Education for Information -1 (2024) 1–23 1
DOI 10.3233/EFI-240082
IOS Press
CORRECTED PROOF

Ancestral calls: What if learning is bearing witness? And other derivatives of June Beer

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This paper aims to engage readers with artist-activist-scholar-librarian June Beer of Nicaragua via a close reading of her poetry while tracing connections of field-specific library pedagogical practices that may be drawn from the ancestral calls evident within her work. Her geographic location informs her embedded community role as artist and librarian as well as her socio-cultural connection to her ancestral lineages. Using a close reading of Beer's poetry, this article gives power to the language of poetry, and aims to draw conclusions of poetic form which identifies ancestral calls, and may be applied to library and pedagogical practice. Informed by Beer's subversive work of poetics, activisms, and artmaking, sentipensante pedagogy, storytelling, place, and time, this article aims to reveal that within her writings are embedded useful tools for library and pedagogical practice, as informed not via traditional and normative librarianship, but via ancestral teachings, revelatory within the poetic articulations.

Keywords: Sentipensante, critical pedagogy, Creole poetry, June Beer, Nicaragua, SoTL

I can't tell my future so I'm going to tell my past. – Ma Rainey

1. Method

The method is reading, closely.

We're paying close attention to the words here.

We are reading with our whole selves in a sub-distant proximity to the words on the screen or the page. We are reading to receive. We are noting the pace, the flow, and considering the intention of the author. We are reading more than once, referring back to points we have passed over. And inside of the reading, we are listening, not only to the imagined voice that erupts when the words enter our psyche, but to our own voice, and the insistent memories and understandings that may creep in as we read the words. We are listening to ourselves and the voice that utters the words on the screen, or the page. We are open to the interference that takes place when we read the words. We are reading slowly, then quickly, then starting over. We are taking in the stories, the voices behind the stories, and inside of all of that process, we are bearing witness.

The method for this article is a close reading or textual analysis of two produced works by Nicaraguan-born writer and artist, June Beer in order to identify applicable practices to our pedagogical praxis and knowledge-formations. To get started, you may stop here and forge ahead directly to the appendix which will holds the poems for which this article is based.

Welcome back.

We are entering into a close reading of Beer's work in order to identify the ancestral call – hear it, learn from it, and possibly even, practice utilizing it ourselves, as educators. This is attempted with acknowledgement that it, the method, will likely be misinterpreted, disregarded, or viewed as primitive, unempirical and useful only as a form of creative writing at best, or if respected in form, will be considered biography or ethnography with little application to library and information science or education. It is from that place of disavowal that the article is written, before it exists, up out of its absence, primarily because it is reliant upon ancestral dialog as a core practice: mine as the writer, yours as the reader, and the ancestral calls of our subject: June Beer, for whom we will collectively receive through this re-search journey, as an ancestor herself. An acknowledgment of ancestral connection therewithin, will add the required layer of understanding to fully receive the teachings of this artist-librarian-poet through her writings. In this close reading, Beer illustrates practical application of perspective, care, experiential learning, fluidity of knowledge, awareness of variations of knowledge, balance, and emotional connection in her storytelling, and attention to place and time.

In "Seven Possible Futures for the Black Feminist Artist," Alexis Pauline Gumbs remarks upon a variant of potential futures in a lyrical homage that considers the connection survival and death to the life of a black feminist artist. It begins, "one (1) they began to study the death of the black artist" and continues to name the persistent materiality of the body: hair, eyes, veins, blood, skin, all juxtaposed against birth, bodies of water, borders and reflective surfaces. Gumbs introduces the ancestors from two angles: first via the gaze of the onlooker, "they wanted to know if there was physiological weight to the common perception that their ancestor portals were enlarged, and if so, what swelling, what inflammation bore the evidence of that transit . . . (Gumbs, 2016). The second instance, an embrace by the black feminist artist,

> the language they derived from it was beautiful, i certainly never could have thought it up. it was not an abstract language where arbitrary markings were assigned to sounds and those sounds meant words just symbolically with no felt relation, (because how could they ever know how this sounded? how could they ever know how this felt . . . it meant everything at once, it meant once there was water, it meant once there was birth and possible birth, it meant there were ancestors and that someone had survived (Gumbs, 2016).

The use of ancestors in the remainder of this article is not a euphemistic consideration, but instead a tangible and lived consideration if we are to remark upon a new way to approach knowing, understanding, teaching, and learning. Gumbs uses a multitude of standpoints in the form of seven possible futures, allowing the learner to approach knowledge formation from various frameworks, some of which include the act of passing through thresholds or entering into points of understanding. The possibility that one of these thresholds may include ancestral connection will be explored in the readings of Beer.

Additionally, our teaching and learning and engagement work within the field of

library science incorporates Critical Race Theory and Critical Pedagogies. Critical Race Theory teaches us that Race is a social construct, Racism is normal, encourages interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, and asks us to center BIPOC experiences while critiquing dominant ideologies (Leung & López-McKnight, 2021). Critical pedagogical praxis for Latin American Studies, as with the work of all subject specialists, may begin with a centering of historical context to a broader global understanding, considering implications of place and space, or less broadly speaking, land and sovereignty, to then bring us to understandings for how we reclaim our land, our culture, our language, right here, where we stand within the borders of US-based pedagogical teachings, the standpoint from which this article is written. A move toward an expanded pedagogy is also a move towards "home" an ancestral home for which we may adopt if we follow the practices of women whose identities are centered in the fight for sovereign rights, human rights, language rights, with the urgency of genocide as the sole alternative to this reclamation.

