

AMNESIAC BODIES OF CURRICULA: DIALOGUES ON INDIGENEITY, REFUSAL, AND BEING

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The Making of Indigeneity: Curriculum History and the Limits of Diversity
Ligia (Licho) López López/ Routledge / 2018

In her text, *The Making of Indigeneity, Curriculum History, and the Limits of Diversity*, López invites the scholarly community into what Anzaldúa (2015) might describe as a space to engage with the pregnancy of imagination. López's work is conceptually rich and is grounded in a re-envisioning of the "how" and "why" of qualitative research, an exploration into the curriculum of indigeneity. This is because López carefully pulls at the webs of significance (Geertz, 1973) that tend to be woven within the trappings of modernity. She does this as a means to re-consider Western ways of knowing and being that are intimately tied to the colonization of indigenous peoples and their histories.

Similar to Winfield's (2007) discussion on cultural memory, Gilbert's (2010) dialogue on generational violence, or Quinn's (2010) images of theoretical and practical phantoms, López articulates the "historical amnesia" that exists across layers of scale that are always already "lived in the present" (p. xvii). López's work is timely in its description of the multiple ways that indigeneity is entangled within, beside, and through the historical and the contemporary, existing as a "both/and" within the iterations, recursions, and temporality of time, space, and place. As López argues, the project of curricular de-construction in Guatemala means engaging with the "palimpsestic quality of the past (or the present, or the future, or time) in doing curriculum by thinking of time as fractal and adopting eventalizing in doing historically oriented research" (p. 5).

This is important because as past, present, and future possibilities, challenges, and conditions are nested—as Brian Massumi (2002), Karen Barad (1999), or Jasbir Puar (2007) also argue—the analysis of how norms and values are entrenched in the everyday becomes all the more significant. Take, for example, the curriculum in the United States that still marginalizes indigenous voices and perspectives while upholding "Americanⁱ" values, histories, and knowledges. As Anzaldúa (2015) argues, it is in the dissection of the "nos/otras", the (feminist) "we" that exists as "other", that can disrupt normalized violence that is often found in the "neat categories of ... Euroamerican feminists and western concepts of race, identity, reality, and knowledge" (p. 80) that pervade sociopolitical systems that are entangled with schools and schooling.

In a manner similar to Anzaldúa's work, McGranahan (2016) describes the necessity to refuse the everydayness of "nos/otras" through the art of refusal as a "part of political action, of movements for decolonization and self-determination, for rights, for rejecting specific structures and systems" (p. 320). Toward this end, López's text weaves images, poetry, play scripts, and narratives to question and, in many important ways refuse, traditional understandings of "realities". López identifies the making of realities that is "a process constituted in series of ideas and through actual things" (p. 5). She continues by stating that, "reality is an event" (p. 13) in the Deleuzian sense of happenings, verbs, and processes, rather than things, nouns, and substances. In this way, López draws significant parallels between the chaos of "event-alizing" as it exists in a non-linear knot between histories and contemporary moments.

Across the events described by López in her research, this book gives but one of many examples of what it might mean to be, learn, and live under the ideas and ideals of "lo indígena". Through a troubling of "expert knowledge", languages, and political reforms, López's work traverses the narrative that in nothing is everything and, in the building of everything, oppressive values have not only touched the people of Guatemala but are deeply entrenched in systems of education that will only maintain indigeneity as it has been made and remade in a post-colonial sense. This dialogue on identities and how people are identified runs parallel to complicated conversations in curriculum studies (e.g., Asher, 2010; Castenell & Pinar, 1993; Grumet, 1988; Miller, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012) as well as those within educational anthropology (e.g., Heath, 1983; Nesper, 1997; Page, 1991; Varenne, & McDermott, 1998). Speaking to and across fields, López not only critiques but also offers another engagement with marginalized positionalities.

The Making of Indigeneity stands as a strong piece scholarship that fills a general gap in the field in terms of how one might negotiate the subject/object inquiry that often occurs in and across educational dialogues. Although it is impossible to attend to all the nuances of culture within a single book, it might have been helpful for López to engage more with questions of her own identity as a researcher at the site itself, and then again as the author working through the enormous undertaking that is writing a monograph. While the text certainly engages in what Geertz (1973) calls "thick description" in regard to constructing an understanding of the research context, it feels as though it is missing the author's complex positionality as related to indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing.

To be clear, one's identity does not need to be claimed in order for a person to do a certain kind of work. In fact, identity politics in general have become a form of policing where oppressed people and groups police out perspectives while upholding others, despite the strength of the scholarship (Wozolek, in press). This is also not a move to divest agency and access from marginalized people and groups. This would be especially antithetical to my own position as a bisexual, biracial mother and particularly to the work presented by López in this book. As López describes, there is a fine line between attending to 1) the ways that violence can swell through norms and values, 2) empowering those who enact oppression both intentionally and unintentionally, and 3) allowing dialogues based in identity politics to become a platform to remove power from marginalized groups that such groups have taken generations to garner.

