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The Pinay Scholar-Activist Stretches: A Pin@y Decolonialist Standpoint

Melissa-Ann Nievera-Lozano

In the 1983 groundbreaking book, *This Bridge Called My Back*, Mitsue Yamada reveals, “I am weary from starting from scratch each time I speak or write, as if there were no history behind us, of hearing that among the women of color, Asian women are the least political, or the least oppressed, or the most polite.”¹ And still I write, tired of being polite or of quickly silencing myself in what bell hooks calls the “dominator context.”² As a Pinay³ (pronounced Pee-nye) scholar, I struggle to speak in fits and starts. I struggle to write in fits and starts with words that parrot the academy, with words to legitimize my worth and position. I do belong here. Urgency is met with hesitancy, and I hate this feeling; it stings. Like you, I carry an ever-evolving epistemology, so dynamic and sometimes arbitrary that I can never fully detail my continuities and contradictions moment by moment; but today, I will try.

This paper is a chance for me to communicate how I wrestle with such conflict: holding, shifting, sharing, and transforming a personal/political identity in academia. As part of an interconnected web of thinkers, actors, and players in relation to an agenda called equitable education, I lay bare the dynamic fluidity of this identity. To explain, my dissertation research involves collecting the life histories of critically engaged Filipino American faculty in higher education to see how transformative moments in their lives (personal confrontations with race, class, gender and sexuality) inform their teaching today. However, before I can approach others with questions eliciting their vulnerability, candidness, and realness, I am obliged to put forth my own.

In this paper, I travel an unconventional route to explicate the transformative processes throughout my life as an eventual scholar-to-be. I assemble an unorthodox framework of decolonized feminist methodologies, Buddhist philosophy, and human rights discourses to develop what I am calling a Pin@y decolonialist standpoint. This paper describes selected theoretical and analytical tools, which allow me to see self as subject. In this critical looking inward of private (often painful) formations of race, class, gender and emerging sexuality, this paper shall reveal my process of becoming a scholar-activist: my personal/political identity and its meaning in my work.

I proceed with the understanding of education — not merely as a form of privilege for a select few, but rather — as the state constitution of California declares: “a fundamental right.”⁴ In this process of rearticulating “rights,” I offer a small but significant piece of a tremendous puzzle that I will assemble throughout the paper to elucidate how power is “always circulating in multiple and multi-directional ways”⁵ throughout my research. However, the puzzle begins here: where pieces of me have been pulled apart in education — as a K-12

student, as a community educator, as a graduate student, and now as an aspiring researcher/professor. The power I must elucidate first is that which resides within me.

Breaking Silence: A Process of Decolonization

While writing with multiple boundaries, my tongue wrestles with a language too foreign. I feel delayed. I am naïve. I process thoughts across an imagined 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper while trying to carve out a space so I can intimately share my formation of a Pin@y decolonialist standpoint. The ways in which I have survived in alien spaces⁶ shape my epistemology, and it is important that I make it as transparent as possible. I must tell you my story and unpack it before I begin snatching the stories of others as earlier Eurocentric, colonial, and privileged researchers have recklessly done with imperialist ears and eyes.⁷ I deliver my testimony with a different kind of understanding then, akin to the humble Buddhist notion that one “cannot travel the path until she has become the path itself.” In doing so, I boldly attempt to show the bigger picture of my role as a Pinay scholar-activist from various angles with a multi-sited approach located within me, projected out. . . ouch, here. Allow me a moment to catch my breath. It is never easy to write for/in the academy. The pressure to articulate is heavy and daunting.

These hives, the lump in my throat, and the strands of hair falling are externalized signals of the stifling pressure I’ve internalized to define the researcher I hope to become. It’s been a year since I started this paper. I still feel muffled in this attempt to testify, when I should really be “stating the facts,” “staying neutral,” and “writing without bias.” But write, I must. My body responds with resistance. These pages are suffocating and this grief, this silence, is an all too familiar place. I’ve been here, in lifetimes before this one, straining to package my words in a neat, tidy box I can hand you without it crumbling apart, Mr. Dominator.

“Young lady,” said the cop, bending down to me as I stood there looking down at my feet. I must have been four years old. It was early in the morning, a little passed midnight, and Papa was in handcuffs, out on the driveway. Mom was crying, somewhere in the house. The door was open, and I was cold. “Young lady, does your father have any guns in the house? We need to know for your safety. Does he have any?” I nod yes. “How many?” He probes. “Fourteen,” I softly reply, recalling Papa counting them. Grandpa, from across the room, shakes his head in disapproval. I did something wrong. I gave the wrong answer.

Who is my audience? Whose truth is my truth and whom should I be protecting? Who is the real authority? With whom do I ally? Am I on the right side? Where does culture lie?

And so the Pinay scholar-activist stretches. . .

Here he is: this white cop in my mind—Mr. Dominator, Mr. Colonizer, and Conquistador of the righteous West who know best, I suppose. And yet, I feel violated deep inside. This white man’s presence in our family home is disturbing and unwelcome. His gaze and his stance speak volumes: what he thinks about me as a child of a Filipino immigrant family who inconveniently occupies a space on an American street block. As a young girl, maybe four years old, I can’t help but feel injured; I’m without a language to defend my father and grandfather, now inept in this man’s eyes. And then I learn, as decolonial scholar Schiwiy notes:

European and Caucasian men have thought themselves in opposition to colonized men who have been represented as effeminate or as par of an irrational nature where nature itself is also bound up with tropes of femininity. . . The emasculation of indigenous men. . . has prefigured and paralleled that of other colonized peoples, enacted and inscribed through rape, both real and in the imaginary of colonial texts. . . The force of this tool of war has relied not only on the harm inflicted on women it also enacts the inability of colonized men to protect ‘their women’. [Such rape] re-enforces patriarchal relations where women are reduced to objects and their abuse comes to signify damage to male honor.”⁸

And yet that obtrusive, penetrating pressure to carry my role as a little young lady comes not just from a white man cop, but also from my grandfather. How do I split myself to answer both? Why must I? When was I assigned this duty? What am I supposed to say? I can feel it, as bell hooks asserts: “language is a place of struggle.”⁹ Let me find my language, my power as I write.