2. Referencing June Beer

June Beer is internationally acclaimed for her work as a painter, capturing in what has been named, "primitive" style, portraits of black women within the landscape of Bluefields, Nicaragua. Her images countered the absence of a black women's gaze and life experience in the cultural milieu at the time, which included domestic settings, mothering, and landscape portraiture, all of which aimed to capture and translate artistic renderings of black women in the region. Her work was uncovered by Latin American curators and art historians who aimed to highlight women's work in Latin America, a focus of the Latin American art field in the 1970s which foregrounded feminist perspectives, including the heralding of Nicaraguan women poets in the 1960s, such as Michéle Najlis with "Armed Wind" (Blanco, 1987). In addition to being a visual artist, Beer was also an active supporter of the Sandinista movement, holding her work in conversation with the national move to denounce, "President Anastasio ("Tachito") Somoza Debayle's National Guard of subjecting innocent peasants to 'inhuman' abuse 'ranging from torture and rape to summary execution' during the government's two-year drive against leftist guerrillas" known as Sandinistas ("Somoza's Reign of Terror," 1977, p. 29). As a singular part of her cultural identity for what it meant to be in Nicaragua at the time of her life, as any citizen who had an interest in human rights would side with the cause against the government led by Somoza, a conservative and cruel leader known to equivocate his people as "uneducated oxen," (Lernoux, 1980, pp. 85, 90) the illiteracy rate of the Nicaraguan peasant at "70 percent of 2.5 million Nicaraguans" (Wolin, 1979, p. 19) had little recourse under Somoza rule. Where cultural interest in literature and arts was retained for the elites, according to Padre Ernesto Cardenal, Minister of Culture, "with the revolution, culture is now of all the people. There has been a democratization of culture and that's the difference" (Martin, 1989, p. 128). The

reception of an artist as a visual storyteller was a chosen political stance that held significant value in a community struggling with literacy, and newly encouraged to embrace cultural "change of consciousness" (Martin, 1989, p. 128).

Shortly after the Sandinista victory on 19 July 1979, Beer began working at the newly formed Ministry of Culture in Managua where she was tasked with making an inventory of books on the Caribbean coast and heading the Bluefields library, where she worked from 1979 to 1983 as its director (Jo, 2016, p. 225; Roof, 2016, p. 16). Throughout her time as a librarian and up to her untimely passing in 1986, Beer continued to produce visual art and took up poetry as a labor of regional and communal love. She has been noted as a self-taught artist and the "first female poet" from Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, writing in Nicaraguan Creole, English, and Spanish (Alexandra, 2022). Her work in both poetry and art explored themes of Black identity, feminist empowerment, and her local environment, but there is not much research on Beer's work as a librarian. Her station did develop additional libraries across Bluefields, and her collection development strategies were integral to a grander mission for keeping the culture of Bluefields alive for generations. Though there are mentions of her collection development, weeding practices, and advocacy (including her exodus of romance novels), there is more to learn from the early development of Bluefields libraries.

Beer's life has been captured by both feminist and librarian scholars as an artist and separately, as a poet. Beer was identified in Black, feminist, bisexual, poet, June Jordan's chapter, "Nicaragua: Why I had to Go There," as part of her 1981 collection, *Moving Towards Home: Political Essays*. Jordan describes the heat, the sparsity, and swift militancy of the women, that "many of the Nicaraguans are poets. I had to go there" (Jordan, 1989, p. 152). During a welcome ceremony in Bluefields, held in her honor as an invited poet, Jordan meets Beer and describes her as "the most distinguished artist of the Atlantic coast" (Jordan, 162)." The Black painter and poet June Beer, describes to Jordan why she had been imprisoned and says, "In the revolution I was too old to be militant. But my mouth was not too old" (Jordan, 162). Jordan captures the essence of Beer's choice to speak, through literature in the form of poetry, and as a visual artist, solidifying a need to respond to the injustices that exist for Black people in Nicaragua and for women inside of the home. Beer also "wondered aloud to June Jordan whether she would live to grow old" further cementing the gravity of the "dangerous revolutionary situation of the Afro-Caribbean community in Bluefields" (Gumbs, 2010, p. 46). Jordan's choice to highlight the work of Beer in a 1981 publication, during her time as a librarian and only very shortly after the revolution, sheds light on the impact Beer held for women revolutionary art-makers in the region.

It is the study of Beer's poetry that alludes to the state of literacy of the Nicaraguan community, during a literacy campaign (Cardenal & Miller, 1982; Deiner, 1981; Hanemann, 2006), that directly after Somoza's rule, "some 400,000 Nicaraguans mastered elementary reading and writing skills, studying their history and revolution in the process" (Miller, 2018). Beer's response to storytelling as a function of art and

poetry, allowed for the manipulation of and craft in language to further canonize the existence of the variety of communities that fell within the diasporic blackness of the Nicaraguan peasantry, suddenly a ruling class. Not a single monolithic community, Black Nicaraguan community members in particular and for which Beer was a part, could be represented in a variety of languages. Jordan's detailing of her journeying to Nicaragua included a demographic overview that was intertwined with the absorption of distinctive language: "27,000 Black Nicaraguans living on the Atlantic coast of the country. For them, English is a first language. Also fluent in Spanish, they are fully bilingual citizens who reached those shores …" (Jordan, 1989, p. 156). The language that emerged from some Black Nicaraguans was like for many others in the region a Creole derivative and socio-cultural identity: Garifuna, a tongue of the afro-indigenous and colonized, being of these many dialects. Beer as a Black Nicaraguan aimed to reach "all races in a love poem to Blacks, Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas and Mestizos as worthy children of Sandino" (Roof, 2016, p. 60).

