CHAPTER 12

Critical Spirituality: Decolonizing the Self

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At the age of thirteen, I was straddling between being an American, Canadian, and a Latino. Being born in El Salvador, raised as a child in Canada, and living in the United States as an adolescent led me to consistently experience movement, differences, and ambivalence when it came to my identity formation. I lived in the *in-between* state of the three cultures and never felt like I belonged to any one of them. Due to the civil war, my family and I left El Salvador when I was very young so I barely remembered anything about my "home" country. Indelibly, being raised by immigrant parents, the Salvadorian culture was the first culture I encountered and Spanish was the first language I spoke. But things quickly changed when I started going to school in Kitchener, Ontario. My parents opted to put me in Christian schools and I was always one of the few, if not only, racialized student in these settings. It was tough.

At the age of six or seven, I started to learn how to juggle two cultures: one at home and one at school. At home, I was Josue, but at school I

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was Joshua. I remember the ambivalence I felt when my peers would ask me where I was from. I would say something like, "I was born in El Salvador but I am Canadian." I was always trying to prove the former identity to my family and the latter one to my peers and friends. But deep down inside, I felt like I was different, like an outcast. For example, I remember always interpreting between two languages (Spanish and English) at parent teacher conferences. For some reason or another, I started to feel embarrassed about my Salvadorian identity because I felt that people looked down on it. So, I tried extra hard to *perform* a Canadian identity, attempting to convince others and myself that I truly was Canadian. I obsessed over speaking "proper" English, ate Tim Hortons all the time, and even lied about liking hockey. No matter what I did externally, I felt inauthentic on the inside. I mean, I felt Salvadorian when I was at home eating *pupusas* and watching *telenovelas* with my mama, but everything would change as soon I stepped outside. And vice versa, I felt Canadian at school or with my friends but there were always reminders that I was not fully one of them—whether it was the color of my skin, my parent's financial hardships, or the fact that besides my father, mother, and younger brother, I had no extended family or relatives in Canada.

Unexpectedly, at the age of eleven, I was forced to move back to El Salvador with my father. I lived there for a year and along with being separated from my mother and brother; the culture shock of moving back to my "home" country was extremely difficult. Suddenly, I found myself being ridiculed for apparently speaking broken Spanish and for being Canadian or a "gringo." Ironically, I was being ridiculed for an identity that I myself did not fully accept or belong to. Immediately, I found myself trying to *perform* a Salvadorian identity and was frustrated at the fact that no matter what I did, I was yet again seen as an outsider, as different. Everything about El Salvador was different for me. It is an extremely burdening situation when you feel like a foreigner in your "home" country. At the age of twelve, my father and I moved to Kansas in the United States and reunited with my mother and brother. However, yet again, I experienced another cultural shock when I encountered the American/Latino culture. For the first time in my life, I would hear people talking about being "Latino" or "Hispanic." Once more, I was the different one because I was "from Canada" and on top of that I spoke "proper" English which apparently did not sit well with my American/Latino friends. At this point, I was an expert, at least in my mind, at being a social chameleon and started to identify as a Latino. I changed my "proper" Canadian English and perfected

an American accent in order to fit in. Whether it was because of my age or the fact I was living in Kansas, I started to encounter pervasive state, cultural, and educational narratives defining and constructing the meaning of "Latino" and "Hispanic."

Within the interviews conducted, Latin American Canadian youth consistently conveyed the feeling of living *in-between* the overlapping and layered spaces of Latin American and Canadian culture. Along with being in state of ambivalence, the participants also expressed "feeling not good enough" because of gendered, raced, and national binaries that enfold Latin American Canadian youth into dominant worldviews and social ways of being. While these psychological and sociological *in-between* realties can be troubling, all the participants expressed finding a transformational peace, or what Barthes (1975) calls "jouissance" (bliss), through *critical spirituality*. Regarding the importance of spirituality, Hooks (2003) states:

> I knew only that despite the troubles of my world, the suffering I witnessed around them and within me, there was always available a spiritual force that could lift me higher, that could give me *transcendent bliss* [emphasis added] wherein I could surrender all thought of the world and know profound peace. (p. 106)

For the Latin American Canadian youth in this chapter, *critical spirituality* was found to have the potential to create new forms of *becoming* that temporarily transcend both the constraint and contestation of Latinidad's cultural performativity. According to Anzaldúa (1987), *Nepantla* is a space of in-betweenness that becomes a space of meaning-making and creativity. By inhabiting the space of *nepantla*, border-dwellers (*los atravesados)*, such as the Latin American Canadian youth in this chapter, are more prone to develop a critically reflective stance. The critical reflection that emerges from this "in-between place becomes a turning point initiating psychological and spiritual transformation" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 569).