In the tradition of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back*, I write this piece to mark my healing. My work as a Pinay researcher/scholar/cultural worker is undeniably about healing. In “occupying a marginal position within the academy”¹⁰ I answer Patricia Hill Collins call to “place greater trust in the creative potential of my own personal and cultural biography”¹¹ and I explore the kind of violence that human rights researcher Sally Merry understands as a “slippery concept that cannot be understood only on physical terms. It also includes assaults on personhood, dignity and the sense of worth and value as a person.”¹²

As a little girl, squirming in my socks I was exposed to both the white male cop and my Filipino immigrant grandfather. I am caught in-between, looking up from below, like an ant beneath a glaring magnifying glass in the midday sun. I occupy an often-oppressive marginal space. I feel betrayed by grandfather, and I wonder where he had gone. Where did I belong? It seems I should be right here as part of this working-class family; yet at the same time, I feel disconnected as if tied to an alien bunch.

Endless internal shifting, redefining and rearticulating, I try to fit myself onto some continuum or measure myself based on some barometer out there. This is taxing and tearing away at my center, but deeply, I understand it unquestionably indicates spurts of growth: my voice, in fits and starts; my growth, in fits and starts. In the spirit of Audre Lorde, “it is looking to the nightmare that the dream is found.”¹³ I will go there. I don’t want to be measured anymore. I just want to be heard. I write to break silence, to self-determine my time and place of exposure. It is here.

I began writing my life when I was handed a diary as a gift by an aunt who insisted it was a tradition for young girls to begin journaling at the tender age of seven. I never stopped. The journals included hardback covers with corny floral designs, pretty locks with keys, basic spiral notebooks, romantic cream-colored pages bound in leather, and Word documents on file. All are saved. I penned the thickest, most dense material particularly in the darkest of times, when answers appeared to be the furthest from me. This act of writing, of needing to write moves from the diary to scholarly notes. As leading transnational feminism theorist Jacqui Alexander contends, “this gesture of looking back then is not one of nostalgia or an expression of loss. . . but a critical looking back, an act of self and collective reflexivity. For how could we truly apprehend the archeology present, unaware of its lay contours?”¹⁴ Here are my lay contours; that is, the conditions, relationships, and questions shaping the way I have come to see my position and work in the academy.

You will get acquainted with my pain, its source and its twisting path. Here, you will be exposed to the love I employ in my work, the kind of love Chela Sandoval says can be used as “a political technology, as [part of a] body of knowledges, arts, practices, and procedures for re-forming the self and the world.”¹⁵ In due course, you will witness my emotionally unstable growth as a Pinay scholar-activist trying to get used to the discomfort of my position. Let us not discount our emotions, for they too are sites of knowledge production. Feminist scholar Alison Jaggar echoes Alexander’s encouragement to look back/look in as she notes, “Critical reflection on emotion is not a self-indulgent substitute for political analysis and political action. It is itself a kind of political theory and political practice, indispensable for an adequate social theory and social transformation.”¹⁶

Women of color before me have been trying to change the game in academia, aiming to transform society while transforming themselves. They were reaching, stretching, breathing, linking and living as bridges. They were revealing more explicitly this “in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. . . living in this liminal zone. . . a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming.”¹⁷ They make the simple case—we are not the same.

Human rights scholar Eva Brems reveals the danger in assuming sameness across apparently different approaches. In the context of human rights, Brems imagines that women and men are equal and that white women and women of color are equal (and so on). It attempts to illustrate universality and neutrality around gender, culture, privilege, or experience as if non-Western women are not discriminated daily for simply being non-Western women. We know they are. The assumption that their lives are the same as anyone else’s hazardously erases the truth of their experiences, from the American classroom (as student or professor) to the global stage. Brems stresses that natural law no longer prevails in today’s global context, and further insists, “the reasons for opposing [a] practice must be close to the experiences of the women who are most concerned.”¹⁸ Thus, I take up her challenge to depart from the sameness approach and focus on “managing multiple specificities”¹⁹ and pay attention to the intersections of multiple identities. While it remains a huge challenge for

international human rights law to manage multiple specificities, this paper marks my participation at least within the realm of education, as Brems further explains: “Non-Western women from developing countries will certainly be more effective in arguing [for change] . . . [As] “insiders,” [they] have to resolve conflicts that arise between human rights and cultural practices, on their own terms rather than on any abstract notion of right and wrong.”²⁰

As a descendant from the Philippines, born and raised in the West, my story has been distorted by others who rely upon colonial ideologies as sources of information. Brems notes that even well-intentioned sociologists, anthropologists and educators should check their views that have been influenced by the enlightenment era on “human nature.” According to Brem, the well-intentioned folks who “attempt to assume a common human nature inevitably result[s] in a projection of their own experiences, needs, and values onto the rest of humanity . . . the needs and values of well-off white Western men.”²¹

My epistemology attempts to clear up distortions about what it means to be a Pinay scholar-activist. I did not stride through college and into graduate school in typical fashion. I did not reach the academy in ways a normed middle class white male traditionally can. I do not nor have ever taken for granted the availability of relevant curriculum and critical pedagogy. I must create it all. I must study it and be clear about a specific history — forget sameness.

The Paradox of the Pinay Scholar-Activist

Creating a new curriculum and pedagogy in consideration of multiple specificities demands one to be agile, flexible, malleable and patient. First, such work would move towards what Brems calls “inclusive universality”. Here, it gives the insider a voice, “recognizing that people who don’t speak from the white male perspective have experienced exclusion . . . Ultimately, this means listening to what women have to say about how the present system of human rights [or education] does not sufficiently protect them, correspond to their needs, and reflect their priorities.”²² It sounds pleasant and doable, but it is in fact not such an easy game. Playing with specificities can become a conundrum in and of itself. Can one draw too much attention to specificities so that it becomes harmful? Villenas challenges me with questions I should ask myself to gain perspective, “How am I damaged by my own marginalization? How am I complicit in the manipulation of my identities such that I participate in my own colonization and marginalization and, by extension, that of my own people — those with whom I feel a cultural and collective commitment?”²³ I become intimate with these reservations with the (earlier mentioned) wisdom shared by Alexander and Jaggat: that my deep reflections are all towards the service of an argument and epistemology I must build before moving forward.