Beer's contribution to the literary landscape is not only a cultural recognition and documentation of Black and Indigenous lives, but also embraces the creole language as central to the reclamation of these lives. She uses language as a tool crafting for an audience of listeners and readers, but also stewards of the revolution, and architects of a post-revolutionary future. In a close reading of two poems by Beer, *La Parcela* and *Vacacionej en Cornailan*, curated in a collection edited by Zoë Anglesey, with translations by Yolanda Blanco, Beer introduces the reader to key functions of the written word as representative of her sociocultural and political standpoint that was responsive to and in direct opposition of a totalitarian government wherein teaching and learning was deemed illegal. From these poems, as will be outlined in this article, Beer provides a practitioner's blueprint providing insight into instructional practice foregrounding afro-indigenous ways of knowing through reclamation.

3. Pedagogical practice

Beer's work was a tool for militaristic uprising and served as community documentation. In this close reading, Beer's work may also be viewed as a tool for pedagogy. Pedagogical practice in libraries has been interwoven with academic frameworks in the scholarship of teaching and learning or SoTL, a new paradigm for the scholarship on teaching, produced primarily by educators who research their own teaching practice. Since its tracing back to 1990, SoTL has amassed over tens of thousands of articles revealing the foundational need for educators to engage in scholarly inquiry on teaching practice (Major & Braxton, 2020). Of the many conversations surrounding SoTL, recent contributions have included decolonial contexts (Gariepy & Bjartveit, 2023), including whole convenings of scholarship from the 'global south' with an eye towards indigenous forms of knowing, or place-based teaching and learning.

With publications such as *SoTL in the South*, a journal dedicated to the scholarship of teaching and learning in the 'global south,' forms of scholarship that center framings

outside of colonial output have proliferated the academic landscape and entered classrooms. Because scholarly production is a colonial enterprise, it is the decoupling of colonial frameworks from ancestrally grounded ways of knowing that enables a re-search of the sort produced in this paper. Generating a teaching practice that focuses on ancestrally-grounded ways of knowing may be approached as listening in the classroom, encouraging disobedience in the classroom, implementation of another widely adopted pedagogical framework: sensing/thinking pedagogy, or sentipensante, a pedagogical framework that embraces wholeness, reflexivity, cultural multiplicity, inner wisdom, and social justice.

Ancestral connection operates in the realm of internal knowledge, as does sentipensante when partnered with metaliteracy. This internal reaching may coalesce with liminality, where learning is challenging, unsettling, disturbing, and often where a learner may become stuck against a threshold for which surpassing may become transformative, integrative, irreversible, bounded, and troublesome (Jacobson & Friedman, 2019; Mackey & Jacobson, 2011, 2014). Sensing and thinking pedagogies, threshold concepts, and many other pedagogical frameworks used in the information profession utilize dispositions that encourage value systems, inclination, resistance, consciousness raising, realization, motivation, and questioning, to name a few, in the classroom (ACRL, 2015; Goodman & Godbey, 2023; Nataraj & Siqueiros, 2022; Schroeder & Cahoy, 2010). Educators who incorporate active learning with instruction that foreground sentipensante via ancestral connection may activate these dispositions and encourage nuanced connections for information transference and effective information literacy.

Within sentipensante Rendon appoints us to utilize six dialectical spaces: Intuition, Subject, Contemplation, Human Community, Humanism, and Personal Development Outcome while outlining hegemonic culture as playing out in the classroom as seven agreements:

1. the agreement to privilege intellectual/rational knowing
2. the agreement of separation
3. the agreement of competition
4. the agreement of perfection
5. the agreement of monoculturalism
6. the agreement to privilege outer work
7. the agreement to avoid self-examination

Contrastingly, the sentipensante seven agreements is a call to action that ask us to unlearn and agree to new ways of being and co-existing with our students in learning environments. As educators, we can instead agree to:

1. work with diverse ways of knowing in the classroom
2. embrace connectedness, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity
3. engage diverse learning strategies (i.e., competitive and collaborative learning, and individual-based and community-based learning) in the classroom
4. be open and flexible about being grounded in knowing and not knowing

5. highlight multiculturalism and respect for diverse cultures
6. balance our personal and professional lives with work, rest, and replenishment
7. take time for self-reflexivity (Rendón et al., 2023; Rendón & Nepo, 2014)

As described by Forbes and Bowers in their 2018 book chapter, "Social Justice, Sentipensante Pedagogy, and Collaboration: The Role of Research Consultations in Developing Critical Communities," their interpretation of sentipensante on library and information practice in consultations and reference interactions, was directly correlative to the development of learning communities for which pedagogical goals would "address not only the intellectual needs of students, but also their social, emotional, and spiritual growth" (244). They go on to say, "holistic, sentipensante research consultations engender compassion, collaboration, and reflective engagement with critical information literacy and ultimately foster the development of a critical community of learners for social justice research and action" (Bowers & Forbes, 2018).

