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*Research on their Terms:
Desmadrando(nos) el Ivory Tower*

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Research on their Terms: Desmadrando(nos) el Ivory Tower

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Desmadre: Go wild, go on a rampage. Separate a child from its mother.

Alma Mater. Madre Nutricia. Nourishing Mother. This motherly and still current figure of speech of more than 400 years of usage describes the same hallways the authors of this special issue and I have been trained to become researchers. The choices made during these years are crucial to shaping the kind of researchers we want to become, even the small and seemingly meaningless ones: who you seek for mentorship and who you avoid, the messages we take heed and the ones we choose to ignore. The way we speak up, or the silences we swallow, assimilate, forget, or save as a *papelito guardado* (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) to later use it as fuel for destabilizing writing that talks back at that neglectful *Mater*. This is especially true for emerging scholars from minoritized communities who, through their (un)learning process at the Ivory Tower classrooms, find ways to connect with their reflective selves, in mind and body, to share scholarship that speaks of onto-epistemological departures.

This special issue of Texas Education review showcases a snapshot of the most current pathways research is taking among emergent scholars from the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and the tensions that come with the new understandings of what it means to be trained as researchers in institutions that epitomize Western colonialism since their inception and to conduct research that attempts to recuperate onto-epistemologies that such training tries to invisibilize. Fortunately, the contributors to this special issue engage in the tension fearlessly and bring what is considered “no real knowledge, only beliefs, opinions, magic, idolatry, intuitive or subjective understandings, which, at best, can become objects or raw material for the scientific inquiry” (De Souza Santos, 2007, p. 5). The body. Caring pedagogies. Mama Gino & other elders (old and new). Nepantleras, Testimonios. They bring all these offerings despite the relentless and blinding whiteness in the Ivory Tower.

This collection of transgressive articles speaks of a departure process at the intersections of the political, pedagogical, methodological, and personal levels that not only exemplifies the current issues in cultural studies but models praxical research as a contestation against the scarification process that academia inflicts on scholars that wish to research on their terms. Research on embodied pedagogies in the middle of assembly line-like classrooms (Link, 2022; this issue), using CRT lens to magnify subtle and not-so-subtle racism in academic spaces (Bigelow, Pineda & McLean, 2022; this issue), forefronting Indigenous epistemologies to ground all-around growth with the vulnerability of the unfinished (Montes, 2022; Eufrazio, 2022; this issue) while trying to close the gap and tensions between dire current realities and demands (Luna, 2022; Caddel, 2022; this issue) with freedom futurities. This is not an easy task in this socio-cultural-political environment with the current and legally backed-up curricular restrictions on anti-racist and discriminatory practices and materials, the disconcerting book banning, xenophobic policies, the overt attacks on public education, CRT, ethnic studies, reproductive rights, all of which happens in Texas, the land where our *Alma Mater* stands.

As an alumnus and former member of the editorial board, the invitation from Texas Education Review journal to lead the foreword for the special issue Critical Topics in Cultural Studies of

Education allowed me to reflect on the commonalities among my doctoral cohort and the authors, all of us driven by similar impetus to denounce and depart from Western whitestream epistemology, just a few years apart. In other words, *desmadre*: both tear down and detach. That was the sentiment that drove us—a group of doctoral students at UT Austin¹—when we created the first Annual Cultural Studies in Education (CSE) Graduate Conference in 2012 (initially framed as an “unconference”) while engaging in the CSE tertulias held at the Dobie Center. That spirit led us to create a parallel curriculum and research resources in solidarity, forging long-lasting BIPOC friendships and partnerships across the country in different capacities. This volume shows the same spirit at an intercollegiate level but with similar challenges and unknowns. However, the papers showcased here engage in significant departures from past efforts.

What I found in this cohort of new voices is the search for otherstances (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) in research, in what Anzaldúa calls *autohistoria-teoría* (Anzaldúa, 2000), engaging in praxis while theorizing from within through their lived /embodied experiences or from *sabiduría* passed down from theorists who are not included in the several research books we are usually required to read. This is why this issue is a homage to theories and pedagogies that are not traditionally credited but that are the real nurturers in the middle of years of epistemic violence in this academic career: Mama Gino (Montes, 2022, this issue), Elsa Duarte Noboa (Caddel, 2022, this issue), Manuel & Francisco Guajardo’s father (Montes, 2022, this issue) and auntie Gloria Anzaldua (Eufrazio, 2022, this issue). I want to add to this list two of the authors themselves, Alexis & Monica (Bigelow, Pineda & McLean, 2022, this issue). They exemplify Black & Brown mentorship and future eldership as a sign of comradeship, solidarity, and care.

So, how do we *desmadre* the Ivory Tower? How do we find ways to wean ourselves off if we know that its milk can be poisonous? As I read the articles in this issue, I cannot help but think of the tensions between trying to make dents in the structures in which we were trained and socialize and setting boundaries we need to create to reinvigorate ourselves and recharge to keep resisting and doing research against the grain. The key might be what this special issue offers: other methodologies, mentorships, theories, and histories where *cariño*, rage, grief, spirituality, awakenings, the senses, ancestors, and rebirths are centered and prioritized unapologetically and without permission. Maybe this is a clear example of how to wean ourselves off and abandon the *Mater* to find real reconstituting nurture. Perhaps they are whom Gordon and Gordon (2016) referred to when they wrote:

There are those who used those tools, developed additional ones, and built houses of their own on more or less generous soil. It is our view that the proper response is to follow their lead, transcending rather than dismantling Western ideas through building our own houses of thought. When enough houses are built, the hegemony of the master’s house—in fact,

¹ The founding group comprised mostly doctoral students at the Cultural Studies in Education at UT Austin and me, who was part of the Bilingual & Bicultural Studies program but was immediately “adopted” as a CSE member when I started my doctoral studies. Influential members of this group are Dr. Ganiva Reyes (Miami University), who had the original idea for the 1st CSE Graduate Student Conference, and Racheal Banda (Miami University), who spearheaded the following conferences until we graduated in 2016. I am proud to call these two strong Tejanas my scholar comadres. Other founders are mis queridos comrades José García (University of Illinois Chicago), Raul Olmo Fregoso Bailón (UTRGV), José del Real Viramontes (University of California, Riverside), Martin Smith (Duke University), Eric Bybee (Brigham Young University), Brenda Rubio (UNT), Kristine Massey, Ismael Cuevas, Sergio Delgado, Juan Portillo, and many graduate students from other programs who joined us when the conference expanded locally and nationally.

mastery itself—will cease to maintain its imperial status. Shelter needn't be the rooms offered by such domination. (p. ix)

The blueprints of such houses, which might finally feel like home—are in the making. I am sure these authors will move these efforts forward and encourage others to become the architects we have been waiting for.

Finally, this issue contributes to the emergent and transformative scholarship that attempts to articulate and model emancipatory research praxis as a way to delink from traditional and oppressive learned discourses of what research should be. The key in this issue is to provide mentor texts of efforts to relink with legacies of brilliance among our subalternized communities and ways of being and try to reimagine liberatory scholarship/fellowship while thriving in the tensions and contradictions of working in those hallways. I encourage the reader to take in this series of pedagogical examples of research and find inspiration in the accounts of this group of scholars in their unique intersections and trajectories and accept the challenge to reexamine the way you engage in the research.

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