. Resisting and surviving an academy that finds new ways to inform us that we do not belong is depleting. But for many of us, we are not in the academy because of any abstract love for knowledge or institutions. It is a political and ethical imperative, powerfully articulated by liberation psychologist Martin-Baró (1996, pp. 41-42): to "make a contribution toward changing all the conditions that dehumanize the majority of the population, alienating their consciousness and blocking the development of their historical identity." As people raised in the post-colony and within coloniality, any escape or "running away" has an entirely different connotation for us. As Hugo shared,

[2] I have taught in the United States and currently teach in the United Kingdom.

> I needed to run away. Of course, I have come to a place full of genocide memories and thousands of bodies. I have been to three memorials with mass graves and walked among the remains of people. Africans who are ancestors. Against their will. Literally over 100,000 skulls. So, I have a new fatigue and appreciation of the sedimentation of trauma stemming from the colonial moment and its repetitions.

Deanne spoke for all of us as she observed:

> …being exhausted, depleted and defeated is, almost, an existential condition of being marginal in higher education. That then led to the recognition that the university in neoliberal places is a failed institution.

We struggled to think and exist outside of the negative affect produced by coloniality. Through moments of compassionate and impassioned solidarity, we birthed this project of retrospective autoethnographies - a form of protest and praxis through which we re-imagine the desired New University.

We are here because we desire to be part of a different space where the arc of justice and not the economic bottom-line defines what is possible, a space that runs counter to our current experience of the academy but is so much more than a reaction to it; to move around from border crossing and liminality to find a way to gather stories about what remains excluded from the academy. In Jesica's words, "a place of emotional (and intellectual) emancipation. . . creating a collective vision toward healing and affirmation of ourselves and the self, in and through our work."

Trespassing white spaces: The bodies of women of Color. In the fall of 2014, I (Jesica) entered the academic job market. I was told to apply widely and vastly, to any and all tenure track programs that would align with my training as a social-community psychologist with an

emphasis in Latin American and Latino Studies. I was told to apply out of state, to leave California because I "could always come back." I applied to a few programs that fall, some in psychology, and others in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary departments, specifically ethnic studies and Latino studies. I was warned, by well-meaning mentors, that if I decided to "leave" the discipline of psychology for a "non-traditional discipline" that I would be sentencing myself to a life "on the margins," that I would not be able to "return" to psychology, and that I would suffer a sense of loss – an academic disciplinary identity crisis of sorts. What these mentors and peers did not realize, however, is that I was living – and had always lived – on the outsides. I learned to live on the outsides, on the borders, the very first day I stepped into a classroom setting. It was in context of learning and schooling where the predominant language, cultural norms and values, and even bodies in the space, marked my visible race, ethnic, cultural, class and gender differences as other and foreign. When I started the graduate program, I had to expand my repertoire of techniques to move through the margins and embody a form of strategic resistance. Lugones (2010) purports that there is value in resistance, and uncompromising one's agency and action in spaces which suffocate. Resistance is thus characterized as a form of productive tension that lies in the push away from subjectification/objectification and oppression.

Chicana social psychologist, Aida Hurtado (1989), writes that, "by the time women of color reach adulthood, we have developed informal political skills to deal with nation-state intervention. The political skills required by women of color … are more like urban guerillas trained through everyday battle with the state apparatus." As Hurtado (1989) and other women of color feminist critical scholars assert, "women of color's fighting capabilities are not codified anywhere for them to learn" (as cited in Sandoval, 2000, p. 59). Cherrie Moraga (1981) stated this clearly when she claimed that, "Our strategy is how we cope on an everyday basis, how we

measure and weigh what is to be said and when, what is to be done and how, and to whom" (as cited in Sandoval, 2000, p. 59). Daily deciding and taking risks on who it is we can call an ally, a friend and a resource is exhausting, yet this process allows for the building of coalitions and intersectional solidarities that build up toward transformation and healing.