The fusion of critical self-reflection and spirituality, or what Wane (2014) theorizes as *critical spirituality*, is what propels our agency to activate new meanings. When discussing the importance of spiritually based curriculum, Wane (2014) emphasizes the importance of critical reflection to cultivate in youth a "sense of belonging, connectivity, responsibility, respect, and self-worth" (p. 133). In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) explains that while we cannot be taught how to think, we must learn how to achieve the practice of critical reflection. A component of critical reflection is taking

a holistic approach to the experiences one faces throughout our lifetime. This requires taking a deeper look into our past and present experiences while reflecting on how these experiences may influence our attitudes and decisions.

When it comes to spirituality, many scholars have discussed the ambiguity surrounding how to define it (Palmer, 2003; Smith, 1999; Wane, 2014). In our current modern world, and especially in the West, spirituality is separated from the material validation of science. Thus, spirituality is many times undermined and undervalued since it cannot be objectively measured or theorized as a "valid" phenomena (Collins, 1998). In addition, many repudiate spirituality because it is typically conflated with religion and "dismissed as an apolitical, ahistorical form of escapism that inadvertently reinforces the status quo" (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 8). Furthermore, within academia, spirituality is not considered a credible knowledge since academic epistemologies are typically grounded on rationality, logic, and objectivity (Ellerby, 2000). As Anzaldúa (2000) succinctly puts it, "this whole society is premised on the reality described by the scientific mode of observable phenomenon, while whatever is imagined or subjectively lived doesn't have any credence. Spirituality is subjective experience" (p. 282). Nonetheless, feminists of color have made great strides to challenge the notion that subjective experiences and the knowledges acquired through these experiences are not as important or valid as objective/observable phenomena (Alcoff, 2001; Anzaldúa, 1990; Collins, 2008).

While having different interpretations and definitions regarding spirituality, the youth in this chapter expressed how their subjective experiences of spirituality enable them to not only resist hegemonic discourses and the performative aspects of their gaze, but *temporarily* transcend them. By emphasizing the temporality of this transcendence, I wish to discard the notion that spirituality alone allows us to fully or permanently overcome structural impositions such as discursive constructions (race, gender, etc.) as well as material impediments (socioeconomic status). But for many, including all the participants in this study and myself, spirituality is the most powerful and authentic form of agency. Consider the following *testimonios* from Diana and Bria:

> Honestly, it's hard. It is a hard question. Like I question myself all the time and sometimes it stresses me out because I question myself so much. I question my authenticity, my performativity, and I call myself out on it and it's

> almost like you're not living at the point because of all this. I think my spirituality gets me by. My faith. Like my beliefs. I think what gets me by is addressing what kind of energy I have. I have a thing for like energy crystals and checking in with my *feelings*, checking in with my body. I see that more as a spiritual thing instead of a performativity thing. Like, why do I *feel* the way I *feel*? Why is my body reacting the way it's reacting? Kinda like connecting with myself…mind, body, and soul. Instead of what is imposed on me. And more than just simply resisting, spirituality is the space where I *feel* [emphasis added] the most authentic. (Diana, personal communication, October 14, 2016)

> My spirituality as a Latina is just as complex and full of seemingly contrasting dichotomies, similar to my cultural and racial identity. I believe that I am a very spiritual person because I have to be…it grounds me. I've *felt* and seen supernatural things so much around me that I'm convinced that there is more to life than which we experience as humans. For the longest time, I *felt* that everywhere I went, I was trying to do too much. Because I wasn't embracing all of me, it was hard to fit in. And I think when I let that go, that's when I *felt* most at peace with myself and all of my racial backgrounds Spiritual grounding has been the only consistent source of peace and rest for me as I fight through bouts of depression. I know that whatever inner strength that I possess when I completely drained is God given and somehow I'm able to push through. Who I am as a Latina is deeply rooted in my spiritual walk. Spiritual healing is necessary for my personal authenticity on this planet. (Bria, personal communication, October 15, 2016)