Ancestral connection as a mobilizing strategy (for library practice) and for teaching and learning at large is relational, responsive, and centered in engagement. Learner and the instructor have interwoven positionalities, and may be perceived as a single body, replacing teaching and learning wholly with engagement. The Oxford English Dictionary defines engagement as "the fact of being entangled" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). It is attachment, prepossession, a moral or legal obligation, a formal promise, agreement, undertaking. What does it look like when we investigate head on, the role of the classroom and its practices of engagement, participatory learning, and apply critical information literacy? Threshold concepts reveal that when we aim to actively engage with learners from their experience, we are thereby pushing them up against the boundaries of their own comfort and our own as educators. If aiming to attend with a liminal space, the push for "affect" may draw the tension required for liminality. In other words, what does a learner "feel" in the classroom? How do we get from a place of learned and pre-assigned classroom structures to ancestral connection? Why are we reaching to our ancestors? What do our ancestral connections have to do with our learning? And how does this liminal state take us there?

4. Ancestral calls

Following a mention of sentipensante, this paper acts as another "shift in perspective at best, or at the very least, a rearticulation" as it attests that engagement with an artist-activist-librarian of Central America with a focus on June Beer of Nicaragua, may act as a blueprint from a "place of knowledge to a new space where information lives" (Smith-Cruz, 2018, p. 277). I intend to illustrate what we can learn from Beer's work practice as a librarian and activist, while tracing connections of her library practices from her poetry. Geographic location and her embedded community role as an artist and librarian is central to her cultural connection to ancestral calls. This

Table 1
A remapping of the seven sentipensante agreements to Beer's *La Parcela* and *Vacacionej en Cornailan*

Sentipensante agreement	*La Parcela*	*Vacacionej en Cornailan*
1. Work with diverse ways of knowing in the classroom	Perspective – "He seh de loan sure"	Perspective – look back behine "im/an 'e tink umbrella was walkin by itself
2. Embrace connectedness, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity	Care – "a half to try fa dem"	Care – "ah was so afraid . . . /dat grampa had dem cut down"
3. Engage diverse learning strategies	Experiential Learning – Maybe we euda boro money fron de bank	Experiential Learning – "Grampa sen me to de shop in front"
4. Be open and flexible about being grounded in knowing and not knowing	Fluidity of knowledge – "John, me fraid we no unnastan dem ting"	Fluidity of Knowledge – "Ah don't rememba is wat I gone to buy"
5. Highlight multiculturalism and respect for diverse cultures	Awareness of variations of knowledge – ". . . wit a slipry smile"	Awareness on variations of knowledge – "so ah scare 'im"
6. Balance our personal and professional lives with work, rest, and replenishment	Balance – "dem shud go to school."	Balance – "meh mada sen me Corn Island/to spend vacation
7. Take time for self-reflexivity	Emotional connection – "oh laad how we gon mek it."	Emotional connection – "ah was so afraid of de savage wind"

article enters into the under-researched documented history of June Beer's subversive work of poetics. In addition to biographical elements which are meant to provide necessary context-dependent findings of her work, this overview pulls from two poems that aim to encapsulate a re-search of the artistic renderings of this influential librarian with an aim to support a new lens to the counter-story that we may connect to reframing our pedagogical praxes.

The stories inside of *La Parcela* and *Vacacionej en Cornailan* demand the reader or listener to come close and engage, incorporating elements of the seven agreements of sentipensante. In each poem, we may identify the following passages as examples for how we may link Beer's poetry to a sentipensante agreement.

5. Re-frame/re-search

In addition to sentipensante agreements, which have been outlined above, traits that appear in Beer's works include perspective, care, experiential learning, fluidity of knowledge, awareness on variations of knowledge, balance, and emotional connection. These elements of Beer's poetry have pedagogical practice intertwined with storytelling to her community of readers in the language of their kin, with the acknowledgement of their place and time as post-revolutionary. As a result, additional reframing illustrates key components that Beer's writing reveals.

- Storytelling – as the method for which information is transferred, with an associated narrative, requiring a protagonist, acknowledging the multiplicities of characters, and their respective standpoints as structural. Storytelling also includes the use of voice, narrative, and language in its multiplicities. Beer's use of language in her storytelling pressures the use of the common tongue, with words as recognizable as images, and use of culturally phonetic devices to connect with audience.
- Place and Time – as connected to intergenerational knowledge, before and after, memory, negotiating linearities, seasonal as is interwoven with crops, farmland, and sovereignty, as is represented by the introduction and acknowledgement of colonial dichotomies that limit access to basic needs and prosperity; as is relative to embodiment of place and situating oneself within; fully enmeshed within economics and value.

How do we as educators consider the storytelling coupled with place and time in our teaching practice? Whether it be how we contextualize the information provided, or how we may engage learners to curate their own understandings, it is through Beer's exampling that we may identify a formulaic approach to pedagogical engagement.