In this pivotal stage in my academic career as a young doctoral student, I insert myself completely in these questions, to the point of becoming the question. Naturally then, understand that this paper is less about proving theory; it’s more about being theory — materializing theory through the act of writing. The discomfort I feel in my position to “tell it like it is” might very well disorient the reader who habitually reads academic prose. There will be no linear argument or cohesive thesis. I take this opportunity to exercise/exorcise the phantoms that plague me in approaching to make change in educational research — a field still much more beholden, it seems, to traditional positivist methodologies that frustrate the hell out of me because I am an outsider. I tell my counter-story nonetheless as a form of “organic praxis.” Described by Ruth Gilmore²⁴ and extended by Laura Pulido, organic praxis is the:

[o]ppositional work as “talk-plus-walk: it is [the] organization and promotion of ideas and bargaining in the political arena” . . . What distinguishes organic praxis is “the walk,” or more specifically, political bargaining. Whether the bargaining takes place on campus or in the larger community is irrelevant; the point is that the scholar is somehow connected to oppositional action beyond writing for academic audiences.²⁵

Thus, I am not interested in wooing esteemed ivory tower intellectuals to understand me completely — just listen. Be mindful and examine with as many senses as possible how vibrations match frequencies through sharing and dialogue. Through counter-story telling, change is in sight. With this, I share my life process. Authentic and forceful, I know the answers to unlock paradoxes lie herein.

In this liminal space I will evolve through the mantra of Pinayism: “pain + love = growth.”²⁶ This paper will let me air out my wounds.

It will let me stitch together fragmented pieces, repair fractures, pinpointing trauma, which has disconnected me from others. I have not been able to understand others’ viewpoints well enough, hushing myself to first fully acknowledge my own essence, my own being — being Pinay. To say that I am Pinay, in and of itself, is not one thing, as Pinayist Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales explains:

Pinay is a woman of Filipino descent, a Filipina in American and/or a Filipina American . . . Pinayism is localized in the United States . . . making connections to the issues of Filipinos and Filipinos in the diaspora . . . Pinayism is a revolutionary action. Pinaysim is a self-affirming condition or conduct. Pinayism is a self-determining system or anarchism . . . Pinayism is not just a Filipino version of feminism or womanism; Pinayism draws from a potpourri of other theories . . . including those, which have been silenced.²⁷

Tired of being silenced (as well as polite), I employ Pinayism — as a mode of operation — to move forward in the educational research I pursue from one Pinay to another; or from one Pinay to a non-Pinay, either way forthrightly regenerating (each moment I write, speak and act) a kind of coalition identity politics with other differential modes of consciousness²⁸ that move towards what Kysa Nygreen imagines as: a democratic, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial egalitarian society. Though Pinayism can shift gears to address different issues and different social movements, it also promotes the Pinay scholar-activist, a descendent of a colonial history, to first begin working diligently just to explain her own life — to recognize and name her scars, to educate herself about her specific cultural history, and to uncover its connections to her subjectivity.²⁹ This, I will do throughout this paper. However, let me be clear: this paper, in its entirety, is not about my oppression. It is about resilience.

Diaspora: World Traveling Inside and Out

In keeping up as a resilient woman of color, I travel through different worlds reaching for different understandings. A crucial exercise it has been; as Maria Lugones describes, “the outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life . . . required by the logic of oppression. I recommend this resistant exercise that I call ‘world’-traveling.”³⁰ I break walls and throw open doors to get to new places, even if it leads me to a paradox where others find such “world”-traveling foolish. Tension hisses in the distance. Feminists alongside Daphne Patai posit that this wallowing in “endless querying mode” threatens our work.³¹ I argue that this paper and all of its content — in its questioning and challenging; in all its remembering and reconciling — is a process that isn’t just preliminary. It is a continuing and constitutive process in activist scholarship.

Nor do I believe this is but a “phase” of my graduate career, as I was told by another Pinay when I first got involved in cultural/community work in San Diego. At the time I was a nineteen-year-old at the junior college, wet behind the ears, excited to facilitate discussions highlighting facts on Filipino American history. I am still here. So, despite Patai’s view that “we are spending much too much time wading in the morass of our own positionings,”³² I do not deviate from my purpose. My questioning does not render me useless. And no, Patai, I do not perpetrate “academic fads” that leave me “stay[ing] up nights worrying about representation . . . in a mental game [of] self-reflexivity.”³³ I am not about fads. I know that people are hungry. I know the economic crisis is real. I know that our country is still at war — I was in it. And in it, I traveled.

I was seventeen when I raised my right hand to join the U.S. Army at the request of my parents, who said we otherwise could not afford college for my five younger sisters. In the practice of utang na loob (abiding debt to one’s parents), I raised my right hand to Uncle Sam. As a young Filipina American woman, I stuck out among the sea of white men donned in the same battle dressed uniforms, marching in the same combat boots, carrying the same M-16 rifle. I hung on, tolerating their bonehead remarks about my “kick-ass hair,” my almond eyes, or my wide hips protruding the sides of my cargo pants.

I am an outsider within.

I hardly graduated boot camp. I did not agree to the War in Iraq when it broke out. Dubbed as “Operation Enduring

Freedom,” I was issued my orders during my senior year at UCSD and deployed overseas. My mother cried. My nascent activist consciousness screamed.

What am I doing? Whose truth is my truth and whom should I be protecting? Who is the real authority? With whom do I ally? Am I on the right side?

In the 130-degree deserts of Kuwait, I ate in mess halls where the kitchen help largely consisted of Third Country Nationals (TCNs) of Philippine descent, contracted to work civilian jobs for low wages. We shared the same eyes and they nodded to me in passing. They served me my food, spoke Tagalog amongst themselves, and went about their labor chasing the dollars their families waited for back home. Imagine: our diasporic journeys meet here and they do not engage.

I am an outsider within.

I then turned my gaze to observe the disparity of jobs assigned to enlisted soldiers of color in contrast to those managed by officers, predominately middle-aged white males, as we coordinate the transportation of units from Kuwait to Iraq. Being here heightened my awareness of marginalized groups on a global level. Returning to the U.S., I realized I yearned to use my skills as a Sociology Major where it hit home. I recalled that in my own coming-of-age, I had no one with whom I could honestly discuss the many societal ills I was witnessing in the world, how they affected me, and how they affected my family. Thus, I found my niche in volunteering as a youth mentor in the Filipino American community.

