
Mi Mamá, La que Lloro

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Course Design: Counterstory

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Bio: Natali Coronado is currently attending the University of North Texas majoring in English and Political Science, while minoring in Spanish, after graduation she plans to study rhetoric, critical race theory, and write counterstories further. During her time at UNT Natali has focused on courses that included thinking critically about societal structures,

her research interest include feminist, queer, border, Latine rhetorics, and all its intersections. When she is not reading or writing, she devotes her time to fighting for civil rights by attending protests and having difficult conversations. In addition to her activism, her main goal is to enact change through her written works, including publications with the North Texas Review that further showcase racism in academic and social contexts in structural institutions. Natali wishes to continue to write about these issues that plague society but specifically to highlight the inequities of communities that continue to be silenced and create accessible works for all people.

For far too long people have been force-fed a version of reality that has suppressed knowledge and truth. The very founding principles of the United States have been suppressed for the people by its very own rulers, while there are those that this system benefits, there is a major disparity to those included in the “We The People” that is stated in the U.S. Constitution. Derrick Bell was someone who saw these disparities. In 1957, Bell graduated from the University of Pittsburgh Law School, he was the only Black person out of his class of 120. After this Bell began his career, he went from working for the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division to working with Thurgood Marshall for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, to being Harvard Law School’s first African American tenured faculty member, all within the span of ten years. During this time, Bell was helping Black people as they challenged racist and discriminatory practices, mainly pertaining in the South during the 60s. During his time at Harvard, while teaching constitutional law he noticed the lack of accessibility of the Constitution to his students and the lack of relations to race the teaching foundational document is when the country itself was

founded upon matters of race. Bell sought storytelling to create a more accessible way to teach his courses, while being able to call attention to systemic racism, what we now refer to as Critical Race Theory(CRT), thanks to Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term. From this, Bell created counterstory, as a means to challenge stock narratives told by the dominant culture’s idea of minorities’ experiences, it works as a way for minorities to tell their own stories about their own communities and is often referred to as legal storytelling. Counterstory is heavily embedded in the CRT movement, counterstories include the themes of the CRT tenets which are; Permanence of Race and Racism, Challenge to Dominant Ideologies, Interest Convergence, Race as Social Construct, Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism, Interdisciplinarity, Centrality of Experiential Knowledge and/or Unique Voices of Color, Commitment to Social Justice, and Accessibility. Though Bell is considered the father of CRT and counterstory, his legacy still continues with those he inspired throughout the movement, counterstory-tellers such as Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, and Aja Martinez, whose work inspires the next generation of counterstory-tellers, critical thinkers, and anti-racists.

The following counterstory, follows Richard Delgado’s narrative dialogue style and draws inspiration from his counterstory “Metamorphosis: A Minority Professor’s Life,” where his main character, the Professor slowly turns into an insect after he has dealt with his colleague’s racist behavior that begins to dawn on him as he embarks on a successful career in civil rights law. In light of Delgado’s work, this counterstory focuses on the struggles of a immigrant mother, Amelia, who loses her daughters to their assimilation into American culture, going through geographic, emotional, and physical changes. The main character, Amelia Cortez, is a mother that ultimately has no power, she is forced to move to the U.S. because of financial hardships, she loses her home, and because of the move loses her kids as well. This story centers on Amelia talking to her older sister Mirella after Amelia has been hospitalized after an incident. The legend of the la llorona is a Latin folklore that encourages kids to listen to their parents and not to stray from them or else la llorona will take their children. In this case, the spirit of la llorona is embodied by two entities, one being the U.S. and the second being Amelia. While the Cortez family

comes to the U.S. in hopes to rid themselves of their financial struggles and in hopes of living the infamous “American Dream,” Amelia learns that in order to live the dream, one must pay for it in being Americanized, which is what her children experience, as an act of revenge, while Amelia embodies la Llorona in a more literal sense as an act of resistance. La Llorona initially represents both revenge and resistance, according to “From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros,” Ana María Carbonell explains the legend is closely tied to the period of colonialism in modern-day Mexico, being an embodiment of the pre-colonial goddess Coatlicue represents destruction and fertility, and the colonial figure of la Virgen de Guadalupe representing passivity and silence. The legend of la Llorona is one woman but signifies the experience Latinas have been forced to endure while having a force of destruction inside, these women were forced into a passive and quiet role men wanted them to play. Though duality plays a significant role in this story, the CRT tenets it focuses on are Intersectionality, Race as a Social Construct, and Challenge to Dominant Ideologies. In the light of CRT, this counterstory highlights the destructive role the American education system plays in a system embedded in white supremacy and benefits from the indoctrination into white society.

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Throughout the day, people hear her weep. La Llorona¹, that’s what they call her. “Le robaron los niños, so she tries to take other people’s kids”, the other moms whisper and they hold their children closer.

The accident left Amelia in the hospital, she was surrounded by her family for once they were all looking at her ready to listen, at least that’s what she thought. Amelia babbled, though they looked at her they did not listen, but focused on her situation, they thought she was in the hospital she would finally get some help. That is until her older sister came, Mirella came to visit.