Diana expresses dealing with performativity and the constant internal questioning that living in the *nepantla* (in-between) precipitates. Bria also reveals she was "trying to do too much" and the sentiment of not fitting in. Spirituality counters this as it is not a "performativity thing" and provides a space of authenticity for both. There are many elements that comprise spirituality. However, there are two specific elements articulated by the individuals in these interviews which I would like to focus on. The first element has to do with how Diana and Bria interpret their spirituality as a feeling or a set of feelings. Diana conveys the importance of having a critical spirituality which enables her to "check in with my feelings" while critically asking, "why do I feel the way I feel?" Bria expresses the same attitude when she talks about "feeling supernatural things" and "feeling at peace" when she lets go of trying to put up an act. In many ways, Diana's and Bria's spirituality of feelings entails the "passionate rationality" that Collins (1998) correlates with African American women's spirituality. According

to Collins (1998), "this type of passionate rationality flies in the face of Western epistemology that sees emotions and rationality as different and competing concerns… deep feelings that arouse people to action constitute a critical source of power" (p. 243).

Hence, the deep feelings that individuals experience are a powerful source of agency that enables us to not "simply resist," as Diana puts it, the hegemonic discourses of Latinidad but it provides a "consistent source of peace." Critical spirituality becomes a catalyst for the awareness we need to tap into our deepest feelings or what Audre Lorde (1984) refers to as the "erotic." She elaborates on this critical power and writes, "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (p. 53). Consequently, our deepest feelings or the erotic is a key component to critical spirituality because it "becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives" (Lorde, 1984, p. 57).

The other element of critical spirituality that was discussed is a sense of interconnectedness. This entails the "I" feeling interconnected with not only herself, such as Diana "connecting with myself…mind, body, and soul," but with all aspects of the universe. It is the belief or feeling that we are all connected both physically and metaphysically through a spiritual force that embodies itself in material and nonmaterial forms. By advocating for a holistic spirituality, we are interconnected with humans, animals, plants, and the intangible world that creates an invisible harmony in the cosmos (Mazama, 2002). As Anzaldúa (2000) explains in an interview, "everything is interconnected. To me, spirituality and being spiritual means to be aware of the interconnections between things" (p. 9). To "be aware" of this interconnection is to practice a critical spirituality. What this means for me is that I am related to everything in one way or another; it speaks to an eternal relationship with the universe, even when I stop living. Both Ana Maria and Stu share this feeling:

> Spirituality is a constant search, identification and revision for me. Essentially, it is *feeling* at peace with who I am and with the world around me…even in the chaos. This has led me to search for other spiritual paths and teachings. For example, Indigenous beliefs of creation and the power of pachamama, Afro-Brazilian candomble deities- representative of our brown and black skins but also manifestations of sacred humanity. The belief that we are *connected*

> [emphasis added] to all creation. My spirituality is necessary to not only the ways I construct my Latinx identity, but also how I navigate, deconstruct, and reappropriate the racialized and gendered discourses of Latinidad. (Ana Maria, personal communication, October 30, 2016)

> Spirituality keeps me grounded because it reminds me that my identity is not found in anything else but Jesus. If I didn't have God, the racial tension and questions about my identity would affect me more. However, God helps me to see the bigger picture, which goes beyond racial barriers. When it all boils down, we are all *connected* [emphasis added]. Every human being has a soul, no matter what skin color or background they come from. God helps me to look beyond the physical. It's not about categorizing or putting labels on people. It's about seeing every person as a human being, a human being made in the image of their Creator. (Stu, personal communication, August 25, 2016)

In her *testimonio*, Ana Maria speaks of being "connected to all creation" as part of her critical spirituality. She also speaks to the temporality of this critical spirituality as it is a "constant search," one that entails constant movement and change. But in this "constant search," there is a feeling of peace, "even in the chaos." Likewise, Stu's critical spirituality enables him to be aware that all of us are connected through a common spirit or soul. For both Ana Maria and Stu, as well as the other Latin American Canadian youth interviewed, critical spirituality offers the ability to "navigate, deconstruct, and reappropriate" the racialized and gendered discourses of Latinidad, giving them a special agency in the formation of their identity. Even if it is temporary, critical spirituality allows us to "see the bigger picture" that goes beyond discursive or structural barriers. Many times, the narratives that are imposed on us can be painful and confusing, making us feel like we don't belong or fit in; nevertheless, critical spirituality engenders a powerful form of agency that replenishes with authenticity, peace, and love.

