

A Collaborative Autoethnographic Platica: The Multi-Layered Citizen in Academia

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As world and local events impact communities, from environmental catastrophes, to global pandemic, the attack on reproductive freedom, to wars displacing people around the world, notions of citizenship make its way into the classroom, research, and service activities. From the moment a professor walks into academic spaces, whether it be virtually or in-person, these contexts can lead to opportunities where belonging is fostered among colleagues, and between professors and students in the classroom. And for others, exclusions continually occur. When reflecting on academic exclusions it is important to recognize that for some (i.e., DREAMERS and immigrants), the societal rejections experienced are compounded by life-threatening and legally bound realities, resulting in having their sense of belonging denied or deferred, making them feel like second-class citizens. Resources, jobs, and other opportunities are oftentimes tied to legal status, where many resources prioritize citizenship as a requirement for access. Beyond legal notions of citizenship, there is a need to grapple with citizenship in all its complex manifestations and the way in which academia contributes to creating obstacles for the multi-layered academic citizen. The multi-layered academic citizen includes faculty, staff, and students – whose sense of belonging in academic institutions are informed by locality, ethnicity, national origins, age, class, and gender. In our *plática*, a conversation, we offer a collaborative autoethnography that manifests in the form of vignettes and specific examples exemplifying our lived experiences in academia during global pandemic. A collaborative autoethnography is a research methodology in which the researchers retrospectively and selectively analyze their experiences (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). In this article each vignette represents varying positionalities among three academics, an early career Chinese (Qi), a KoreXicana administrator and tenured faculty (Fukushima), and a Purépecha/Xicana tenured professor approaching full professor status (Alvarez Gutiérrez). To collect the vignettes that appear here, we enacted *pláticas* which enables researchers to engage in both the personal and the academic dialogue. To *platicar* (to have a conversation) is a legitimate form of methodology in ethnic studies and for

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Latinx education scholars (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016; Guajardo and Guajardo 2008; Gonzalez and Portillo 2012; Valle and Mendoza 1978). In addition to vignettes, examples that appear throughout this article are reflections on our own lived experiences. We engaged in multiple conversations discussing our struggles and how we were and are experiencing belonging and citizenship in academic spaces in predominately white institutions (PWIs) in the mountain West and a Midwestern state.

Multiple global events such as the pandemic, yellow peril discourse, anti-immigration, the attack on reproductive health, ongoing racism, and gender-based violence impact belonging in academic life. These sociopolitical issues shape what it means to teach and research in PWIs where exclusions are rife. The authors discuss challenges experienced when institutional structures and interlocking oppressions impact research and teaching. A central analytic for this paper is intersectionality, where interlocking oppressions cohere and are met with resistance: race, national origins, and gender. We draw on Nira Yuval-Davis' (1999) notion of the multi-layered citizen, whereby women of color academics belong to multiple political communities. As diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts are abound, the multi-layered citizen is often excluded from such endeavors where DEI efforts in institutions oftentimes focus on limited notions of who belongs in academic spaces. To conclude, we illuminate how we create belonging through coalition and community, even in the face of exclusion.

Multi-layered Academic Citizens

A legal citizen is a person who has the rights in a sovereign nation, oftentimes connected to how communities create a sense of social life. An academic citizen is a person who has the freedom to engage in research, teaching and academic learning environments without constraint. The legal citizen and the academic citizen intersect where the history of belonging and legal citizenship in the United States is a fraught and riddled with exclusions. The passport as a legally authorizing document for entry in the twenty-first century invokes leisure, labor, wealth, and mobility and surveilling communities of color traced to a racial history where free papers and the slave pass are relics of U.S. systems of slavery and documentation as a means to belong (Fukushima 2019b; Pryor 2016). Instead, we offer a notion of citizenship as defined as a multi-layered one, recognizing that U.S. notions of citizenship have historically been and continue to be predicated on exclusions.