The words by Moraga (1981) and Hurtado (1989) underscore my experiences as a "space invader," to borrow Nirmal Puwar's (2004) phrase. Very early on in my years of schooling, I learned how to be, how to move and transverse life "on the margins." How to navigate spaces – especially "white spaces" where I was either invisible, or hypervisible, but not welcomed – proved to be very useful within the quarters of academia. I was not concerned with leaving "the field" of psychology because I had never really felt "in it." Yet I remained committed to it because it allowed me to develop the tools, skills and perspectives that I would come to merge with other disciplines and areas of study that spoke to my experiences and the lives of communities I work with, learn from, and accompany in our struggles, healing and liberation. I found solace in critical decolonial theories, critical race and ethnic studies, and women of color feminisms. In fall 2014, in the midst of writing a dissertation and gearing up for the job market, I experienced deep pain, brokenness and uncertainty. But, I also discovered fortitude and a relentless uncompromising desire to honor what feels right for me, to be guided by what Moraga (1981) describes as "theory in the flesh." For four consecutive years I was on the academic job market, applying to a select number of institutions and programs that I felt would honor the integrity and value of my scholarship and teaching, and would welcome me with dignity and respect.

Dollars and dispensability: Neoliberal encounters as a woman of Color. I (Urmitapa) recently went through the tenure process – successfully I should add as it was not a given for me.

After all, we know that the refusal to be an "anxiously compliant worker" is not taken kindly by those who are vested in maintaining the status quo. When I register my critique and refusal, it is met with anger and disdain. I am read as the ungrateful brown woman whose allegiance to the institution is suspect.

My research interrogates power structures and is steeped in an incisive critique of institutions including the academy. It is not amenable to measurement nor can it be slotted into easily recognizable categories such as "fundable" or "high impact." Well-meaning senior colleagues advised me to "package" my work better, to do a better job of "selling" myself as a scholar. Suggestions included dropping the word activist from "activist scholar" – it could raise questions of whether my work constitutes rigorous scholarship as opposed to "mere activism." I was told to replace "we" (as in communities and collectives where my scholarship is rooted) with "I." I was asked to mention potential collaborations with colleagues in the U.S. and not just in countries such as South Africa or India – the assumption being, how would this research speak to U.S. issues; and some may wonder whether I am pushing myself beyond my "comfort zone."

To the extent that voice is a privilege afforded to those with tenure, I strongly believe it is imperative to use my privilege to question the status quo – to speak up and speak out[3]. The only person of color at a discussion about institutional diversity, I argue: "The institution wants to *see* "diversity," that is, people who look like me, but they do not want to hear us speak our truth. They want non-white looking people as long as they are white passing in their politics." I am immediately censured. I am told that this is not a good strategy to change the behavior of senior

[3] I do not intend to romanticize tenure as if the power it bestows is natural. It does mean that people have less power over me in terms of determining whether I have a job or not and that is liberating. I have since discovered that tenure does not shield dissenting people of color from being surveilled—literally, not just symbolically. That one speaks does not necessarily mean that one has a voice; not all voices are heard or received equally.

administrators. My white female colleagues remind me that it is counterproductive to talk about intentions, it alienates people.

Microaggressions to the rescue! A concept coined by scholars of color to name the everyday insidious intersections of prejudice and discrimination – are now used against us when we deem to question the intentions of administrators, or the lack thereof. As I sit in that room acutely conscious of the whiteness of that space, Audre Lorde's words resound in my consciousness: "When women of Color speak out of anger," we are often accused of "standing in the way of trusting communication and action" (Lorde, 1984, p. 131). The repetition and reassertion of good intention feels oppressive ("their heart is in the right place;" "it's not that they are doing this intentionally;" "a lot of it is ignorance, really"). As Sara Ahmed (2012) argues, diversity becomes a method for protecting whiteness.

As our contingent colleagues protest gross disparities in salary, healthcare, and denial of their right to unionize – the university spends billions in renovating/constructing "state-of-the-art" facilities on campus. While pervasive layoffs and escalating costs threaten our colleagues and students at our sister campus– my campus is "thriving" – we are supposed to feel good about ourselves because – "we have managed our money well." And yet, we are increasingly asked to demonstrate our commitment through the dollar amounts we "give" to the university.

The neoliberal institution enforces compliance through coercive measures, but more than anything, it buys silence in exchange for small inducements; it capitalizes on the fear of forfeiting these possible inducements. As a consequence, we do not talk about the precarity of contingent faculty except in small groups; we fail to raise a collective voice against tuition hikes and increasing food insecurity faced by our students, instead contributing to food pantries; we do not ask why a public university guilts its faculty into funding student scholarships; or question

the ethos of a public institution that requires payment for hosting events that have "outside people," even when they are a handful of local community members attending events that are free and open to the public. We do not talk about the university whose support to the only women's research center on campus is conditional and shaky while cheerfully accepting corporate awards for being one of the "top women-led businesses" in the state. We do not talk about what it means for community and peace studies programs to lead an uncertain existence while security and terrorism studies receive accolades for bringing in big dollars from private defense contractors and the Department of Homeland Security – doing research focused on finding new ways of surveilling majority world people.