I am a nexus.

My life course is a testament to theories I have read after such experiences. It took years to find academic language that validated my life course as a place of learning, a “fund of knowledge.”³⁴ Call it narcissistic, but I fall in line with Wanda Pillow’s response to Patai: although “we do not escape from the consequences of our positions by talking about them endlessly.”³⁵ I do not believe that the solution is then to stop talking about our positions.³⁶

Thus, I talk about it all, and write about it all. While I don’t readily invite discussion around my disturbing military experience, I still look back on it as a part of my pain/growth process in the pursuit of my Sociology degree. Patricia Hill Collins’ leading work in Black Feminist thought³⁷ helps me fit together such pieces, as she argues:

At its best, outsider within status seems to offer its occupants a powerful balance between the strengths of their sociological training and the offerings of their personal and cultural experiences. Neither is subordinated to the other. Rather, experienced reality is used as a valid source of knowledge for critiquing sociological facts and theories, while sociological thought offers new ways of seeing that experienced reality.³⁸

I know that at the end of the day, I hold down the same small corner Pulido holds: I have “never been the leader of a major organization, nor am I an academic star. I am an average-performing academic who has tried to keep one foot firmly in academia, the other grounded in community struggles and institutions.”³⁹

There are a good number of us in this corner, and I don’t say this to further divide us—feminist scholars, future educators, grad students, etc. I only mean to shed light on a space that often feels overshadowed by the traditional, binary imagination of the highly accomplished intellectual or the bleeding heart revolutionary. I am neither, and yet I unabashedly aim to be a bit of both. I accept this. There is a historicity in my trying to be both.

“You Cannot Cross Out My Lived Reality”: Navigating the Academy as a Pin@y

I reflect on how my doctoral work has been influenced by the historicity of my graduate education. In the Fall of 1969, the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University was established to meet the needs of the students on strike. This strike called for a “redefinition of education, which in turn was linked to a larger redefinition of American society.”⁴⁰ James Hirabayashi, the Dean of Ethnic Studies in 1974, continued to advocate this idea by arguing that the “basic necessities of ethnic education [. . .] must ensure relevance for the ethnic minorities and proper linkage [. . .] between the primary experience and the conceptualizations that follow from it.”⁴¹

These demands, along with my sociological work, are grounded in the history of longer radical movements (social, cultural, political). They are grounded in the Third World Liberation movements of the 60s and 70s. They are grounded in the coexisting radical movements of students of color and feminist/queer studies birthed in the same era. They are grounded in the culture wars against the backlash of neo-liberal agendas with the closure of affirmative action in the 80s and 90s. They are grounded in our fight against No Child Left Behind and the budget cuts effecting our education system since the 2000s. The web of work still needs to be spun as issues of racism, classism, and heteropatriarchy continue to inform everyday practices, policies, and culture in the United States and abroad.

Thus, my intellectual future will keep grappling with the same breakages between the academy and the community. I take seriously the reality that, although the Filipino American community is ranked the second largest Asian Pacific American (APA) subgroup in the United States⁴² there remains a dearth of knowledge on the contemporary lives, social networks, and educational experiences of this group. I invest my academic work as a responsibility to my community that is in need of educated professionals who will put forth their efforts for the betterment of the contemporary Filipino American experience. Living out this responsibility is my contribution to social change. How much of this can I really say, so that it is palatable for the academy?

Yamada notes that “when Third World women are asked to speak representing our racial or ethnic group, we are expected to move, charm or entertain, but not to educate in ways that are threatening to our audiences.”⁴³ In the same vein, decolonialist scholar Maria Lugones argues that “women of color” is like its own category; to make them visible their experiences are homogenized with men of color or white women.⁴⁴ We know we should not remain complicit to this homogenization. We have something to say, and we know we have the right to articulate our standpoint, no? Or so we believe.

It turns out it ain’t no cakewalk moving through the academy, not according to Third World woman, no matter how comfortable she might have found herself right out of an Asian American Studies program. I can dream and saunter and envision, but the “utopian postcoloniality”⁴⁵ entertained throughout the pursuit of my MA doesn’t necessarily cross over seamlessly to my current pursuit of a PhD.

One step forward, two steps back... In my first quarter as a PhD student, I received my first methods paper and found to my dismay that my use of the words “lived realities” had been crossed out. No extra comments to explain. It was a simple fix: I was to find other words, another phrase. And in this realization, I felt more “othered.” This won’t do. It doesn’t fit. This is not research. So what is research, Melissa? To whom are you really trying to “give voice”?

And so the Pinay scholar-activist stretches...

I clutch my chest, for there is no hand or arm nearby of fellow activist scholars who “get me.” I ache for their proximity and physicality. My conceptual, intellectual, theoretical, methodological, epistemological, counter-hegemonic tools once developed in community diminished into thin air. Melissa, think of a way to describe your point of view “objectively” — say what? Melissa, convince them, in very general, maybe universal terms — universal who? I lost my tongue. Stunned to near numbness, I recoiled in my seat and wondered what I was doing there, in that seat, in that classroom, in front of that white, male professor and his ideas of “true educational research.” This can’t be an isolated experience: being welcomed into the academy as new blood “with a different story,” only to find my story denied. It must happen often. Decolonialist intellectual Catherine Walsh draws attention to this common practice of institutions, as they maintain:

that while the curriculum [or research] can incorporate elements of local practice [i.e., lived realities], this incorporation should not take away from ‘real’ knowledge, ‘real science’. Such example clearly points to the social, political, epistemic, and racialized tensions and struggles that underlie the conceptual configurations and practice associated

with [. . .] hegemonic tendencies that work to dilute [the] “other.”⁴⁶

My story, now diluted. My being, violated. This moment in class is akin to what Merry would define as “epistemic violence [. . .] a situation where radically divergent ideas are joined together without any possibility of resolution.”⁴⁷ In her research, Merry examines the work of Buddhists having to claim secularism as a human right in Nepal. The “problem” for them is that their Buddhism does not entertain individualist assumptions underlying human rights framework. So how do they make their epistemologies count? It is the age-old story of unequal power, resonating with my position in the academy, as I butt heads with positivist assumptions driving much of educational research. Without my comadres, I felt like I had to submit. I was alone. Note that comadre is Spanish for close friend. In this context, she is one who shares personal experiences and political ideologies.