My position on citizenship is both academic and political. As a Chinese scholar, I was able to study abroad and get to know the U.S. from both academic and cultural aspects. I came to the U.S. as an international student when I was 21; I was the first in my family to travel outside of China. I believed that a sense of belonging should unify within my professional and personal life for a very long time. Over time, however, I developed a deeper understanding of the distinctions between citizenship with a nationality boundary versus academic citizenship with a sense of justice and social activism. To me, the journey of being in the U.S. is a lonely and challenging one. However, over the years, I was able to use teaching and research to reconnect my multi-structured citizenship to others. Teaching and research are powerful tools for me to not only engage my students to reflect on their citizenship, but also allows me to become an engaged citizen in my own academic field to advocate for those who are marginalized and forgotten. I am also inspired to engage my students to think their own involvement and engagement as a

multi-struct citizen. I often incorporate my research and theory of intersectionality on victimization in my teaching. By doing so, I encourage my students, future criminal justice professionals, to serve the public with confidence, compassion, and knowledge to work with groups with diverse backgrounds. – Qi

Citizenship is a multi-layered construct in which one's citizenship has different layers meaning shaped by local, ethnic, national, state, cross- or trans-state and supra-state understandings of belonging constructed by the "relationships and positionings of each layer in specific historical context" (Yuval-Davis 1999:121). More specifically, multi-layered citizens' identities are embodied and linked to individuals' location and constructed by other intersecting social identities such as age, class, ethnicity, gender, and immigration status to name a few. The dimensions of citizenship are also gendered, where norms in academic institutions continue to illuminate who is seen as an authority, scholar, or educator (norms of white cisgendered men), even as changes and diversity efforts ensue. As illuminated by Fukushima during the plática, social identities of belonging as the multi-layered academic citizen is connected to identities and connections to other people in academic settings; but not all women academics are homogenous and have similar experiences. Additionally, "gender divisions" are socially, politically, culturally, and economically determined (Yuval-Davis 1997). These identities shape rights and obligations in local ethnic, religious, national, regional, transnational and international political communities (Alvarez Gutiérrez 2017; Yuval-Davis 2007). As described by Alvarez Gutiérrez, the multi-layered citizen is shaped by intersecting identities:

My citizenship encompasses my various intersectionalities, including being Purépecha/Xicana, daughter of Indigenous Mexican immigrants, being first-generation, and being a scholar-activist and educator. Citizenship to me is more than a document I can use to "prove" to officials that I belong. Being a citizen includes being an academic citizen who strives to benefit and improve the circumstances of the communities which struggle educationally and socially. At the university level, I attempt to support and engage with students and colleagues who can use my support. In the community I work closely with young people of color and educators to transform their circumstances. I know what it feels like to be excluded and this exclusion continues in many ways as a university professor today. I attempt to include the voices and experiences of many young people and families who are often silenced. Being an academic citizen is not only to share their experiences but also to transform their experiences within school and communities.

For the academic citizen, inclusion and rights as a citizen are tethered to a particular kind of imagined community where the conversation about belonging and how to become an engaged citizen transcend national and state boundaries. Academic communities that foster a multi-layered citizenship allows for transformative and empowering connections, where identities, locations, and connections to a wide range of communities are viewed as an asset and a strength. The conceptualization of how one belongs even enters into the realm of memory, as described by Fukushima:

My mother immigrated from Korea in the 1970s. She was sponsored through family reunification, where her oldest sister migrated through the 1945 War Brides Act. A family of migratory people with mixed status family members, my mother was the only

one of 8 girls to receive a high school education in the U.S. Her sister's exclusions from accessing an education meant many of the women in my family labor in intensive and low-wage work. I am the first of women in my family on my matrilineal side to earn a Ph.D. I do not know my Mexican family history as well, and know that there are many firsts for my generation there too. I am a KoreXicana who was raised in the UK until I was 8 years-old. I remember the first time I felt like I was not from somewhere, at 7-years old, in school, I was asked "what are you?" I said proudly, "I am Korean Mexican!" I was told, "No you're not, you're an American!" I later asked my mom what this American was – at the time, I had no recollection since the last time I was in the U.S., I was 3 years-old. It was my earliest recollection of race and national origins.

As academic citizens, our citizenship identities are intertwined with multiple communities: families, classrooms, the academic community which is part of an institution, and other communities outside academia (e.g., community nonprofits). And as institutions sustain the criteria of "inclusion," the consequence is that some are excluded. Therefore, the endeavor to create a sense of belonging, and a will towards all individuals having rights is incomplete and ongoing because "people who are constructed to be members of other ethnic, racial, and national collectivities, are often not considered 'to belong' even if formally they are entitled to" (Yuval-Davis 2007:563). We have described our own connections to multi-layered citizenry, what follows is a discussion of our pedagogies as sites where academic citizenry are constructed.

Multi-layered Citizenship and Pedagogy

Academic citizenship is multifaceted and emerges in teaching, research, and service. In this section, we discuss how faculty academic citizenry intersects with student positionalities in the classroom, scholarship, and service activities. As faculty, we seek pedagogical strategies that encourage learning environments that encourage belonging while embracing equity, accessibility, and inclusivity. These pedagogical approaches are vital for all our students, especially given that the exclusionary and racist discourses that are so prominent across the country and spill into university classrooms. Additionally, students' roles in their communities begin with how they enact compassion and inclusivity towards each other in the institution and in the classroom.

