ON THE CUSP OF INVISIBILITY: THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY, MARGINALIZED STUDENTS, AND INSTITUTIONAL SPACES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the potential for decolonial possibilities for and democratic participation of students in three rhetorical and institutional spaces: the writing center, the classroom, and the archives. The Lower Río Grande Valley, the site of the study, is located at the Southernmost end of Texas, and is situated between the almost 2,000-mile-long geopolitical border spanning from Brownsville, Texas to San Diego, California and the internal checkpoints that run parallel to and 70 miles north of the border. The Lower Río Grande Valley has remained a Mexican American cultural province and zone despite six phases of colonization. Little is known of Mexican American uses and practices of literacy, rhetoric, and identity in the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition. This is even more apparent in regards to Mexican Americans of the Lower Río Grande Valley. On one level, this dissertation focuses on the historical and current state of colonization in the Lower Río Grande Valley. On another level, this dissertation is interested in the presentation and representation of culture through place making, meaning-making practices, and knowledge production. Part historiographical and archival, part ethnographic and decolonial, this rhetorical project brings into focus a region and student demographic that has remained on the cusp of invisibility in society, the academy, and the discipline of rhetoric and composition. The contribution of this research includes developing spatial and temporal awareness, increasing attention to local and regional cultural differences, and articulating decolonial possibilities.
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INSTITUTIONAL SPACES

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my life friend and partner, Jenavi, and our son, Julius. Both of you always put life into perspective for me, especially when I get caught up in doing work. I continue to be inspired by you Jenavi because of your strength and fierceness. I continue to be inspired by you Julius because despite the challenges you have faced so far, you are more than willing to meet them head on. I hope that both of you are proud of me and that you remember that I worked hard so that way we never struggle as we did at the “blue” and “white” house on Elizabeth Street in Corpus Christi, Texas.

I would like to thank my mom. I have and continue to appreciate the strength you exhibited in tough times, even though it did not always result in the best decisions. I appreciate you. I would like to thank my tíos Nano and Chichi. Both of you were there for me in different ways when I went through those tough times. I strive to be as kind and humble as you both are.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: On the Cusp of Invisibility

We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories other tell about us, and the possibilities of new stories. I am these stories. I lived them or I inherited them and they live vibrantly and turbulently in and around me. All stories are political; they involve power that has structural underpinnings and material consequences. Judy Rohrer, *Staking Claims*, p. 189

By 'space,' I mean a place that has been practiced into being through the acts of storied making, where the past is brought into conscious conversation with the present and where—through those practices of making—a future can be imagined. Spaces, then, are made recursively through specific, material practices rooted in specific land bases, through the cultural practices linked to the place, and through the accompanying theoretical practices that arise from that place—like imagining community ‘away’ from but related to that space.

Malea Powell, “Stories Take Place,” p. 388

...identities are constituted by social contextual conditions of interaction in specific cultures at particular historical periods, and thus their nature, effects, and the problems that need to be addressed in regards to them will be largely local.

Linda M. Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, p. 9

I come from a people and tradition situated within the Lower Rio Grande Valley (The Valley/LRGV). This is an important to make. My ways of being, seeing, and doing emerges from my lived experiences and participation in meaning-making practices within this place. When I was younger, I had a sense of place and I knew my place. I did not need statistics to tell me I was a statistic. I inherited stories that at first seemed fixed. Would I end up like my mother who struggled on a daily basis to provide for us or would I end up like my father who I only knew through pictures and letters? This was a question I constantly pondered over as a youngster. I had a sense of place—El Valle—and I knew my place because of the differences I embodied and performed. Too often, we forget that the stories we tell ourselves and that tell about us can change. For many of us, it is a difficult task to imagine new stories. For many of us in the LRGV, we wake up everyday and see that nothing has changed. Yet, we have hope. We wake up and are constantly reminded of our place in society. Yet, we have dreams. For many of us, things just do not work out or go in our favor. Yet, we remain strong. That is the story of our people and tradition in the LRGV. Today, I write as a reflection of the possibilities of new stories.
The essence of this dissertation revolves around history and memory. There are four threads that tie this dissertation together: difference, listening, memory, and participation. My aim is to bring attention to the ways sites (e.g., the archives, the writing center, and the classroom) endure and ensure narratives of power structures. I approach difference, listening, memory, and participation as analytics and apply them to these sites in order to create entry points into them. I specifically consider how the narratives of power structures within these sites offer decolonial possibilities. I make this consideration in the context of Mexican Americans of the LRGV, who I believe remain on the cusp of invisibility. The essence, then, of this dissertation, operates at the level of humanity and visibility. I will suspend further explanation, temporarily, and offer a series of memories and stories. These memories and stories offer life lessons, some that reveal the political realm of stories, and some that suggest stories need revisions.

**Recuerdos**

In the backyard of my tíos house, my grandma and tíos would sit at the mesa and talk. Sometimes they’d talk about past experiences: “¿Recuerda cuando trabajamos en los campos?” a tíó would ask. From there they would talk about working “con las manos” and life in general. Sometimes they’d talk about comadres/compadres.¹

¿Y Nacha, todo está bien con la comadre?

Ay Nacha, necesito ir a verla

¿Por qué?

Pos, ella estuvo enferma y esta sola

---

¹ Comadre, in the English language, translates to friend. But, naming and identifying someone, as a comadre, does not carry the same meaning as friend in Mexican traditions.
Here my tío was asking my grandma about a comadre called Nacha. My grandma was concerned because her comadre was sick and lived alone. She went to visit her the next day. My grandma cared about others, about people from the neighborhood, about la comunidad. This is partly what being a comadre/compadre is about.

I remember walking with my grandma to Nacha’s house, and to others’ as well. In the time it took to walk there, she’d share stories of her upbringing, struggles, and accomplishments. Our walks would become fundamental to how I situated myself and viewed the world around me. The comadres would talk for hours, reminiscing and reflecting, holding each other’s hands as they braced for the cuento, empathizing and supporting each other as they narrated their testimonios. I sat there listening. At least once a week they’d convene at the iglesia to share these stories of struggle and accomplishments with others. I sat there listening and observing, feeling the impact of their words, moved by the chanting of women supporting others, and comforted by their strength and fight. I come from a people and tradition.

There were several important questions asked in our daily walks together. ¿Entiendes? My grandma would ask, after every cuento and testimonio, if I understood. After my acknowledgment, she’d say, “Te digo esto para que sepas y aprendas.” She wanted to make sure I understood what was being said because for her every story and testimony carried a lesson, something to know about and learn from. She’d underscore this by saying, “No te dejes.” I come from a people and tradition. This is an important point to make. My tradition does not begin from Westernized intellectual traditions. No! My tradition begins in being educated by my material and social conditions and being educated by my grandma.

---

2 The idea of a walking exigency draws from the metaphor of “walking” and the capacities to engage in reflection and reflexivity in the process—understanding situations, responding to situations, and creating situations as an act of resolve.
In one of her cuentos, she talked about being a maid. The image above is a record of this occupation. She recalled how badly some of her customers would treat her. She’d say, “Nunca volví.” She did not go back because for her it was important to maintain dignity. She did so as a maid, dishwasher, shrimp peeler at a factory, and as a fieldworker. She came from a people and tradition. “Sabía que era ilegal,” my grandma would say, but to her that did not mean she could be treated wrong. The notion of no te dejes represents a mentality of my family and community that was communicated to me by my grandma. No te dejes does not translate well from Spanish to English. It is an extension of a rhetoric of survival. It is an articulation of the self unwilling to accept anything but respect for humanity. This is my tradition. It is a mentality that stems from colonial conditions that have for so long attempted to render a people silent and invisible.
I learned that my grandma did not ask me to merely accompany her on those walks. No. Walking involved more than just the physicality of movement. Walking afforded an opportunity for translations of memories, through cuentos and testimonios, from her to me. To transfer her knowledge, through the accumulation of cuentos and testimonios, brought assurance that my personal memories would always stand at the nexus of historical and collective memory. I was not alone on my life path. She was showing me the paths we’ve walked together all along. She’d take me to visit the comadres and to participate in their conjuntos at the iglesia, because this is where layered histories and memories would intersect. The comadres did not forget their struggles. I have not forgotten their struggles. They became comadres out of struggle in the 1940s. This is part of my genealogy, a genealogy that is rooted in struggle, that thrusts the spaces between social and historical structures and self-determination and self-empowerment, and that changes because of hope and through resiliency. My tradition emerges from stories, from the embodiment and performance of those stories, with the hope of new possible stories.

Their memories connected them to their homeland (Mexico), to their people, and to each other. But, their memories also reminded them of how they had to re-imagine themselves, in definition and representation, in the changing U.S. There was a conscious effort to illustrate an epistemology and ethos of survival, preservation, and resiliency. The communicated this through language and through the connections of bodies. Today, the memory of walking and the comadres serves as a reminder of this to me. My epistemology and ethos is rooted in historical and cultural memory, rooted in a historical sense of place and bodies. My story begins in place, but changes with each interaction and encounter. I speak and compose from my body, a site which re-signifies the interplay of history and memory and which re-imagines a future anew. On the cusp of invisibility, this is not just a catchy phrase. I have inherited this story and performed
it as I straddle what seems to me to be two disparate cultural worlds (e.g., Mexico and Texas/U.S.) from the LRGV. I am between history and memory. This is my point of reference and my point of departure. We were never meant to be fixed in time nor stuck in history. Our daily struggle always involves entering’s and crossing, navigation and negotiation, and invention and re-invention. We have done more than just survive. We have done more than just inherit stories that tell of our past, that render our bodies to palimpsest readings. Our stories continue to change.

On the table my grandma would work on writing out the English alphabet, numbers, addresses, and then responding to questions she wrote out herself.
Before she passed, my grandma wanted to know how to read and write in Spanish and English. She was from Xilitla, San Luis Potosi, Mexico and came to the U.S. in the late 1940s. She didn’t know how to read or write in Spanish or English. In fact, whenever a signature was required, she’d mark the line with an x. She would never attend school, but she had a yearning for learning. My grandma’s story of being in the U.S. may begin in an unfortunate way, but it does not end here.
On the table, there would also be a black tape recorder. She would play a tape that would say words in Spanish and translate them into English. My grandma would practice these translations. Then, when I’d get home, she’d practice with me speaking in English, and I would practice speaking Spanish with her. We created a material and symbolic space in which we refused the narrative of assimilation. The predicament we found ourselves in was tied in every way to the stories we tell and the stories that tell about us. Such stories were open to and invited always the possibility of change.

Eventually, she’d gain U.S. citizenship. One of the proudest moments, she recalled, was being able to vote. She maintained Spanish as her dominant language and she wrote most of her comadres’ addresses in Spanish, but she always had English as a resource. Our interactions and encounters were always of becoming in so far that the dialectical nature of being and doing characterized new properties of seeing that resulted in new understandings. Understanding this,
in the moment itself, perplexed me. It perplexed me in that we refused to be contained by the impossibility of possibility.

The letter “x” that my grandma provided as a signature in the U.S. is part of my genealogy and trajectory. She’d tell me to not forget her struggle and to remember the importance of learning. On the cusp of invisibility, the collection of these images, which I will call literacy artifacts, contains memories. These memories serve as a reminder of the presence of our people in the U.S. engaging in transformative change. These memories are my past and future. I struggled with literacy in my schooling. In higher education, I was told that the discipline of English was not for me. Yet, I persisted. I look at these literacy artifacts, ever so often, and I cannot help but think about my grandma’s words: “entiendes, para que sepas y aprendes, and no te dejes.” She started off with an “x” and I pursued a career in the study and teaching of writing and rhetoric. She believed in learning. I will become part of a Mexican American Ph.D. cohort that represents less than 7% of students in higher education. Grandma, entiendo. I continue to listen, as to know and learn, and I use our memories and knowledge as a source of agency and acción. This is just one story that surrounds a life full of stories. These types of stories surround all of us. They are what give way to our rhetorical practices, in the LRGV, and all around. These stories forge the links between identity and language, between place and people, and between epistemology and ontology.

Judy Rohrer (2016) writes, “We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about us” (p. 189). Often, we get bogged down with the question, “¿dónde empezamos?” when all we have are the scatter of memories, loose-leaf papers, and/or photographs. All I have left of my grandma are stories, memories, papers, and photographs. Sometimes, as scholars interested in archival work, we have less than this. We begin! We begin
to make connections. We begin to see possibilities. We begin from memory, and in memory of, so as to not default to invisibility and silence. I came to know language and myself through my lived experiences, my family, and my community. I came to see the world in and through borders. When the question of where to begin for this dissertation emerged, the answer was easy. I begin by telling our story, our story of visibility. To be from the Valley is to experience and be aware of how borders and checkpoints function and operate everyday as designs meant to limit mobility and ultimately access to resources and opportunities. I know this not from the statistics published about us, but from my lived experiences as a statistic to now a scholar. The LRGV holds a special place in my heart. I came to be through struggles and accomplishments en El Valle. I came to see through the stories we tell ourselves, the stories we tell others about ourselves, and the stories we create that imagine new possibilities. Paula Gunn Allen (1986/2016) once wrote, “[They] believe that the roots of oppression are to be found in the loss of tradition and memory because that loss is always accompanied by a loss of positive sense of self” (p. 438). So, to reiterate, I come from a people and tradition. I care for what has and continues to happen in the LRGV. Soy del Valle, soy Valle. For many of us, we look to our past and we engage in memory-making in order to envision a future anew with a positive sense of self. This is not always an easy task to do accomplish. But, we have hope.

**My Felt Sense**

I was born and raised en El Valle. I knew what outsiders thought about the Mexican Americans of this region: lazy, uninterested in improving their conditions, and uneducated. Yet, being and seeing from a Mexican American lens, I knew this to be untrue. I saw how the white people in the LRGV treated us, as below and inferior, how they separated themselves with their railroad tracks and their school districts. Yet, being and doing, from a Mexican American
subject-position, I knew that we were not going to be imprisoned by the actions of a colonial people. I come from a people and tradition unwilling to be contained by colonial conditions or accept those racial myths that so often stereotype us. These observations and lived experiences are not isolated. In fact, on a macro level, they reflect the historical and current plight of Mexican Americans in the U.S. My felt sense, however, has so often reminded me that here in the LRGV, we do things differently—we are different.

My felt sense\(^3\) and my travels beyond the LRGV have reminded me over and over that the material conditions and social relations in this region have been under-examined. The question I have been asked is why does it need to be examined. I am not a historian, but I am from a historical place. I am not an anthropologist, but I am concerned with how our social and material conditions shape and form our ideologies and ideological behavior. I am not a cultural geographer, but I know that this space and place that is the LRGV has its own political economy that partly stems from how borders and boundaries function to spatialize (and temporalize) people. I am not a mobilities scholar, but I know that for a region such as the LRGV to exist in the ways that it does, it requires the movement and mobility of a people and tradition. My response to the question of why I study the Valley includes two parts. First, before I can become interested in advocating for disadvantaged communities, I must help my own. And, second, my tradition of rhetorics, of literacies, and of translating and composing the body begins in place and from a people and tradition. I am not only motivated to speak of this regions colonial tie, but also its people’s pursuit of decolonization. It is the latter of these that that has yet to be fully developed, in definition, scope and content, within the discipline of rhetoric and composition. The breadth of the word—decolonization—seems to be stipulated, and sustained, by universals

\(^{3}\) Although Sondra Perl refers to felt sense in a writerly context, the idea of how inextricably connected thought, language, and bodily knowing are, is a productive way of drawing from one’s embodiment(s).
rather than embedded and situated within places and materialities. My felt sense is that at the local and regional level, there is a disruption to universals and an observable breakdown in Western social practices and systems.

My journey through the higher education pipeline—my experiences sitting within classrooms that knew very little about me; my critical dialogue with nationalist historiography that continues to keep my community on the cusp of invisibility—has culminated in this moment. My research into local and regional attitudes and practices in the LRGV grows out of a concern for how spatial and temporal awareness, curricula and pedagogies, and research practices can hinder the development and success of students like me, students from the LRGV. My felt sense has grounded me in the historicalness and particularities of place, culture, and materialities. The meaning derived from these historical particularities is something that I embody and carry with me. Today, as a scholar and educator, I draw upon such felt sense as a reminder of the means and modes by which I study and teach composition and rhetoric.

Yet, I feel that the current of globalization and the advent of modernity continue to cloud the concerns expressed above for others in rhetoric and composition. This is why, by and large, I have taken up a multi-methodological approach to this research project, using methods that are archival, historiographic, geographic, mobilities-focused, and decolonial. I work towards developing place-based pedagogies and theories based on my research in the LRGV. In a larger project, these methods would assist me in conducting a multi-sited ethnography. For now, it is important to account, as much as possible, for the social and historical context of the Mexican American in the U.S., both on a global and local level. In the next section, I continue the theme and arc of storytelling. I mix in storytelling (and counterstory) with archival materials. I do so intentionally to illuminate the myth of modernity and how this myth operates and functions at the
expense of keeping a people on the cusp of invisibility. This rhetorical move allows me to transition into the ways in which Mexican Americans have and continue to respond to social and material conditions.

**The Socio-Historical and Economic Context of Mexican Americans**

The Mexican American people are a complex and dynamic group, whose historical plight continues today because they are still perceived as a conquered people. I say complex and dynamic, because not every Mexican American’s experience is created equal, not every Mexican American has the same experiences with oppression, and not every Mexican American endures the same historical and material realities. This is why Mexican Americans, in and across the U.S., self-represent, engage in situated literacies and rhetorical practices, and identify with geography differently. The parallel for me, in this context, is the importance of regional foods within the Mexican American community. An enchilada may have basic components and basic instructions for being made in the Mexican American community. But, enchiladas differ from region to region because they are connected to a historical place, historical bodies, and social and material conditions. Difference matters because class matters; because local histories matter; because presentations and representations of culture matter; and because place, meaning, and knowledge making practices matter. We have to acknowledge interconnections as well as discontinuities. Yet one historical and material reality that Mexican Americans do face together is that of being occluded from and/or being present in objectified ways in the national historiography of the U.S. I work to this point, first, by introducing a local archival box, then considering how Mexican Americans have responded to material and social conditions, and lastly, how a white/black race paradigm impeded on these historical narratives of struggle.
Fieldnotes about a Local Archival Box

I am at the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley Special Collections and Archives. A lady is bringing me the last set of archival boxes I requested on the LRGV. I am excited to open up the first box of archives, the first of many on the history of the LRGV. I have decided to begin with the box about Harlingen because it is where I was born and raised; it is my point of reference. The box has many clippings from the 1920s, 1930s, 1950s, and 1960s. The first archival artifact I take out is a pamphlet (below). I am taken away by the historical element of these clippings. I am also taken away from the narrative the box projects.

Image 4: Harlingen Pamphlet, 1925

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4 Images were collected from a local archival box at the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley and from their Special Collections and Archives department.
The narrative begins with the pioneer Lon C. Hill (below) who is celebrated as the individual who named Harlingen and who helped develop the city. Of course, there was civilization prior to his arrival in the LRGV. But, what counts as civilization is always contested, for the visionaries of progress and development determine those parameters, ensuring that history is on their side.

Lon C. Hill purchased land out of the Espiritu Santo Grant. He helped bring the railroad industry to the region, assisted in establishing the Cotton Gin and Sugarcane industry, and was central to the promotion of the LRGV as an agricultural paradise with promises of profit. The Valley, as one newspaper clipping states, “was still a frontier with all of a new area’s hopes and hazards.”
This region was the “Wild West” and it was nicknamed “Six Shooter Junction.” By helping to develop “modern cities” (Image 4), Lon C. Hill is said to have brought civilization. Ironic it is that the clipping above (Image 6) exclaims, “Harlingen was settled on free land with no Spanish background.” There are no studies to prove that this statement is true. In fact, some studies suggest otherwise (see Arreola, 2002). My issue with this narrative so far, is not so much with the good that Lon C. Hill brought. Rather, I take issue with the historiography of colonization, of progress and development, which articulates an origins story by occluding the “other” or presenting the “other” in objectified ways.

I am taken away by the overwhelming absence of Mexican and Mexican American residents in this narrative and the non-mention of their contributions to the “making” of “modern cities” along the LRGV. They were indeed there, before the pioneers of white settler colonialism,
and are still present afterwards. But once again, imperial visions and eyes play out in terms of beliefs and values, bodies and territories, language and geography.

Image 7: Harlingen’s first school, a Newspaper Clipping

Notice the headline, “The Valley’s first school for white children,” set against the words “contention,” “bandits,” “danger,” and “fences.” The cultural logics in play reflect a reality of inferiority/superiority and insider/outsider.

When schools did open for Mexican and Mexican Americans, they were created under the pretenses of segregation. While some clippings indicated that segregation was “more de facto” than policy as there was no policy barring Mexicans and Mexican Americans from schools with Anglo students, white prejudices ensured the presence of “Mexican schools” and even a “Black School” (e.g., the Booker T. Washington school).
Notice the headline, “Harlingen Proud of It's Modern School System,” followed by the middle image that states, “Mexican Ward School.” The significance of “modern” alongside the “ward” suggests that as Harlingen underwent progress and development, it was important to occlude and/or to make present “The Mexican” in separate and objectified ways.

After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, Mexicans and Mexican Americans of the LRGV faced many obstacles in the U.S., including the protection of their political rights in the context of “transition.”
Mexicans and Mexican Americans were seen as barbaric and primitive. The Texas Rangers, specifically Company A, was moved from Alice, Texas, to Harlingen, Texas, to make the region a safe place to live and raise a family—that is, for white settlers. Lon C. Hill was credited with making the city safe from those who threatened the Rangers and others of “Six-Shooter Junction.”
Other clippings also challenged the rhetoric of progress and development with the reality of racial tensions and discrimination, depicting a world where Mexicans and Mexican Americans were largely excluded from an economic, political, and judicial system, and often the victims of racial violence. The significance of “Six-Shooter Junction” was the role it played in treating the Mexican and Mexican American as inferior. When the Mexican and Mexican American would resist this discrimination, they’d be shot, killed, or arrested.