Refusing Defeat: How to Begin to Invent the New University

When Urmitapa asks, in one of our dialogues about the retrospective nature of this project, *How to begin to imagine,* I (Deanne) become seized with the question *How to begin to invent the new university.*

I experience the neoliberal university as a crucible of oppression (Bell, 2018). Recognizing that neocolonialist leadership in the university resists reimagining a university that would realise its social justice, equality, diversity and inclusion rhetoric I choose to begin to imagine another university. Inspired by radicalists who refuse defeat, joylessness, and despair, I return to the imagination to source a world through which learning, discovery, solving and repair is possible. These imaginings are moored in the logic of surrealism – the cultural movement emerging out of the inter war period when the loss of freedom and inhumane exploitations emanating from colonialism, racism and imperialism (Breton, 1978) brought artists and intellectuals together to defeat the "closed rationalism" (p. 271) of the Western world. This sterility of mind, "hegemony of consciousness" (p. 336) that impoverishes psychological life and

social consciousness and that sustains colonial logic is a dead-end street I refuse to travel.

*So,I begin elsewhere (*and invite *Others* to join in this experiment).

We begin with surrealism. With:

…the exaltation of freedom, revolt, imagination and love…revolutionary movement …to lessen and eventually to completely resolve the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams … [our intention is] not only to discredit and destroy the forces of repression, but also to emancipate desire and supply it with new poetic weapons… (Chicago Surrealist Group, 1976)

We begin "with the abolition of imaginative slavery" (Chicago Surrealist Group, 1976).

We "imagine backwards" (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 196).

We shift our gaze away from the plantation university. We shut our eyes to it (literally and figuratively) and re-centre ourselves in our bodies by riding our breath.

We imagine a space of joy, beauty and love (including visions of a new university if they emerge).

Bringing all of our senses to bear we notice the sounds, the feel of the air, the colors that surround us, the light, the fragrances in the air….

…it is 20 years from now. Things have changed culturally. Our deepest desires have taken root. We see and feel how our desires have shaped campuses, organizational life, admissions criteria (both student and staff), research practices, financial arrangements, pedagogies and relationships.

We use our third eye to explore what has shifted in us and in the atmospheres around us.

We turn our gaze outward, toward the world outside of our campuses. We see how the campus is integrated into community life, the countries where we live and the world.

We pay attention to the felt sense of this experience. We see if there's a "word, phrase or image" that captures what we are experiencing.[4]

If we feel called to (and I hope we do) we share these words, phrases and/or images of our experience of the new university with each other.

We dialogue with these seeds nestled in our imaginations.

We repeatedly ask, "what would need to happen at this point, to prepare the way for utopic reality to come into existence?" (Boulding, 1983 as quoted in Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 196)

We share these speculations, begin to organize our lives around them, start to act on them knowing that the power to invent the new university can be sourced from our shared desire. [5]

Part Three | Enacting a Politics of Refusal

Retrospective autoethnography is a methodology for invention born from desire and the long shadow cast over our lives by the neoliberal university. How do we do the radical work of making space for those on the margins, when we are tied to the whims or hegemonic interests of the neoliberal University? The New University, as we imagine it, is rooted, anchored and committed to serving, advocating and protecting its community of students, faculty and staff, as well as local surrounding communities, for we are bound to each other. The New University's classrooms are the communities, settings and social contexts that are read and discussed but rarely seen, heard and lived. The New University does not stay silent when injustice unfolds; it speaks up, talks back, and pushes the boundaries of the nation-state.

We refuse to subject our narratives into yet another damaged reading of the oppressed

---

[4] From Gendlin's 'Focusing', The International Focusing Institute.
[5] This exercise is liberally adapted from "Utopic Imagining" in *Toward Psychologies of Liberation,* Watkins & Shulman, 2008, pps. 196 - 198).

subject.

We refuse to engage in a reflexivity that demands that we lay bare our vulnerabilities, only for it to be used against us.