The pandemic may be challenging, destructive, and devastating for many. However, it also provided many an opportunity to connect and share the triumphs and strengths we gained during this unprecedented time. I was able to understand students' struggles with learning and engagement inside and outside of the classroom and I learned to be attentive to students' trauma and struggles during this time. I also learned that showing vulnerability is a strength, and it was ok to take a break and take care of my mental health and engage with self-care. I also learned that student learning should be encouraged outside of the classroom where they could explore their passion and activism as engaged citizens. Building a learning community with students is crucial to facilitating creativity, self-growth, and a civic engagement environment. Working at a teaching institution, I found my daily connections with students inside and out of the classrooms. To a certain extent, my academic citizenship is established by showing my compassion, empathy, support, and encouragement for students and seeing their growth and shine through their learning activities – Qi

Notions of belonging within the classroom are impacted by national and local events and the role of the professor is vital in creating a safe space while critically engaging students with everyday topics. As Qi illuminates, the role of the professor is critical in creating connections during national crisis. During the global pandemic, we witnessed students, community, and family members, exposed to COVID-19, where for some, the effects were debilitating. The Utah legislature mandated 75% of university classrooms return to in-person, and this heightened students, we mentored, a fear for their lives. Fukushima recalls a Latina student of hers who was afraid to catch the bus because she feared exposing her vulnerable family members to COVID-19, however public transportation was her only means to get to campus. Similarly, Alvarez Gutiérrez vividly recalls that many of her students' family members worked on the frontlines and they were concerned for their health, but they had no choice but to go to work in order to survive. In a rural teaching institution (where Qi currently works), many students look forward to experiencing college life on-campus, which may include joining student organizations, attending sports, and other extracurricular activities. For many in academic settings, remote learning was and is difficult to make connections with others. Early on, students began to show and express signs of heightened stress. A student's sense of belonging is also impacted by the inequities in academic programming. For example, when courses were shifted online access issues became apparent. In particular, the digital divide became clear as some students had limited digital access and thus no access to class assignments. Furthermore, many students, experienced their home and school spheres colliding which meant the classroom was a home and this often interfered with the care for loved ones (e.g., children and younger siblings). For others, home is not a safe place due to poverty, violence, family struggles and systemic oppressions; however, for some, school is the only "safe" place.

The pandemic exposed inaccessibility and exclusions, and for some, it has also illuminated what Arundhati Roy (2020) has described as a "portal" towards opportunities. Pandemic teaching provided opportunities to radically reimagine what teaching could be, despite the various challenges. We used the pandemic to reimagine how to integrate justice into the classroom in ways that were not being contended with pre-pandemic – breakout rooms, utilizing Jamboard to work collectively, create sticky notes or blackboard activities via online, the ability to utilize mobile technological activities with photography and community sharing, and live-note taking, Twitter activities to modes of creating community events in the face of asynchronous distanced learning, and flexible deadlines with clear expectations. Alvarez Gutiérrez reflects on the entryways created during the pandemic for pedagogues of color:

The disproportionate economic, racial and health disparities that were highlighted by COVID-19 were devastating for many culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Along with digital disparities, the emergence of COVID-19 brought to the surface the class and racial injustices that run through culturally linguistically diverse communities. But I saw this as an opportunity to transform difficulties into opportunities to re-think how I interacted with my students, especially given illness and death that many of us were experiencing with loved ones. Transformative were the relationships I was able to create despite remote teaching. I thought that I was not going to be able to build strong relationships while on remote teaching, however, I viewed this as an opportunity, a portal for me to transform the situation and still maintain strong relationships with students.

Thus, I took more time to listen to my students' everyday experiences, as well as integrate self-care into our course time. Transformative was also integrating some time to just take a break from the everyday stress and I found pathways to emphasize self-care, health, while being really flexible with timelines, and due dates. Most transformative were the assignments that I created that allowed/required students to do research about the impact of the pandemic on education and the teaching profession. They were able to integrate the experiences of students, teachers and families in the educational system and integrated their own experiences into the assignments. Students shared that these assignments were healing and that many of their professors didn't even acknowledge the pandemic in their courses. Besides creating a strong bond with my students, I encouraged students to develop strong relationships with one another. I did this through assignments, conversations and reflections.