Image 10: Commentary on the Treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans

Mexicans and Mexicans Americans were also conscripted into a low-wage labor force. Their exploited labor helped the LRGV in regards to development, the agricultural industry, and other “modern city” projects.
The pioneers, as one clipping reads, “came and conquered.” In one clipping, Lon C. Hill writes,

When I first came to this area in 1903…there were few streets or roads of any kind…Most of the commerce was with Mexico, rather than with markets in the States….There were no water systems in those early days…There were no railroads until 1904…Land was cleared, road and canals built, townsites established.

In Hill’s writing, he very rarely acknowledged the racial tensions between two cultures—the Anglo and the Mexican American in his writing. Instead, his rhetoric was always about progress and development. Yet, at the 75th anniversary of the founding of Harlingen, Mayor Sam Lozano gave a speech that sheds insight into such tensions:

Harlingen has a lot of future…But for that future to be bright, friendly, happy and prosperous, there has to be a strong effort by two ‘cultures’—the Anglo and the Mexican American—to move closer together…My only wish and desire is that we leave aside those labels that are hyphenates—labels like Mexican-American. Then, and only then, can we really have a good community!

In this speech, we find clues that suggest segregation existed in Harlingen. The argument that we leave aside identity-terms that are hyphenated also suggests that we, as a community, begin to see subjectivities as always coalescing with one another, at least within the context of the LRGV. This type of rhetoric, however, is absent in the narrative of the archives and Hill’s writing.

The archival box I opened is just one origin story of a city in the LRGV—Harlingen, Texas. In the process of reviewing these archival materials, archives that tell a particular history, I have found the history of progress and development to be limited. To understand the
relationship between Mexican Americans and the United States, a historical and political context must be provided. By revisiting this historical and political context, we can begin to understand both the global and local struggles of Mexican Americans.

*The Threat and Articulation of a Colonial Enterprise*

The historical and political plight of Mexican Americans in the U.S. has been one undergirded by the threat and articulation of colonization as well as colonial management and control (Acuna, 1988; Contreras & Valverde, 1994). The Treaty of 1848 stipulated all property and civil rights of Mexicans would be protected (Articles VIII and IX). For their significance to this history, I quote Articles VIII and IX extensively here:

**Article VIII**

Mexicans now established in territories previously belonging to Mexico, and which remain for the future within the limits of the United States, as defined by the present treaty, shall be free to continue where they now reside, or to remove at any time to the Mexican Republic, retaining the property which they possess in the said territories, or disposing thereof, and removing the proceeds wherever they please, without their being subjected, on this account, to any contribution, tax, or charge whatever.

Those who shall prefer to remain in the said territories may either retain the title and rights of Mexican citizens, or acquire those of citizens of the United States. But they shall be under the obligation to make their election within one year from the date of the exchange of ratifications of this treaty; and those who shall remain in the said territories after the expiration of that year, without having
declared their intention to retain the character of Mexicans, shall be considered to have elected to become citizens of the United States.

In the said territories, property of every kind, now belonging to Mexicans not established there, shall be inviolably respected. The present owners, the heirs of these, and all Mexicans who may hereafter acquire said property by contract, shall enjoy with respect to it guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to citizens of the United States.

**Article IX**

The Mexicans who, in the territories aforesaid, shall not preserve the character of citizens of the Mexican Republic, conformably with what is stipulated in the preceding article, shall be incorporated into the Union of the United States and be admitted at the proper time (to be judged of by the Congress of the United States) to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the meantime, shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction.

The articles stipulate all Mexicans who chose to stay within the U.S. would be able to retain their property and enjoy “all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to the principles of the Constitution” (“Transcript of Treaty” Article IX). But when the treaty was ratified, the government reneged on its promises. Article IX ceased to exist and power was granted to ceded territories and states to determine the status of Mexican Americans (see Rodriguez, 2007; Bedolla, 2009). Due to historical events such as the reneging of Articles VIII and IX, and the creation of structures that reflected then, and today, ideological beliefs for (and
of white supremacy, the Mexican American people became, and would remain, a colonized people in the white imagination (see Munoz, 1989; Rosales, 1996; Menchaca, 2002).

This historical narrative is one that has and continues to be excluded from U.S. history, for it threatens and destabilizes the national historiography of a white/black race binary and the extent to which racial violence against Mexican Americans and other non-Black peoples was carried out. These oversigns are brought to life in the recovery work of Richard Delgado (2009) in “The Law of the Noose” and William Carrigan and Clive Webb (2003) in “The Lynchings of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent,” which demonstrate not only how the political and judicial system failed to protect the Mexican and Mexican American people, but how race functioned as the instrument of oppression which, with the advent of capitalism, sought to manage and control all labor and all people. A white/black race paradigm has allowed the history of Mexican American struggle for recognition to remain absent from larger conversations on race and power in the U.S.

Juan Perea (1997), in “The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race,” is one scholar who confronts this limited paradigm. Perea argues that the Black/White race paradigm is a product of linearity that has truncated and/or omitted the Mexican American struggle in U.S. history. This paradigm “shapes our understanding of what race and racism mean and the nature of our discussions about race” (p. 128), so that there emerges a “widely accepted way of thinking and of producing knowledge” on this subject that “tends to exclude or ignore alternative facts or theories that do not fit the expectations produced by the paradigm” (p. 131). Currently, this binary paradigm of race is exclusive to two constituent racial groups, the Black and the White. Perea asserts that the paradigm excludes Latino/as (as well as other racial and ethnic groups) “from full membership and participation in racial discourse” (p. 129). This is detrimental
because by excluding Latino/as, there is limited understanding of Latino/as, their history, and their struggle and past/current impediments. Perea writes, “The Black/White binary paradigm, by defining only Blacks and Whites as relevant participants in civil rights discourse and struggle, tends to produce and promote the exclusion of other racialized peoples” (p. 167). The linear version of the story of civil rights and equality, therefore, speaks exclusively of “Black struggle for equality and a gradual, progressive White concession to Black demands” (p. 156). This form of ‘normal racial science’ suggests that race and racism can be analyzed through the Black/White binary paradigms, which in turn erases the existence of Latino/as. Perea suggests that to counter this process and treatment, we must engage in careful inquiry “into the particular histories of these groups and the forms of discrimination they have experienced” (p. 153).

There are other scholars who acknowledge the race binary and who are beginning to explore how ethnic Mexicans have struggled for equality. Two examples are the efforts brought upon by Carrigan and Webb (2003), as well as Richard Delgado (2009). In the context of cultural violence and lynching, Carrigan and Webb’s work is the first systematic analysis of Mexican lynching victims. They argue that “the story of mob violence against Mexicans remains relatively unknown to the wider public” which has created the “false impression that Mexicans ha[ve] not been the targets of organized racial violence” (p. 411-412). Carrigan and Webb argue that the lack of statistical counts of Mexican lynching victims (p. 412) and the division of lynching victims into two categories, black and white (p. 413) brings attention to the traditional limitations of the Black/White paradigm (p. 413). They assert that placing “the experience of Mexicans into the history of lynching” will expand “our understanding of the causes of mob violence and the ways in which individuals and groups sought to resist lynching and vigilantism” (p. 413). Moreover, Carrigan and Webb claim that by recognizing the history of Mexican
lynching, we can begin to view the story of Mexican lynching as a critical chapter in the history of Anglo western expansion and conquest (p. 414). Their study reveals how the legal system served as an instrument of oppression of Mexicans (p. 417). Carrigan and Webb propose race as an analytic frame of reference, which I return to in other chapters (p. 417-418). This begins with moving beyond the narrow racial emphasis circulated by a Black/White binary that limits our sense of the historical scale of violence in the U.S. and its colonial project.

Delgado’s (2009) work is an extension of Carrigan and Webb’s research. Delgado’s essay reveals how Mexican Americans in the Southwest “were lynched in large numbers during roughly the same period when lynching of blacks suffered that fate” (p. 298). His study illuminates how “Mexicans were lynched for acting too Mexican—speaking Spanish too loudly or reminding Anglos too defiantly of their Mexican-ness” (p. 299). Delgado writes, however, that lynchings of Latinos have remained a “relatively unknown chapter in the United States and part of a worldwide pattern of shaping discourse so as to avoid embarrassment of the dominant group” (p. 303). Delgado argues, “Scholars of all disciplines adhere, consciously or not, to a paradigm or common understanding of events. Since Latino lynching falls outside the dominant paradigm of American history, the few historians and writers who came across reference to it may have afforded it scant treatment” (p. 305).

Craig Kaplowitz’s (2005) social history of Mexican Americans in LULAC is also important on the matters of the White/Black binary paradigm of race. Kaplowitz writes, “for all practical purposes the world of civil rights policy was black and white” (p. 3). His analysis of domestic policy of the 1950s suggests that indeed, as the nation began to pay attention to the needs of ‘minorities,” “minority” nearly always meant “black” because “blacks were the only group suffering from America’s dilemma” (p. 63). Moreover, he argues that the success of the
black civil-rights movement “reinforced the black-white dichotomy in national and political discourse” (p. 63). By engaging in critical work such as Carrigan and Webb’s, as well as Delgado’s and Kaplowitz’s, we can begin to imagine a broader struggle for equality in the U.S. that is inclusive to other ethnic/racial backgrounds and accounts for a multiplicity of racialized struggles for justice. We Mexican Americans matter and our history, our ongoing story, matters. Our stories, too, are tied to the principles, manifestations, and articulations of power in the “discovery” and “conquest” of the U.S.

One of the principles of power under capitalism is to dehumanize the “other” body by displacing “others” from their land, from their resources, from their subjectivity and history, ultimately working to create a dependency upon those who manage and control capital. This is why, as one New York Times editorial reads, “the killings of Mexicans [in Texas] without provocation is so common as to pass unnoticed” (as cited in Bedolla, 2009, p. 57). Through a complex and dynamic, and yet invisible and omnipresent, structural system of oppression, the dehumanization of the brown body and the objectification of it through racial and mob violence was normalized and naturalized as air.

The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 was significant because it allowed the rhetoric of manifest destiny to come into fruition, while cloaking the logic of management and control over land, power, capital, and people. This is especially true in the context of Texas. What this rhetoric of manifest destiny professed was that a people, the Mexican and Texas Mexican to be specific, needed to be saved from their culture’s barbaric and primitive characteristics. In They Called them Greasers, Arnoldo de Leon (2001) argues that what “whites found in Texas…was that Mexicans were primitive beings who during a century of residence in Texas had failed to improve their status and environment” (p. 12). This created an
opportunity for the whitening of Texas, first by “civilizing” Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and second, by populating Texas to reflect, as De Leon points out, the desired cultural and racial makeup of the United States.

So, on one hand, the rhetoric of manifest destiny sought to liberate and empower the Mexican and Texas Mexican by saving [it] from itself. The government, after going to war and signing the Treaty, created a situation in which almost overnight certain Mexican people would be considered citizens of the United States, eventually leading to the identity-term Mexican American. Yet the logic of management and control over bodies and labor played out differently. Within the rhetoric, and myth, of modernity, the “other” can be sanctioned to otherness, to second and third-class citizenship. As such, the “other” can be relieved political, social and economic rights, those rights guaranteed under the Constitution, because if and when the “other” is perceived as a peril to the fabrics and tapestry of power, those in power can justify imposing a brand of inferiority not only upon the body, but also upon the land which those bodies occupy.

Another principle of power and capitalism is to institute social and racial structures that can function and be operation in vicious cycles that continue long after colonialism as an explicit political order is destroyed. This principle illuminates the significance of mapping people, national historiography, and language and ideology. The first social U.S. colonization instituted was the questioning of land grants. The United States government violated the spirit of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Because of settlers squatting, legal articulation to help squatting, and deceptive practices, ultimately Mexicans and Mexican Americans were bereft of land (see Meier & Ribera, 1994). What would result was a long history of internal colonization wherein Mexican Americans would be made to feel foreign and inferior in a land that was once part their ancestors’ (see Urbina et al., 2014).
The next social structure was economic. With World War I and II and the advent of the Bracero program in the U.S., labor shortages up North resulted in the need for cheap labor, and eventually Mexican and Mexican American people were targeted to fill this need. Mexican migrants began to dominate the unskilled sectors of the U.S. labor market. Along with this migration came the perception that they were “inherently backward, slow, docile, indolent, and tractable people” whose race was both “culturally and physiologically suited to perform the arduous manual labor” (Gutierrez, 1995, p. 46). Who do you think picked the crops, built the roads, and manufactured goods such as sugarcane and gin in the LRGV? While the “white man” has the ability to do laborious jobs, the perception is that these jobs require cheap labor, and cheap labor is for “The Mexican.”

By controlling bodies through labor, by articulating whiteness at the center of production, the opportunity to colonize the “other” land and bodies even extended to the mind. That is, the trickle-down effect of colonial social structures extended to the realm of education. Even those Mexican and Mexican American students who could afford and/or had the privilege to attend school were subjected to segregation and Americanization efforts. The presence of “Mexican Schools” suggests that Mexican Americans were seen as different, a perception that became institutionalized. Mexican Americans were characterized by “illness” and “otherness,” seen as a threat not only to the morality but also the very health of the white community (see Garcia, 1989; Menchaca, 2002). This rhetoric of illness condoned the segregation schooling of Mexican and white students, a system in which inferior Mexican Schools offered second-rate learning opportunities and inferior equipment and facilities to those of the White schools (see San Miguel, 1988; Valencia, 2000; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Spring, 2005).

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5 I acknowledge that private schools existed in this era for Mexicans and Mexican Americans, but I am referring to students who did not attend such schools.
Jessica Enoch’s (2008) work in *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, specifically attending to the politics in the Laredo, Texas region, describes how the powerful managed to separate residents by race by creating Mexican barrios and schools in Anglo neighborhoods, accentuating topographical exclusions. In all, the white society was not interested in offering education to Mexican and Mexican Americans and attempted to pass de jure segregation laws. Because of the Treaty’s stipulations of equal rights, white society devised creative ways make the Mexican American feel inferior and experience inferiority (see San Miguel, 1997).

Among other stipulations, the Treaty’s Articles stipulated that Mexican Americans were considered U.S. citizens and classified racially as white. This rendered segregation of Mexican Americans unconstitutional, even as some courts concluded Mexicans were not white (see Menchaca, 2002). Mexican Americans, however, “could not be segregated from children of other white races, merely or solely because they are Mexicans” (G. Martinez, p. 365). However, white power structures found other methods for separation. Spanish, for example, was prohibited in public schools (see Spring, 2005). In 1930, however, the *Independent School District v. Salvatierra* ruled that Mexican American students could not be segregated, but students in grades 1-3 could be sent to “separate” schools to remedy their language deficiencies (see Levin & Hawley, 1975; Foley, 2014). What ensued thereafter was Americanization through academic institutionalization. The logic of management and control was still intact, just manifesting in different ways. It manifested through the idea that Mexican Americans had cultural, social, and language problems that needed to be remedied through Americanization, first by stamping out their identity and cultural practices, and second, by creating “Mexican” educational tracks that would subjugate these students to manual and domestic education (see Bedolla, 2009). A justification was that Mexican Americans did not care about education (see Valencia & Black,
2002). Again, colonial logic permeated, which allowed Americanization efforts to evolve into a “whole scientific approach of teaching Mexican American inferiority through segregation and English-Only language pedagogy” (Blaton, 2007, p. 3). Ultimately, Mexicans and Mexican Americans would be stripped of their land and access to land, exploited for labor, provided with an inferior education, and considered second-class citizens (see Montejano, 1987; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004).

In her elucidation of the term “rhetorical listening,” Krista Ratcliffe (2005) offers the formulation that whiteness “functions overtly as a racial category that is privileged even if all white people do not share identical social and economic privileges” (p. 12). This colonial logic created a dynamic and complex situation for (Texas) Mexican Americans of the LRGV and the nation. The demarcation of the LRGV (by a nearly 100 mile-long geopolitical border to the South-end and a border of checkpoints within U.S. territory to the North) is an interesting case in point. This border underscores the perception, ideologically promoted since the United States reneged on the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalogo, that the Texas Mexican American is stuck in space (barbaric) and behind in time (primitive). What is most revealing of such belief and strategy is how whiteness is at the center of production, at the center of not only the erosion of the social class of Mexican Americans, but also at the center of the Mexican American peoples historical and current struggle for political, social, economic, and civil rights. Whiteness does indeed function both as a racial category and as an inscribing service for palimpsestic readings, for it always ensures that “white” is privileged and everything else (the “other”) is not.

The idea of “The Mexican” is not unique to the LRGV. When we think of the Mexican American body as a text, a text of history, memories, and struggles, it is critical to look at the rituals and practices that are inscribed, circulated, and re-circulated in the affective realm to
preserve the racial symbol/archetype (i.e., savagery, barbaric, primitive) inflicted upon the body.

In the everyday U.S. context, “The Mexican” is considered subhuman. As Ratcliffe (2005) explains, while all white people do not share identical social and economic privileges, they are still considered white. Meanwhile, Mexican Americans are considered “other.” This is the way that a rhetoric of assemblage works, creating an affective figure that does not need to be conformed through direct action, but rather through residual memories and imaginaries that carry with them meanings and associations (see Wingard, 2013).

The idea of the “The Mexican” makes the hegemonic white U.S. citizen family feel protected and secure. The rational/other and in-place/out-of-place intimacy is at the center of the production of management and control. In the LRGV, Mexican Americans have not rejected the Spanish language and have not forgotten their Mexican cultural traditions. This is not a post-racial place. The past and current phases of colonization are as much part of Mexican Americans as they are of it. They—we—are not a people living in a post-colonial material-social world. We still occupy an intellectual space in the American imagination wherein we are beneath them, inferior to the American culture. The checkpoints and the geopolitical border that box us in have two functionalities then. The first is to manage and control “flow” and “circulation” of people, ideas, and objects. The Valley becomes an othered space, monitored and deprived of resources. But there has been an unintended consequence to this colonial management and control, however. In the failure to eradicate the consciousness and sub-consciousness of a denigrated people, we have created our own world of resistance, one driven by a human will and spirit to survive and overcome, unwilling to remain on the cusp of invisibility.

The rhetorics of this place and this place of rhetorics, this site of human activity, of historical and current encounters and interactions, of global flows and local streams, are
surrounded by colonial events caused by spatial and temporal colonial difference. But in listening well and deeply to such rhetoric, to the activity of the everyday, through language and subjectivity, to claims of what it means to be American in the U.S. (but at the border), we learn and we tell how the people of the LRGV continue to make place, culture, and people in transgressive ways. Take U.S. route 77 South towards the LRGV and you will find a border(ed)land, built by design through colonial management and control. Yet, here you will find a culture and a people, unlike those from other places, unlike other Mexican Americans, who test the limits of English as the lingua franca, who destabilize assumed identity-politics, and who engage in meaning-making practices and knowledge productions that cannot be understood unless examined from within. Concerned with visibility, these are important observations and inferences. To understand el Valle, you have to be there. Maybe, even from there. The everyday cultural rhetorics of the LRGV can be read, analyzed, and interpreted. But, for such to matter, we must move from universals to the particularities of cultural rhetoric.

A Reflection

_Llama’ a ama, my mom would say when it was time to go the pulga. The pulga was always packed. Tengo botas...Botas de todo tipo, one vendor would yell out. Vestidos...zapatos, cinturones...ay por los ninos y ninas... Mam...mam...mam...tengo ropa...tengo clothes...for the chiquitos...for the kids...Come...come...podemos hacer un deal mam...another could be heard saying. Qué curioso, my grandma would say of each pulga we went to. I also found it curious, as my grandma would say. In the middle of one pulga was a man with what I now know was the confederate flag. My mom and grandma would say to ignore him. He was preaching every time I saw him, and the people would “speak back” by calling him names, telling him to leave, and by straight up just ignoring him. Every weekend he was there and every time he’d be ignored. In_
reflecting about this, I am reminded of how whiteness is always there. Yet, as my people have taught me, I have options. The number one thing to remember is that we have options; even our silence is an option. Yet, I cannot ignore how one white man, amongst a sea of brown, can result in pain.

Speaking Back

On a local and global scale, in and across Texas and the Southwest, Mexican Americans have been on the cusp of invisibility. The politics of the local/regional area of South Texas and the LRGV is especially important given its global implications in regards to desegregation, civil rights, and Mexican American politics. However, the history of Mexican Americans, in particular within South Texas and the LRGV, is often one told without accounts of racial violence by Texas Rangers, racial tensions and social estrangement, and the continued oppression of the Mexican American community. The Mexican Americans of South Texas and the LRGV have responded (and continue to respond) by speaking back, engaging in strategic democratic participation.

In response to the conditions and local/regional needs of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest, in the late 1880s mutualista organizations began to emerge, ultimately playing a vital role in the organization of Mexican and Mexican American community life in the U.S. These mutual aid societies can be traced to non-elite groups of Mexicans who believed in political action and participation. They emphasized common experiences, identity, and the need to remain active participants in public life. Mutualistas were involved not only in the survivance of the Mexican and Mexican American communities, but were also involved in urging ethnic Mexicans to vote in U.S. elections and to organize strikes within the labor force. They emerged across Texas in the mid and late 1800s—in Laredo (Sociedad Union Mejicana,
Sociedad de Obreros Igualdad y Progreso, Club Azul Independiente Mejico-Tejano, Sociedad Union Democratica), San Antonio (Sociedad Benevolencia Mexicana), Corpus Christi (Club Reciproco), and Brownsville (Sociedad Mutualista Miguel Hidalgo). The actualization of mutual aid societies created opportunities for local and regional political struggles. The sense of unity (pan-Mexican) and coherence (equality and equity) led to strategies for address and resolution. Within mutualista organizations the role of rhetoric and deliberation was profound. Emphasis on the spirit of mutualism, civic pride, identity, and political objectives and strategies intensified the rhetoric of civic action and participation, creating a discourse of Mexican American culture and politics amidst white bourgeoisie material interests. Mutualistas based their efforts on unity and inclusivity and would play a critical role in the development of Mexican and Mexican American politics and organizations in society (see Calderon, 2000; Zamora, 2000).