We refuse to subject ourselves to colonial scrutiny that tries to parse our autobiographical, activist, and scholarly contributions.

We refuse to be shown our place by scholars who are discomfited by the possibility of unfettered imagination.

We engage in a politics of refusal. Following Tuck and Yang (2014), we believe that refusal is generative rather than prohibitive. It is a critical intervention to resist those rarefied representations that invisibilize or hypervisibilize, and to turn the gaze back to power. We continually grapple with the question posed by Rosalind Morris: "What kind of representation becomes available to the one who, having partially escaped the silence of subalternity, is nonetheless possessed by the consciousness of having been obstructed, contained, or simply misread for so much of her life?" (Morris, 2010, p. 8).

Embracing Failure in the New University

The stakes are high for we who invade spaces that are not meant for us (Puwar, 2004). We cannot fail. The university expects our failure, our families tell us that we dare not fail and let them down, black and brown youth hold us up to slogans like "black excellence", and as first generation black academics we cannot fail. We stand in for women, "our race", queer people, people with disabilities, people who were once working class, for middle class black people. We are representations and gestures. But what if we had the freedom to fail? What would it look like? Failure is valuable for experimentation and trying out new ideas. Space for failure allows for a retreat to think anew about what went wrong. It makes room for a return to try again. The

New University would therefore embrace failure. This would mean that the competitive impetus that drives the colonial university would be the antithesis of the New University. Competition closes off space for failure. Failure would take the pressure off and allow me to be a better person. We would write what we want without pressure to convert this into particular kinds of publications. We would think more deeply and not feel that this was a luxury. We would pay more attention and care for our students. For our colleagues. We would be less afraid of poverty. This means that we would take more risks without worrying about how these would impact the bottom line of the university and our own financial wellbeing. Without the pressure to be excellent in the New University, we and other scholars would be more deliberate in pursuing social justice. Activism does not pay and it is often punished. But in the New University, activism would be the norm because the creation of a more socially just world would be the priority of the university. We would write, teach and experiment without fear.

Collaboration and solidarity mean that failure is cushioned and learning is shared. In my (Hugo) decolonial dreaming, the New University will value failure. As a cis-gender male academic, I would place my privilege on the line and support women and transgender colleagues. We would share strategies for rooting out patriarchal cultures. I would be less suspicious of the motives of white colleagues. And if whiteness re-emerged in the New University, I would not be afraid of the bruising effects of failure from fighting racism. I am numb now. I do not have the energy and emotional resources to fight institutional racism. But underlying this paralysis is the fear of failure. Freed of the fear of failing in the battle, I would make a greater difference in the world. If we embraced failure, we'd forgive each other more readily and the spaces between us would not be drenched in fear and loathing.

My (Hugo) decolonial dreamings come from a place of deep exhaustion. For those of us

on the periphery of the colonial university, this iteration of the university is untenable. If we matter at all, we must dream for something better and collectively work towards it. I do not celebrate "my" individual successes in the university. I know too well that my presence points to the fates of those who are excluded. I see my childhood friends dying of preventable diseases and violence. Celebrations of being the only one who "made it" ring hollow. They capitulate to neoliberal strivings. They mean buying into the scorched earth policy of educational attainment that eschews community building. Looking back to my community, my decolonial strivings come from a place of dejection. I have failed. But the mirage of what is possible gives me a glimmer of hope.

A Call for Decolonial Imaginings

This paper has sought to lay out the vision for our dream. We grappled with the tension of owning the negative affect that structures our lives within our places of work while also daring to dream of a New University in a better world. Encouraged by our black, Chicana and Latina feminist predecessors and current interlocutors, we found auto ethnography to be a productive methodology through which to convey our resistance and decolonial dreams. As we write and speak from desire, daring, and dissidence, we then invite you to join this decolonial project, to come together in critical solidarity, fortified with compassion, care, love, and the desire to heal from the wounds of the academy. We invite you to explore retrospective autoethnographies – together and separate—but always as part of a critical collective. In Deanne's words, "As new and creative methodology. As epistemology. As radical engagement. As decoloniality. As liberation."

References

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Bell, D. (2018). A pedagogical response to decoloniality: Decolonial atmospheres and rising subjectivity. *American Journal of Community Psychology 62*(3-4), 250-260.

Boulding, E. (1983). Women's visions of the future. In E. Masini (Ed.), *Visions of Desirable Societies,* Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, pp. 9-25.