While the pandemic may have served as a portal for radical forms of pedagogy, the accumulation of events and trauma, led many students and professors to experience chronic "Zoom fatigue" (Fosslien and Duffy 2020). In addition to the chaotic and devastating situations due to the pandemic, there were many hate crimes on campuses across the country and these sentiments often made their way into the classroom: Most notable and recent was the bomb threat to the Black Cultural Center at a Western University (Tanner 2022).

As threats to Black life are ongoing realities, international students too, faced multiple racial threats creating a deep link between anti-immigration and exclusions occurring in academic institutions. Recently, Zhifan Dong was murdered by her intimate partner (Pace 2022). While these events are the most visible forms of violence, other forms persevere. As described by Qi, "students still refer to [Corona Virus as a] China virus. We can see this...this is ongoing struggle." Soon after the Atlanta murders in 2021, Asian women at a Western University convened through the Women of Color Academics Collective (WOCA) facilitated by Fukushima, of which Alvarez Gutiérrez is also a member. Through coalitions and solidarity with other women of color, WOCAs spoke about their anger, fear, and grief as they reflected on what Hwang and Parreñas (2021) describe as the gendered racialization of Asian women that justifies disposability. The macro effects of violence ripples through our lives, where events removed a sense of belonging. WOCAs described feeling afraid to be out in public, and that these sentiments emerged more profoundly reflecting concerns surrounding rising anti-Asian violence (Yellow Horse Jeung, and Matriano 2020).

Women of color theories encourage entering into the "uncomfortable," where safety for women of color in the classroom is not guaranteed (Kishimoto and Mwangi 2009). Engaging students with equity focused topics in the classroom, regardless of comfort, offers opportunities for all students to consider just practices and perspectives, while also validating marginalized faculty and students who may find themselves at the center of content. Another way to create a sense of belonging is to foster community engagement by connecting learners and communities where civic participation fosters belonging (Alvarez Gutiérrez 2017).

Conclusion: Care to Support Multi-Layered Citizens

Academia upholds the notion of an ideal academic citizen. An "ideal" academic citizen in capitalist economies is a person who's individualistic, is producing scholarship in top tier

journals, and is the subject can work in a capitalist structure and keep it functioning. This definition excludes academic citizens who do not fit the archetype. Most often, academics who are women of color, gender non-binary population, individuals experiencing disabilities, immigrants, and scholars conducting research outside of the global north are excluded. The ideal academic citizen may also exclude faculty members who work at teaching intensive institutions, and adjunct faculty.

Narratives circulate about how academics are unable to write and research during crises which is in part true as gender inequalities impact research during global pandemic (Pinho-Gomes et al. 2020). However, for some scholars, especially those whose work delves into violence, crisis, and the uncomfortable on a regular basis, means that they are always writing in crisis. For Fukushima, writing during global pandemic did not lead to a decline in publications because, “we all survive and live differently, and it impacts our ability to think. It impacts our ability to write and to be in community. But for some of us writing in crises is how we write.” Fukushima continues:

During the global pandemic, I began in a new role as a director of the Office of Undergraduate Research and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Reflecting on what led me to shift from a “paragraph 5 writer” during my undergraduate academic journey to scholar, there was a vital component in my experience that I see in running undergraduate research: the vital role faculty mentoring has in creating a sense of academic belonging for students. The mentorship and experiences that fostered an opportunity for me to explore what it meant to do academic research included mentoring relationships with faculty and classmates alike – collectively, they helped me to journey into academic spaces, even when it was difficult. I learned to write by writing more, I learned to enter into academic spaces by taking risks of being a part of it, all the while recognizing that these spaces were never intended for our survival. It was through the mentorship of women of color across the generations that led to my arrival into academia and sustained engagement. To foster similar support for the next generation, I created women of color academics collective as a way to create a multi-level mentor model. It now structures how I view my role and responsibility as an administrator, pedagogue, and researcher. By creating connections of the self and community through the multiple.

Similar to the narrative of Fukushima, Qi and Alvarez Gutiérrez also engage in scholarship surrounding violence and trauma. During the pandemic, their research work stalled due to the restrictions of traveling and in-person meetings in the community. While Qi was fortunate to have a group of supportive team members and academic communities (e.g., professional affiliations) to support her work, such as funding and guest lecturing via online seminars, to create a sense of belonging, Qi reflects how research that is crucial impacts “the community members positively to share ideas and engage in conversation to support each other during the unprecedented time.”