6. Storytelling

Storytelling has been proven to evoke a strong neurological response, inducing unavoidable somatic experiences for which our brains produce the stress hormone

cortisol, especially when receiving the tense moments in a story (Monarth, 2014). Storytelling also emits the release of oxytocin, which may promote connection and empathy (Van Cappellen et al., 2016). Evidence doesn't exist to identify the experiences of Beer's audience, but her poetry's storytelling format implies an intention to provide an experiential response from her audience, initiating storytelling as an act of resistance. Beer publicly resists a governmental regime that aimed to divest citizens of basic human rights, including access to education. This examination of her resistance stories overlays her act of storytelling with the act of political engagement, thereby not defining her poetry as solely an artform, but also as a tool for educational empowerment. Sium and Ritskes contextualize storytelling as resistance work in their introduction to a 2013 issue of *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* journal. They directly relate stories as tools against decolonization, with full acknowledgement that the telling of these stories as symmetrical to resistance work is not widely received in mainstream scholarship. They state,

> While dominant scholarship might push aside methods such as autoethnography or traditional storytelling as not rigorous enough or as 'identity politics', the experiences of those who live out decolonization are integral to the integrity of the movement, grounding it to the material realities of the people whose lives bear the scars of colonialism and the long histories of resistance and triumph. (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. III).

Unapologetically, as editors of this journal issue, Sium and Ritskes clarify that "stories and storytelling are political, always more than personal narratives (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, pp. V–VI). Another way to define a political motive, analysis, or distinction within storytelling is to define such type of story-making as the counterstory.

The counterstory has been coined as a critical race theory tenet which Solorzano and Bernal identify as a methodology, introduced by Richard Delgado in 1989 who used a methodology called counterstorytelling. Scholars Solorzano and Bernal (2001) and Delgado (1989) argued that counterstory is "both a technique of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse – the majoritarian story" (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). In this description of the counterstory, Beer elicits this method in her literary contributions by the act of their very own creations, and then, within the text, providing formulaic examples for what counterstory looks like from a Central American – Nicaraguan – Creole – female perspective.

Use of the counterstory inside of the intersectional consideration of racial injustice was met with additional backlash. The counterstory has been critiqued by legal scholars who discredit any basis of law with reliance on storytelling or narrative. Richard Posner a Chief Judge of the Supreme Court of Appeals and Senior lecturer of the University of Chicago, for example, published a book review in defense of whiteness, stating,

> What is most arresting about critical race theory is that . . . it turns its back on the Western tradition of rational inquiry, forswearing analysis for narrative. Rather than marshal logical arguments and empirical data, critical race theorists tell stories – fictional, science-fictional, quasi-fictional, autobiographical, anecdotal – designed to expose the pervasive and debilitating racism of America today. By repudiating reasoned argumentation, the storytellers reinforce stereotypes about the intellectual capacities of nonwhites (Posner, 1997).

Juxtaposing legalese with humanities-based scholarship is an issue of language, and many have sought to respond to Posner's dismissal of CRT (Hayman Jr, 1998; Rosiek, 2019; Rubenfeld, 2001). Since this paper aims to supply a close reading to Beer's work, application of this method of literary analysis, to Posner's quote above could illustrate Posner's own naivete on the impact of stories for which he translates as "repudiating reasoned argumentation." Defining the story as unreasoned because it is not rooted in Western tradition implicates Posner as rooted in Western tradition, and thereby disinterested in grasping the impact of stories outside of his own colonial mindset. Sium and Ritskes attest that it is due to colonial metanarratives that indigenous storytelling must also be a "remapping project," precisely because as illustrated in Posner's critique, "in colonial metanarratives, the colonial holds full narrative power. The colonial controls the national story, which characters are introduced, and how they are constructed" (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. VI).

The counterstory, instead, offers additional perspectives, aiming to actively include the voices of the dispossessed, unheard, invisibilized, and silenced. Posner's definition of story as both fictional, autobiographical, and anecdotal are tells of his limitation in perspective, as harboring only the angle of whiteness and western knowledge; to Posner, a black woman's story will always be a fiction, illogical, and a reinforcement of some stereotype of the Western ear. To confirm this truism, the story is often a conversation, requiring an audience, for which has to be a willing and participatory audience – one that Posner has opted out of. An example of the story is embedded in ancient oral traditions. For example, literary critic, Maggie Sale, details Toni Morrison's call-and-response technique:

> Antiphony or call and response, function, improvisation, and audience performance can all be thought of as part of the group or communal nature of art. This theory of art is interactive, process-oriented, and concerned with innovation, rather than mimetic, product-oriented, or static. Call-and-response patterns provide a basic model that depends and thrives upon audience performance and improvisation, which work together to ensure that the art will be meaningful or functional to the community (Sale, 1992, p. 41).

As a communal force, as a communicative tool, and as a device for amplification, the storytelling form requires a storyteller and an audience, directing some to listen, others to bear witness. This galvanizing dynamic enables an ancient indigenous tradition to not only transfer information but to galvanize. "Stories are not only

agentic and individual but they are communal sharings that bind communities together spiritually and relationally" (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). The impact of story is a re-search that produces knowledge to and of specific communities and has the ability to lead revolutions.

Counterstory is used as a method within the literary tradition, namely in formats of memoir, poetry, auto-biographical writing, or any type of creative non-fiction counter-narrative for which a manifesto may be stamped as a reimagining. This kind of retooling of one's own memory, conducted as a formulaic trope for women of color writing throughout the Caribbean, Central, South, and North Americas, and other spaces and places of the formerly enslaved and colonized resulting in a diaspora of multi-lingual peoples, still healing from traumas and modern-day political responses to divestment, the counternarrative via counterstory can be a collective re-search, a reclamation, and even a space for healing. Co-editors David Luis Glisch-Sánchez, and Nic Rodriguez-Villafañe conceived of a collection of writings titled, *Sana, Sana: Latinx Pain and Radical Visions for Healing and Justice*, from Glisch-Sánchez's interview project of queer and trans Latinx's experiences on their encounters with social harm and learning. The narratives they created around pain, trauma, and healing were representative of the title, "Sana, Sana" which is a phrase pulled from childhood affirmations in Latinx cultures aiming to provide "a calm but firm command to heal," and that in fact, "healing is a technology" (Glisch-Sánchez & Rodriguez-Villafañe, 2023, p. 8).