Sofia Villenas feels my pain and recalls with utmost eloquence, her strikingly similar dilemma in an education seminar:

I was the only Chicana there, and had to think and speak individualistically rather than collectively. I was without my Latino friends from home who shared the power of our activism in defying the colonization of our identities and of our people. In the absence of that collectivity . . . deep inside, I wanted to voice . . . the disempowerment that comes from being cut off from your own.⁴⁸

In this position, it becomes easy to fall prey to the coloniality of power⁴⁹ that is, the process of being colonized, even while still undergoing processes of decolonization within. I propose that coloniality occurs and reoccurs in the university classroom when third world feminists aim to speak on their own terms, but are debilitated by the constraints of the subject topic at hand; by the lack of allies in the room; by the need to “belong,” acquiesce, fly under the radar; and consequently, by the feeling of alienation. As Pierce additionally describes from my standpoint:

Being Pinay thus means . . . constantly negotiating neo- and postcolonial identities . . . [it] means having a relationship to decolonization: whether active or passive, engaged, conflicted, opposed, or in denial, the relationship is automatic by virtue of living in America [or by virtue of taking up doctoral studies in the university].⁵⁰

While Pierce’s words walk dangerously close to essentialism, I buy most of her claims, which posit: “the project of decolonization is both personal and political; it hinges on identity politics, interrogated and contextualized.”⁵¹

Unraveling Coloniality

As this paper swims through a series of personal and political interrogations, it becomes what Shivy might view as a:

[s]tudy of epistemic relations of power, [which] comprises research on epistemologies that were subalternized in the process of colonization and its aftermath . . . For many involved in thinking coloniality a crucial step has been to think from subalternized perspectives that may be enunciated through multiple media and bodily enactments.⁵²

It is my hope that my writing illustrates a bodily enactment that moves from this concept once understood as postcolonial or neo-colonial, to embrace the more fitting idea of coloniality (of power), seeking ways to speak from the subalternized voice (the voice I had/have which is often silenced in the academy, as earlier demonstrated in the example of my research of ‘lived realities’ being questioned).

Nelson Maldonado Torres offers a new lens in his article “On the Coloniality of Being” by explaining coloniality as different than colonialism; it is what survives colonialism. It is the longstanding power that exists as a result of colonialism’s history.⁵³ Coloniality defines labor, knowledge production—way beyond the limits of colonialism (some encapsulated historical moment in time). Coloniality is not just the residue of colonialism, because to call it “residue” would lighten its weight. It is real. It is here. It is current. It is maintained. Re-

searcher of critical pedagogy and race, Zeus Leonardo furthers the examination of coloniality by seeing it: “not just in the negative sense (or as a burden in the Fanonian way) but as offering a more complex understanding that our experiences, our standpoint, our epistemologies are fundamentally filtered through these real histories of colonialism; and so let’s talk about colonialism as a place to talk about survival.”⁵⁴

Lugones takes seriously the framework of coloniality of power in her article, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern System,” to show us how we can look deeply at how the social classifications of race and gender fused together this new arrangement onto the indigenous peoples of the Americas. There was this replacing of “relations of superiority and inferiority established through domination with naturalized understandings of inferiority and superiority.”⁵⁵ To understand the modern system in which we live, where these social classifications pervade our everyday lives, Lugones explains that colonialism:

Imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers. Thus, it introduced many genders and gender itself as colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing. But we cannot understand this gender system without understanding what Anibal Quijano calls “the coloniality of power.”⁵⁶

A striking historical moment where coloniality of power is dangerously at work is in the violent sixteenth-century illustration of European encounter with “New World” inhabitants. Anthropologist Jonathan Goldberg retells of the vicious act in 1513, when Spanish conquistador and explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa arrives in Panama to find “Indian cross-dressers” whom he immediately accuses of sodomy. Disorienting European perceptions of normativity, these “cross-dressed” people were in fact indigenous priests and shaman of their village, practicing spirituality in their image with unique forms of knowing.⁵⁷ Despite their distinctive connection to the spiritual world, conquistadors, explorers and those exercising coloniality of power would nonetheless question or deny the very existence of their souls.

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano who originally developed the concept of coloniality of power, traces such a concept to debates about whether or not they (indigenous peoples) had souls; because the definition of human in the early modern era was whether or not one had a soul. Latina feminist scholar Rosa-Linda Fregoso clarifies “to have a soul, you were made in the image of God. This image the native peoples evoked was no image of God to the European.”⁵⁸ To “correct” this disorientation, to cut clear those lines of male and female (of right and wrong; of moral and immoral), Balboa fed these strange indigenous bodies to forty dogs.

This horrific scene is but an overt demonstration of how the global south — peoples of South America, Africa, Oceanic peoples and so forth — have been subjected to this historical arrangement where they are deemed inferior: where their race becomes gendered, their being becomes classed. From such history, Jacqui Alexander hopes we continue to have “the dogged attention of class hierarchy, class consciousness, and class struggle understood through the color of gender and the sexuality of race.”⁵⁹ What I have here is a political project to make visible these intersections of non-neutral race/class/gender/heterosexuality lines, and how this “modern/colonial gender system” has been imposed upon us. Coloniality has marked our bodies in a way where we can distinguish “colonialism as the catalyst; coloniality as the embedded.”⁶⁰ Thus, coloniality becomes the crux of my work.

Embodied Knowledge

Theorists help me speak nice language. Researchers give good thought to ponder. However, both can debilitate. Where then do I turn when I’m tired of the acrobatics of academia? What do I have left as tools to my existing, forever worthwhile goals to continue reaching across?

If there is one thing to take away from this paper, it is this: what I do in the academy and down on the ground is something I feel. Embodied knowledge. My work, like that of indigenous cultural productions found in Latin America and the world over, “has this fundamental aspect . . . to counter the effects of ethnic self-denigration that the pressure to assimilate has exacerbated . . . [it is] this effort to decolonize the soul.”⁶¹ In looking to my soul, I infuse my intuition — something society has gendered as that which encircles primarily the experiences of women. I head on, nonetheless, invoking my spirituality as a way to wrap my arms around my work and project my light. This is my life.