Thus far, the two elements of critical spirituality that have been discussed are enigmatic feelings and a sense of interconnectedness. Moreover, the combination of both these elements manifests itself and takes form through something we all discuss but rarely fully understand. There is no greater feeling that breeds connection than love. For the youth in this chapter, love emerged as the integral source of their critical spirituality. Love, as the ultimate source of agency, is remarkably liberating, not necessarily because of its capacity to resist dominant narratives (which ultimately is a power

struggle), but more so for its ability to *let go* of struggling all together. Consider Andrea's and Diana's concluding *testimonios*:

> I think being able to name what you are feeling is powerful. I think love in and of itself is the most powerful. We're not supposed to love each other, we're not supposed to have self-love, so that, in itself, is contrary to the dominant narratives. They don't want us to love each other. As a direct action, we are going to love. Like, that's actually our revolutionary action. A revolution based on loving more than resisting. (Andrea, personal communication, November 2, 2016)

> Love. I think we forget about that in a lot of the theories and all these conversations about agency and authenticity and identity. It's like you feel things at the end of the day. I don't think feelings are necessarily a performance. I tie that to my spirituality, like what is my body feeling? What is my soul feeling? What am I thinking? Doing things with love is really important because it allows you to let go. (Diana, personal communication, October 14, 2016)

What does Andrea mean when she talks about a "revolution based on love not resisting"? Or when Diana discusses how love "allows you to let go"? When discussing the liberating effects of a differential consciousness and revolutionary love, Chela Sandoval writes,

> love provides one kind of entry to a form of being that breaks subject free from the ties that bind being, to thus enter the differential mode of consciousness, or to enter what Barthes perhaps better describes as "the gentleness of the abyss". In this unlimited space, ties to any responsibility are broken such that, Barthes writes, even "the act of dying is not up to me: I entrust myself, I transmit myself (to whom? To God, to Nature, to everything. (Barthes, 1978, pp. 11–12; Sandoval, 2000, p. 141)

Love provides access to a different consciousness that allows one to let go of control. In this "abyss" or *nepantla* (in-between), adherence to narratives must be let go, and a "third meaning" surface that releases one from the binaries of meaning and signification. Barthes (1977) describes the "third meaning" as always present in this "abyss" but not searchable because it is that which "outplays meaning" altogether; it "subverts not the content, but the whole practice of meaning" (p. 62). As seen through the experiences of the Latin American Canadian youth interviewed, the passage into this "in-between abyss" is a painful crossing which produces ambivalence and a lack of authenticity (feeling not good enough). But this pain or what

Barthes (1978) defines as a "punctum" is what enables us to break free from the meanings of hegemonic discourses and the performative aspects of their gaze. Consequently, even though the meanings transmitted by, for instance, the racialized and gendered discourses of Latinidad do not magically disappear, Latin American Canadian youth can temporarily transcend their significations.

While hegemonic meanings and significations generate internal turmoil, critical spirituality can provide a sense of stillness, creating a space for new imaginations. But this is only possible through the abandonment—albeit temporary, of meaning and one's ego. Palmer (2003) reminds us that "spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than one's own ego" (p. 377). Thus, critical spirituality and the revolutionary love that it nurtures make it possible to "entrust myself…to everything," a place where the binaries of being oppressed/resisting oppression are interconnected, not opposed. Ironically, through the critical awareness of this interconnection, we are able to, at times, disconnect from the binaries of living and the "act of dying" as well as everything in-between.

This chapter began with the schism of my own cultural identities. At school, I was Joshua, while outside of school, I was Josue. I was stuck in this arresting dichotomy of either being a validated student within an educational space or being a vindicated Latino within the cultural space of Latinidad. I have come to realize that throughout these stages of my identity formation, there was always a constant scrutiny or *gaze* that influenced who I thought I was and how I performed my identity as a Latino male. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) social practice theory of self and identity comes to mind when they explain, "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to *act* [emphasis added] as though they are who they say they are" (p. 3). The *gaze* or judgment of educators, peers, and even family made me feel like the only way to be validated was by *performing* certain narratives. In the end, no matter how well I performed, I still felt like I was not good enough and that I didn't belong.