“Are you okay?” Mirella asks.

“I’m in the hospital, what do you think?” Amelia started, even after her accident she remained herself.

“What happened?”

“Me robaron mis hijas.”

“Your daughters are outside, what do you mean?” A worried expression took over Mirella’s face.

“Those aren’t my daughters, they took them,” Amelia said her eyes growing larger, Mirella’s face settled in a confused expression. “Do you remember when I had Olivia², people kept telling me if I wanted her to have papers that I needed to start working en el otro lado?”

“I remember, they told me the same thing.”³

“I should have just stayed.”

“Porque dices eso? We came here to give them a better life.”

“I wanted a better life for my family and look what they did.”

“Tus hijas estan bien, de que estas hablando.”

“It started when we moved to the U.S., Mateo⁴ and I had to work, so we had to enroll the girls in school with Venny’s address so that Lupita could take care of the kids after school.”⁵

“We lived in those ugly apartments, I remember they lived in a better neighborhood too” Mirella added. “The school wasn’t too bad either.”

“The teachers did the best with what they had, they advocated for the students to do a baile folklorico⁶, but they were only able to do it once because of the lack of funding. But it was the best that was available to us, Mateo was working with Venny doing carpeting and Lupita was working from home, so it was only natural for the girls to go there. I thought it would be good for them to go to school with their cousins to at least have someone that they knew even if their cousins were older.

1 La Llorona, “the weeping woman,” is a Latin mythical ghost woman that is said to roam bodies of water mourning her children that died, versions of the story vary, but it is often said she drowned her own children.

2 Olivia Cortez, Amelia’s first daughter, which she had to raise as a young single mother when she was 17, out of wedlock, and was constantly looked down on.

3 Mirella is the eldest daughter, she was the first in the family to have a child out of wedlock, her daughter, Consuelo was the first grandchild in the family, though Chelo was loved, her mom lived with the consequences of a family whose roots were planted in machismo. Mirella, like Amelia had a daughter at 17 and was left to raise her daughter by herself.

4 Amelia’s husband.

5 Venny was the eldest brother and the first to make the move to the United States, he had slowly built up his carpeting business, he and his wife, Lupita had three daughters and were the ones who had been in the U.S. the longest, if anyone needed help, they were the first to ask.

6 Mexican folkloric dance, dance that emphasizes local cultural traditions, stemming from indigenous peoples cultures that lived in modern day Mexico.

"I think that's how my condition commenced. The girls would spend hours with their cousins who have been living here for a longer than Olivia and Maria.⁷ When I took them home they began to listen to popular English music, the ones their cousins would listen to. At Venny's house, they had cable which was different from the VHS movies we were able to buy for the girls. Maria especially became a big fan of the Disney Channel, she would come home singing English music from the shows and the music her cousins would show her. After school at Venny's house became a cultural gateway into gringolandia, I forgot to mention they had a computer, they could look up and learn anything."

"The internet has become a big part of our lives but the kids really were the ones who started to grow up with it" Mirella adds.

"But it wasn't only that, Maria was enrolled in the bilingual program, though they were teaching her reading and writing in both languages the culture calls for the priority of a certain language. During this time Mateo was applying for citizenship, to be able to apply for citizenship, they have to read, write and speak English"⁸ Amelia explained. "Mateo was trying his best to learn English and the girls saw his struggle, it also didn't help that he would constantly remind Maria how lucky she was not to be dealing with what he had to go through to become a citizen because she already was one and was taking steps to learn English from a young age. Though Olivia wasn't a citizen yet she knew English pretty well. English that's how it starts. It was in the tv they watched, the music they listened to, what they learned at school, and what they picked up from their friends, it especially got harder as they started getting older and the light of the Spanish part of the bilingual program was beginning to dim. The spelling words they would bring home began to take a turn, and trying to help them with their homework started to become a struggle for me and Mateo, trying to read and understand what they had to do for their work was a struggle for us in itself, math became the one subject that we could help the girls with, Mateo was good at math and he did the best to help them. Oli had started taking on that role to help her younger sister with her homework that we couldn't help with. I became neglected by an essential part of their world, I started to become a shadow in their existence."

"It starts to feel that way when the kids get older" Mirella claimed.

"I don't think you understand, I couldn't understand them, talking to my kids became a struggle when they didn't know how to talk to me, their own mother. I picked up some English from here and

there but I mainly nodded my head and smiled. My face began to crack from the smile lines, I grew pale from the inside out. I missed my kids, they didn't talk to me anymore, I would ask how their day was, and they only answered with 'good,' they didn't even want to put effort into talking to me. Mateo started working nights, I would lie in bed and just cry, I couldn't talk to my children, but every morning I still got up every morning to wake them up for school because we came here for them, but what I don't understand is how this is better? Just because Mateo is making more money? We risked the lives of our children for what people claim is freedom and liberty, is this the cost of freedom?"