I, born and raised Catholic, recently found Buddhist philosophy the most helpful in dealing with the simultaneity of shifting across scenes — from academia, to community, to romantic partnerships, to home, to self. You will find Buddhist teachings emerge in this paper that inform my practice of being (and the critical knowing of the coloniality of being, per Maldonado-Torres). As a regular (simultaneous Buddhist) practice, I often remind myself of how bell hooks encourages her students to believe “in the power of prophetic imagination . . .

that what we cannot imagine, we cannot bring into being. . . that is not confined to some private dream but is a fully public imagination.”⁶²

In this regard, I write my work into being for you to read, and for me to reflect upon. To point to the essence of being, I exhibit points in my life when/where I was clearly not allowed to be or wasn’t supposed to exist: as young girl in new immigrant family, having to answer to American authority; as a Filipina in battle dressed uniform; as a doctoral student who couldn’t write about “lived realities;” as a grown woman choosing queer identity. I write then, to survive. I’ve noted my lifelong practice of journaling since age seven to underscore my sincerity; like other young ones with pen in hand, “If I couldn’t write, I would die.”⁶³

In liberating myself through writing, I aim for a mutually transformative process in our work as scholars in agreement towards equity in education. We sit at different levels on a hierarchy determined by the larger institution, but our work began with a single, shared impulse as women. In the ways described by Buddhist philosophy, “each impulse we have lays down an imprint (our writing); when it’s repeated it becomes a groove. The groove creates a channel, and energy as well as more material things start to be pulled and channeled more and more in that direction.”⁶⁴

This is my rite of passage. I do not move forward from here with grand illusions of “social justice” or “human rights” as weightless rhetoric. I deliberately push back on “the rules instead of becoming integrated into a multicultural [universalistic idea of] diversity.”⁶⁵ I do this because I believe in the “potential of this other thinking, the possibility of reflecting from other angles on what it could mean to deconstruct naturalized identities and power relations framed by these identities [which] demands an approach that engages with subalternized discourses without reducing them to colorful objects of study or consumption.”⁶⁶ I am novel, but I don’t aim to be bought. Our stories together are more than novel, and should be taken more seriously than some “edgy, sexy stuff” currently examined across interdisciplinary fields at the moment.

Most enticing about advancing my use of decolonizing feminist methodologies in this research is the chance to employ an even stronger position of reflexivity, so as to include and problematize my allied epistemology as a second-generation Filipina American researching in an American university towards social change.

I first start by seeing the American classroom as both a fragile and powerful place of becoming; where “emerging identities are being invented within a contestation of dominant discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality.”⁶⁷ My developing dissertation project is interested in exploring how one’s epistemological relationship to race, class, and gender informs her/his purpose in teaching and subsequently their pedagogy, and will serve as my overarching question for this paper. It extends from the understanding that the exclusion of particular histories and texts in the traditional classroom has forced the construction of new alternative spaces, wherein the production of knowledge requires creative, critical, and collective thinking towards radical transformation.⁶⁸

My story then, isn’t just reactionary. It is a “cultural production from which [one] can identify the meanings, hopes, aims, and desires contained within. . . lines of force and affinity. . . to contribute to a redefined decolonizing theory and method.”⁶⁹ In pushing to reveal the educational experiences of Filipino Americans, in particular, can I be faulted for being too political? I return to Pinayism as a way of theorizing that self-acknowledges the multiplicities within and across Pinay scholar-activists (or Pinays in general) who locate themselves differentially. I also return to Pinaysim as way of looking at “the complexity of the intersections where race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, educational status, age, place of birth, diasporic migration, citizenship, and love cross.”⁷⁰

Recapturing My Totality

Freiré asserts, “I am a totality and not a dichotomy.”⁷¹ I look inward: how do I make sense of my perceived dichotomies as I step towards honoring my totality? In pursuing this reputable/damned future of a Pinay scholar-activist, I admit I feel more fragmented than ever. Pieces of me, too many to mention, are simultaneously sites of sorrow and strength that have something to do with my being here today. I have played a distinct role, as eldest child; an important, transformative role as daughter reaching across; both roles informing my place in the world.

Papa, a former US Navy sailor, soothed his recurring nightmares of the Vietnam War with a nightly dose of alcohol, marijuana, and meth. Watching Mom endure the ensuing mental, physical, and emotional abuse for nearly a decade broke me. She contemplated suicide on numerous occasions, but eventually plotted and executed a quick “family escape.” We stuffed our clothes into trash bags; loaded the family van and fled to find a hideaway. Mom carried us

to survival, I held her hand. I was 10 years old.

Papa reappeared after years of desertion (living in the Philippines). He came back with nothing. I was 17. His drug addiction led to homelessness, while Mom’s accounting career flew through the roof along with a second marriage. By the time I turned 25, I was afraid Papa would die alone. I stood by. Grocery shopping, calling homeless aid and job placement agencies, coppin’ legal documents, remitting my bit of funds to his new family in the Philippines, and visiting him to connect on some level of hope—these were all indisputable acts of a limitless love I cannot explain.

I reflect on my family life as one starting place and arrive at the realization that through our journey—the military, drugs and, alcohol use, the abuse, the family separation, as well as the divergent trajectories of each of my parents—what I take away from this “brokenness” is in fact the skill to locate myself in this healing. I already mend together. I already have found a way to traverse imagined opposite ends of a continuum, to close the fractures riding up the walls between us.

The endless internal shifting follows a shifting that has already once occurred through life’s course. The having to redefine and rearticulate the circumstance of my family through the years; the straining to understand our condition, trying to fit myself onto some continuum, the transformation of my mother—strong, resilient Pinay—it all taught me. . . love. Papa and mom—despite the mayhem in our family history—taught me how to really love. The women writers in *This Bridge Called My Back* complete the translation of life and its implications for our work as they reflect: “We are still trying to separate the fibers of experience we have had as daughters of a struggling people. Daily, we feel the pull and tug of having to choose. . . This is how our theory develops. We are interested in pursuing a society that uses flesh blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal.”⁷²

In beginning to heal, I have become a bridge in both worlds: breaking bread with homeless and upper middle class; talking to the abuser and the abused; it has taught me how to be a healer throughout life, and these are my beginnings. Today, the same tense and painful love I wrestle with as a budding Pinay scholar-activist has evolved into a practice of massaging the injuries which occur between teacher and student; academic and ‘activist’; researcher knowledge and local knowledge; university and community; Filipino and American; male and female; heterosexual and queer, etc.