Counterstory and storytelling is connected to healing also because it is wholly reflexive, reaching to familial sources as the balms for potential healing. In *Sana Sana* the phrase is known as "a common refrain given to children when they get hurt" and is offered by a familial agent of safety such as a kiss on a wound may secure any ailment back to its rightful state (Glisch-Sánchez & Rodriguez-Villafañe, 2023, p. 8). Counterstory as healing or as Sana Sana is resonant in Aja Y. Martínez's creative writing piece, titled, "Counterstory as Catharsis: Alejandra's Deepest Wound." The narrative piece ends with a poem: "Counterstory is/this storyteller's praxis for/radical/healing and/justice. . . . Counterstory is vision – /it is seeing, re-seeing, differently seeing, truly seeing/this story" (Martínez, 2023).

Beer as Storyteller

In overviewing a curriculum for library information science, Nicole Cooke defines stories in respect to their community impacts and authorial intentions: stories can be either stock stories, concealed stories, or resistance stories. In these demarcations, resistance stories, "like concealed stories, they buck against stock stories, but they also highlight great injustices" (Cooke, 2016, p. 339). The significance of these variations of story allow learners to get to the other side of learning, or pass through the threshold, where we eventually have emerging/transforming stories, and new storytellers.

The learned experience of post-Revolution Nicaraguans in Bluefields was heavily dependent upon generative and localized educational practices for the creation of

their new society. This is investigated further in a master's thesis by junior scholar, Thelma Lucila Patnett where she conducted eight interviews with Afro-Nicaraguan women between the ages of 18 and 60 of Bluefields. Patnett aimed to "use storytelling and testimony" to "wedge out overshadowed narratives of Afro Nicaraguan women's engagement in the time of the revolution and place Afro Nicaraguan histories beside the overarching mestiza history" (Patnett, 2018, p. 2). This quest led to revelations of transformation, for which connections to literacy activated these revolutionaries. One interviewee, named Ms. Carla, mentions Beer in her recalling of Creole and Garifuna women's realities in Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua:

> Ms. Carla acknowledged the lack of black visibility within the history of Nicaraguan Sandinista revolution in saying, "Here in the Coast, we had June Beer, a poet, talking about blackness and the revolution (*in favor* of the FSLN movement). Yet she is not the face or mention of the two [revolutionary or feminist] women's movements" (Patnett, 2018, p. 56).

Attesting to the erased presence of Beer impacts our knowledge of her, but does not diminish her educational impact of the time. As Ms. Carla selects the names for whom she chooses to pay homage inside of this documentary recalling, Patnett as the oral historian heeds the ancestral call in her re-telling of this memory of Beer as storyteller.

> Ms. Carla's mention of June Beer calls upon the memory of other black women taking part and supporting the Sandinista revolution. By presenting June Beer's story, as a prominent black figure, Ms. Carla designates a position for Beer in the history of the Sandinista revolution. In producing a case of "corrective history" of sorts Ms. Carla portrays Beer, as a forgotten and influential woman well-known for her art and talents yet so suppressed from any associations with the Sandinista revolution (Patnett, 2018, p. 57).

In this memory work, we receive a glimpse of Beer's storytelling impact. We witness the act of storytelling in the narrator's voice as self-reflexive, as they each embody a recalling. The poems allow the reader to interpret variations of perspective and vantage points as a strategy for acknowledging diverse ways of knowing, which disable or enable someone to move.

In *Vacacionej en Cornailan*, or *Corn Island Vacation*, we read a story of a seven-year-old little girl, the narrator, who recalls her first fright as she scares a shopkeeper as a result of her own concealment, imposed from her own fear or inability to show her face. Even as she takes the direction of her elder grandfather, the story turns against the narrator, without a happy ending, seemingly at the fault of this small child, too small to shop, or be seen outside of an umbrella. In *Vacacionej en Cornailan*, Beer teaches lessons of family intervention, societal misunderstandings, and knowledge formation, highlighting the limitation of access. We only know what we can see.

In "La Parcela" or "Chunka Faam," we read a story of a family struggling to make ends meet, and taking a risk of going to the bank to support their growing children

who need money for school. The debt accumulated was too great. What seemed like a manipulated plan from the start of the loan, the family loses their farm. In *La Parcela*, Beer teaches a class of people about the trappings of colonialism through predatory loans, sourcing its point of entry.