In 1911, El Primer Congreso Mexicanista was organized in response to recurring oppressions like the swindling of land grants, discrimination, and violence, as well as to address other local/regional needs of South Texas and the LRGV. The Congreso offered workshops on confronting the social oppression and racial violence inflicted by Texas Rangers and Anglos, and the economic situation faced by Texas Mexican Americans. The conference placed emphasis on civil rights, economic protection, education, and civic participation through its deployment of rhetoric focused on a federation of community organizations. This rhetoric drew upon the historical struggles of Mexican Americans and the community’s efforts to deploy strategic objectives to be heard and seen not on Anglo terms but, rather on Mexican American terms. The rhetoric of unification and organization illuminated profoundly the organizers’ and leaders’ message that through unity and coherence Mexicans and Mexican Americans could assert their rights, civic mindedness, and participatory action within a U.S. context. The Congreso, and the
Harlingen Convention, which followed, reflected not only the strategic practices of redress, but also a commitment to organize against the racial discrimination that would persist for the years to come (see Limon, 1974).

In 1915 a “Tejano Revolt” emerged from non-elite Mexicans and Mexican Americans in South Texas. This revolt is not to be confused with the San Diego Revolt, a call for revolution from Texas to the Southwest (see Hager, 1963; Sandos, 1992; Harris & Sadler, 2014). The Tejano Revolt was a social movement in response to the local/regional conditions and needs of the LRGV. Such conditions included discrimination, inequity, inequality, and poverty. During this time, Texas Rangers shot and lynched Mexican and Mexican Americans. The effects of the Mexico and U.S. war had created a sense of coherence and common experience caused by Anglo dominance and a pattern of violence against Mexican and Mexican Americans that stretched the entire South Texas region. This revolt had repercussions—Mexican dances and holidays were deemed unlawful, the searching of Tejano homes became lawful, violence by Texas Rangers went unchecked, and there was “out-migration” of Mexican border residents. It is reported that approximately 50% of the Tejano population left the Valley as an effect of measured enacted after the revolt. The Tejano Revolt, however, still stands as a reminder of the politics and strategic objectives of Mexican and Mexican Americans in South Texas and the LRGV to challenge Anglo domination and violence (see Rocha, 2000; Johnson, 2003).

On August 14, 1927, Mexican Americans met again in response to the conditions and local/regional needs of South Texas and the LRGV. Many organizers from El Primer Congreso participated in this conference as well. Initially, Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Mexico Texanos met at the city auditorium in Harlingen, Texas. It was a statewide political meeting to discuss organizing against racial discrimination. Two hundred delegates were said to be in
attendance, with conference speakers including Eduardo Idar, Clemente Idar, and Jose Canales, and Alonso Perales. Initially, similar to El Primer Congreso, emphasis was placed on a pan-Mexicanist coherence and unity. However, there was a re-articulation and re-postulation of representation. Unlike at the previous Congreso, Mexican nations were excluded from this gathering based on the idea that progress could only be realized through a Texas Mexican American effort. While there was deliberation on what it meant to be of the Mexican or American race, the deployment of a rhetoric of separation was strongly tied to emphasis on citizenship by the U.S. and Mexico. From the separatist point of view taken at the conference by Texas Mexicans, the Mexican government did not protect Mexicans of American origins, only Mexican citizens. Therefore, an effort led by Texas Mexican Americans was necessary to gain momentum in the effort to pursue civil rights and to appeal to the Anglo audience through a claim of citizenship. While the success, or failures, of the Harlingen Convention are many, what remains to be true is that it had effects beyond the region (see Orozco, 2009).

In 1928, the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was formed by some of the members of the Harlingen convention of 1927. Emphasis was placed on achieving civil rights for Mexicans who had American citizenship. The idea was that in the coherence and unity found by American citizenship, civil rights could be fought for in a more practical way. The conditions and local/regional needs of South Texas and the LRGV required not a rejection of all things Mexican, but rather, a measure of appeals to U.S. ideals of citizenship, thus allowing for social change and improvement of the Mexican American community. It was through an emphasis on American citizenship that LULAC could eventually argue, effectively, for a national remedy to impediments and injustices faced by the Mexican American community. LULAC emphasized education for Mexican American children, established funds for Mexican Americans to attend
college, and pushed for productive and responsible citizenship within a U.S. context. LULAC would move forward to tackle varying issues affecting the Mexican American community such as labor exploitation, discrimination, segregation, wage theft, and lack of civil and equal rights (see Kaplowitz, 2005).

The American G.I. Forum, led by Hector P. Garcia of Corpus Christi, Texas, was also a response to the conditions and needs of local/regional people as well. The actualization of this struggle percolated into the American G.I. Forum where citizenship was argued to be a right as well as a strategic tool for agency. The forum, and in particular Garcia, called for the full inclusion of Mexican Americans in the civic life of the U.S., emphasizing civic mindedness and the civic participation of Mexican Americans. Like LULAC, Garcia focused on American citizenship for Mexican Americans in order to begin challenging American exceptionalism, tracing a pattern of racial oppression and exclusion of Mexican Americans in the pursuance of civil rights. The Forum helped re-articulate and re-postulate the Mexican American community against prevailing stereotypes. According to Garcia, citizenship was not just a state of being but a performative and action-based becoming wherein all citizens should be able to participate in the creating of a democratic vision. The Forum vowed to uphold the American Constitution, but also pledged to confront institutionalized discrimination and to promote cultural and ethnic education. Overall, the goal was to be heard and seen. The American G.I. Forum would have national implications that would help establish a platform for the eventual Chicano/a movement (see Kells, 2006).

The recovery of these political events is significant. Jose Limon’s (1974) essay, “El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911,” illuminates how Chicano/a ideology deemed certain elements of Mexican American politics and history illegitimate and/or apolitical. The essay
details Mexican American politics in response to the conditions and local/regional needs of South Texas and the LRGV. In No Mexicans, Cynthia Orozco (2009) recovers the “Harlingen Convention of 1927,” which signaled a realization by the Congreso’s organizers that progress could only be made through an articulation of citizenship and an embrace of a synthesized Mexican and American identity. While Chicano/a scholars distinguished the 1920-1965 era from post-1965 era through nationalist politics and intra-racial discourses that eschewed previous eras of politics and condemned those calling themselves Mexican Americans, Orozco’s framing of civil rights movement to post 1965 means there has been a legacy of politicalness by the Mexican American community.

In his book LULAC, Craig Kaplowitz (2005) discusses the emergence of LULAC as an after-effect of the Harlingen Convention. Kaplowitz also shows the dynamic interplay taken up by the Mexican Americans of LULAC between working within American political/economic systems and fighting for civil rights of Mexican Americans nationally. LULAC came to influence national policy and set precedent for the landmark court case Brown v. Board of Education. LULAC challenges the myths that Mexican Americans were apolitical and that there was no civil rights movement until the Chicano/a movement. In Hector P. Garcia, Michelle Hall-Kells (2006) discusses the role of the American G.I. Forum, focusing on Hector P. García’s work organizing for the full inclusion of Mexican Americans in the civic life of the nation. The text illuminates the tension between Chicano/a and Mexican American politics and discourses and reminds readers of LULAC’s and the Forum’s roles in establishing a platform from Chicano/ as would later speak.

These eras reflect a continued political struggle, but more importantly these secondary texts reveal points of contention, which highlight the importance of revisionary work. A rich
history of epistemic politics has been erased and/or conflated both within a white/black race paradigm and Chicano/a deterministic discourse. Nonetheless, local and regional politics have indeed informed national politics pertaining both to Mexican Americans and Civil Rights. The history and unresolved struggles of South Texas and LRGV have contributed to global politics regarding Mexican Americans. From El Primer Congreso Mexicanista (1911) to the Harlingen Convention (1927), from the emergence of LULAC (1929) to the American GI Forum (1948), Mexican Americans from South Texas and the LRGV have addressed concerns in ways that laid the foundation for other civil rights movements that followed.

*Filtering of Identity Terms as Strategic Postulation*¹

Identity politics have been at the forefront of Mexican Americans of South Texas and the LRGV’s strategic articulation of representation. Chicano/a discourse and rhetoric disavowed previous politics for their perceived assimilationist ideologies and identity politics. However, I argue that Mexican American’s filtering of identity terms reflects a strategy that illuminates the tension between local/regional incorporation, rejection, and revision of politics within such contexts. My focus on the filtering of identity terms calls attention to the importance of global and local terms.

Prior to the 1920s, as we see with mutualista organizations and the Primer Congreso Mexicanista, a pan-Mexican identity was emphasized. In each instance, a pan-Mexican identity was figured as the best strategy for solidarity against a unified front of white power. The Harlingen Convention of 1927 began in the same way. The Harlingen Convention was the “second major statewide attempt to unite the various Mexican-origin organizations following the Primer Congreso Mexicanisata in 1911” (Orozco, 2009, p. 121). The work of Cynthia Orozco

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¹ Images in this section are not from the local archival box at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Instead, they have been collected from various online repositories.
(2009) valuably documents how this event unfolded and resulted in the strategic articulation and postulation of representation. It was argued that, “only Mexican Americans could provide leadership and solutions to the unique problems facing Mexican Americans” (p. 121). Alonso Perales, Clemente Idar, Eduardo Idar Sr., and Jose Canales argued for the exclusion of Mexican nationals from the conference. They believed that Mexican Americans and Mexicans could collaborate, “but only as two groups with different standards, each preserving its national identity” (p. 134).

According to Orozco, in advance of the convention, “dissension soon arose within the committee,” in which “one faction favored a single organization embodying both Mexico Texanos and Mexicans” and another “wanted two separate associations to address distinct needs and goals of each citizen group” (p. 122). The emphasis of the time was on citizenship and the Harlingen Convention was the site selected to address the Mexican American situation. There was increase in efforts by both the U.S. and Mexico to postulate nationalism and what that effectually did was leave the Texas Mexican American in the middle. The program would address nine items (see image below)
Some of the agenda items addressed the question of membership and the idea of a merger between existing organizations. Yet, according to Orozco, Perales’s intention was to secure the “well being of the Mexican Americans and when possible, of the Mexican citizens residing in this country” (as cited in Orozco, 2009, p. 123). While Mexican nationals and Mexican nationalism was supported by the Mexican government, Texas Mexicans (or Mexican Americans in general) enjoyed no such support. M.C. Gonzales explains:

The Mexican citizen[s] can at least call upon their government [Mexico] for protection through the many conveniently located Consular offices, and in case of grave [in]justice appeal may be had through diplomatic channels, but we citizens
of the United States of Mexican extraction, we are helpless. (as cited in Orozco, 2009, p. 128)

The reality of U.S. citizenship leaving Mexican Americans more “helpless” than their Mexican national neighbors resulted in a strategic response by Mexican Americans, one that allowed them to enter the political arena and participate in politics. In this way, a Mexican American identity and politics created a stake and space for political and cultural improvement. Of course, dissent emerged even amongst Mexico Texanos. Shortly after the convention, Perales would move forward to promote the formation of yet another organization, the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

LULAC carved out a space for new strategic articulation and postulation of representation. The work of Craig Kaplowitz (2005) and Arnoldo De Leon (2001) is beneficial here. LULAC was “bent on eliminating racial prejudice, struggling for legal equality, aiming for better equal educational facilities, and gaining a voice in local, state, and national politics” (Ethnicity, p. 81). LULAC “believed that only as American citizens could [Mexican Americans] effectively press for reform in politics and society” (Kaplowitz, 2005, p. 22). This immediate goal meant engaging in civic discourse (p. 23). The long-term goal was advancing the Mexican American community’s economic, educational, and public health conditions and working towards the “inclusion of all those of Hispanic origin and not just Mexican Americans” (“LULAC History”). The organization’s rhetoric emphasized articulation within a U.S. context. Most notably, this meant filtering the identity-term Latin.

Because LULAC believed “whiteness might work as a technicality to gain inclusion for Mexican Americans” in all social sites (Kaplowitz, 2005, p. 63), filtering out the identity term Latin was “strategic and was indicative of [LULAC’s] dissociation with the Mexico migrant
population” (Navarro, 2005, p. 206). LULAC limited its membership to U.S. Mexican Americans. By placing emphasis on citizenship, the belief was that “society would accept Mexicans as equals to other Americans” (Ethnicity, p. 84). This new rhetoric and new subject formation/position was reflected an adjustment to the times. In the 1930s, militant protest was considered intolerable, so LULAC adjusted to the times. LULAC used the rhetoric of citizenship never at the expense of renouncing a Mexicanista identity, but rather to “adhere to democratic ideals while maintaining their prerogative of observing their parents’ old tenets” (Ethnicity, p. 94). According to Louis Mendoza (2001) in Historia, LULAC’s “strategy was to accept exclusivist structures and work around them rather than remove them” (p. 137). LULAC’s approach may seem problematic, but stands as a testament to what types of negotiations were needed to gain access to equality and civil rights.

The most prominent example of this “new” rhetoric appeared in the Del Rio Independent School District v. Salvatierra. The 1931 case was the first class-action lawsuit against segregated “Mexican Schools’ in Texas and ultimately was precedent-setting. Prior to the 1930s, there was precedent for Mexican Schools, wherein Mexican-heritage children were segregated from Anglo schools. As discussed above, this racialized separation was part of a xenophobia movement against the Mexican American community. The court, however, would find “Mexican Americans as white, holding that Mexican Americans could not be segregated from children of ‘other white races, merely or solely because they are Mexicans’” (G. Martinez, 2011, p. 365). LULAC both helped finance this court case and also provided lawyers, and despite setbacks, the courts considered “segregation of Mexican Americans illegal, but only if such segregation resulted from prejudice rather than pedagogy” (Kaplowitz, 2005, p. 33).
LULAC claimed that because Mexican Americans were citizens and defined as “white,” thus promised the due process of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, Mexican Americans deserved all rights granted by the Constitution. LULAC would move forward throughout the years, advocating for the Mexican American community at the following junctures:

- The 1930’s re-classification of persons of Mexican descent to a designation from Mexican to White
- The 1946 *Mendez v. Westminster* lawsuit, “which ended 100 years of segregation in California’s public schools and [became] a key precedent for *Brown v. Board of Education*” (“LULAC Milestones”)

A militant and radical rhetoric and positionality would not have been suitable for inclusion at this particular juncture, especially amidst the pressures of citizenship both from Mexico and the U.S. Therefore, the “new” rhetoric was dependent upon inclusion. However, it is critical to note that dependency does not necessarily mean subordination. This articulation and postulation carved out claims that all Mexican American citizens had the right to exercise civil rights granted by the Constitution.

The second wave of filtering identities reflected the social milieu of the 1950s. Again, a militant and radical rhetoric and positionality would not have been rhetorically suitable at this particular juncture, especially amidst ongoing pressures of citizenship both from Mexico and the U.S. in the aftermath of the World Wars. Post-WWII, there was a new sense of urgency by the Mexican American community, one that demanded a rhetorical response and a new strategic articulation and postulation of representation. The Mexican American was still in a state of limbo
and was still dependent upon strategic identification with the U.S., but the cultural propriety within the social milieu of the 1950s shifted because of an emphasis again placed on citizenship, articulated by military service and patriotism. The Felix Longoria affair gave rise to the American G.I. forum of Texas, spearheaded by Hector P. Garcia, and this is where a ‘new’ rhetoric was used to carve out a new space, both in establishing “Mexican-American” discourse on a regionalist/national arena and advocating for the “Mexican-American” by projecting the Mexican American as a good citizen who deserved full inclusion “in the civic life of the nation” (Kells, 2006, p. 2).

Hector P. Garcia’s new rhetoric filtered the identity-term ‘Mexican American,’ which “designated identification with the United States as well as distinguished citizens of Mexican origin from Mexican nationals” (Kells, 2006, p. 16). Garcia used this ‘new’ rhetoric to question the limits of civil liberty, citizenship, and even homeland security. Garcia highlighted the forgotten citizen. In the first wave of ‘new’ rhetoric, the political and ideological struggle for legitimization focused on embodied and enacted rhetoric(s), placing emphasis on argumentation. Garcia did not appeal for full civil rights solely as a ‘Mexican,’ but rather as an American left begind as a forgotten citizen. This rhetorical move was not only a signal to the nation, but in fact challenged how an “American” was defined. Garcia placed emphasis on a rhetoric of demands:
The second wave of ‘new’ rhetoric focused on the limitations of civil liberty and citizenship, juxtaposed with what the founders had in mind in founding a ‘Great Country’ as a ‘safe’ haven for freemen. Given that Garcia served in the war, he found it especially unacceptable for his civil rights as a Mexican American to be violated, and in turn to be minoritized and racialized by the
nation for which he served. Garcia used this ‘new’ rhetoric to make an argument, based on first-class citizenship and equal rights, supported both by appeals to patriotism as well as returns to the motto of ‘forgotten citizen,’ with the strategy of exposing America to itself (Kells, 2006, p. 7).

Ethnic consciousness and mobilization reached their climax during the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, the rallying points for political solidarity were faltering and there was still the ever-pervasive presence of societal structures and discursive practices of subordination. The Chicano/a movement was radical (and militant) and necessitated yet another ‘new’ rhetoric and ‘new’ strategic articulation and postulation of representation. The ethnic reaffirmation of the identity-term Chicano/a was reflective of a radical vision for the Mexican American community. A new rhetoric emerged with new rhetorical responses. Mexican Americans felt that they were at a “juncture between integration or self-determination” (Gomez-Quinones, 1990, p. 101), and this juncture heightened a sense of national and political consciousness. Chicano/as felt that the evoking of the identity-term Mexican American was itself a controlling mechanism of selective and limited mobility, and so their ‘new’ rhetoric and representation became one of Chicano/a—a militant and radical rhetoric and positionality that was suitable for the social climate of the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1967 Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales wrote his famous poem “Yo Soy Joaquin.” The rhetoric deployed here tied into the historical plight and fraught conditions faced by the Mexican American community, both in its struggle to achieve full civil rights and to define itself. Similar to Hector P. Garcia’s rhetoric, this ‘new’ rhetoric made demands, both exploiting a ‘gringo society’ and the many ways in which it continued to subordinate the Mexican American/Chicano. Gonzales invoked revolutionaries such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata
to signal the trajectory of a Mexicanista struggle. Thus, in the re-articulation and re-postulation of representation, the Chicano/a is projected and defined as an individual that embodies strength, valor, and determination. In furthering this self-definition and representation, the Chicano is one that is prideful, both in the context of heritage and in terms of what is due to them post-Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. Gonzales’ rhetoric, therefore, exposes the U.S. as a culture that permits ‘rape,’ both in the sense of citizenship and usurpation of land. What is culminated within his poem, as a rhetorical response, is a revolution.

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan was introduced at the 1969 National Youth and Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado, representing both a nationalist consciousness and a ‘new’ form of rhetoric and rhetorical responses. A plan of liberation and revolution, it would work to realize the rhetoric of ‘Yo Soy Joaquin.’ This rhetoric focused on how the colonial structures continued to traffic in the present. The rhetoric of El Plan Espiritual de Atzlan moved to unite Chicanos and the Indigenous as inhabitants of Aztlan. This was the plan, a plan steeped in re-claiming, re-defining, and re-postulating against the backdrop of social structures/barriers and discursive practices of subordination. Similar to other Mexican and Mexican American movements and organizations (e.g., El Primer Congreso Mexicanista, the Harlingen Convention of 1927, and LULAC), in Denver emphasis was placed upon economic, educational, cultural, and political liberation. However, the context was different and the organizational strategies were more militant and radical. Emphasis was placed on nationalism (also known as Chicanismo), and the ideology of Chicano nationalism tied present struggles through the colonial eras and back to a reclaimed MesoAmerica (Aztlan). Chicano/as used Aztlan as a concept to evoke a sense of nationalism (Chicano nationhood) and unity amongst Chicanos. Similar to previous Mexican American rhetorics, Chicano/a rhetoric was about action, but it was different in that it was driven
by militancy and radicalism that focused on autonomy and liberation as connected to land and revolution.

The term Chicano/a was not without controversy. It has been well documented that while Cesar Chavez did have a “deep measure of pride in being a Mexican American” (Munoz, 1989, p. 52), Chavez considered himself a union leader, as opposed to a leader in the Chicano movement, and was opposed to Aztlan and Chicano/a discourse (Bardacke, 2012, p. 238). In fact, Chavez argued that “When La Raza means or implies racism, we don’t support it. But if it means our struggle, our dignity, or our cultural roots, then we’re for it” (Levy, 2007 p. 123).

BUT ALL OF THE LEGAL APPROACHES TO THE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MEXICAN AMERICANS ARE BASED ON THE FACT THAT
1. WE ARE WHITE CAUCASIANS.
2. THAT WE ARE AN ETHNIC IDENTIFIABLE MINORITY GROUPS MEXICAN AMERICANS, ETC.

WE HAVE ESTABLISHED BY SUPREME COURT HEARINGS AND DECISIONS THAT OUR CIVIL RIGHTS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED NOT NECESSARILY AS A RACE "WHITE" BUT AS A "MINORITY, ETHNIC GROUP OF THE WHITE RACE".

PERSONALLY I DO NOT DISLIKE THE WORD "CHICANO" IF APPLIED TO WHAT I SAID. BUT ANYONE WHO WANTS TO BE CALLED A "CHICANO" HAS THE RIGHT. I DO NOT ARGUE WITH THEM AND THEY ARE WITHIN THEIR RIGHTS...

HOWEVER THE TERM MEXICAN AMERICAN AS AN ETHNIC GROUP IS MORE ACCEPTABLE.

ALL OF THE GROUPS MAYO, MECHA, RAZA UNIDA ETC. HAVE DONE VERY MUCH GOOD AND I HOPE THEY CONTINUE TO DO SO.

HOWEVER IN THEIR MOVEMENT THEY HAVE FAILED TO GIVE RECOGNITION AND RESPECT TO OTHER GROUPS MUCH OLDER THAN THEY LIKE THE "AMERICAN G.I. FORUM" A MEXICAN AMERICAN FAMILY ORGANIZATION.
"LULUCOS" LEAGUE OF LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS.

IT ISN'T SO MUCH THAT THEY DID NOT GIVE US CREDIT IT IS THAT THEY ATTACKED US WITHOUT KNOWING THAT IT WAS US THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO EXIST WITHOUT BEING DESTROYED.

GOOD LUCK.

DR. HECTOR P. GARCIA
MOUNTEN AMERICAN G.I. FORUM

Image 13: Hector P. Garcia Correspondence
Hector P. Garcia also acknowledged the right to claim ‘Chicano’ as an identity-term. Garcia stated in a correspondence, “All of the groups, MAYO, MECHA, Raza Unida etc. have done very much good…However in their movement they have failed to give recognition and respect to other groups much older than [themselves]…it isn’t so much they did not give us credit it is that they attacked us without knowing that it was us that made it possible for them to exist without being destroyed.”