Living in a state of *in-betweenness* produces insecurity, feelings of not being good enough, and the overall difficulties of fitting in. These experiences and feelings emerge from the struggles of maneuvering both multiple cultures and realities. It is a fragmented feeling that constantly searches for wholeness. Truth be told, it is a feeling that all humans deal with at some point in their lives and it's something that never completely goes away. Many times, it is hard to find this wholeness or peace in such a divisive world

full of dominant narratives telling us who we are or what we are supposed to be. Nevertheless, this state of *in-betweenness* engenders a spiritual and intangible "*conocimiento*" (knowledge) that many have encountered which makes *us* feel whole—albeit temporarily, in a fragmented world (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 542).

Critical spirituality has the potential to release us from the constraints of narratives, oppression, and even resistance. Through *critical spirituality*, a meaning of self that goes beyond the dichotomy of oppression/resistance is possible. Anzaldúa describes the potential of a self that rejects binaries and that does not form self-understandings based on external forms of identification such as race, sex, and gender, but instead imagines "a different story enabling you to rethink yourself in more *global-spiritual* [emphasis added] terms instead of conventional categories of color, class, career" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 561). Furthermore, Barthes (1978) speaks about a "third" or "zero" meaning that functions as a "punctum" which breaks social narratives and creates a "gentle hemorrhage" of being that can go beyond the dualisms of meanings/narratives (pp. 12 and 19). When speaking of this transcendental state, Barthes (1975) refuses to be "driven about my language's illusions, seductions, and intimidations. I remove myself from narrative" (p. 18).

Critical spirituality consists of letting go of one's ego to disarm the arresting components that social narratives have on our *being*. This is where the holistic component of critical spirituality is powerful. It engenders collectiveness, community, and relationships. The participants in this study spoke about how critical spirituality induces self-love and love for the other. This dialectical relationship between self-love and love for the other enables you "to rethink yourself in more *global-spiritual* terms" because critical spirituality is not just about the self, it is interconnected to other human beings, animals, the environment, and so on (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). The practice of critical spirituality seeks not only an inner transformation but a collective one as well. Unfortunately, due to neoliberalism and the meritocratic culture of achievement, individualism is rewarded over community, rights over responsibilities, and objectivity over subjectivity (Dei, 2008).

We need to understand that critical spirituality is subjectively understood and enacted; thus, differences should not only be tolerated but be allowed to flourish. At the same time, there are many commonalties such as the need for community, relationships, and love that can incite both individual and collective liberation. For Anzaldua, "spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us

yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as a catalyst for transformation" (quoted in Keating, 2006, p. 11). Critical spirituality is much more than simply meditating our way into a better world or having an out-of-body experience. Again, it involves a dialectical relationship between decolonizing imagination(s) and action(s) or what Freire (1972) theorizes as praxis. The imaginative component of critical spirituality empowers and gives us the energy to act upon our reality. I believe praxis, the act of applying new possibilities, is what distinguishes humans from non-humans. According to Freire (1972) and others, praxis is the ontological process of becoming human. Critical spirituality allows us to imagine a revolutionary praxis that rejects oppression, while dialectically creating new forms of social, educational, and political relationships.

Critical spirituality is a powerful source of liberation and reinvention. The reason for this is because it is a source of *becoming* as opposed of *being*. The hegemonic narratives regarding our identity will always be constraining because it limits the possibilities of *becoming* and instead seeks to impose a fixed state of *being*. Critical spirituality enables us to be at peace with the perpetual movement of meaning, identity, and social reality. It enables a critical understanding that nothing can be permanent, whether it be the constraining effects of social narratives on our identity or the transcendence from them. This is the beauty of living in the in-between state; it teaches us that nothing is stable or permanent.

Movement, uncertainty, and vulnerability can become tools that generate new meanings, new imaginations, and new forms of becoming human. Critical spirituality fully embraces feelings like "I don't completely belong in one or the other" because it embraces the unpredictability of becoming human. It embraces the perpetual suspension between the past (being) and the future (non-being). It thrives in learning to abide in the present moment, in the possibility of becoming something, someone new. I share Freire's (1998) sentiment when he writes, "I like to be human because in my unfinishedness I know that I am conditioned. Yet, conscious of such conditioning, I know that I can go beyond it" (p. 54). Based on my life experiences and the participants in this study, the journey or process of "unfinishedness" is at times contradicting and painful but can also be blissfully peaceful. To be human is to experience and embrace this dialectical relationship between pain and joy, self-love and love for others, difference and commonality, and, as much as we don't like to talk about it, life and death. La belleza de esta vida es que todo es temporal.