The path of inquiry I shall follow here is one that regards human experience as a yeasty site of knowledge production: epistemology. I do this so that I can fully bring myself to understand the creative potential of my personal and cultural biographies of the people (with whom) I research. I dwell in the interconnectedness: “us with them” versus “us and them.”

Interconnectivity

Recalling my personal link in this web of thinkers, actors, and players on an agenda called equitable education, I move towards exemplifying the agenda as a matter of human rights. Within the body of work is a human rights discourse that exists in the overall context of education. It may be floating over, or buzzing beneath, somewhat invisible, yet ever present. Like air, like gravity; like the bullet that hits you, tearing away at you, but you can’t quite see it—the concern of human rights is there.⁷³ We cannot deny this.

This standpoint aligns with the human rights battle of other third world women and/or women of color seeing, feeling and confronting a different kind of pain, reaching for a different kind of wholeness not found in the traditional academy. It is in my approach to the academy where I find and build security in womanist pedagogies of spirituality and wellbeing. In planting seeds here, I hope this work engenders endless possibilities, beginning with the impulse. I turn repeatedly inward and see that I:

[h]ave an impulse based on past experiences. My impulse leads to. . . thought; the thought becomes a movement (words or deeds) that will bring [me] to [connect with others pursuing similar work, personally, locally, globally]. This establishes a pattern. Through repetition, a pattern becomes habit. Habitual patterns help form character, which in turn determine our destiny. This is karmic evolution. This is how we constantly shape and reshape our lives—for better or worse.⁷⁴

If change starts within, then this paper is part and parcel of the bigger picture. I write unconventionally, perhaps “unnaturally” in my tension to deliver, but it is not and is never in vain. In taking stock of my life, I have pinpointed pieces of me that vulnerably and candidly illustrate the splitting, which occurs in mind, heart, and soul in poignant memories of my past. The sort of splitting that challenged my purpose and position at every turn brought a necessary discomfort that encouraged an immediate questioning of self. The place of discomfort becomes a place of transformation so that what once felt weak and unwarranted, is real, solid, and foundational. I become a bridge, where theory meets practice. I become a bridge, where theory, methodology, and pedagogy intersect. I become a bridge, of the personal, local, and global issues plaguing our transnational communities in education. As Pinay scholar-activist insisting life, I have answered Donna Kate Rushin’s urgent call to, “Stretch . . . or die.”⁷⁵

Theorizing From Vulnerability Towards the Operationalization of Love

I return to this place where language is a place of stretching or struggling, for “when I say . . . that these words emerge from suffering, I refer to that personal struggle to name that location from which I come to voice—that space of theorizing”⁷⁶:

Now at 30 years old, I have fallen in love in uncharted territory. He is bisexual. And for the first time ever, I have tapped into memories of my own, hushed for so long. Memories of wanting share intimacy with someone of the same gender. Moments in adolescence. Moments in adulthood. There were quiet times with women that I couldn’t dare mention or fully pursue. I was afraid. Here we are now, where his femininity makes sense to me.

Today, we feel the pull. Gay friends insist he really is “just gay.” Straight friends insist I really am “just straight.” No one quite sure how to accept or believe that both of us, man and woman, can be together in this seemingly “straight” relationship and yet both be bisexual. We are a menace to this society, facing righteous claims on separate sides of the spectrum. They try to speak for us. We will not — I will not — be silenced again.

I lie naked in the harsh light, in all my vulnerability, trying yet again to find a source of wisdom from this place so difficult to find voice. How do we understand this vulnerability and what do we do with it? First, there is the immediate bleak image of the vulnerable. According to Merry’s human rights perspective:

Vulnerability is central. . . Victims of human rights violations are typically those who are somehow helpless, powerless, unable to make choices for themselves, and forced to endure forms of pain and suffering. Women and children, indigenous people, poor people, and marginalized ethnic and racial groups are the most common categories of people who are identified as suffering human rights violations. . . This conception of vulnerability hinges on the idea of agency.”⁷⁷

While the center of a human rights interventions protocol aims to “preserve the agency of vulnerable people,” how does a vulnerable person speak for herself if others do not know how to speak for her? I acknowledge vulnerability as a place of suffering, by briefly returning to the image of Balboa feeding indigenous “queer” bodies to forty dogs.

In practicing their perceived blurring of gender lines—in all of their vulnerability, in the eyes of an outsider assuming “authority”—native peoples of Panama are put to death without reservation. Thus, a law was defined. There existed no international human rights system that would “provide a recourse against the array of abusive laws and practices that criminalize, pathologize, or demonize those whose [alleged] sexual orientation or gender identity does not fit the perceived norm.”⁷⁸ There exists only very definitive ways of being male and female, separately.

Western law researcher Valerie Oosterveld gives us an example of how the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court must define gender, and inevitably define sexuality. We must ask ourselves if law is being politicized above humanity, if it is indeed acceptable to have a definition, and for what cause? In assuming we can provide or come up with clear definitions (of anything, for that matter), do we

not overlook the notion of iteration? This notion of iteration points to how “every repetition [of any term such as gender or sexuality] is a form of variation. Every iteration transforms meaning, adds to it, and enriches it in ever-so-subtle ways.”⁷⁹ In being discussed or performed, the term and its meaning undergoes a transformation. Furthermore, every performance is always different; so that it also changes the vision or function of the term and meaning at play. Understanding the notion of iteration loops us back to Osterville’s work in international law as she discusses “constructive ambiguity.”⁸⁰

Constructive ambiguity is often where states seek refuge, whereby the International Criminal Court (ICC) can take a progressive position in “defining gender and sex” by “understanding the ‘context of society’ as equal to ‘socially constructed’; seeing definitions of “gender” as “broad, multifaceted, and cross-cutting” and hopefully not “deferring to a misogynist or homophobic context” as Balboa did in 1513. It is where the Rome statute doesn’t clearly define gender, its:

definition is broad and flexible enough to ensure a positive and sensitive interpretation by the ICC’s Prosecutor, Registrar, and judges; its text is also spare and circular. . . broad enough, allow[ing] the ICC to interpret the definition to reflect the approaches taken within the United Nations. . . [the definition is] also enough of an empty vessel that increased attention to the theories of ‘gender’ by international lawyers could also have a significant and positive impact on the content of ‘gender’ within international law.⁸¹

Constructive ambiguity becomes helpful in thinking about how such an approach can work in the American classroom or American educational policy: where gender, class, or race is open for definition by law and/or by students to allow free movement and promote liberation; where democratic iterations “not only change established understandings but also transform what passes as the valid or established view of an authoritative precedent.”⁸² So that while we aim to define labels, perhaps we should — not remove them — but unfasten ourselves from them.