Mirella stayed silent as a man resembling a cockroach walked by.

"Mateo arrived around the same time the girls needed to be up for school, he would see me wake up and jokingly started calling me 'la llorona' because it looked like I was crying and because complained about us living here.⁹ I got a letter from Maria's school, but it didn't say, 'Maria,' it said 'Mary', I don't know if it was a mistake, but that's not her name and I wondered if people knew her as Mary or Maria. And then, the girls started to ask if they could spend the night at their friend's houses, I wouldn't let them, because I didn't know their parents, but I would suggest they bring their friends over, but they didn't say anything, but I knew they were thinking that they couldn't bring their friends to our apartment. Perhaps I thought it was my tired eyes, or maybe my gray hairs, I started to dye my hair black more, thinking maybe I could at least look like what I used to when they were mine. I started to watch some movies in English, maybe I can pick it up as the girls did, but I couldn't understand. I tried asking the girls if they would teach me English but brushed it off as if I was joking. Oli and Maria talked and laughed amongst themselves before they used to talk and I would be able to listen, to understand, now I all I can do is wait for them to want to tell me what it is they were talking about, for them to want or have the ability to say it in Spanish."¹⁰

"I'm sorry I didn't know you lost so much."

"My cries turn to sobs," Amelia continued "The people around the apartments started saying they heard La llorona's sobs at night, as my sobs got louder during the night, I stopped seeing children around as much. Until one day I saw two girls by the creek near the apartment, they reminded me so much of the girls when they were kids, my eyes started to tear up and soon enough I was crying loudly, I quickly ran inside, too quickly and I ended up slamming the door on my finger, letting out an enormous wail. Soon after,

7 Maria Cortez, Amelia's second daughter and Mateo's first child.

8 Department of Homeland Security Naturalization Eligibility Worksheet(<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/guides/M-480.pdf>) ask the applicant if they can "read, write, and speak basic English," to be able to begin to apply for naturalization.

9 Delgado, Richard. *Metamorphosis: A Minority Professor's Life*. 2019, <https://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/online/53/files/53-online-Delgado1.pdf>. In this Counterstory, Delgado argues that social construction works in both ways

10 Mora, Pat. "Elena" *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults*(2000). The poem describes a Mexican losing the ability to enjoy motherhood because of her children's assimilation to the dominant society.

I heard the girls crying as well, yelling for their mom as they ran. My mistake was going back to see what happened to the girls. As I made my way out there, the girls came back with their mother trying to explain what happened, when they saw me, their mom accused me of taking her children. I wish I would have warned her that I would be the least of her worries, but I stayed silent. After this, there was rumors that I was kidnapping peoples children, after awhile no talked to us so we decided to move.”

“Wow I didn’t know thats why you moved, I though it was because Mateo finally made some good money,” Mirella added.

“We had been saving money for emergencies and it was always Mateo’s idea to ‘move on up’ as he called it. He was able to find a house, but it was even further from Mexico, where we were moving to, would make trips to Mexico more difficult and less frequent, but I thought maybe a house could bring the family closer, my mood changed I wasn’t crying anymore. However, I was wrong. We went from having a two room apartment to a three room house, everyone had their space and I saw less of Oli and Maria, they spent most of their time in their rooms. I later found out I was pregnant with our third child. I thought what would happen to me with a third child, when I have already lost my daughters to the gringos. My cries were louder than before, but I found a way to manage my condition I would go into Oli’s and Maria’s room and watch them sleep for awhile, it reminded me of when they were just little girls, before the move to the states, and just for the moment they were mis hijitas, but I did the best I could to not worry about this new baby. I tried to focus on the pregnancy as much as possible, I went to the doctors visits, I did the shower, I worked as much as I could to distract myself. When the baby came I struggled. I couldn’t hold him, feed him, sometimes it was hard to even look at him,”¹¹ Amelia started crying. “Then I started to think about raising him here it would be the same thing all over again.”

“So you were gonna drown him?”

“I wanted to protect him from this!”¹² Amelia yelled.

11 Silverman, ME, Reichenberg, A, Savitz, DA, Cnatingius, S, Lichtenstein, P, Hultman, CM, Larsson, H, and Sandin, S. The risk factors for postpartum depression: A population-based study. *Depress Anxiety*. 2017; 34: 178– 187. doi: 10.1002/da.22597. Study found women with a history of depression were more than 20 times as likely to experience postpartum depression(PPD).

12 Carbonell, Ana Maria. “From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros.” *Short Story Criticism*, edited by Joseph Palmisano, vol. 72, Gale, 2004. *Gale Literature Resource Center*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1420058879/LitRC?u=txshracd2679&sid=summon&xid=40022c88. Originally published in *MELUS*, vol. 24, no. 2, Summer 1999, pp. 53-74. La llorona myth was derived from the Indigenous women protecting their children from the spanish colonizers who took their children and made them slaves. The women would resort into killing their children as a form of protection against the colonizer(56-57).