Breton, A. (1978). What is surrealism? Atlanta, GA: Pathfinder.

Cervantes-Soon, C. (2014). The US-Mexico border-crossing Chicana researcher: Theory in the flesh and the politics of identity in critical ethnography. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, *6*(2), 97-112.

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.

Chicago Surrealist Group. "Surrealism and Blues." *Living Blues,* no 25 (January/February 1976), 19.

Cruz, C. (2013). LGBTQ youth of color video making as radical curriculum: A brother mourning his brother and a theory in the flesh. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *43*(4), 441-460.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2010). The university in the twenty-first century. *The Routledge international handbook of the sociology of education*, 274-282.

Deb, S. (2002). The point of return: A novel. Ecco.

Denzin, N. K. (2003). Performing [auto] ethnography politically. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, *25*(3), 257-278.

Denzin, N. K. (2006). Analytic autoethnography, or déjà vu all over again. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35(4), 419-428.

Denzin, N. K. (2009). A critical performance pedagogy that matters. *Ethnography and Education*, *4*(3), 255-270.

Dutta, U. (2015). The long way home: The vicissitudes of belonging and otherness in Northeast India. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(2), 161-172.

Ellis, C. (1998). Exploring loss through autoethnographic inquiry: Autoethnographic stories, co-constructed narratives, and interpretive interviews. In J. H. Harvey (Ed.), *Perspectives on loss: A sourcebook* (pp. 49-62). Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. n N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.)*, Sage Publications, p. 733-768.

Gray, R. E. (2003). Performing on and off stage: The place(s) of performance in arts- based approaches to qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *9*(2), 254-267.

Holman Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: Making the personal political. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 763-792). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holt, N. L. (2003). Representation, legitimation and autoethnography: An auto ethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *2*(1).

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

hooks, b. (2000). *All about love: New visions*. New York: William Morrow.

Humphreys, M. (2005). Getting personal: Reflexivity and autoethnographic vignettes. *Qualitative inquiry*, *11*(6), 840-860.

Hurtado, A. (1989). Relating to privilege: Seduction and rejection in the subordination of white women and women of color. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 14*(4), 833-855.

la paperson. (2017). *A third university is possible*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Kelley, R. (2002). *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon.

Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, *25*(4), 742-759.

Louis, M. R. (1991). Reflections on an interpretive way of life. In P. J. Frost, L. F. Moore, M. R. Louis, C. C. Lundberg, & J. Martin (Eds.), *Reframing organizational culture* (pp. 361-365). London: Sage.

Martín-Baró, I. (1996). *Writings for a liberation psychology*. (A. Aron & S. Corne, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (1981). Entering the lives of others: Theory in the flesh. *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*, 21-2.

Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.). (2015). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Suny Press.

Morris, R. (Ed.). (2010). *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Pelias, R. J. (2004). *A methodology of the heart: Evoking academic and daily life*. Lanham: Rowman Altamira.

Peters, M. A., & Freeman-Moir, D. J. (Eds.). (2006). *Edutopias: New utopian thinking in education* (Vol. 5). Sense Publishers.

Puwar, N. (2004). *Space invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place*. New York: Berg.

Reed-Danahay, D. (1997). *Auto/ethnography*. New York: Berg.

Sandoval, C. (2000). *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Vol. 18). U of Minnesota Press.

Silva, J. M. (2017). When Research "Unravels": One Community Psychologist's Tale of Becoming a Nepantlera. *American journal of community psychology*, *59* (1-2), 239-251.

Spry, T. (2010). Call it swing: A jazz blues autoethnography. *Cultural Studies? Critical Methodologies*, *10*(4), 271-282.

Suvin, D. (1990). Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies. *Utopian Studies*, *1*(2), 69-83.

The International Focusing Institute. (2018). Retrieved from http://www.focusing.org/sixsteps.html

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2014). R-words: Refusing research. In D. Paris, & M. T. Winn (Eds.). *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities* (pp 223-248), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Watkins, M., & Shulman, H. (2008). *Toward psychologies of liberation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Williams, P. J. The Alchemy of Race and Rights. (pp. 75-80). In F. J. Crosby & C. Van DeVeer. (Ed's.) (2000). *Sex, Race, & Merit – Debating Affirmative Action in Education and Employment.* United States of America. University of Michigan Press.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of prejudice*, *40*(3), 197-214.