This section demonstrated the continuous efforts by Mexican Americans to be seen and heard as they responded to the conditions and local/regional needs of South Texas and the LRGV and all across the Southwest. However, it is important to note that Mexican Americans have indeed evolved in disparate ways and this is why acknowledging difference is critical (see Munoz, 1989). Resistance goes two ways in this context, both in the terms of the language of the resistance itself as well as in the ways this resistive language is embodied, circulated, and performed. In the absence of study of the latter, Mexican American identity in the academy has been universalized as Chicano/a, more specifically, in the discipline of rhetoric and composition.

Trinidad Gonzales’ (2008) work, “Conquest, Colonization, and Borderland Identities,” is a great resource for thinking about how identity terms (e.g., Mexicano, Mexico Texano, etc.) were filtered in the South Texas and at particular times in U.S. history. Gonzales asserts that while the discourse of U.S. nationalism worked to “dislodge the ethnic Mexican view of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as a Mexican place” (p. 187), place-making practices and self-representations worked to counter this discourse of erasure. The discipline of rhetoric and composition has much to learn about how place, knowledge, and meaning-making practices are tied to place (and geography) and local histories for Mexican Americans. This may indeed make all the difference for such students who attend school outside of regions such as the LRGV.
A Reflection

It is an ordinary thing to say where one is from. “Soy del Valle” translates to “I’m from the Valley.” However, there are complexities involved as well. To name your historical location, the LRGV, is a cultural claim. It speaks to a collective consciousness and ethos, attesting that despite the dynamics of each city of the Valley, there is a collective and public announcement of “who we are” and “where we are from.” To say, “Soy del Valle,” is one of the rhetorical strategies of being heard and seen within a local and regional scale. This act depends on connection and collective identity performance. Insofar people say “soy del Valle,” there is a level of communicative and performative connection that is embodied, witnessed, and praised throughout the socioeconomic contexts of the Valley. For us, this connection is expressed through identity and language—it is our identity and our language. These identities and languages are productions performed, and circulated in the Valley to a uniquely high degree.

Regional identity and language is observed in the material infrastructure of the Valley such as billboards, radio stations and music, television advertisements, and restaurant names and institutional infrastructures such as governmental buildings, institutions of higher education, and services-rendered offices. In each case, there is both the visual and textual aspect of blended Spanish and English. At any given time, Spanish and English are imposed upon the ear; at any given moment the body will be called to negotiate, to negotiate identity and language, to negotiate identity through language. The assumption is that if you are from the Valley, you speak both Spanish and English to varying degrees. Subjectivity, and language use and practice, are two forms of cultural claims that reflect an ideology about locality, regionality, and globality that must be studied on the scale of human interaction.
From Charro Days (originated in 1937) to fiestas patrias such as Diez y Seis (originated in the 1800s) to Borderfest (originated in 1976), each of these scale-making projects represent the Valley’s efforts to preserve the heritage of the LRGV, produce and circulate a sense of community amongst the peoples (who both respond and engage as well), and educate the people about their local culture. There is one phrase, “Pa’ los que saben,” that is part of a billboard in the LRGV that circulates widely (a phrase I return to in other chapters). Speaking to those who know, we call our people of the Valley “raza” because we see ourselves as one community in the LRGV. We acknowledge our history of perseverance and resilience, which is also why we call ourselves “raza pesada.” This is the equivalent, I believe, of saying no te dejes. That is, to self-represent as “raza pesada” is to mean we are people who are aware and who are unwilling to accept anything less than respect for humanity. To continue, we play and listen to corridos, Norteno and Tejano, cumbia, and country, because we cannot separate our Mexican, American, and Texas roots. We speak a language, something mashed of Spanish and English, and we create our own words, just like we’ve created our own place, because we are shapers and users of language and place. Nosotros decimos, “Soy del Valle” and “Soy Valle,” because it means something to say where one is from and what one is—Valle. And, for those who know, and those who do not, the Valley is something special, something different, something that can only be understood by being and becoming in it.

Fieldnotes from the Archives (10/20/2015)

The lady bringing me the archival boxes is interested in my work. She keeps asking if I have found anything interesting. She does not seem shocked when I tell her what I believe. Perhaps, because she is from the Valley, she knows better than to believe in a “white” history of the Valley. I ask her, “¿Donde están los Mexicanos?” We both laugh, but cringe thereafter.
“We’re all around, huh,” she replies. “¿Sabes que?” she continues, “Conozco a un grupo de Harlingen who collect and write about the history of the Valley.” She gives me their number and I call it. A lady answers and ultimately says, “We are here, come by.” How symbolic I thought it was, the comment, “We are here.” So we are, even now. I close the lids on the boxes, push them aside so I can come back to them the next day, and I leave. I thank the lady in the archive for bringing me the archival materials and for engaging in a brief, yet critical, conversation.

I meet up with Sonia, the woman who answered the phone. She is one of the group leaders of an organization dedicated to preserving the history of the LRGV. She is a small Mexican lady, about 70 years old, who is excited to meet up with me. We talk for two hours about what I was finding and what my concerns were. She invited me to their next meeting. She told me to “close those boxes” and, instead, listen to their stories. I have my ears wide open. I am ready to listen, well and deeply. To be continued…(see chapter 6).

**Conclusion**

This dissertation is influenced by the ways in which the past coalesces with the present as well as by the ways in which the signifying and signification of the Valley coalesce in response to material and discursive conditions—histories, geographies, and memories. What results, I hope to demonstrate, is an epistemological and collective ethos that emerges from place, knowledge, and meaning-making practices that are also constitutive to geo-graphical, body-graphical, and mobile-graphical displays of expression. I hope to describe this through the stories we tell ourselves and the stories that tell about us. One of my goals is to be able to reveal the stories we inherit and the possibilities of change in the stories we tell.

By Valley, again, I refer to the cities stretching 100 miles east to west and to cities one hundred and seventy miles north of the Texas Mexico geopolitical border. The tracings and
markings of these borders and checkpoints signal colonial difference. The effects and affects of imperialism, colonialism, and the idea of race, as well as the practice of racial classification, are ingrained in this geography and branded upon the bodies of Texas Mexican Americans. The traumas of colonial legacies, colonial manifestations and postcolonial life stand at the nexus of interactions and encounters, approach and re-dress, and silence/invisibility and the actional activity of being heard and seen. The Valley has indeed incorporated global designs of progress, development, and civilization. And this geography of exclusion, which I expand on in other chapters, reveals the importation and transformation of this region by the constraints of power, culture, race, and class. But, simultaneously, this geography of exclusion exemplifies the fragmentation of colonial and imperial initiatives and projects. In other words, “Valley” stands at the nexus between exporting, adapting and revising global designs. The recognition by “gente del Valle” of their difference gives way to an ethos as well as a mobile politics of knowledge that is itself “decolonial in the making.” I return to the LRGV to study its history (which I have, in this chapter, attempted to account for) and the disposition of Texas Mexican Americans in institutional spaces, for what it reveals to and demands from our the discipline of rhetoric and composition.

As I will discuss in chapter five, Latino students in higher education are most likely to be placed into lower academic tracks throughout their secondary education, enroll in remedial courses in high numbers, and are less likely to earn a postsecondary degree. In the LRGV, our poverty levels are among the highest in the U.S. As with other impoverished and minoritized communities in the U.S., the LRGV sees a great corollary between poverty and levels of literacy, education, and mobility. This study focuses on use, practice, and attitudes of literacies and identities and performance of rhetorical practices. The overall goal of this dissertation is centered
on the needs and desires of Mexican American students and how to develop pedagogies that begins with these students in order to enable them to succeed and develop the skills necessary for success in higher education. One of my goals is to consider the potential for decolonial possibilities and the efficacy of democratic participation across three sites (e.g., the writing center, the classroom, and the archives).

My goal is to influence composition and rhetoric scholarship on Mexican Americans, as well as to influence Mexican Americans from borderland cultures. The idea of listening plays a significant role throughout: listening to where rhetoric exists and is used; to how ethnolinguistic identities and rhetorical practices emerge from the intersections of place, culture and mobility; and to how places and people perceived to be stuck in space and behind in time are actually in production of place and time. Composition and rhetoric studies will benefit from the type of listening I deploy, as I help us all learn about a community that is on the cusp of invisibility, which embodies, circulates, and performs local histories, memories, and ideas of political and democratic participation. Also, to learn how a community such as that from the LRGV engages in rhetorical activities of making and creating.

As globalization continues to erode local cultures with universalism, it is the argument of this dissertation that difference matters. The people and culture of the LRGV have and continue to accommodate, change, and transform meaning in their critical interactions with the global. However mighty the logic of management and control seems, the “set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories other tell about us, and the possibilities of new stories” are stories that “involve power that has structural underpinnings and material consequences” (Rohrer, 2016, p. 189). These stories must be acknowledged as different, as difference existing within difference, because difference matters, in the particularities and
contextualizations of everyday experiences, in the ways in which ethos and epistemology are constellation and emergent.

This dissertation considers the potential for decolonial possibilities and democratic participation for students in three rhetorical and institutional spaces: the writing center, the classroom, and the archives. What does it mean to invoke a decolonial imaginary or decolonize institutional spaces? This is a question I continue to contemplate, especially as I acknowledge decolonizing spaces may not be fully possible. However, as I attempt in this dissertation, I can create an environment and a curriculum and deploy pedagogies which in every way reflect a decolonial commitment. The goal of this study, to be clear, is not to overthrow an institutional space or institution. Rather, it is meant to stimulate awareness of a community on the cusp of awareness, to work towards changing the terms and content of talking critically about difference.

Malea Powell (2012) stated in her CCCC Chair’s address, “When I’m talking about decolonizing our discipline, our scholarship, and our teaching, I am talking about the actual students in our classrooms—their bodies, how their bodies are marked and mobilized in dominant culture, their language and how their language is represented in dominant culture, their lives and how their lives are denigrated as not quite good enough without the fix of Western literacy instruction” (p. 401). My goal is to create a classroom and disciplinary space that privileges local histories, self-representations, literacies and rhetorics, intersecting this with grounded pedagogies that encourage students to engage and participate in their own decolonial possibilities, however that may look. I believe this can be done through the teaching of writing and rhetoric.

My research is grounded in location and people and tradition. Their stories, values, practices, and ways of being, doing, and knowing inform my pedagogy and theory. Naming and
enunciations are central to decolonial knowledge. I am Mexican and American. I cannot deny how Texan, Mexican, and U.S. culture influence my identity and self-representation. To deny, or come in with pre-commitments to labeling identifications and import them, is to allow cultural violence to ensue. In *Latino/a Discourses*, Kells et al. (2004) write, “We know of [their] linguistic complexity, but we haven’t yet found ways to translate this knowledge into classroom practices that aren’t still founded on assimilationist sets of assumptions” (p. 2). In the case of the Mexican Americans of the South Texas and LRGV, Michelle Hall Kells’s (2002/2004) work in “Linguistic Contact Zones in the College Writing Classroom” and “Understanding the Rhetorical Value of Tejano Codeswitching” has proven valuable in regards to acknowledging and recognizing difference in language variation. Our language practices are the product of preservation, resilience, and social cohesion against a sociopolitical Anglo-Euro-American project of domination. Again, to deny, or come in with pre-commitments to label language practices, is to silence and invisiblize our students.

My rhetorical project is partial and incomplete, limited by the constraints of doing and writing up a dissertation. But, my work here reflects my commitments for the future. This is evident in the questions that I ask:

- How can the political and demographic features of a region, designed to limit economic mobility, be resisted through the creation of alternative identity and collective strategies enacted through linguistic, stylistic, rhetorical, and literacy practices?
- How can a multi-methodological and transdisciplinary approach illuminate students’ rhetorical practices and strategies of place-making and becoming?
- How do pedagogies premised on non-regional categories enable (or disable) the literate community strategies of Mexican American college writers in composition classrooms?
• How can the pedagogical situation of a composition classroom within or outside students’ home region utilize the use of community-based ethnolinguistic identities and rhetorical practices?
• How does the recognition of locally generated literate practices intersect with normative professional development of teachers located in minority-majority institutions?
• How can the field be challenged to break from its pre-commitments to a white/black race paradigm and begin to consider the Mexican American and Texas Mexican American, as Jaime Mejia called the discipline to do back in the 1990s?

These questions are premised on people and place. They work from the idea that we can respect and value difference and that pedagogies and theories can be developed in efforts to help the development and success of all students, but at times particular students, within higher education. The goals of this dissertation include considering how a writing pedagogy might be developed and considering how students can better inform our current notions of the use and practice of language and literacy, identity, and rhetoric by minoritized and racialized groups. I believe a focus on the latter enables us to think about decolonial possibilities and ways to create strategic democratic participation for students.

Although I have reservations about how scholars in the discipline take up Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, her scholarship has indeed had an impact on me. In a critical chapter from *Borderlands/La Frontera*—“How to Tame a Wild Tongue”—Anzaldúa (1999) provides an account:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for “talking back” to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do
was tell her how to pronounce my name. “If you want to be American, speak American. If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong. (p. 75)

I can remember feeling lucky that I was not put into the “other” class in elementary school, the class in which most Spanish-dominant speakers were enrolled. I had an accent, but I knew English well. Ironic, though, that my teachers spoke Spanish when class was not in session. I remember my grandma telling that it was important to learn English as well because it was an important language. My family’s first language is Spanish and continues to be used and practiced dominantly in my family. But, I understand the cultural violence Anzaldúa speaks of, for the cultural logics that exist in her narrative persist today.

My corporeal body is a representation of my embodied and lived experiences; my knowledge and ways of seeing and doing are grounded in those experiences. Sherry Shapiro (1999) writes, “The body comes to be seen as the preeminent material upon which inscription of culture and its particular discourses become embedded” (p. 77). Our students write from their bodies, from their place, from their ways of seeing and doing that positions them uniquely. How students exist in our classrooms and how they perform their races, identities, cultures, and language and literacy practices says something about our classrooms and about us. Shapiro argues, “A language that emerges from our bodily living speaks of a kind of rationality distinct from one that is intellectually rooted” (p. 27). We are not, and should not, be in the profession of teaching writing and rhetoric if our goals are to silence and make invisible the differences that play out in our classrooms, the differences that are complex and dynamic enough to create a politic born out of necessity (see Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015). Difference matters.

For many students, like me, we aware of the expectations set for us. But, we have hope. We are aware that even when things do not go our way or when we fail, that we must remain
strong because the situation is much larger than ourselves. Our stories begin with “we are the first in our family…” The reasons are many, but the fact of the matter is, we have hope that if we can only succeed, we can make a difference. In this way, we become the possibility of new stories. Some stories are cut short, some stories are in need of revisions, and some stories never begin for they never start beyond the mind. Are we ready to listen to the stories students inherit and that they write and re-write? Or, will we be a contributing factor to stories cut short?

**Chapter Overview**

**Chapter 1: “Introduction: On the Cusp of Invisibility”**

In this chapter, I provided a socio-historical framing of the LRGV to show the effects and affects of colonization and coloniality. I then explored the collective strategies used by residents throughout recent history to respond to local conditions through identification, rhetoric, and community organizing. I mixed in reflections and ethnographic fieldnotes to bring in the personal to this account of my research. Finally, I asked what might be the local and global implications of these strategic responses and what might be some takeaways for the study and teaching of writing and rhetoric.

In subsequent chapters, I work to articulate a framework and state of mind that is a central method for my research. As I visit three sites—the writing center, the classroom, and the archives—I consider the implications for local and regional studies and potential for decolonial possibilities and democratic participation. My work in this dissertation revolves around the attitudes of ethnolinguistic identities and rhetorical practices used and practiced in the LRGV. It centers on the significance of difference, first, as tied to a history of spatial and temporal colonial difference, and second, as an indication of social and cultural action and agency in spaces and times.
Chapter 2: “Situating my Ethos, Ethics, and Methodology”

In this chapter, I discuss the ethics and ethos involved in re-immersing myself into a familiar yet distanced environment. I account for my research questions and methods through personal accounts with co-participant narratives. These accounts talk about place, practices and (im)mobility. I then reflect on what these accounts have taught me about listening, memory and participation. These methods, I discuss, come to frame my study of literate and rhetorical lives of students from the LRGV.

Chapter 3: “Of Space, Time, and Historical Bodies”

In this chapter, I articulate a mobile-decolonial framework as a central method for my research. I begin with a decolonial examination of spatial and temporal difference linked to the “myth” of modernity and globalization. Next, I trace a series of critiques that re-orient space, place, time, and historical bodies within the theoretical paradigms of decolonial and mobility studies. I conclude by arguing that this framework can nuance how difference is used in relation to local and global discussions about pedagogies and curriculum.

Chapter 4: “Unmaking Gringo-Centers”

Focused on my first research site, a writing center, I begin with a study of how writing center scholarship about race has (and continues to be) focused on African-American experiences. I move to include the Mexican American student as part of writing center conversations. I argue that while writing centers have been progressive, the “center” cannot hold without accounting for Mexican Americans. In so arguing, I identify listening as an agenda for decolonial work and focus on local-regional subjectivities and histories.

Chapter 5: “Working with Students from the Lower Rio Grande Valley”
Focused on my second research site, the first-year composition classroom, in this chapter I enter the conversation of translingualism and difference. Using the decolonial/mobilities framework from Chapter 2, I reflect on my ethnographic study of two first-year composition courses at a HSI in the Valley. This framework allows me to demonstrate that students are active agents in the production of their own identities, even within the material constraints or immobilities of their historical situation. I then argue that such frameworks, embedded within regional and local practices, offer the seeds of an effective curriculum.

**Chapter 6: “Epideictic Archives and Archives of Enunciations”**

Focused on my last research site, the archives, as well as local history organizations, I come back to this idea of the “myth” of modernity and globalization. I work through several pieces of evidence that reveal the limitations of this myth, while articulating how archives historicize the potential for student agency. Next, I discuss the possibilities of students working from institutional archives and the power of creating assignments that are located in local-regional and institutional exigencies.

**Chapter 7: “Conclusion: Implications for the Study and Teaching of Writing and Rhetoric”**

In my conclusion I consider the implications of this study for composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies. I offer some final remarks and suggestions that clarify the vision of this dissertation as well as the direction of future research in the discipline.
Chapter 2: Situating My Ethos, Ethics, and Methodology

I come from these two cultures, I’m a product—albeit not a finished one, yet—of them, I cannot be anything else, and I choose not to be anything else other than what I am.

Rolando Hinojosa-Smith

I say I come from the border between Tejas and Méjico. Nobody asks me what side of the border I’m talking about, and I don’t tell them, mainly because, to me, the border is the border, and it would not make any sense to divide it into sides.

Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “Literary Wetback,” p. 288

Engaging in border thinking is tantamount to engaging in decoloniality; that is, in thinking and doing decolonially…border thinking is not directed toward ‘improving’ the disciplines, but toward ‘using’ the disciplines beyond the disciplines themselves…Border thinking is actional.

Walter Mignolo, Local Histories, p. xvii-xviii

What we know is at all times attached to bodily knowing, whether as tactic knowing or as a conscious knowing. What we know speaks with and to our bodily memories of living.

Sherry Shapiro, Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body, p. 32

A central focus of any project as intensive and significant as a dissertation should be on ethos, ethics, and methodology. I argue this because we must always be conscious of the efficacy of our work and how we define our work. In being attentive to these two aspects, I realize that my perspective stems from my sense of difference and that my political ways of being, seeing, and doing emerges from my lived experiences. Driving this conversation on ethos, ethics, and methodology is the fact that I come from a people and tradition situated in the LRGV and that I have lived experiences that support and justify my politics of the flesh. Both points are important to make and emphasize. Today, I speak in the register of pedagogy and rhetoric. But, before all this, my education began in place, it flourished with experiences, and it involved knowing how to listen and negotiate. Listening and negotiating always necessitates so much more than a singularity of the corporeal body. Listening and negotiating pushes the body to thrust the spaces between, centering the body as sensuous within and between the physical, temporal, and symbolic. In this way, we know that as human beings we are not static or fixed, but rather always in the process of becoming. As human beings, of the LRGV, crossing and entering borders is a
fact of life, and it attunes us differently both to each other and to the land. In this chapter, I talk about the role of ethos, ethics, and methodology.

Because of the constraints of a dissertation, the idea for a comprehensive and multi-sited ethnography was out of reach. This dissertation’s research, first and foremost, focused on a people, tradition, and place. I did not lose sight of this. However, to respect the disciplinary tradition of ethnography, I have reframed from calling this dissertation an ethnography. This, though, has worked in my interest. To do the work of thick description and thick interpretation, for example, a transdisciplinary and multi-methodological approach is needed. In this way, I can still say that my work drew upon the rich traditions of ethnography. Drawing upon Dell Hymes (1970), James Spradley (1980) describes three modes of ethnographic inquiry (comprehensive, topic-oriented, hypothesis-oriented). I want to highlight the first two:

- **Comprehensive ethnography** seeks to document a total way of life. The ethnographer doing comprehensive ethnography in a village would, through participant observation, try to describe a wide range of customs, hoping to cover most areas of the community before completing the research.

- **Topic-oriented ethnography** narrows the focus to one or more aspects of life known to exist in the community. (p. 31)

According to these definitions, my study would fall under topic-oriented ethnography. The focus of this dissertation was on rhetorical practices and ethnolinguistic identities. Spradley also defines two types of ethnographies, *macro-ethnography* and *micro-ethnography*: “Macro-ethnography requires many years of research and often involves numerous ethnographers. On the other hand, micro-ethnography of a single social situation can be done in a much shorter time” (p. 30). Because of time constraints and my focus on three single social situations (e.g., the
writing center, classroom, archives), my research would fall within the realms of a micro-ethnography. This micro-ethnography is meant to help establish a foundation for what I imagine to be a future project that is comprehensive and multi-sited. Topic-oriented ethnography would make up one component of my multi-methodological approach.