Is this loosening of labels irresponsible? Or is it responsible?⁸³ Does it bring about the same worry that if we assert feminism, we thereby assert patriarchy in the same breath? The double-edged sword we hold in the classroom and in research keeps us alert, sensitive and vigilant, to the new definitions we hope to put into “law” which at the same time don’t become fixed or polarized so as it recreate another violence, or to re-select who shall next become the “vulnerable.” Let us move from the muddled space of law and return to a brighter space of spirituality in observing this concept of vulnerability.

How can I shift this paradigm to see how spirituality can perhaps rearticulate vulnerability as a place from which one can build agency, in preparation to link up with others in their struggles. In sharing my story, I understand that “this visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength.”⁸⁴ I do not replace the human rights definition of vulnerability, but encompass it and add on. If vulnerability calls for a voice to be heard, then I feel the urge to dialogue because we don’t partake in it enough. I offer my story. I don’t expose these jarring differences of sexuality and/or gender identity for shock and awe, for it is not these differences that immobilize us, it is our silence.⁸⁵ In this “coming out” and honoring of self, I chart my development in the capacity to be with others in the most understanding way. To understand others deemed politically vulnerable in the greater landscape requires a soft spot born from a spiritual vulnerability within, as Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön further highlights:

Fortunately for us, the soft spot—our innate ability to love and to care—is like a crack in these walls we [often] erect. It’s a natural opening in the barriers we create when we’re afraid. With practice we learn to find this opening. We learn to seize that vulnerable moment—love, gratitude, loneliness, embarrassment, inadequacy—to awaken. . . the rawness of a broken heart.⁸⁶

Writing self as subject in broad daylight is a heartbreaking process; indeed, but only through this journey of self-discovery will I be able to see, hear, and really be present for others when they share their story and testify their deep, raw truths. Golden words by Buddhist monk/peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh advise, “knowing thyself is the first practice of love.”⁸⁷

To know myself means to ask myself: Who am I? Where am I from? To whom am I accountable? What are my intentions?

What will be the gain? What are the risks? Thus, I offer this paper as part of my own participation in the process of dialogue, which Freiré says cannot exist, “in the absence of a profound love for the world and for the people.”⁸⁸ I argue that my experience of “romantic love can access revolutionary love.”⁸⁹ Sourcing from the work of Roland Barthes, Chela Sandoval discusses the strength of “falling in love,” but another kind of love, “foreign to the Western dialectic . . . [as it] punctures through traditional, older narratives of love [and] ruptures everyday being . . . demands human consciousness [to] undo the very forms dominant society depends . . . [It is a] no-place where everything is possible—but only in exchange for the pain of the crossing.”⁹⁰

This crossing my partner and I have encountered in our love teaches me everyday how to transcend the sort of binary thinking which keeps society in gridlock (i.e., “You must be either gay or straight. There is no in-between”). Such limited, binary thinking kills our creativity in imagining possibilities for change. Thus, the revolutionary love that builds from this romantic love requires a “differential consciousness,”⁹¹ so that our “third voice” can break the binary. I now look towards a love that is concerned with the pursuit of egalitarian social relations in an ever-globalizing era. We need new theories for change. Something better. Old social/intellectual movements, fragmented and divided, make it difficult to locate domination/resistance in this day and time. Newer movements like those for sexual rights, Saiz shares:

enables us to address the intersections between . . . discriminations, and to identify root causes of different forms of oppression. It also offers strategic possibilities for building bridges and coalitions between diverse movements so as to confront common obstacles more effectively (such as religious fundamentalism) and explore how different discourses of subordination work together.⁹²

Alongside Saiz and Sandoval — from human rights to education — I am calling for a new order: I shamelessly recognize love as a common project in developing oppositional consciousness for change.

I join third world writers before me who understand love as a necessary piece as we theorize social change. I hold up love as a technology, a tactic, and a tool for movement and mobilization. In the world of education, I see what Freiré and Darder see: a love wherein teachers, researchers, students, and community members can “find the strength, faith, and humility to establish solidarity and struggle together to transform the oppressive ideologies and practices of public education.”⁹³

Beneath this hot climate of No Child Left Behind, we are killing ourselves to meet standards. We are looking for ways to juggle competing goals of education: of social efficiency, democratic equality, and social mobility in a market-driven economy.⁹⁴ In the push to pump out serviceable curriculum, refashion school structures, and name “good teachers,” the educational battlefield has left us standing at its edge watching the dust settle, stirred by a faint feeling of isolation. Here, we sense the damned disconnect slicing the air between us as we, though many in the field, are seemingly on a sideline quest to serve ourselves.

Nonetheless, there are those of us trying to reconcile these three competing goals (suggested by Labaree), while at the same time working to “answer the call to a liberatory practice of education . . . truly motivated by our passion for learning and teaching and [our] love for others.”⁹⁵ Like Parker Palmer, I want to move from “an essentially depressive mode of knowing that honors only data, logic, analysis, and a systematic disconnection of self from the world, self from others,” and instead delve into how researchers describe (or don’t describe) “what it . . . mean[s] to reclaim the sacred at the heart of knowing, teaching, and learning.”⁹⁶

Put simply, one cannot pursue or project love for others without first loving self, by critically questioning self. For researchers, this is a necessary intellectual practice. By “intellectual,” I mean one who “seeks union of mind, body, and spirit; a union of the intellectual as a whole person.”⁹⁷

This standpoint and testifying of self is not over. Thus, this paper remains unfinished. I am well aware that even in this sharing, a mere thirty-six pages can never span the scope of my vision, the depth of my passion, and the width of all of me — my story and my hope. I offer this piece as a living, breathing document, much like the work we do. It will revise, just as our lives do. I allow myself to leave this as is, improving and sharpening over time as I continue my work across worlds pulled apart. I will continue to bridge.

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