7. Place and time

From the first line of Beer's poem, "Corn Island Vacation," she includes four characters bound up in time: the narrator, the narrator's seven-year-old self, the narrator's mother, and the narrator's grandfather:

> "Wen ah had seven years/meh mada sen me Corn Island/to spend vacation at meh grampa"

If we assume the narrator is the author, Beer herself, knowledge sharing and communicating to her own community, we read then, time as cyclical as she recalls a memory from when she was seven years old. This recalling of a childhood memory speaks to an intergenerational understanding of the world, as she intends to make the poem's protagonist an adult's reliance upon her childhood, a time for which knowledge seeking is optimized and teaching and learning is foregrounded. Within this particular memory, she is engaged with her grandfather. The reader can assume that at the time of the recalling, the author as an adult, grandpa would be an ancestor. The reader is given additional context of the relationship between the child and her grampa from the first section for which grampa alters the earth to respond to her fear of the wind, exhibiting a deep love and dedication for which the reader immediately understands as familial and ancestral love. She writes:

> ah was so afraid of de savage wind
> which bend de palms
> so near de eart
> dat grampa had dem cut down

The reader may also extrapolate a positionality of innocence coupled with unknowingness. But what is present here in Beer's connection of the power of the earth as well as that of her grandfather, is that each of them were able to reconstruct the environment, whereas she was only engaged in fear. Is it the case that an adult man would alter the earth on behalf of the cries of a child? Would fear merit the cutting down of a tall palm tree, or would it be that this cutting was some otherworldly political or economic outcome for which the child would have been unaware? Beer responds to this question indirectly with a pitch to the heavens, when she ends section one with:

> Laad ah neva see before or afta
> palms quite so tall, maybe
> because ah wasn seven before
> nor eva again

Placing us back in time, "before or afta" and "before/nor eva again" and at the start with her age and a recalling, Beer foregrounds the relevance of time in connection to ancestor, the environment as it relates to crops and climate, but also as it relates to power. Beer acknowledges that not only was her perspective skewed, but that she would never have that same perspective again. This could also be an admission of the trees having been altered over the course of her life, losing the lush and robust plentitude of a past political climate. Many writers apply these devices of allegory or metaphor into their work to connect the reader to a broader theme, however, the work of Beer as is the case for many African diasporic writers, is distinctly a connection to a power that is ancestral. In her essay, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison describes the ancestor as revealed also throughout her text in a way as she describes the Chorus: "I've gotten, all of nature thinking and feeling and watching and responding to the action going on in *Tar Baby*, so that they are in the story: the trees hurt, fish are afraid, clouds report, and the bees are alarmed" (Morrison, 2021, p. 20). If we apply a Chorus, or those who bear witness to the ancestral story as an element of these works, then it may offer clarity on the positionality of a learner.

The characters of "Chunka Faam" are picninny (children), John, Mary, a banker with a slippery smile, and Mr. Wilson, the loan officer. In "Chunka Faam," time is revealed using the very first four lines to place us inside of the farm for which the story takes place, enumerating the crops, and situating the normalized plentitude of their yield over a continuous period of time, with seasonal production:

> Mango, rosaaple, cashu,
> lime, plum, breadfruit,
> cassava, coco, dashin,
> yampi, coconut, plaantin
> a little a dis a little a dat
> we go fron year to year so.

This normalization is timeless, and yet embedded in a continual flow of life and livelihood. Connected to sustenance and the upholding of their community, the need for the children to go to school poses this farm life as a conflicting one when enmeshed with the western way of life. This story includes Black Wata Criek, the tide for which the farm feeds, but which is separate from the farm, and unable to yield the items needed for the children to go to school; the farm cannot grow "Book, pencil, pants, shuts, *shoes* –" In this story, there is no solution. Instead, there is the comparison of years of labor and normalcy to "15 days" for which all things could be lost, in an instant.

Note that there is no direct ancestor in this story. The narrator is the protagonist but not the author, because the narrator is "Mary" whose partner is "John" – two names that are meant to act as two representations of colonized citizens, describing the structural stages of displacement. The narrator tells her story in hindsight, replaying the moments leading up to the loss of her family farm with no recourse other than the acknowledgement that there was a lack of understanding shared between the two of

them: "John, me fraid we no unnastan dem ting," that the system is orchestrated by lies: "But wen we gone to de bank/only halkf wat we ass, we get," and was set up for them to fail: "a program foar/peeple like you."

Different than other writings by Beer, and images for which the protagonist is inside of a position of power, or knowingness, the defeat present in this poem is intentional. The absence of the ancestor teaches its own lesson. As Morrison denotes, "... if we don't keep in touch with the ancestor that we are, in fact, lost ... When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself" (Morrison, 2021, p. 22) The story Beer tells in "Chunka Faam," which translator, Yolanda Blanco, translates in Spanish to "La Parcela" or "The Plot," is a story of death, an exact killing, an intentional murder. Beer is asking the reader to bear witness to the formula for genocide, because the picninny cannot survive and the "laad in heven" cannot save them. The narrator, then, as the protagonist of such a story for which the family does not survive, not the mother or her children, identifies the narrator herself as the ancestor, guiding the community of readers, as if to say, here is how it happened to me, to her, to all of the Mary's, in no time at all, they took what we had, and set it so that we did it (to) ourselves: it is a battle cry and a tool for mobilization.

Morrison reminds us that there is a potential method for evaluating literature as Black literature, and that this may be the presence of the ancestor:

> ... it seems to me interesting to evaluate Black literature on what the writer does with the presence of an ancestor. Which is to say a grandfather as in Ralph Ellison, or a grandmother as in Toni Cade Bambara, or a healer as in Bambara or Henry Dumas. There is always an elder there. And these ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom (Morrison, 2021, p. 21).

8. Conclusion

At the center of both "Corn Island Vacation" and "Chunka Faam" are the points of inertia that set the stories in motion. Each of these stories include false imperatives: that education should cost money and that safety is possible, or that it can be found in a thing called vacation.