As I’ve gone through higher education, I have drawn upon the people, tradition, and region that I come from as a source of empowerment. Ultimately, this culminated into a research question for my dissertation. I believe the questions I asked (see chapter 1) were ethnographic questions, because the thread that tied them together surrounded the need to be in place and to re-enter my community. This is an important point to make, because returning requires a re-orientation to how people make place and geography through listening, movement and mobility, and participation and action. From these ethnographic research questions, I thought about the need to incorporate methods of participant observation, interviewing, and shadowing. These methods were important because my focus was on visibility and visibility requires presence (and co-presence). I did not believe it was enough to merely observe, I needed voices beyond my own to be articulated in and on their own terms.

Yes, a constraint of mine was time, and in one instance, institutional politics. Therefore, this dissertation is not a comprehensive or multi-sited ethnography as I first imagined it to be. But as Harry Wolcott (2008) discusses, I did engage in ethnographic work that involved an ethnographic way of seeing, being, and doing.\footnote{Wolcott (2008) writes, “My point is that an ethnographer’s way of seeing tells us more about doing of ethnography than does an ethnographer’s ways of looking...What the ethnographer does...is to think about how other ethnographers would see the setting, what they would make of it” (p. 70).} I was not just “looking” at the LRGV. For me, there was so much more at stake than this. I was successful in participating, observing, interviewing, and shadowing, because I showed that I cared and respected the situations and exigencies of the LRGV to others. My way of seeing, being, and doing was rhetorical and
ethnographic in nature. Seeing, being, and doing is a dialectical processes that resulted in new ways of seeing. I believe both my field notes and reflections suggest that at the very least. My purpose was to analyze, interpret, and describe culture as it was performed and shaped by bodily activities in and across place and sites. No one body ever conformed to a pre-formed performativity. Yet, a collective ethos could be observed, as what connected each student I worked with was his or her struggle. In the end, I conducted a topic-oriented ethnography and began the work in this dissertation for a multi-sited ethnography. Throughout this dissertation, thick analysis and interpretation of meaning-making practices and knowledge productions played a central role. Ethnography, as a way of seeing and doing, encouraged me to flesh out how people are constituted differently and make present voices that constitute human practices and agencies differently. This drew me to understand the role of difference and be attentive to how difference plays out in place. It encouraged me, most of all, to advocate for envisioning sites as de-colonial possibilities and sites as a critical space for student democratic participation. For me, the public sphere is inseparable from the academic, because if anything, the academic sphere is an extension of the hegemonic family.

In addition to inquiring about and observing people’s attitudes in the use and practice of ethnolinguistic identities and performance of them as rhetorical practice, my “work” also involved the “doing” of historiographical and archival work. I place quotations over the words “work” and “doing” to suggest a commitment to action-based research. I was not just aligning with historiographical and archival work. There was indeed a rhetoricity to this project that I was always conscious and reflective of and in this way I recognized by responsibility as a scholar doing historiographical and archival work. The next two components that made up my multi-methodological approach include, again, historiographical and archival work, and the “work”
involved in “doing” such approaches involved making histories, peoples, traditions, and one’s own ethos and ethics visible. Shirley Brice Heath (1983) writes,

Anthropologists study social life as and where it is lived through the medium of a particular social group, but the ethnographic present never remains as it is described, nor does the description of the current times fully capture the influence and forces of history on the present. (p. 9)

The point Heath makes is that the people of her research, which is simultaneously ethnographic and social history, are “products of the region’s history” which “determined the times, places, and ways they could interact” (p. 9). I presented a brief and partial history of Mexican Americans, both local and global to situate the social, historical, and political contexts of the students I was working with (see chapter 1). I argue that their bodies are constellative to a historical genealogy in the LRGV and situated within the present social, historical, political exigencies of the LRGV.

In doing historiographical and archival work, my point was to illuminate how students are influenced and shaped by exigencies in which they are situated. My goal was to bring attention to how these exigencies have been informed by racist ideologies, attitudes, and prejudices as well as how they have been contested (see De Leon, 1983; Limon, 1994; Foley, 1997; Richardson, 1999). In doing so, I believed that I would be able to reveal both the politics of the flesh involved in movement and mobility and interactions and engagements. I included archival materials (see chapter 1 and chapter 6) and student voices (see chapter 5) to make present that which has been made invisible in the mainstream sphere. While this research is only

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8 Johannes Fabian (2008) struggles with the “ethnographic present” and writes, “it is impossible to make the past present without recourse to the ethnographer’s personal memory or memories” (p. 4). For this reason, he refers to the process of re-presenting knowledge as late ethnography. The point I want to make is that Fabian argues ethnography is historiographic and autobiobiographic.
a partial account, for the full ramifications of a people and tradition, time, or place cannot be captured fully, I do believe this partial offers insight into the “work” left to be done. While the “ethnographic present never remains as it is described,” I can ensure the coevalness of the students I worked with by making them present in ethical and responsible ways. To accomplish this, the goal was not merely to show how people are shaped by conditions, but also how they are in the production of meaning and of space and time itself.

At the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), a panel convenes on the topics of rhetoric and historiography, better known or referred to as the Octalogue. Their commentary on what it means to do historical work has been beneficial to my research. In Octalogue I, James Berlin, for instance, writes, “Historians must become aware of the rhetoricity of their own enterprise” (p. 6). The rhetoricity of my own enterprise was to acknowledge how global histories exist regarding Mexican Americans, but also to illuminate how local histories are engulfed in place and how they tell a story of difference. The rhetoricity of my own enterprise surrounded a political ethos and ethics that on the basic level of humanity was concerned with how a people and region remain on the cusp of invisibility. A question that motivated this research revolved around the idea of visibility, not for the sake of academics, but for the sake of a people who remain on the cusp of invisibility in higher education. Nan Johnson suggests that historical research is a rhetorical activity, wherein the research strives for a dialectical relationship between evidence and partiality. It is the rhetorical component that drove me to question the myth of modernity that is present in archival materials (see chapter 1 and chapter 6) and it is the rhetorical component that drove me to begin from historical bodies and historical spaces and places because it is here, at the level of human practice, that I believe offers alternatives to modernities instead of strictly contested modernities. The dialectical relationship
between evidence and partiality is something that is real and that I had to account for, because without acknowledging differences within difference, this dissertation could slip into the very habit that I critique of rhetoric and composition—universalisms.

In Octalog III Vicki Burton writes, “We are in danger of not seeing what is before us, of missing our chance to dwell” (p. 111). My work may be partial and incomplete, but it was important for me to re-enter this region, to dwell within the region and my community, and at least provide an account of what the discipline has been missing, especially in its now trend of arguing for seeing and acknowledging differences. I believe it was my role, at this particular juncture of my career, to teach the discipline of this place, people, and tradition, at least partially. And, to provide the discipline the opportunity to “dwell” within the borders that such students of the LRGV navigate and negotiate. In this way, my call to action is for the field to listen, well and deeply, to “see” instead of look, and to be “do” instead of merely “be.” My goal was to at least describe how Mexican Americans in the LRGV, historically and presently, perform from and with their bodies. This was an important point to make. We perform from the body, the body is always in the process of becoming, and hence, political in its very nature, whether subtle or explicit. Dwelling in the border(ed)lands of the LRGV does not look the same as dwelling in other borderlands. It cannot. Students’ stories reveal this much. There is a history in the LRGV, which is not wholly embedded within the histories of Greece and Rome, which is not fully westernized. This was another important point to make. There are rhetorical legacies in the LRGV, I believe, that invite us to be open to new epistemologies and ontologies that have yet to be accounted for in our field. There is no singular rhetoric or literacy. The purpose of this dissertation was to begin the work that describes rhetorics, literacies, and rhetorical practices that are dynamic and complex.
In Octalog III, Malea Powell argues we have to learn to rely on rhetorical understandings different from that of the origins story, which are celebrated and substantive of colonial discourse (p. 122). My rhetorical enterprise is partial and incomplete, it is limited by time, but it begins the work I hope to do in the future. The work of scholars in this discipline have too often reminded me of the importance in doing revisionist historiography; of being open to the impossible possibilities of historiography, of participating in the stitching together of histories that can and do unfold; and, of bringing into focus historical actors, situated in both micro and macro contexts responding to their exigencies (see Glenn & Enoch, 2010; Gold, 2012; Hawk, 2013; Ballif, 2014). For me, this begins with stories, which as Malea Powell (2012) argues, “take place” and “practice place into space” (p. 391). For me, it begins with the stories we inherit, the stories we tell and circulate, and the stories that speak of who we are, where we are from, and where we hope to go. I cannot stress this enough. Part of doing historiographical and archival work involves listening, well and deeply, both to the stories of action and human agencies, and the stories of hope. To begin from stories is to recognize there is not one origins story of anything. To begin from stories is to acknowledge that we must step outside the normative, to question where the discipline has been and where it has not been, and to be committed to the reality of co-existence. To do historiographical and archival work in the LRGV required a rhetorical dimension that always questioned both the presentation and representation of culture and my own ethos and ethics to research and speak back to that presentation and representation. To begin from a different story is to recognize and acknowledge co-existence. This is a central goal in working towards co-existence, co-trajectories, and coalitional building.

In addition to doing ethnographic, historiographical, and archival work, I believed it was important to open my work up to digital humanities methods (see chapter 4). This was motivated
by the fact that some people have argued that I only do “Mexican American stuff” and that I am not a “digital humanities person.” While not an expert, I did want to experiment with other strategies and methodologies (see chapter 4). I did so because I understand my own limitations in close-reading approach and because I am always open to new ways of seeing. Alana Liu (2013) in, “The Meaning of Digital Humanities,” writes,

In both their promise and their threat, the digital humanities serve as a shadow play for a future form of the humanities that wishes to include what contemporary society values about the digital without losing its soul to other domains of knowledge work that have gone digital to stake their claim to that society. Or, precisely because the digital humanities are both functional and symbolic, a better metaphor would be something like the register in a computer’s central processor unit. (p. 410)

Methods of the digital humanities are both functional and symbolic, especially in an age of mass information. The truth is, close reading approaches, as a methodological approach, is limiting for the researcher. Matthew Jockers (2013) has continued to lead a conversation on macroanalysis and computational methods that interested me. In my fourth chapter on the economy of race in the writing center, I read all the articles sited. The potential of missing something was greater at this type of scale of analysis. A macroanalytic approach opened up chapter four to new possibilities, that of patterns and topics within a larger economy of articles that I had amassed from one major depository and other sites I had collected articles from. One thing to note, computational methods still relies on thick description and thick interpretation. Close-reading and distant-reading approaches are in the service of each other, I believe, which allowed me to contextualize my close-readings in practical, empirical, and theoretical ways (see Jockers, 2013;
Jockers & Flanders, 2013). I hope to continue working in ways of digital humanities because I know that is has much to offer to methods of analysis and research in rhetoric and composition.

At the heart of my transdisciplinary and multi-methodological approach was doing actional research. I cannot stress enough, my goal is to bring visibility both to a people and tradition and a place so that way we can better prepare ourselves for working with and within differences. The idea of actional research stemmed from seeing advocacy as foundational to my project and acknowledging that I must take a critical stance in order to see that advocacy into fruition, especially within the context of pedagogy and curricula. For me, it was not enough to just say I want to study the rhetorical practices of the LRGV or that I would remain neutral in my endeavor. No! There is no neutrality in education or in research. The type of actional research I imagined aligned with decolonial scholars who argue a coloniality of power, knowledge, and being is a sophisticated structural articulation that exist today as a basic form of oppression in public and educational spheres. I have studied under and read many of the works from the post-colonial tradition. However, I have acknowledged that this tradition began from within higher education. There are limitations to it then. To engage in decolonial work is to begin not in the interest of the academy, but in the interest of humanity.

Walter Mignolo (2012) argues the logic of coloniality produces and reproduces “unjustices covered up by the illusory promised of the rhetoric of modernity anchored today in progress, development, growth and innovation” (“Coloniality,” n.p.). Higher education, in addition to places like the LRGV, is a prime site for narratives of modernity. Yet, the rhetorical dimension of this dissertation always understood that people were at the expense of articulating such narratives (see chapter 1). Mignolo presents a modernity/(de)coloniality framework as a form of critical approach that is interwoven through this dissertation. The reason I began from
both place (e.g., the LRGV) and higher education is because modernity and power exist in both spheres, which demands a framework for changing both the content and terms of redress. I believe there exist efforts to control language and history and to manage the body and mind. I have lived experiences to prove this. To counter this move, it is of the upmost importance not only to be critical of colonial logic (and colonial management and control), but to recognize and acknowledge that our geographies, bodies, and mobilities matter.

In sensu stricto (within the modernity/coloniality project) and sensu largo (beyond the academy), Mignolo argues for the importance of delinking the rhetoric of modernity from the logic of coloniality. He writes that at the level of critical thinking, the concept of decoloniality engages with “undoing the logic of coloniality and imagining de-colonial societies” while focused on: constructing “genealogies of decolonial thought in many world locations”; looking at “concrete experiences and practices of decoloniality going on today world wide”; and paying attention to decolonial projects (“Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking,” p. 18-19). I did not grow up anticipating to be an academic, and to be honest, there was very little expectation for me to amount to the level that I am at currently. This dissertation was always imagined, first, beyond the academy. For this dissertation, I recognized that logic of colonial management and control is very much present in the local history of the LRGV. To advocate for students in the LRGV, it was important then to understand how colonial logic and colonial power operated at the local level, and also the global level. It is acknowledging this that has allowed me to ultimately begin to imagine how coalitional building can be made through differences. But, the immediacy of this dissertation, first, draws me to the condition and exigencies in the LRGV. Before my encounters with Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo, my community taught me what it looks like to encounter oppression and strive for empowerment and what it means to garner
such empowerment and circulate it through language and identity. For this reason, I understand that difference matters and that we must critically work from difference to nuance how we develop pedagogies and curricula.

This dissertation focused on a local/regional history and centered on literacy and rhetorical practices with the intention of calling attention to how such a people, within a particular locale, are engaged in some kind of decolonial project, although it is impossible to argue that the whole region is doing so. The project of decoloniality, Mignolo (2007) writes, is ethically oriented, “epistemically geared, politically motivated” (“Delinking,” p. 312). I was born and raised of this place, from its people, and one of my goals was to advocate for how they are building a future that is not necessarily under the auspices of white domination. This was of the upmost importance to acknowledge and weave throughout, the relationships between difference, people, tradition, and place in space-time. Decolonial thinking is a “relentless analytic effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity, the structure of management and control” (The Darker Side, 2011, p. 10). Being born and raised of this place (the LRGV), I have observed and participated in the ways in which the “logic of coloniality” does not operate smoothly. But, I also understood that hegemony was inescapable. This drove me to think of the importance of the mind and body in relation to local and longer histories. Decolonial thinking and doing thus allowed me to focus on:

- the enunciation, engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix in order to open up decolonial options—a vision of life and social that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions. (The Darker Side, 2011, p. 9)
• an other thinking, an other logic superseding the longer history of the modern/colonial world, the coloniality of power, the subalternization of knowledges and the colonial difference” (Local Histories/Global Design, 2000, p. 338).

I believed that in the LRGV there is a local history and people working towards decolonial thinking and action. Whether this is intentional or not, there is a whole demographic engaging in practices (body-graphical, geo-graphical mobile-graphical) that questions what it means to be in the U.S. and to be a U.S. citizen. Furthermore, there is a whole geographic region made and re-shaped into a Mexican American cultural province and zone, despite its six phases of colonization, and despite being a U.S. territory. In this context, it was imperative for me to at least attempt to capture what cultural expressions are and how they are circulated and performed, and determine what they say about people and place and what they say about locality, regionality, and globality. In the process, what I did was open up the dissertation to the possibility of decolonial options and possibilities. This endeavor has been ethically oriented and epistemically geared and politically motivated.

It is difficult to conceive of decolonial actional work without considering the impact and influences of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which focuses on race and racism, social justice and equity, and challenging modes and means of master narratives. In Aja Martinez’ (2014) article, “Critical Race Theory,” she brings Critical Race Theory into conversation with discourses and rhetorics of race. Martinez writes,

Americans are overwhelmingly subjected to hegemonic education in which the histories of people of color in this country are minimized to footnotes within textbooks, and these passing acknowledgments generally subscribe to a
multicultural studies model that steers well clear of social justice oriented and consciousness-raising history. (p. 11)

Critical Race Theory helps cultivate awareness: of race as a structural category; the social historical, systematic, and institutional articulations of race in society; and the illusion that race no longer matters. Martinez argues, “Because whites do not often acknowledge the experiences of people of color, CRT recognizes and has developed the methodology of counterstory to relate the racial realities of people of color while also providing marginalized people a means to challenge” myths subjugating minoritized peoples (p. 20). Martinez’s use and practice of counterstory, both in this article and others, has served the field in beneficial ways so far. The method and methodology of CRT counterstory reminds us, the minoritized and racialized, that our cuentos and testimonios can empower us, can connect us, and can help us intervene “in the erasures accomplished in the ‘majoritarian’ stories or ‘master narratives’” (p. 24). Although I do not explicitly name CRT, I do weave counterstory throughout the chapters, both for my people and the discipline in which I participate. However, I did so by expanding its scope and content, for stories tell a different story of what it means to be in place, what it means to self-represent, and what it means to encounter and interact with social and material conditions.

Martinez (2014) suggests that counterstory is a “method of telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 24). This is a compelling argument. However, more often than not, there exist a “majoritarian” or “master” narrative in and within the Mexican American community in higher education too. As the title of this dissertation suggest, my own locale and people are on the cusp of invisibility, both because of white master narratives and because of deterministic narratives. Therefore, in doing decolonial work and Critical Race Theory I was also doing critical regionalism, which adds a dynamic. Critical regionalism works
against homogenization (Herr, 1996, p. 28) and focuses on spatial, temporal and political relationships (Rice, 2012, p. 207). As Jose Limon (2008) argues, it is a theory, methodology, and form of practice that is grounded in illuminating the “complexity of local cultures in comparison to others in the world,” while also recognizing “that all are in constant but critical interaction with the global” (p. 168). As I have already, and will continue to argue, borderlands are not created equal. As Carlos Munoz (1989) has argued, Mexican Americans have evolved in disparate ways (p. 10). In doing critical regionalism, my goal was to read, critically and rhetorically, the making of place and rhetorical practices. My intentions were not to dismiss the work that has been done to promote the advancement of Mexican Americans in higher education, but to add a perspective that has so often allowed my people and region to be on the cusp of invisibility. My intentions for the dissertation were to always make present a people and to question the systems that which allowed for the invisibility and silence of my people.

I have briefly accounted for the different components that make up my multi-methodological approach that is transdisciplinary. In chapter three, these components are further described in ways that support the threads that run throughout this chapter: difference, listening, memory, and participation. I will continue this chapter by reflecting on my ethos and ethics involved in this dissertation and research. I will then describe some of the details from my research project and introduce my methods for collecting data. Lastly, I will discuss the principle features of this project: listening, memory, and participation. I will do so in the context and with the language of ethnography. Again, this is for the purpose of establishing a foundation of which I will build upon after the dissertation and research done in this project.

**Ethos and Ethics**
Growing up, I learned the importance of mental mapping. Los Vecinos neighborhood was on one side, El Parke (e.g. Fair Park) was on another side, and La Reyna was on yet another. I “kicked” it with people from each neighborhood, either because I had family or friends there, but never together. Each barrio had rags (e.g. bandanas), signs, and graffiti-styles. The neighborhood did not belong to gangs per se, but generation after generation permitted these barrios to stand on their own, with physical and symbolic demarcations, often associated with these gangs. In school, each hall was represented by these barrios. Down the main hall, one barrio stood opposite from another along the walls, staking out and claiming their spaces. The school had several halls and this was the case for each. The members of these neighborhoods did not own these spaces, just like they did not own their barrios. Yet, the circulation of handshakes, colors worn, and graffiti spray painted on the walls demarcated such spaces as their place. And, people acknowledged and respected such signatures that signified a sense and expression of place. I learned to “kick it” between these spaces and places, not without failure of course, but in the process of acclimating, I would come to know how to negotiate and traverse other spaces and places. This experience is how I came to know the LRGV and acknowledge it as a unique region, an extension of Texas and the U.S., but its own world.

My friends and I resided at 2828 East Grimes. Our parents left those barrios (mentioned above) and hoped to provide a different type of access to opportunities. But, because most of us had single parents, with barely a high school diploma, the different place—2828 East Grimes—did not amount to a better situation. That is, while there was physical distance between the barrio and our apartments, the barrio had indeed transposed itself into this new space through circulating norms of behavioral patterns and attitudes. So, while “new” opportunity sparked curiosity of a new life style, the barrio seemed inescapable. The realization that a “new” place
does not necessarily result in a better situation was undergirded by low income, high school and college completion, and struggle and hardships. The inescapability of the barrio, for many, led to giving up on dreams of “new” opportunity. This is a reality for many who hope, who envision a better life, but are left with dreams deferred. Yet, what remains significant here, is the idea of hope.

From an early age, I knew what difference looked and felt like. At sport events, on our side, our parents were brown, and on the other side, they were predominately white. Standing in line at the W.I.C. office, there were no whites in line with me, just us brown folks. On our drives to the hospital, the houses of Treasure Hills fluttered my mom’s imagination, but even working two or three entry-level jobs, she knew she’d never be able to live in such a space, a place where the well to do lived. No, we were of the space, of the place, where we only had enough to get by; where we lived outside our means, even if momentarily, thereafter, bracing for the consequences that were sure to ensue; and, where we knew we always had candles just in case the lights would be turned off. I was always hesitant to turn of those damn lights; knowing that the roaches would come out at this time was never a pleasant feeling. Yet, such a reality did not stop mom from trying, from trying to introduce and force new relationships.

Mom tried to make friends with those other parents. She thought it would be a good idea to introduce me to “different” children, children who could see a future for themselves beyond their “place” in Harlingen. On a one-to-one level, it worked; we befriended each other. But, once other white children would join the pictures, those differences—that of language, color, and attitude—would starkly differentiate us. My white friends, and no fault of theirs, would default to their own kind, but I understood “why,” we had different trajectories, different embodiments of boundedness and mobility. I understood difference in this way, in the ways that are
internalized and performed in the everyday. It’s difficult to listen to folks who say not to worry about difference or to not accept statistics. These are often the same people who’ve never experienced the reality of the lower class.