As a scholar, I am particularly sensitive to this given the push-pull of my own identities and ways of being. For example, in my own life, my grandmother speaks Konkani, but the language of our state of Goa is Portuguese. My father, despite being septi-lingual only spoke to us in English, and Spanish became my refuge as a means to escape the consistent essentialization I received from people who identified me as Latin@—both insisting that I speak as a member of a community that was not my own and seeing me as the Other during the consistent rise of xenophobia in the United States. Similarly, this pulls into question the richness of what Indians in the United States often call an “American Born, Confused Desi,” or “ABCD”, experience as it is in friction with Goan identities as “not enough” within the Indian context itself. From an Indian perspective, the combination of location and colonizer places the state of Goa in a not quite Indian, north/south binary in which Goans themselves are often essentialized as not quite Indian. All of this existed against, through, and between my research with Indian women.

The complexities of identity as described here run parallel to scholarship of those like Gershon (2017), Quinn & Meiners (2009), Carlson, Schramm-Pate and Lussier (2005), and Berry and Stovall (2013), to name but a few, who have discussed the nested and layered nature of subjectivities and the tension of identities, of being identified, and of how these ideas play out within the sociopolitical landscape. The difficulty resides in negotiating the tension between the author’s histories and vulnerabilities (Behar, 1996) and the re-creation of the local context in ways that balance one’s role and bias with what was un-seen in the research. Wolcott (1990) argues that this process of “trying hard not to get it all wrong” (p. 127) reflects the painstaking efforts to balance the self and other as they collide in context. While López’s project engages in the project of care for participants, the concern is that through a partial absence of the author’s identities, those coming to indigenous understandings for the first time may yet miss the complexity and beauty of what and how anything called “lo indigena” might function.

Further, there is a degree of tension between López’s experiences with indigeneity and talk about how being Indigenous functions in everyday lives. Specifically, this text clearly stands as a rejection of Western methodologies, but tends toward a deep use of Western theoretical constructs. The tension lies in how López was then positioned to ensure that often oppressive Western ideas and ideals supported the more liberatory possibilities of “lo indigena”. For example, discussion of being Indigenous is utilized as an articulation of a multiplicity of peoples across groups, communities, and places in ways that are decolonial and liberatory. However, the combination of a brief discussion of how the author understands her own positionality and the twinned rejection/usage of some Western notions and not others could leave readers wondering how the depth and breadth of Indigeneity was conceptualized and/or the ways that particular places and spaces shape understandings and knowledges. One consequence of this combination is that readers more familiar with new materialisms than indigenous understandings, a potentiality that is rightly claimed throughout the book, have the potential to incidentally engender a flatness of the plurality of what it means to be indigenous. This is much like the ways in which the multiplicity of African diasporas and identities have been flattened into the singular construct of “Africa”.

Finally, one of the most striking refusals that occurred in this text was the opening chapter, which is written in K’iche’. López continues her systemic refusal of normalized English by including parallel indices, one in English, and one in Spanish. This braiding of languages was

central to the text and important in its political disruption of English in scholarly dialogues. After the introduction, K'iche' remained peppered throughout the text. As several scholars have noted (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2015; Moraga, 2011; Simpson, 2014), indigenous cultures too often live in the language of the colonizer, something this text addresses well. For the reader's context, it would also be helpful to engage in a discussion about the decisions made as to how and when the author used Spanish vs. English vs. K'iche' as López worked through what is always a complicated moment for those of us whose lives are lived in more than one linguistic identity.

In conclusion, López's work stands out as an exciting development in educational contexts and a brilliant conceptualization of arts-based qualitative research. *The Making of Indigeneity, Curriculum History, and the Limits of Diversity* stands rightly beside notable scholars like Eve Tuck, Audra Simpson, Nicholas ng-a-fook, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa, to name a few. In closing, the following excerpt from the book is meant as a provocation that speaks not only to the work of Dr. López but to our work as scholars in and across fields of education at this current moment:

Now that you've done all that historical work
 Now that you've done all that intellectual work
 Now that you've done all that theoretical work
 What are you going to *do*?
 What is the result?
 What is the answer?
 What is the solution?
 You come for me
 To hold me hostage too
 To assimilate me into you
 To tame my untamable wild and rebel soul.
 I refuse

(López, 2018, p. 168)

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ⁱ “American” is quoted here to attend to the multiple ways that people and groups across the United States have on one hand used dominant norms and values as a colonizing tool throughout history. On the other, it is an attention to the contemporary contexts that function as a means to maintain hegemony across the Americas. Just as the term “American” un-intentionally usurps all other possible “American” identities, so do the cultural ideas and ideals of what it means to be *an American* function as a means of dominance and oppression.