To radically alter the way institutions of higher education approach citizenship, and create belonging, requires engaging with a new ethic of care and pedagogy. In classrooms, this requires that educators foster learning and contend with students in holistic ways; including caring about what is going on in students’ lives outside academia. One way to engage students is to provide

students with reflective spaces to share their own struggles, vulnerabilities, as well as aspirations. Instead of perceiving political discussions as insecurities, we encourage and engage students and communities to think critically on the issues, struggles, and challenges faced by marginalized communities.

Enacting a radical act of care to support a multi-layered citizen requires educators' commitments to enhance students' perspectives and develop self-reflection and critical awareness about their role in the world. To care for the multi-layered citizen also includes caring for the mental wellness of our students and ourselves. As we reflect on care, we cannot ignore mental health and wellness within institutions of higher education. During the 2021-2022 academic year, most courses have been delivered in-person; however, many students continue to struggle with the pandemic and its lingering effects, including stress and mental health. As institutions grapple with the lack of or limited services available to respond to students' mental health needs, the care for faculty and staff's mental and emotional well-being is further exacerbated by classed-based resourcing. The demand on faculty is to grow the number of majors, to expedite student completion rates, but all the while our schedules are filled with unreasonable research and service expectations and not reflective of care on part of the institution.

To speak about trauma and academic exclusions is to pay attention to how professors themselves are unable to fully participate in their own classrooms, avoiding, surviving, and working through their own trauma without bringing back into the classroom ourselves. Alvarez Gutiérrez reflected on how, her parents were really sick - her mother is on dialysis and hospitalized several times, and her father had a stroke. She often travels out of state to assist with the care of her elderly parents. Fukushima had recently visited an elder, her mother's eldest sister who is living with dementia - assisting her mother in travel and has been unable to visit her father who has skin cancer. Qi reflected on her own struggle with stress, and how her students too suffered, where it was described as "chaotic." All of us experienced loss during the pandemic. As universities contend with faculty retention, central to these endeavors requires situating them in their context and understanding faculty as people whose communities are extensive, wide and complex.

Teaching with care includes the interactions between students and faculty, even virtually. Qi asked students to document their learning journey during the pandemic as a class assignment, which also allows them to reflect on their own strengths and growth during this challenging and trying time. Qi states, "I incorporated activities that allowed students to share their personal narratives using talking circles... to discuss complex topics, such as mass incarceration, systemic racism, and gender-based violence." Alvarez Gutiérrez also had to be creative and find ways to include students' experiences with the pandemic, while also being aware of the struggles that K-12 students, their families and teachers were also experiencing. Students presented their analysis using various means, including multimedia productions, podcast, narratives, testimonios and written guide for families and teachers. Alvarez Gutiérrez received positive feedback and was told, "You made me feel like I mattered, you care! Other professors are ignoring the pandemic in class, thank you!" For Fukushima, care in the classroom meant fostering student interests with research - from creative research to familiar forms in the social sciences and humanities - her students authored drafts of novels, conducted oral histories, examined court records, collaborated with her to conduct interviews and focus groups, created podcasts, and surveyed community members through community-driven research. This care also included making recommendations

for policy and practice at the institutional level, where she published university memos encouraging collaboration with undergraduate students as part of research teams (Fukushima, Agutter, and Rothwell 2022a) and campus messaging on how faculty could foster and support “collective well-being” when working with undergraduate researchers (Fukushima et al. 2022b).

To care for students means that the pedagogue not only contend with the trauma students face, but also integrate our own humanity as educators who are also facing tremendous pressures with who we are in the classroom. And to leverage our roles in leadership, and wherever we may be positioned with some level of institutional power, to enact forms of care through collective well-being. By committing to the collective, all academic citizens, even those most financially, socially, or politically marginalized are cared for. To conclude we move towards reflecting on how we create belonging where trauma breaks our sense of connection to ourselves and community, to address trauma, one avenue is through creating connection.

Academics and students alike are not passive, and we have the ability to organize and create a sense of community, even if that community is connected across time and space. As communities took to the streets and their capitols to mobilize for Black Lives Matter, immigrant rights, and gender-rights during the pandemic, and even before, we recognize that resistance that is always happening. To be in coalition with other people, specifically those who are oppressed, is to commit to a decolonized form of witnessing (Fukushima 2019b; Lugones 1987).

Communities organize despite lacking resources. Therefore, to conclude we offer exemplars from our own work and lives where we have witnessed transformative ways of creating belonging even in the face of hostility, violence and erasure. To create coalition is to create a sense of belonging for people, it is the endeavor of the multi-layered citizen who wills to exist.

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