I was but another statistics, and I knew this reality. I knew it from how normalized it was that our fathers were in prison and our mothers were working multiple jobs; from the first time I saw a friend of mine get arrested and not tell on me; from the first time that I lost a friend; and, from the first day I stayed at a shelter home and thereafter could never find a sense of home. I didn’t have a home (and today I still struggle with that experience). The foreseeable became definite. I would be stuck in the layers of composites that culminated into my reality. I would come to learn, as many of us do in the LRGV, as many of us have over time, how to survive, judiciously, in a capricious environment. Yet, in this way, in the juxtapositions and incoherencies, a modality of negotiating and traversing different spaces and places gave way. In this way, in the messed up things we have to do to sometimes survive, we grow a thicker skin and learn to question and think more critically of situations that come our way. I say “we” because so often I saw others like me. While not unique to my experience alone, the degree to which this reality grounds me, and others from El Valle, in the physicality and materiality of the region, is significant. An ecosystem of struggle, survivance, and resilience, a historical one at that, surrounded by a sense and expression of being, seeing and doing through our bodies and everyday practices, creates a regional ethos that circulates in and across the region to create El Valle. This much I observed, experienced, and knew. In space and time, as well as across it, this ethos has led to changes and transformations of El Valle as a place and as a geography. Yet, still, we remain connected through that ecosystem of struggle and resilience.
When I left Harlingen, with one suitcase in hand and a one-way ticket to a place far beyond El Valle, I truly had no intentions of ever coming back. My grandma, before I left, said, “Ve y no vuelvas.” The translation, “go and do not come back.” She knew the magnitude of this opportunity. I was on my way to a region of Texas, to an institution of higher education, by which my family had never entered. The bus stopped at the Sarita, Texas checkpoint before I could cross into this region and enter this academy. I had crossed here before, metaphorically, through letters to my dad at the Huntsville prison unit, physically on my way to visit my tío in prison, and spiritually in thinking and projecting myself out of this region. People in the Valley are aware of these internal checkpoints that run 70 miles North of the geopolitical border. They are there for one reason, and one reason only, to protect the interior parts of Texas and the U.S. from whatever and whomever is below those checkpoints. The question of whether they are constitutional or not are up for debate.

This space, this place of monitoring others and managing outgoing flow (e.g., people, ideas, objects), is the last line of defense for the government. These checkpoints are strategically located. And, along the stretch of U.S. 77, border patrol and ICE edge the terrains; their presence is meant to deter those considered “illegals.” The idea of “illegality” is expounded in questions of who, where, and why one is leaving the LRGV. In many ways, these questions mark the body, as different, otherizing and accentuating difference in color of skin, accent, and perceived citizenship. I never thought it would bother me if asked where I was going, why I was going there, or whether or not I was a citizen. But, it did and has.

So, this time was different. As the agents entered the bus, one asked me, “¿De donde eres?” His decision to speak to me in Spanish was based on an assumption conceived from my color of skin. The agent continued, “¿Y a dónde vas?” The continued persistence of Spanish,
despite my responses in English, was a strategy masked by profiling questions. These agents switch back and forth between Spanish and English, because for many undocumented people, they are only trained to answer very specific questions in preparation for their “crossing.” So, when the questions persist, and when the person shows nervousness or perceived inadequacy in language-use, the agents are permitted to pry even more, ultimately with the goal of “catching an illegal.”

“¿Y tu papeles?” he asked, as the questions were coming to a conclusion. This was an interesting question to ask, because typically “papeles” is associated with people perceived to be foreign. I understood this “checking” as form of expression, one inoculated in this space, in this place turned into the “last line of defense.” As I handed over my Texas identification card, his pandering over my presence seized. Lined up outside the bus were those they were able to “catch.” In a very real sense, I understood this moment to be that of entering gringoland. The idea of gringoland is a positing of racialized and minoritized identities and subjectivities, superimposed by the import of a supreme race or perceived superiority, branded upon the bodies of those otherized. The “checking” of “mis papeles” is indication of this white-dominant flexing, an ideology, circulated by rhetorics of assemblage and language, which permits checking before entering the interior parts of Texas from a space and time that has and continues to need surveillance and monitoring.

I entered an institution of higher education, only 6 hours North of the LRGV, as a probationary and conditionally admitted student. I was placed, consequentially, in remedial courses, mandated to enroll and participate in counseling to help with the “transition” and “acclimation” of a new space and place. Perhaps they foresaw what would be my experiences at such an institution, what would foreshadow the “checking” of “mis papeles” at the Sarita, Texas
checkpoint. I struggled in the classroom, because of academic preparedness and internal/external perceived academic illiteracy. Students hesitated working with me because they felt there would be too much investment in “catching me up.” At least this is what one student told me while working on a class project, where the individual tried to do all the work to not risk getting a bad grade.

A professor once questioned my enrollment at the university and advised that I reconsider alternatives like a technical or vocational school. “Maybe going back home is not such a bad idea,” is what was said to be exact. I struggled to communicate, to read critically, and ultimately to write academically. A look at my transcripts and grades show a clear indication of this struggle across subjects. Clearly, they had not met a student like me, with my type of expectations and needs. No, everything was an error. It was easier to send me to the writing center, a “white” center in itself, or default to the rhetoric of alternative options. I was not alone, both in the context of being a student of color and being a student of color from the LRGV there on campus. Out of those I came to befriend, few of us survived all four years, and not without discrimination on all fronts.

Our endeavor, and it was a constant struggle, extended well beyond the sphere of the classroom. In taking the school bus, we endured the micro-aggressions of facial gestures and under-breath comments. But, I think in occupying a space together, in that bus, we shielded ourselves from such aggressions, and empowered ourselves not to falter in light of such. Off the bus, protests ensued, and protesters—angry that the school had committed to diversity initiatives and angry at the fact that besides those students of color in sports we were there—confronted us. “We are not that tree-hugging school,” a reference to the University of Texas, was often a remark I’d hear. The choice of words is significant, dispelling tree-hugger, a slight at liberalism, with an
oppositional consciousness suggest something more conservative, something more ideologically at risk. On more than several occasions, white students, after their stupidly drunker would yell, “go back home you wetback.” The choice of conjoining “home” with “wetback” is indicative of a mindset, an ideology to be exact, which associates skin color and accent with that of a foreign place. Their privilege to yell such profanity suggests that they are “in place,” delineating who and what is “out of place” through ideological belief and strategy. “Home” is not clearly named, but it is indirectly associated with “wetback.”

The point is that “home” is a space where the “wetback resides,” outside of place and time of civilization, and I, the deviant, merely because of my skin color, am out of place. And, this privilege did not only take place on campus, it extended well into the workforce and other public domains. But, the checking for “mis papeles” that also went on at this institution of higher education is important to acknowledge because it is what brings me to name this space, this place, as gringoland and gringodemia. There is no other way to see it, and name it. The idea of gringoland reflects the colonial trafficking in the present, where the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of superiority are functional and operational. Gringoland and gringodemia are functional and operational terms for me, because they reflect the circulation of rhetorics of assemblage, the surveillance and monitoring done on behalf of the hegemonic family, and the branding of “other” upon the body, all of which are meant to heighten the internalization of otherness for people of color.

Wherever there exist an ethos of superiority, there exist an ethos from the “other.” As I stated, the LRGV is only 6 hours away. But, within those 6 hours, there are checkpoints separating the internal geographies of Texas-U.S. and the geography of the LRGV (e.g., a geography of exclusion), there is the ideology of gringoland and gringodemia as “in place” and
that of the border as “out of place,” and the idea of “their world” and an “other” world. My ability to listen, well and deeply, and combine this listening with that of others, allowed us students of color, students of the probationary and conditionally admitted, to survive the historical, material and affective realms of gringoland and gringodemia. The only recourse we found was to “speak back.” So, we opened up a book and read it too. We learned to play the game, as cliché as it sounds. And, in the face of discrimination and racism, we spoke back to retain our sense of agency, our sense of “self,” in the objectification of our bodies and minds. I turned to the LRGV, to my grandma’s words, in those moments of deep reflection and reflexivity. I have carried both, on my back, from the day I left the LRGV to this point, a point in which I am still a “wetback” and the “gardener” being told to “go back home.”

Today, however, I have done more than just “cross,” “enter,” or engage in transgressive activities, I have staked and carved out a space of my own, or at least have attempted to do so. My experience of mental mapping is now an interest of traceable histories and geographies in space and time. My struggle with literacy and composition, my memories of my grandma acquiring literacy of both Spanish and English languages, is what now motivates me to focus on developing pedagogies and curriculum in response to the agencies students bring as well as their differences. Today, I listen, well and deeply, as I have in the past, to speak and research back with my community. I advocate for my LRGV community, and a more specific community as well—the lower and working class—because the truth is, the academy and my field still no very little about this population. For my dissertation, my interests brought me back to Harlingen, Texas. I am often confronted with dismissive suggestions to focus on something else or questions why—as they attempt to interpret my research (and myself)—I feel the need to delineate the LRGV? For many years I have defended such, and today, it is still an uphill battle.
But, as Elaine Richardson once told me, “there is enough ‘white’ people doing ancient rhetoric stuff, your type of work is what is needed.” I stand by my decision to focus on the LRGV.

I was born and raised of this place I speak of, a region of Texas that is predominately Mexican of origin and/or descent. I embodied, enacted, and have carried the language and literacy practices and the ethos and consciousness of the LRGV into spaces beyond the region. My interactions and encounters with others, even those of Mexican origin and/or descent not from the LRGV, remind me of how difference manifests in language, identification and subjectivity, class, and place. Fortunately, I have never felt a part of, or a sense of belonging to a class, to a place, other than my own, even given the benefits and privileges I now have. This has much to do with how I am treated in spaces and places where historically and presently my people have not entered. But, the question of whether people back in the Valley could see me the same, has and continues to concern me. I cling to the LRGV, not out of nostalgia, but out of deep concern for the people and community of which I come from. My concern of whether people would see me the same reflects in many ways a concern for credibility that quite frankly I cannot control. I claim to be Valle, of the Valley, but is that enough for them?

I am still prieto (dark skinned), I still have an accent, I can still speak the language and dialect, but the truth of the matter is, no matter how much I try to convince myself that I have not changed, I have. Back then, I only thought of how to get by, now, I think about scholarship and vacations. I can still go back to the barrios and “kick it,” but I no longer think the same as I did when I was a youngster living on my own. But, I can easily familiarize as I tap into those memories. I can still “hang” but not in the sense of normalized activities in the barrios, which I once participated in when I was younger. But, in reminiscing with others, I can recast myself in a way that reminds them that I am from El Valle and that I am from the neighborhood. In this way,
the very least I can prove is that I was “down.” Yet, no matter how hard I try to remain “Valley,” in their eyes, I made it. What concerned me before my move was how do I mediate the reality that in many ways I had made it, not in the strict sense of economic advantage, because as a student we all know the wages are not favorable, but rather, in the way of distance and accolades, in the ways of crossing, entering and participating in spaces my community has not entered before, historically speaking.

I was no longer that guy up to no good and getting into trouble, the guy getting into fights and skipping school, or that guy that everyone thought would end up in jail. In a very real way, to them, I had made it, and my commitments to school and study reflected both change and transformation. How can I say that I am still “Valle” if I was no longer from there, no longer “down,” no longer one of them. In my heart, I am always Valley, no matter the distance, but as I quickly learned, this is something you have to remind people of as they initially interpret based on what they hear of the “new you.” In my heart, I am still “down,” but now that “downess” looks different as I am concerned with the visibility and betterment of my people. Still, I struggled with how to prove this.

In preparation for my move back to Harlingen, I remained concerned about how many people would be willing to participate in my study that extended to both public and academic spheres. I knew that I could relate to them, but would they give me the opportunity to get close to them. I was committed to capture, in their own words and on their own terms, their everyday lived experiences and practices, but would they allow me a time and day for such conversations to take place. This study would be important to me and have critical implications for my field who know very little of this community, but would they share the same concerns or would they even care. In contemplation, I strategized how I would re-immerse into a community that I once
was part of, but now distant from in the physical sense. I decided that I would not compromise all I had accomplished in order for them to accept me, but rather, I would try to connect with them through experiences and memories. I would try to connect with them by showing them I care, that I respect them, and that I still have love for this region.

Methodological and ethical dilemmas continue in qualitative research such as ethnography. This awareness of such dilemmas concerned me, especially because I was going to study a cultural scene in which I had a direct connection with. I am reminded of two things, Dell Hymes (1970), who in “Linguistic Method in Ethnography,” argued that an “insider’s” point of view is inadequate because the insider is unable to be conscious of their own culture. Second, that this insider/outsider paradigm often projected whites as outsiders and rational and non-whites doing research on their communities as engaged in “cultural” work, who must defend the validity of their data because it subjective (see Rosaldo, 1988; Bonilla-Silva, 2012). The insider/outsider paradigm was and continues to be of interest to me, because I do not believe the “/” is reflective of the reality in conducting qualitative research such as ethnography.

The dilemma of ethics has a legacy, which can be traced back to Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and Margaret Mead (1928). Their theoretical and methodological approach of exoticism and otherizing people within the society and culture being studied still is a point of contention. What we saw were manifestations of colonial encounters and spatial and temporal distancing, which led to the “crisis of representation” and the detrition of anthropology as a field (see Fabian, 2012). In Johannes Fabian’s (1983) seminal text, *Time and the Other*, the notion of *denial of coevalness* depicts such manifestations, the characterizing of the “other” either as

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9 This also reminds of the argument of how “questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied” (Kanuha, 2000, p. 444).
absent or present in objectivized ways. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, a pragmatic shift took place. The limitations of “traditional” ethnography and the issue of ethics would be addressed in a more critical attentiveness to history, geography and power relations.

The social construction of reality would become realized with scholars such as James Clifford, George Marcus, and Clifford Geertz. Clifford and Marcus’ (1986) edited collection illuminated how cultural representation is contingent, historical, and contestable; how the inadequacy of ethnography to capture such representations from an objective orientation limits the research process and cultural descriptions; and, how the transitions between globalization and decolonization, shifts from monological authority to rhetorical performance, necessitated significant changes, specifically, that of working towards the dialogical and dialectical nature of ethnography. Geertz’s (1973) seminal works on the importance of “doing” ethnography, propelled his argument for “thick description,” in which the goal was not to reduce people’s everyday meaning-making practices and knowledge production, but rather, to interpret and describe thickly the purpose and intentions of meaning-making. With all these strides, however, the concern for ethics still remains, and, the debate of insider/outsider orientations continues to persist.

Insider research describes a scenario or circumstance by which the researcher has a direct connection with the people or setting (see Robson, 2002; Naples, 2003). I conducted a study of a community in which I am directly connected to. I did so with the intention of advocating for this population, and this sense of activism, to be clear once more, emerged from my own geographical and socioeconomic sensibility. Scholars refer to this type of research as insider research or insider action research, and it has its advantages such as better access to and familiarity of the community and its meaning-making practices (see Shah, 2004), richer data
collection (see Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), and the ability to understand meaning-making practices within the context of the everyday, its use and purposes, and the intentions/desires undergirded by such knowledge productions (see Coghlan, 2003). I believe my direct connection to the LRGV, and sense of activism, allowed me to mediate what Coghlan calls *mechanistic* and *organic* action research. That is, on the one hand, I am interested in questions of being, doing and becoming as my inquiry process (organic), while on the other hand, I am also interested how a community addresses a particular problem and works toward means to influence change, and, how such meaning-making practices can (and are) translate(d) in functional, operational and pragmatic ways.

It may, up to this point, seem like there is no dilemma, being that an insider, one whose familiarity with a group and geographical location, may provide access to meaning-making practices and knowledge productions, in contrast to an outsider whose does not have that intimate knowledge of the group nor strategic entry point to the group (see Griffith, 1998). This is far from the truth. As I noted above, there seems to exist an insider/outsider paradigm in which others have argued are “mutually exclusive frames of reference” (Olson, 1977, p. 171). Unlike insider research, where personal experience may assume or overtake a research participants’ or allow for bias (see Kanuha, 2000; Serrant-Green, 2002), it was popular belief that only an outsider could achieve an account of a cultural scene in less prejudiced ways because of the distance between researcher and those being studied (see Simmel, 1950; Burgess, 1984). This was based on observed disadvantages of insider action research such as “role conflict” (see Coghlan, 2003; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), unchallenged assumptions and biasness (see Hockey, 1993; DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002), reliability and validity due to excessive subjectivity and privileging of one position (see Sikes & Potts, 2008; Woodward, 2008), and
ability to make the familiar strange (see Hawkins, 1990). However, there indeed appears, as one scholar argued, “to be as many arguments for outside research as against, with the same issues able to be raised in support of outsider research, as against it” (Serrant-Green, 2002, p. 38).

Today, there is consensus that insider and outsider are not mutually exclusive (see Banks, 1998; Naples, 1996/2003; Chavez, 2008). My lived experiences in the LRGV and my distance from the LRGV simultaneously position me as an insider and outsider. Indeed, these two points of references are mutually constitutive and dialectical.

While my study is not multi-sited, it is very much informed by the politics of scholarship that emerges from such a disciplinary focus. The essence of George Marcus’ work permeates this study, especially in the context of activism. In his account of multi-sited ethnography, George Marcus discusses the shift from single-site locations to multiple sites of observation and participation, to “methodological bricolage” and “spectacular performance.” Marcus (1995) writes the people of his study are “mobile and multiply situated” (p. 102), and so, multi-sited fieldwork is “always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and as the landscape changes across sites, the identities of the ethnographer requires renegotiation” (p. 112). His comment that “activism quite specific and circumstantial to the conditions of doing multi-sited research,” challenges the “detached” scholar (an outside orientation), and calls attention both to the “circumstantial activism involved in working in such a variety of sites” and to the “politics and ethics” involved in such movement (p. 113; see also Mercer, 2007). The reason I mention Marcus is because his argument counters the idea that insider and outsider orientations are “mutually exclusive frames of reference” (see Olson, 1977, p. 171).

Beyond the situatedness of subjects of ethnography, Marcus believes people can be ‘paraethnographers’ of their own conditions. In the thick of interaction between researcher and
participants, co-production of data is of interest, but also of interest is the complicity of
ethnography (Marcus, 1998), which holds the ethnographer responsible to how difference takes
place across multi-sites, to how people are not merely just ‘products of essential units of
difference.’ The contingent and situatedness of ethnographic observation and participation, the
dialogical and dialectical nature of ethnographic research, I’d argue, leads to physical and social
relations of “spaces between” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). These are liminal spaces that heighten
our rhetorical awareness, our rhetorical being and doing between and within spaces, and our
ways of becoming.

I am dedicated to this work because there is a people in the LRGV who continue to work
towards their own emancipation and liberation within a global current that has and continues to
mark them as different. On the cusp of invisibility, these Mexican Americans are engaged in
expressions of social and cultural action and agency that the field cannot quite grasp or begin to
account for in terms of pedagogies and curricula. Yet, that is the exigency in which this study
and dissertation emerges from, that of “on the cusp of invisibility.” Although I am an insider-
outsider, I find the space between these two orientations a site of dwelling, both in the sensibility
of insiderness and awareness of difference. In, “The Risk of Going Observationalist,” Robert
Labaree (2002) calls for critical analysis of insiderness (see also Kusow, 2003; Ganga & Scott,
2006; Wray & Bartholomew, 2010). Part of dwelling in these “spaces between” is reflective of
an effort to be critical to my own position within the community.

I would like to be transparent, furthermore. Re-immersing is not a given, taking up an
orientation of insider research is not without its methodological and ethical challenges. I was
born and raised in this region, in Harlingen, Texas. I was one of them, of the lower class, of the
struggling class, but to them, in their eyes, I had made it, as noted above. I remember calling a
mentor of mine and asking him what can I do, because everyone I knew was suspicious of why I was visiting for such a long time and what I was trying to really do with this study. His advice was that I give it time, that re-immersing took work. The next day, I put in that work. I left my rental car parked at my mom’s house and I walked my neighborhood, the same neighborhood where I used to get into fights, and the same neighborhood that I used to walk daily to my grandmas house. I walked 6 blocks down and 6 blocks west. Like my grandma, I walked, took in the surrounding, re-immersed myself to the smell and feeling of the neighborhood, and my memories started to come back to me about my past and things I use to tell myself about leaving this place. And, yet, I was re-immersing into this place, that I once left, that now I return to help in the only way I know how, through pedagogies and curricula.

Every morning I walked this neighborhood. I spoke to the neighbors, who knew my family, especially my grandma. One morning, I came across a neighborhood garden, which I had seen before, but with no one present. This time, there was a group of 15 present, planting and harvesting. Sweating, one of the individuals offered me a cup of water. I asked if I could help and through the process of helping I inquired about what they were doing and what the overall goal was for the garden. “To bring back the ways of our ancestors,” one person told me. I related, and I told them how my grandma used to garden to feed the family, and that up to her passing, she gardened for chiles, fruit, and herbs.

Many planted in memory of those who had passed away, some planted because their own family members could not because of age, and some planted to feel connected to a past time. “This is our community, everyone is welcome, we neighbors come out every week in the morning, with no obligations, and we do it because that is the ways of our people, of the people who lived here in this neighborhood.” While the garden was part of an initiative started by the
agricultural department of Texas A&M University, initially, the people of the neighborhood had taken over and maintained it. At least, this is what another individual told me in conversation. A couple of feet away from the garden, the food pantry line was increasing in numbers. “You see, many of us go stand in that same line, and so some of us here have decided that we can do our part in helping ourselves by planting and harvesting our own vegetables, like our parents use to do.” This statement moved me.