Conclusion

Is there a difference between decolonizing the self and decolonizing the spirit? Can the spirit really be colonized in the first place? In order to think about these questions, I would like to expand on the three driving components of critical spirituality: love, interconnectedness, and temporality. As discussed earlier, love is critical for the process of *becoming* because it is ultimately about surrendering to the unknown. According to Greek philosophy, there are four different kinds of loves. When I speak of the love engendered by critical spirituality, I do not mean romantic love (eros) or the love we have for our friends (philia), or even familial love (storge), but a selfless love (agape). Agape love is an unconditional love that transcends circumstances as well as the self. It is the idea that *becoming* human always points and is directed to something or someone else, whether it's a meaning to fulfill or the relationship we have with the universe (humans, animals, nature, etc.). This is what true interconnectedness is—a dialectical relationship where I cannot exist without being part of something bigger. Therefore, I believe that the disconnected self can be colonized/decolonized, but the spirit can never be. The self is an individual state of *being* that can be bounded by colonial histories, discourses, and realities while the spirit is a collective process of *becoming* that transcends ideologies, materiality, and time. I wrote earlier that the beauty of life is that everything is temporal. What I mean by this is that the self and everything the self perceives are temporal, including the state of *being*. On the other hand, the spirit is always *becoming*, thus eternal, because it cannot be restricted by time, space, or perception. For instance, both Buddhism and Hinduism share the doctrine of *Annica* or *Anitya*. The doctrine basically asserts that nothing lasts and that everything is in a constant state of change (Harvey, 2013). This speaks to the temporality of the self. It tells us that as long we are attached to things that are changing and impermanent, we will suffer. Similarly, the book of Ecclesiastes says that "there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens. A time to be born and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, New International Version). Indigenous African spiritualties also speak to this temporality and inevitable fluctuation. Consider the following Yoruba proverb: "igba o lo bi orere, aye o lo bi opa ibon (no life span extends ad infinitum; a life time is not as straight as the barrel of a gun" (Kazeem, 2016).

Nevertheless, the doctrine of *Annica*, for example, distinguishes between the temporal (self/being) and the eternal (spirit/becoming).

All conditioned existence, both mental and physical, is subject to impermanence and, consequently, destruction. This contrasts with *nirvana* (spirit/becoming), the ultimate state of enlightenment and complete liberation of the self (Harvey, 2013). Furthermore, many people believe that heaven represents a similar place of enlightenment and eternal peace. Could Ecclesiastes be saying that everything *under the heavens* (spirit) is temporal? Lastly, in Yoruba belief, death is a transition from one form of existence to another (Kazeem, 2016). Could the transition be from a temporal existence (self/being) to an eternal one (spirit/becoming)?

Some argue that this higher level of existence is not possible while being in our mortal bodies, while others argue that full transcendence can be reached on earth. All I can say is that I do not know. But what I do know is that many, such as the Latin American Canadian youth interviewed, as well as myself, have experienced what you may paradoxically call a temporal transcendence. And the process for these moments of peace, joy, and acceptance always includes letting go of our egos, allowing us to feel truly interconnected with the universe, which in turn, produces deeper manifestations of love and newer imaginations of meaning. Is there an ultimate meaning to life? Is there a collective or ultimate meaning that was here before us and will be here after us? Again, I do not know. Maybe life is like a movie. Every movie is full of scenes. Every scene has a meaning. These are our subjective meanings that arise from the temporal self. But maybe the ultimate meaning cannot be found until the end of the movie. As such, is it possible that only death reveals the ultimate meaning because it is the complete detachment to self and the eternal attachment to the universe?

I believe that death to the self/ego is the closest thing to nirvana/heaven/higher form of existence. The temporality of life will always include movement, uncertainty, fear, insecurity, and pain. The best way to deal with this is to try to surrender the ego, realize the interconnectedness of the universe, and love. I would like to conclude by recognizing the amount of privilege I have writing about the decolonization of the self and spiritual transcendence when many of our Indigenous and African descendant brothers and sisters are fighting for material decolonization of the land. Decolonization cannot only be about theory or pontifications, it must be about praxis and tangible action. Many are literally fighting to survive and dying daily because of colonization. However, I do believe that decolonization of both the land and the self must be done for true decolonization to take place one day. The self has colonized this earth and is rapidly destroying it. I pray that the spirit of humanity intervenes before

it is too late. I remain hopeful that we can achieve a higher form of existence while on this beautiful earth. It would be, without a doubt, the most meaningful thing we can do.

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