As educators, instructors, teachers, and those of us on the journey of shared knowledge and its formation, we can do the work of furthering the teachings of Beer, using her literary practice as pedagogical praxis. With the addition of sentipensante agreements or any other pedagogical praxis that intends to foreground multiplicities in ways of knowing, we have a roadmap for engagement with learners that includes ancestral connection as a method, storytelling as an entry point, and place and time as central to context building.

The task of the educator can be revealed in pulling lessons from afro-indigenous writers and artists, because their works are directly responsive to forced destruction

and erasure, and it is through that lens that their messages stretch outside of the confines of their stations, sharing with the world new modes of learning through resistance stories.

When evaluating the work of Beer, this article employs the learner and instructor to consider one single question: what would it look like to apply ancestral connection to pedagogical practice? The answer is to return to the principles and frameworks that we already apply in the field of knowledge formation, information science, and scholarship of teaching and learning. Responding to the ancestral call requires a reflexive classroom experience. The call includes storytelling with a use of language that communicates a political positionality that may evoke our own relationship to the colonial state we are in as learners and educators. The call also includes groundedness in place and time, that troublesome state of colonization, naming it as land-based and continual. Each of these pedagogical shifts may bring us all to a liminal state, heeding, from that place, the ancestral call.

One final example to conclude, this homage and example, is a 2023 poem from Trung M. Nguyễn, titled, "Deadlines/Dead-Lines/Đét-Lai. Đét-Lai/Dead-Lines/Deadlines" which asks us, in our scholarly practice, and in our positions as educators to reconsider how we include time in relationship to deadlines. Nguyễn says,

> "I just know once I learned of the politics of deadlines, I am not happy
> Whose deadlines and what is it that you want me to chase?
>
> As a scholar
> I am supposed to teach students how to manage time and deadlines
> But I struggle
> myself
> within the system
> how to keep deadlines
> So how am I going to teach?
> (Nguyễn, 2023)

These posed questions map directly to the teaching and scholarship of our colonial agreements of privilege intellectual/rational knowing, separation, competition, perfection, monoculturalism, privileging outer work, and avoidance of self-examination (Rendón et al., 2023). Instead of these culturally entrapping agreements, Nguyễn supplies us with alternative approaches, which echo sentipensante, but also, move into the ancestral through the use of the ancestral tongue, story, and time and space:

> Đé-lai
> a Vietnamized rendition of dead-lines from its colonizers
> ...
> To teach deadlines or dead-lines or đé-lai differently is a liberatory pedagogy
> To understand deadlines differently is a liberatory pedagogy
> To practice deadlines differently is a liberatory pedagogy

To assign deadlines differently is a liberatory pedagogy
To resist deadlines differently is a liberatory pedagogy

This call to action ends here, urging educators to look to the colonized, and apply the close reading method, which includes listening, and if the ancestral tongue is present, then within the method, we may be led closer to a liberatory pedagogy, should we heed the call.

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Appendix 1

CORN ISLAND VACATION · June Beer
1
Wen ah had seven years
meh mada sen me Corn Island
to spend vacation at meh grampa
It rain an squall so much
ah was so afraid of de savage wind
which bend de palms
so near de eart
dat grampa had dem cut down
Laad ah neva see before or afta
palms quite so tall, maybe
because ah wasn seven before
nor eva again

2
Ah don't rememba is wat I gone to buy
the time was 12 noon an ah was in Corn Island
Grampa sen me to de shop in front
Only fran de varanda step to de gate
seem like a helluva distance
so Granfada tel me here use meh umbrella
Well ah gone wid it open
ah get out de gate arite
only as ah cross de street
haas was tie front a de shop
look back behine "im
an 'e tink umbrella was walkin by itself
so ah scare 'im
'e stan u on two foot, like man
an 'e fa awika so!
Ah drop umbrella, money an ah
run an baal to meh grampa arms
Ah neve go back shop again

(Written by June Beer n.d., published 1987b in Ixok Amar-Go: Poesía de Mujeres Centroamericanas Por La Paz, page 313)

Appendix 2

CHUNKA FAAM · June Beer

Mango, rosaaple, cashu,
lime, plum, breadfruit,
cassava, coco, dashin,
yampi, coconut, plaantin
a little a dis a little a dat
we go fron year to year so.
Se picninny gettin big
dem shud go to school.
Book, pencil, pants, shuts, *shoes*
oh laad how we gon mek it.
Maybe we euda boro money fron de bank,
John seh to Mary on de chunku faam up Black Wata Criek.

John, me fraid we no unnastan dem ting
but wen a look at dese picninny
a half to try fa dem
se les go town wit we regista pepa.
John an Mary visit de banka,
a ducko man wit a slipry smile
who talk like paña playin yanky.
Zhes, we have a program foar
peeple like you – estep over
to Mr. Wilson, he will attend you.

Wilson ass dis an 'e ass dat
den 'e tel me Sunday 'e goin visit we 'paan de faam
an 'e did.
He seh de loan sure
in 15 days we mus go to de bank.
But wen we gone to de bank
only halkf wat we ass, we get.
I tek it an I try, laad in heven know I try –
I try fa dem little picninny
fa dem to go to school
But dat banka wit de slipry smile
give me jus enough money to put me in de hole
an tek meh faam.

(Written by June Beer, n.d., published 1987a in Ixok Amar-Go: Poesía de Mujeres Centroamericanas Por La Paz, page 315)