Every morning I went for a walk and went beyond my neighborhood. I walked to the local and neighborhood grocery store, to the library, to friend’s houses, and even to the barbershop to get a cut. People started recognizing me not as just an academic, but someone who was once from there, but still with hesitation. People started asking me questions, reminiscing about the old times when they use to “kick it” with me or how they use to hear about the trouble I was getting in. Although I welcomed such conversations, part of building what I call a relational framework of ethics was making sure that they felt and were involved, included, and never indifferent to me, as much as I could control that. They started inviting me to cookouts and to hangouts, and over time, they began to ask about my project and how they could help, in and on their own terms. But, even this took work, because while they showed they were interested and volunteered to participate, I could not be too pushy about it. So, instead of allowing the sense of urgency, of completing interviews, to get the best of me, I allowed every conversation to take place naturally, in the settings of their choice, in and on their own terms. I was able to conduct and record 10 of these interviews, which were in addition to the 32 interviews I conducted with students at the local institution of higher education. While these 10 interviews do not make it in this dissertation, they were important to conduct in order to gain perspective.
There were more people who had committed to these interviews, but who backed out at the last minute. The consensus was that they were still hesitant about why I was seeking such information and how I would use it. These were people I had either grown up with or who I had gotten into contact because of mutual friends. This showed me that no matter how hard I tried to show them that I was there for the best intentions, they struggled with the fact that I was no longer the person they once knew back in the day. Then, there were some who actually went to jail during my visit, because they were still involved in the things that sometimes happen in the neighborhood. There were many times that I reflected and thought how this might translate into the study of students as a local institution of higher education. There were many nights that I felt anxiety and pressure to be able to perform and come through on a project that I argued could be done. No matter how well I prepared, it seemed that things were not just going to go the way I had envisioned or even planned for. The same mentor advised that I just stick to it, give it time, and work with who was interested. This was simple advice, I remember thinking at the time, but it allowed me an opportunity to reposition myself, and prepare to work with who was present.

Re-immersing is stressful and hard work. It takes work. The people have to buy into your project, into you, as a person, and they must be able to feel that they can trust you and be able to confide in you. The relational framework of ethics, as I call it, is about co-presence. Re-immersing is about building trust, ensuring others that their time is valuable and that any information they share is valuable, and showing them any and all information written about is in and on their own terms. Below, I have provided an entry from my fieldnotes about re-immersing and the difficulties of it. My reflection is articulated in a semi-reflective tone.

10/31/2015
Yesterday, I called one of my mentors and asked him if he had any advice about recruiting, because so far the process has been slow. There have been many moments, many times, I feel, that I feel defeated. This project is important, but for some reason, not important enough for others to participate in. He, of course, told me that everything was going to be okay and that is just how things go sometimes with conducting research, especially ethnography. I feel hesitant to believe this. But, he also stated that it is not just the numbers that matter, but rather the quality. Maybe he is right, I just don’t want others to think this was a failed project. Tomorrow, I am going to keep walking the neighborhoods, putting myself out there. Tomorrow is a new day.

Ethos and ethics must be at the forefront of any project focused on human interactions and encounters. It is not enough to just say, well I am going down there with the agenda to help and to engage in social activism and advocate on their behalf. This is all good in terms of academics, but the community members must be able to feel, see, and believe in those visions and goals. I believe that I was able to do this, in varying degrees, given the amount of people who participated. My ethos and ethics was on the line everyday. But, this is the “work” involved in conducting such research.

The Research Project

My fieldwork in the LRGV began on August of 2015. In preparation, I reached out to an English professor at a local Hispanic Serving Institution who was to teach two first-year composition courses. I began this correspondence by introducing myself and inquiring about how such courses are taught, both in the general sense by the department, and by herself. After many conversations, I asked the professor if she would be interested in allowing me to conduct a
study over the course of the semester on both her first-year composition courses. The professor agreed.

The next step in the process, after IRB, was to consider how I would attract student participation in my study. Initially, this began with drafting a script, which I had planned to read to the two first-year composition classes at the beginning of the semester. However, knowing this community, I knew this would not do. I needed to be able to connect to them, because otherwise, they would not consider taking time out of their own schedules, ones that include full-time employment and/or familial obligations, to talk with me. Indeed, as I introduced myself to the two classes, I found myself doing away with the final version of the script I was to read, and instead focused on who I was, where I was from, what I was doing, and why this project was important to me. I placed stress on many topics throughout my introduction such as poverty and struggles with literacy, but the two things that came across, which I believe moved many of the students to participate ultimately, was my emphasis on the LRGV and advocacy. By the end of both classes, I had a sign-up sheet of 35 students, 28 of which were from the two first-year composition classrooms, and 7 which were friends of the students who were also first year and enrolled in first-year composition.

Some were interested in my story of coming from the LRGV and making it through higher education. Many, however, were interested in the ideas expressed in my introduction. But, they needed to confirm who I was before they could authorize me to record and shadow them. They confirmed who I was through questions, language and dialect exchanges, and even perspectives on certain topics. All this took place during the first week of my visit. In all, the 35 students who had signed up stated near the end of the week that they were still interested in the project and study. However, none of them had provided me with an email address or a phone
number, which was concerning. I decided not to place pressure on the students; instead, I sat in the back of the class, listened, observed, and even participated in some of the activities, and took notes. In all, I interviewed 32 individual students, collected 29 surveys, and held two-group session over the course of a semester. The students told me they still needed to “get to know me,” and this “takes time,” according to them. I understood, I empathized, although I personally had anticipated to “hit the ground running” as soon as my first visit. I remember making a call to one of my mentors, again, asking what all this meant, and whether any advice could be given. One of the takeaways from that phone call was that re-immersing is not a given and that it takes time.

The 32 interviews I conducted met the parameters I had set for the project, which given the locale of the Hispanic Serving Institution, lent itself to high participation. 1) One parameter was that students be first-year and first-generation and 18 years and older. 2) The next parameter was that students self-represent as Mexicano or Mexican American. 3) Another parameter was that students were to come from lower or working class. 4) Lastly, students were to be born and/or raised in the LRGV. These parameters were essential in order to examine how Mexican American students learn and perform meaning-making practices and knowledge-productions within the material-social environment of the LRGV.

After students provided their phone numbers and email addresses on the second week of class, I reached out through email. In this email, I thanked the students for their willingness to participate and offered myself, as a mentor or friend, beyond the capacity of the project. After students responded to emails, I went over other parameters for the project: 1) Participation in interviews would take approximately 1-1 ½ hours and would be conducted twice in a semester; 2) participation in group sessions would take approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours and would occur
twice in the semester; 3) participation in surveys and journal writing activities would be monthly. After such correspondence, of the 35 students, 32 remained. These 32 students committed their time to my study, where we engaged in thought provoking, emotionally engaged conversations. At no point were co-participants harmed, although emotions ran high at some points of the conversations, and each participant was given the opportunity to discontinue the interview, as well as provided the opportunity to listen to the audio and choose what was kept and what was deleted. Fortunately, none of the participants opted out or opted to delete any content.

Collecting Data: Fieldnotes

I spent a whole semester audio recording and taking notes of interactions and encounters taking place in this classroom, as well as outside. Additionally, I spent countless hours interviewing students either at the library or other public spaces. On top of that, I shadowed several students on days that worked with their schedules, which typically lasted between 2 to 3 hours. At all times, the audio recorder was running, with permission from all participants. I also had the opportunity to sit-in during student-teacher conferences and interview the professor after each conference. These meetings were also recorded. At no time did I observe the participants looking or glancing at the recorder. However, with each classroom session, interview, group session, and shadowing, I made it known that an audio recorder would be used.

I kept fieldnotes through my journal, on my cell phone, and by my laptop, whatever was most convenient at the time. These fieldnotes consisted of date/time stamping, describing the environment and context of interactions and encounters, jotting down the use and movement of language, and identifying who was all was part of such activities. Afterwards, I would spend considerable amount of time either reflecting via an online blog (which would focus on all
aspects of life in the LRGV), typing out reflections on a word document, or talking over some of the things I observed and were interpreting with one of my mentors.

Image 14: Blogging and Reflections

Again, not only were participants notified of audio recording, but also of note taking and my blogging. All participants were provided the opportunity to listen to our recordings and read my blogs.

There were times, I felt, that my pursuance of note taking interfered, because there was an explicit effort to stop time in order grasp and take down all information. These teachable moments taught me that sometimes it was better to listen, well and deeply, rather than interrupt the “naturalness” of conversations. In this way, I learned how to be more reflective and reflexive of what was taking place during fieldwork. I often found myself, in these moments, analyzing and interpreting the data, which I found to be useful. But, I also found that in returning to these
fieldnotes at a later time gave me more opportunity, and distance, to make broader connections that perhaps I could have not done if I was strictly analyzing and interpreting data in those specific times.

Over time, the students came to see me as not just a researcher, but also someone who they could approach with varying questions. For example, some students asked questions pertaining to scholarships, genre-styles, and even applications for employment. Each participant had my personal cell phone number. And, on numerous occasions, this allowed for students to call me during any given day, and ask questions or invite me over for social activities. I played many roles for these participants. After interviews, some would call and ask for my information about issues on class or gender scripts. They would ask to meet up and talk it over more with them. Others were interested in what they were realizing in their everyday. So, they would shoot me a text, or capture an image, and send me a quick note not only to ask me what I thought, but also to express to me what they felt was happening. Others participants were struggling with familial and economic issues, who just needed an ear, and reached out to me to listen and gain advice. Others were struggling with courses and were on the verge of either dropping out or being expelled from school. All together, these experiences reminded me of the multiple factors that border students face as they pursue higher education.

Below are two examples of how my fieldnotes look. Again, they are date/time stamped (in this dissertation, I include some with dates/times and others just dates), and they reflect what I was seeing and doing in the moment, along with some reflection.

Example #1: 10/07/2015 5:00 AM - 7:42 AM

Today I decided to wake up early, 5 am early, and head to campus early, before students arrive on campus. The drive is about 30 minutes long. I am heading to Mi Ranchito first for some
breakfast tacos. The guy asks me at the window, “¿Que quieres ordena?” I order my usual tacos and as I am waiting I am thinking about the significance of this question. It is an ordinary question, yes, “What do you want to order,” but the choice to ask is not ordinary. Across the street, on the fence, the word "RASPA" is spelled out. Right down from Mi Ranchito is Los Asados. I do not feel that the choice to ask me in Spanish what I would like to order was based on my skin color. I think he asked because that is the normative behavioral and linguistic pattern that he is accustomed to in the LRGV. I've been to many tacos shops in my day, all over the U.S., and more times than none, I am typically talked to in English, with the exception of when I am in the LRGV or Corpus Christi. The fenced spray painted with the words "RASPA" is also significant. For us, in the LRGV, Raspa is snow cone, but it does not translate as such. It is interesting how we engage each other in Spanish, not based on assumptions, but rather, part of our ways of being and doing, and we create words such as Raspa, as if we have no regard for linguistic norms.

Image 15: Raspas
I continue my drive to campus. It is 5:43 a.m. The sun has not come up yet. I tune the radio to B104. The "Mojo" morning show is on, it has been running strong for over 15 years. The title of the show is an interesting one. The DJ not only uses the word "Mojo" for the title, but actually identifies each caller as "Mojo." Mojo is short for "mojado," wet back, which for many outside of the LRGV is a derogatory term. But, for some reason, it flies here. The DJ displays his Mexicaness through the way he talks, a mix of Spanish and English, a mix of Tex Mex, and through the music he chooses to play. It is interesting to hear the song Hotline Bling, by Drake, for example, with a Spanish chorus and even some Spanish verses. Drake does not do this, but rather, it is a remix concocted. Many of the mainstream songs that the DJ puts on and plays for the audience are this way, remixed with Spanish. It says something, about the radio station, about the perceived audience, and about the region.

I decided to drive slowly today. It is 6:00 am and I am barely half way. I was crossing many cities on my way to campus--La Ferria, Mercedes, Weslaco, San Juan. I wanted to see these cities come alive as I drove across them. The Mexican restaurants line the highway, I roll down the window to smell the breakfast cooking. The Billboards float above the highways, in Spanish, and Spanish and English, but very few just in English. Some of the billboards are for cellular companies, “Llamadas Ilimitadas A Cualquier Teléfono,” while some are for banks, “Ahorre Más Aquí.” The Valley is only several hours from the nearest metropolitan cities, but one rarely sees this. It is interesting how the culture is on constant display, visually, textually. I drive extra slow, no one is really on the highway yet, and I snap some photos as I pull over on the side of the road. One billboard reads, Lesionado? Soy Su Abogado: La Fuerza Para Ganar. I hear an announcement on the radio, several actually, "Dale gas" one says, the other is talking about the opportunities at a local institution of higher education in Spanish.
I pull over to put some gas, and stop in to buy some water. "¿Es todo mi'jo?" the attendant asks. "Si mam, gracias," I respond. Again, this was a simple question, an ordinary one, but again, there was nothing ordinary about the intention, the choice, to ask. I have said all along, there is something about the Valley, which you have to be there to understand. I have finally made it on campus. I am on campus, home of the Vaqueros. I am greeted by the signage, as well as by the statue of a horse, with the name Vaquero on both.

**Example #2: 10/21/2015 10:00 AM**

Students today showed up early. Some decided to sit at the same table that I am at. “Sir, Romeo, ¿qué piensas?” one student begins to ask me what my thoughts were on their current assignment. This leads us into a conversation about how they want to talk about and learn about Mexican American history and experiences, especially those in the LRGV. They express how they cared about the Black experience, which is the topic of their new assignment (e.g. doing history), but they were having trouble connecting to the conversations because that is not an experience familiar to them. More students come over to our table. People start asking me what my thoughts were on other things. I turn the tables around on them and begin asking them what their thoughts were. Everyone gets quiet. “Pos sabes que sir,” one student speaks up and begins to express his gratitude towards me being in class with them and studying them. I ask the student why he hadn’t signed up to participate in my study. He responds, “trabajo y cuando llego a mi casa sir, I’m just tired, ya sabes.” I sympathized.

We get into other conversations about boots, about Saturday nights in the Valley, and about music. There is still 10 more minutes before class starts. We get into this big conversation about music. “You know sir, country music didn’t start getting popular until a couple of years ago.” I remember that when I was younger and growing up, country music was semi-popular, but
he was right, it was only on one station, as compared to now where there are two stations.

“Things are changing,” the student, continued to say. He is referencing all the restaurants coming and all the new construction that is happening in the Valley. I asked, “Is this a bad thing?” The students around said no, but that the Valley is always “slow” to catch up on things and “behind” on the trends. “We are just stuck in our ways too much you know,” another student responded. She started talking about how when new grocery chains come in, they cannot compete with the local stores, or how when new restaurants open, they cannot stay open because they have to adjust their prices to “Valley” prices.

The teacher walks in a little early and everyone begins to sit where they usually do, except for those who decided to sit with me today. The teacher begins to go over, once again, the next assignment, and provides an overview of the deadlines and overall goals for the assignment. “Tengo una pregunta mam,” one student raises his hand and ask. Meanwhile, while the question is being asked, one of the students who is participating in my study is sitting at the table next time, working with a Spanish speaker who is having trouble following. “¿Qué dijo ella?” he asks her, “Dice que tenemos hasta lunes…” she responds back to him. They sit together often, because she is like his translator. We move on to the classroom activity. Everyone is working hard. Students are moving from one table to the other, asking questions in both Spanish and English. The students at my table are doing the same.

Collecting Data: Surveys, Interviews, and Group-Sessions

Fieldnotes was just one data collection method. In addition, I carried out surveys, as mentioned above. The following topics/categories were covered:

- Background Information
- Schooling Information and Attitudes
• Language History and Attitudes
• Written Language History and Attitudes
• Everyday Oral/Written Language Practices and Attitudes
• Regional Perspective and Attitudes

I expanded categories and provided opportunities for participants to add in their own insight. Each survey took about 30 minutes to 1 hour to fill out, depending on whether the participant had any questions or how much information they were willing to share and add in.

The ethnographic interviews played a central role in collecting data. The ethnographic interviews were conducted in two rounds. On the first round, the interviews were conducted at the beginning of the semester, and the idea was to capture, in a sense, individual/familial accounts of a literacy narrative (as well as attitudes of literacy) in and within a socio-cultural context. Participants were asked to give specific examples of learning, of practice and use of, and reflections on negotiations of such practices and use. I extended the ethnographic interview to conversations of identity and subjectivity, cultural and traditional celebrations, dichos (sayings), and other practices they would like to include (music, art, etc.). At the end, each participant would briefly reflect on the interview process, the interview questions, and would consider what it has meant and what it continues to mean to have literacy sponsors and be literacy sponsors themselves.

The second ethnographic interviews were conducted near the end of the semester. In between the first and second round interviews, ongoing conversations on topics of literacy, language, subjectivity, place, race, class and power were discussed. The idea behind the second ethnographic interview was to gain a sense of community practices including literacy, representation of subjectivities or identities, and spaces or places where both were circulated,
practiced, negotiated, and/or transformed. I wanted to be able to analyze and interpret, from a cultural perspective, how language functioned within a community, operationally and rhetorically. Additionally, the second ethnographic interviews allowed me to conclude the purpose of my study more clearly, provided the opportunity for both the participant and myself to reflect on what we learned, and offered room to ask students to reflect on what they would want to learn if they had control over course curricula.

The purpose of conducting individual interviews was to see if I could capture descriptions of rhetorical practices, whether related to literacy, subjectivity and identity, and/or other forms of representation. This is important, especially given my argument that we must acknowledge differences within difference, the multiplicity of literacies and forms/expressions of representations under which social and cultural constraints give way to. I specifically saw, for example, variations in self-representation, which goes to show that just because the demographic of the LRGV is overwhelming Mexican of origin or descent, we cannot exclude the intentions or desires that motivate meaning-making practices or knowledge productions. Therefore, as I have argued, and what has been re-affirmed throughout the ethnographic interviews, is that an account for differences in its very utterance must begin with the scale of human activity, movement, and mobility, within the exigencies of the social and cultural and the historical and economic. The other goal was to gain a sense of point of reference, where and when is literacy and rhetorical practices perceived to have taken place, the home, the school, and/or other public spaces? I wanted to see if there were intersections between these points of references that could point to a community sense of ethos of cultural values, language and literacy practices, and consciousness and attitude. In a sense, the question of does there exist a discourse community or a rhetorical
context of language and literate activities that I could delineate as “Valley,” motivated the need for group sessions.

Out of the 32 students who participated in the interviews, only 18 were able to show up for the first group session, and 11 for the second group session. The idea behind the first group session was to get everyone together, eat some food, and chat about all the ideas and new topics that were emerging from the interviews. The first group session happened mid-semester and I was remarkably surprised of the turnout. I did not have specific questions to ask, per se, rather, I began with the purpose of the interviews, and allowed the conversations to take place as they did, no matter the topic or subject. Some debates took place on the matter of identity and subjectivity, while some debates took on a solidarity approach towards matters of poverty, inequality, and sense of mobility. Some of the most powerful statements were those of “making it” beyond the LRGV and what it meant for them, as students, who were not only negotiating family and school, but also self and “new-selves’.” Other powerful statements came through in the forms of cuentos and testimonios, about upbringings, tribulations and struggles, sense of accomplishment, and sense of failure, even at the stage they were at. They talked about how the LRGV sets an expectation of bilingualism that is not reflected in the regions beyond, according to their own experiences of visiting states or cities beyond the LRGV. I found this interesting, as a point of reference and perspective, that in their minds, they are themselves laying out a dichotomy between “in place” and “our of place.” More significant, however, from interviews to group sessions, was that this group presented and represented a LRGV rhetoric and ethos.

Collecting Data: Shadowing and Walking the Halls

Another important method for collecting data was shadowing. Of the 32 participants, I was able to shadow three students. Shadowing consisted of meeting with students as they came
on campus, walking with them throughout the halls of the campus, sitting with them during lunch, and participating in extra-curricular activities, such as engaging in conversations with other students and/or family members inside and outside of the institutional setting. The whole process was important because the idea was to observe and participate in their ethnolinguistic and rhetorical practices as they occurred in negotiated and performative contexts of the “everyday.” In essence, I wanted to see the attitudes they expressed in the surveys, individual interviews, and group sessions, in action. I wanted to see how language and rhetorical practices were embodied, circulated and performed, and negotiated and changed. Essentially, I wanted to be able to observe a politics of mobility, a rhetorical context wherein students are shaped by rhetorical situations, but also in production of space and time.

The questions I thought about before and during shadowing included: would rhetorical situations index rhetorical behaviors and practices; would rhetorical situations index a community sense of language practices in the production of discourse; would rhetorical situations give way to “new” productions of discourse given the circumstances and audiences; and could I generalize a rhetorical context that demonstrated language skills, decontextualized and recontextualized in space-time, without flattening difference. Three students, as noted, gave permission for me to follow them on three separate occasions, and the times and days of availability were based on their own schedules and willingness to allow me to follow them those days. Like the interviews, shadowing carried the tone of casualness, and each participant was advised that they could ask me not to record or take notes on something they thought might be too sensitive.

I also “walked the halls” as a form of data collection. Walking as a physical motion and metaphorical state allowed me to fill in the cultural scene. It was my ways of participating in the
cultural scene itself, because in the process of walking the halls, observing and listening, and taking fieldnotes, I was also joining in on conversations. I’d walk up to students and ask them their thoughts on: the campus, the choice by administrators to name their mascot “Vaqueros,” whether or not they found it curious how the culture of the LRGV was transplanted into and onto the campus, and so on. Students were interested to know that I was there to study the campus and the students, and they freely and willfully answered all questions. The idea was to try to gain as much of a holistic response as possible, to see if at any points there were divergences between what they said and what the students who were working with me specifically for the study said. Below, I describe 3 students that I worked with most and shadowed: Abrienda, Erica, and Santana.

A Description of 3 Students

I grew close to the three students who allowed me to shadow them. These three participants—Abrienda, Erica, and Santana—made clear to me their interest in my project and the overall goal of the project, which is to help develop pedagogies, curricula, and theory in response to students like them. These three students shared a common experience in being raised by conservative parents such as Spanish-speaking only in the household, traditional gender scripts and roles, religion (Catholicism), and visitations to Mexico. Throughout the interviews, these students expressed how their friends grew up similarly to them and they believed this was because of their proximity to Mexico, their intimacy with their Mexican family members, and the cultural scenes of the LRGV. The three students, including the other 29 students that participated in my study, all identified as lower and/or working class. In this way, they believed that because of their socioeconomic status, their Mexican traditions and values remained strong and intact. While the common thread between Abrienda, Erica, and Santana, as well as the other 29
students, was struggle, which all students identified as a source of empowerment, these struggles played out in dynamic and complex ways.

Abrienda

Abrienda is 18 years old, a first-year student, who plans to become a nurse. In her household, the family saw themselves as Mexicanos. Although Abrienda identified as Mexican American as well, she often self represents as Mexicana. She was born in the U.S. and this is perhaps why, at least partially, Abrienda self-represents as Mexican American in addition to Mexicano. She spent a few years in a border town along the frontera before her parents moved the family to Mexico. The rationale was that they wanted Abrienda to live and experience Mexican traditions and values in the region rather than as a transplant in the U.S. Abrienda, in her reflections throughout our conversations, felt that it had more to do with the concern that she would take on "American" traditions.

Abrienda was raised speaking Spanish only, initially. She attended an all-Spanish school. At home the only language to be used was Spanish. When she expressed interest in going back to the U.S. for schooling, the parents disapproved and did not allow Abrienda to return. They insisted, according to Abrienda, that everything she needed to know and could learn could be done in Mexico. Abrienda felt trapped, her dreams were in the U.S., she once stated to me in one of our conversations. In our conversations she’d repeatedly say, “It doesn’t matter how difficult things get, I know it is not impossible.” She started learning the English language at around 12 before she decided that she would go against her parent’s wishes to attend school in the U.S. She knew that learning the language would be a challenge, but Abrienda is very head strong and confident in her ability to overcome challenges. In our conversations, she would talk about how well she excelled in school and how she believed this could translate into learning a new
languages. But, Abrienda knew it would be a challenge, especially because English was not her first language and was not a language she'd learn until 12 years old.

Abrienda recalls thinking a lot about the decision she was about to make. She reflected about how she would be breaking away from the customs of being a woman, of being a Mexican woman, where the expectations, to be frank, was that a woman be attentive to the household and nurturing. Abrienda was very much aware of this, and it was not that she did not agree. "I want to be a good wife, I want to be a mother, but just on my own time," she stated. This is a powerful statement, one that did not sit well with her parents. But, Abrienda did indeed leave Mexico and found residence with some family members in the border town she was born in. Right away, she noted, she felt uncomfortable and unwanted. In one of her essays, she wrote about this experience:

My aunt gave me a mattress not a bed, just the mattress! She placed it outside the restroom in the hall, I had no privacy, or a closet; I had to put my clothes on plastic bags, next to the old mattress; besides no privacy her daughter used to inspect my bags and take my earrings, necklaces, or anything she liked that was mine, all she said after I found that she did that was “I’ll give it back to you, don’t be mean,” but that never happened.

Her experiences at school did not make the situation better for Abrienda. She struggled. She struggled because of language differences, not because of abilities or capacities, but rather, because of the language interference.

Abrienda recalls how one teacher worked with her before and after school. It was a way, she noted, for "the teacher to improve their Spanish, and a way for me to improve my English." She spoke to me in length about this experience. She did not learn English to assimilate, this is
an important statement for me to make. In fact, in learning English, she kept Spanish intact, she'd say, by writing down her ideas in Spanish, by writing down her sentences in Spanish and then translating them into English thereafter, and by practicing thinking in her head in both Spanish and English. Today, she claims to still think in Spanish and English, and when she has questions, she will ask in Spanish if the situation is appropriate, or, make effort to ask in English.

Abrienda's story is short of remarkable. She still is not too comfortable in English, but this is something that Abrienda is all right with. "It is who I am," as she'd say. In our conversations, she often talked about how it was okay that she was not perfect in two languages. "In a way, that is the Valley for you." She explained this comment to me further, as I had to ask her what she meant. She believed that people's decisions to use two languages while communicating reflected some kind of internal awareness of how they sound. At least, according to her, that is how she felt. She talked about how she is not comfortable with English, so when she talks with her friends who are predominately bilingual, she uses Spanish dominantly with some English as an indication that she is Spanish-dominant bilingual. Her observations, she recalls, of people speaking in Spanish and English in the LRGV reflects this awareness of how one sounds. "The people they know how people from Mexico feel about the way they speak Spanish and English, and the gringos know that they cannot only speak or know English while in the Valley." This is what she meant by saying, "In a way, that is the Valley for you."

Abrienda has a heavy accent, but she remains confident as she processes her thoughts in two languages. She struggles here, because sometimes what she thinks in Spanish does not quite translate in English easily, so there is a constant effort which comes when she communicates. She struggles with writing and composing, but it is not that her thoughts and ideas are not coherent; it is that the compositions themselves contain many fragments and
sentence-structural issues. Abrienda believes this means that she is not good at writing. But, this is far from the truth, as I have observed some of her writing, which have clear ideas, but for someone else, it might just be a paper riddled with errors, and hence, a bad paper. But, Abrienda continues to practice because she can see that nursing degree, she can feel it, as she once stated. Her thoughts and ideas are indeed coherent. In many of our conversations, she showed an articulation of awareness and perspective, about identity, about movement and mobility, and about developing skills not to assimilate into culture, but to be able to take advantage of resources and opportunities.

Being born in the LRGV, moving to Mexico, coming back to the LRGV to attend school, and now travelling back and forth from Mexico to the U.S. and U.S. to Mexico for higher education, Abrienda has gained ever more perspective. Her story of mobility is a political one. She broke from the customs of what it means to be a "Mexican woman" in Mexico, as she recalled. Yes, she travels back and forth now because she is interested in reconciling her relationship with her parents, but the cycle of politics of mobility started once that decision was made to leave. This politics of mobility continued as she worked her way through struggles and hardships inside and outside of the university. She reflected about her confidence and strength during one of our conversations, wherein she argued that she owed much to her father, for being strong minded and willed, and her mother, for having a mind of curiosity.

Abrienda is mindful of what learning a new language can do; it can result in the loss of the mother language. Yet, for Abrienda, she feels the LRGV provides the opportunity to at least practice both. Today, at the home, Spanish is only spoken with the father. Abrienda has begun teaching her mother English, but around other family members and with friends, Spanish is the dominant language. With her own friends, and on campus, Abrienda is very aware of when to
use Spanish dominantly, when to use English dominantly and Spanish just a little, but she cannot recall a situation where both languages are not used. In the time I spent with Abrienda, we spoke about whether she has noticed any internal changes. "I am still Mexicana," she says proudly, "But I am also American." When asked what this means, she laughed and stated, "You see it every day in the Valley." The story of Abrienda is important, because it is one of change, of transformation of meaning through language and physical movement and mobility within the structures of immobility, both familial and hegemonic.

Erica

Erica is 18 years old, a first-year student, who is undecided on her degree plan. In her household, the family self-represents as Mexicanos. Like Abrienda, Erica also self-represents as Mexican American in addition to Mexicano. She was born and raised in the U.S. in a small border town not too far from the local institution. In our conversations, Erica mentioned she was raised traditionally. When asked what this meant, she stated, "At home it was Spanish, especially with my dad, and with my tias and other family members it was Spanish too, because if you spoke English they thought you were talking about them." Erica attended school where, as she recalled, everyone spoke Spanish predominantly, but in the classrooms with teachers, English was strictly emphasized. So, Erica started learning English almost at the same time that she started learning Spanish. She remembers her mother reading to her in English, but how at church, she was to speak and read in Spanish. "It was very confusing sometimes, because I'd get told sternly to speak one language over the other in certain situations, and I did not know why."

Erica does not recall having trouble with either or language. With her father, like Abriend'a, it was important that she speak Spanish with him. "He did not want me to lose my roots, or at least that is what he'd say to me." So, she practiced Spanish with him. With her tias
and family members, as noted above, she'd also practice Spanish with them. They thought Erica
and her cousins were talking about them when they spoke English with each other, so out of
respect, they only spoke English when they were away from the home. Even then, however, as
Erica recalls, they did not speak strictly English. It was a mix. "I knew Spanish very well, but
with some of my cousins, they knew like 75% Spanish, with others they knew Spanish and
understood Spanish, but felt more comfortable with themselves speaking English predominately
with some Spanish. For Erica, this translated into her everyday conversations with friends at
school, where there was a similar scenario.

    Erica recalls talking about college with her family her freshman year of high school and
how they told her it might not be right for her. She felt tension when her parents stated that it
might be best if she stay home, help around the house, and get a job. "Maybe you will find
someone," she recalls them saying to her. Like Abrienda, Erica struggled with the customs of
being a Mexican woman, and this, according to Erica, is where she started seeing the
significance of being a Mexican American woman. "I'm Mexicana you know, but I knew I didn't
want to be or feel stuck, my brothers went off to college, why couldn't I?" This is both a
powerful statement and powerful realization, one that she contemplated and fought with for a
while. At school, she was doing well, and excelled in composition, but she was not sure if she
should apply to colleges, afraid that she would disappoint her family, and worse, that they would
disown her.

    It made sense to Erica; at least that is what I was getting in our conversations, that college
was not a viable option. In our conversations, she expressed how her parents would tell her that
women are vulnerable, too vulnerable to leave the house, and that they were afraid she'd be
corrupted by some guy or fall victim to racist people. She reflected on how her father and her
would go out to eat on the other side of the city where she was from, and how on that side they were more white people. She felt discriminated against, even though many of the restaurants were filled with Mexicanos, and she herself had experience a waitress tell her that she and her father should be speaking English because they were in America. Erica recalled how her father would "speak back" and say that there are not many gringos around while gesturing to the waitress to look around for her-self. It was not too clear why they continued going to those restaurants, but Erica and I often wondered if it was for that sole purpose, to remind those "gringos" as she would say. Erica is strong-minded and very confident in her ability to speak back like her parents did. She recalled working at a local eatery where the Winter Texans from up North would come visit when it was that time of the year:

The white people would treat you like shit. ‘Do you just speak Spanish,’ they would ask, and then when I would say no, they’d start speaking very loudly to me. ‘Incase you could not hear or understand our English,’ they would say”. “I speak back,” I would respond in two ways: ‘¿Que miras?’ I’ll say if they look at me too long with their sucio eyes. Or I say, ‘I speak English like you bolio,’ I tell them when they assume I just speak Spanish. ‘Puedo hablar Inglés,’ I tell them, and I wait for a while, then I translate what I said in English”.

Erica did not like how some people views "Mexicanos." She often expressed disappointment in their logic that Mexicans did not want to learn and/or how they were not smart. These experiences actually led her to apply to college behind her parent’s backs.

When Erica received acceptance letters to colleges, her parents found out. Right away they told her she could not attend school, and to not even think about going to school outside of the LRGV. "I needed to take care of grandma, they told me, which I had done for a long time," is
what Erica recalls her parents saying to her and what she recalls thinking. Erica had a big
decision to make. She began doubting if she could make it outside of the LRGV, she began
losing that vision of seeing herself outside of a gender script, outside of the family, and inside
higher education. But, she remembered how those Winter Texans treated her and how she just
did not want to be another Mexican up to no good, which was the other perception that gringos
had of her people. So, she told her parents she was going to school. They told her she would be
at fault if something were to happen to grandma. She compromised. She did not accept her
scholarship to the college outside of the LRGV. Another part of that compromise is that she
would stay in the LRGV, visit grandma every day and visit the family every weekend, but she
needed to be able to move out and live in her own apartment. This may seem insignificant, but it
is not, it reflects the very real realities that border Mexican American students face on a daily
basis, the structures of immobility that come both from hegemony and family.

This experience was very new and fresh for Erica, that of moving out and breaking away
from the norms she saw in her family and around in the LRGV. So, in these moments of our
conversations, it was very emotional for Erica, coming to terms with that reality and
acknowledging the strength it took to do so. This is the type of strength and continued
development of awareness that Erica took into the classroom every day. She took her studies
seriously for really there was no other option than to succeed. Her parents were not supporting
her because, first, they could not financially, and second, because they still felt that she had
betrayed them. This constantly weighed upon Erica's mind. But, still, she would turn to her
parents, at least the memories of them, as a source of power. Erica recalls how her father was a
hard worker who always worked with his hands, while her mother was taught her how to be
passionate about reading and writing.
Erica, like Abrienda, practices Spanish and English inside as well as outside of the classroom. She uses the phrase "manadame" whenever a teacher calls upon her, which is a sign of respect in the Mexican culture. Like Abrienda, she works through her academics and her compositions in both languages. She does not see either one as being more important, but rather, part of her being born and raised in the LRGV, and part of who she is that makes her unique.

When asked what her intentions and desires are for using both languages, she recalls what her father once told her, to not forget her roots. Also, "some things just don't sound right in English, so I say them in Spanish, and some things don't sound right in Spanish or they are easier to say in English, so I use English. These are two powerful statements that not only reflect rhetoric choices in language use, but they reflect a larger rhetorical context, that of being and living in the LRGV, where "roots" are situated within two cultures, represented as "Valley."

Erica does not have an accent, she considers herself bilingual, and a Spanish-dominant bilingual at that. However, Erica does realize that when she travels beyond the LRGV, people notice her accent. They ask her if she is from Mexico, in which she responds, no, that she is from the Valley. Erica believes she cannot separate herself from her languages, the same way she cannot separate her identities and subjectivities. Above, I presented "Valley" in the way of a trope. My conversations with Erica reflects this decision to do so, because from Erica, and others, it became clear that identity terms such as Mexicana or even Mexican American could not quite capture their embodied and lived experiences in the LRGV. The story of Erica is an important one, because it is one of speaking back, of speaking back through language as she did with the Winter Texans, of mobility within the structures of immobility that not only effect the physical sense of the body, but also the mind. Her politics of mobility is what she brings into the classroom, which in every way changes the dynamics of the classroom, if it is allowed.
Santana

Santana is also 18 years old, a first-year student, who has plans to be an engineer. In his household, the family represent themselves as Mexicano. Although a U.S. citizen, Santana strictly sees himself in this well. Similar to Abrienda, Santana was born in the U.S., moved to Mexico, and returned when he was 11. The rationale from the parents was that by living in Mexico, Santana would be able to strengthen his appreciation for Mexican culture and traditions. Santana believes this was the right decision and noted "it was probably best for me because some do lose their appreciation for their roots." Santana is a deep thinker, which came off in his writings and conversations with me about living in poverty, stealing to help put food on the table, and always feeling worried seeing his parents struggle. Neither his mom nor dad had a formal education, both of them worked, but this experience, according to Santana, helped him realize the importance of education.

Santana was raised speaking Spanish only, initially. At school and at home, Spanish was the only language to be spoken. When the family moved back to the U.S., he was placed in an ESL classroom, where he felt distant from his other classmates in the "regular" classes and he felt embarrassed that he had to be put into a separate class. Santana struggled with the English language, he stated in our conversations, for a long time. But, again, he believed it was not necessary, not to feel as part of the group or to assimilate, but to be able to provide for himself, for his family, and be a role model for others. As he graduated out of these courses and began his high school trajectory, he struggled with writing and communication still, because as noted before, Spanish was dominantly spoke at the home. "In the Valley, it does not help either, because in many cases, you can just speak Spanish, without any English, and no one will say otherwise because they too feel comfortable speaking Spanish." However, he also mentioned that
the LRGV helped in the sense that if you wanted to pick up English, you could from the dialectical language that was used throughout the region. In everyday conversations with his friends, this is how he would practice the languages, without judgment, he felt.

Santana reflected often about the importance of living in Mexico and how important it was to continue to be able to visit and stay in communication with his friends. "My friends, they tell me I still got it, that I do not speak bad, yet." Santana laughed after stating this, and when asked to explain, he discussed how people in Mexico do not know why people in the LRGV choose to use both languages in communication. But, for Santana, there was value in this because it allowed him to practice English and maintain his home language. This is part of his intentions and desires today, as he too engages in the dialect of the LRGV, to practice and maintain language efficiency. So while living in Mexico offered some experiential experience of sorts and benefits, Santana was also beginning to realize that the LRGV was not as concerning a place as his parents once thought. In fact, it allowed him to thrive in two cultures, two languages.

Santana had an interesting perspective on language, especially language use in the classroom. While he was all right with speaking Spanish or the dialect of the LRGV in and across the institution, he felt strongly that it was a disadvantage to allow this dialect, or strictly Spanish, into the classroom, even though he struggled with the English language still. In fact, as he expressed to me many times, he was not comfortable with the English yet, he was still trying to improve. He believed that others outside of the LRGV, those who had stereotyped Mexican Americans from the region, who look down on him if he was observed just speaking Spanish or speaking the dialect of the region. It was an interesting spatial distinction he was making in the classroom, especially for someone who was struggling with language as he did. His heavy
accent, his thought processes in Spanish and English, and his commitment only to speak English in the classroom, played out in interesting and dynamic ways.

Santana was headstrong, but truly was dealing with so many things such as financial issues, familial obligations, a full time job, and school that I believe it got the best of him in the end. Our last meeting was memorable. We met for lunch and he had asked if we could talk in private, somewhere away from people. As soon as we found a space, he broke down and stated that he was going to be expelled from school because of his bad grades. He had been failing all of his classes, he stopped going to class, and the realization that he was going to have to drop out motivated him to turn things around, but it was too late. Santana asked if I could him fill out some paperwork. Some of the paperwork consisted of appeals for school, but the majority of the paperwork was for citizenship purposes for his father. His father was going to be deported back to Mexico because of some legal issues and he wanted to begin the paperwork for his father who did not know how to write in either Spanish or English. I helped the best I could.

I asked Santana what he was going to do, what if things did not work out for him and his appeals to stay in school. "I will work, like my family has always done," was his response. This is a powerful statement, because for many, the end of an academic career would be daunting. Yet, while Santana was worried, because he wanted to be able to provide for his family in the end, and give back to the community in one way or another, he knew that he could work and provide in different ways. He ended up dropping out of school and his father was deported. The last time I heard from him, he called me and asked that if he ever needed help, could he reach out to me. I assured him that of course I would help him and I wished him the best of luck. He joked that he did not need luck, but that he appreciated everything I was doing with the project and everything I did for him.
The story of Santana is important, because it is one of changes, of transformations, but of also the reality of structures of immobility, and how this reality truly affects many. Yet, what I found remarkable was Santana's demeanor despite hardships and obstacles, that in light of such, he felt that he would be all right. So, even when structures of immobility lead to the faltering of an individual in a specific context, it does not necessarily mean that his/her sense of agency and power is gone. It is intact, needing a new venue into which it can be expressed and performed.

**The Purpose of the Dissertation**

My research grows out my lived and embodied experiences in the LRGV. There, I came to value language, through my grandma whose native language was Spanish, my mother who taught me to value both Spanish and English, and my community who mashed both together to create their own. I came to know my different identities and subjectivities through my grandma who taught me about Mexican traditions, my mother who instilled in me both Mexican and American, and my community who showed me that despite contradictions and tensions we were unable to separate ourselves from Mexican, American and Texan culture. I also came to know what access to resources and opportunities meant through my awareness of living on the “other” side of town and struggling with my community to gain a sense of mobility. As I moved through the educational pipeline I found myself in higher education and in a field where little was known about my community and region. There, I was blanketed into an identity with no variation between local and regional histories, identities, or linguistic and literate practices. From this experience, I knew difference mattered.

In thinking about the impact of studying ethnolinguistic and rhetorical practices by students of the LRGV, the following research questions helped guide this study (also see chapter 1):
• How can the political and demographic features of a region, designed to limit economic mobility, be resisted through the creation of alternative identity/collective strategies enacted through linguistic, stylistic, rhetorical, and literacy practices?

• How do pedagogies premised on non-regional categories enable (or disable) the literate community strategies of Mexican American college writers in composition classrooms?

• How can the pedagogical situation of a composition classroom within or outside the students’ home region utilize the use of community-based ethnolinguistic identities and rhetorical practices?

• How does the recognition of locally generated literate practices intersect with normative professional development of teachers located in minority-majority institutions?

My hope is that this research will have immediate and long-term implications in the teaching and study of writing and rhetoric. This research study, although not the first, will be part of an emergent focus that offers a comparative dynamic to understanding the social value of language and rhetorical practices brought into the composition classroom by Mexican Americans.

Students can teach us about the historical and political practices of (re)invention, agency, and power that moves through places and times. My ethnographic analysis sheds insight into how LRGV students are makers of meaning and place rather than objects of ideological belief and strategy, shapers of subjectivities within classrooms and compositions, and engineers of negotiated literacies. For this reason, I believe the data generated from the LRGV will have a direct impact on composition instruction in the HSI institutions involved in this study as well as
HSI’s nationwide. The research and proposed pedagogical strategies will also be of use to institutions with emergent or significant Hispanic student populations. More generally, the focus on regionally based pedagogies can also provide guidance to institutions supporting students with specific cultural heritages, such as African-American, as well as regional heritages, such as rural communities. Beyond pedagogical strategies, the research will also suggest how the field might need to reframe professional development and graduate courses in pedagogy.

**Principle Features of the Dissertation**

My dissertation engages in multi-methods, one being ethnography. At the center of ethnography and fieldwork, of people and culture, not just in place, but also of/in time, is the story of strategic presentations and representations from knowledge productions and meaning-making practices observed as embodied, circulated, and co-produced; the story of strategic engagements and collaborations in the building of social relations around social issues and concerns; and the story of mediations and interventions, of speaking back with one’s community as a recourse of shared historical and lived experiences, of social action, through writing and pedagogical development as part of my epistemological and ethical commitment. What it means to do ethnographic work continues to change. While this is true, my work intersects and aligns with those critical ethnographers who believe that ethnography is only partial, always political, wherein historical and political situated subjects create and re-invent culture, place, and geography in space and time (see Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Geertz, 1988; Atkinson, 1990/1992). Therefore, I believe my role is to identify structures of immobility and issues of injustices, while working towards tangible social change through dialogical and actional practices, a reflexive relationship between critical praxis and an ethical imperative (see Williams & Brydon-Miller, 2004; Gorzelsky, 2004; Brown, 2004; Greenwood, 2007; Zeni, 2009; Holian & Coghlan, 2012;
Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). In this ways, I see ethnography (and my work) as actional research and rhetorical action, as noted in an early section of this chapter.

My work, again, also aligns with those who make the case for the merging of two methodological frameworks, ethnography and rhetoric (see Marcus, 1982; Conquergood, 1991/1992), for ethnography is always performative, always a matter of seeing (rather than looking), doing, and being (see Wolcott, 2008), always personal and political, “as we do fieldwork, as we write it down, write it up, and as we represent ourselves and ‘others’ we study” (Brueggemann, 1996 p. 3). I continue to believe that ethnography can be an apparatus for social action. Marcus and Fischer (1986) suggest, “there are always… multiple expressions of possibilities active in any situation, some accommodating, others resistant to dominant cultural trends or interpretations, ethnography as cultural criticism locates alternatives by unearthing these multiple possibilities as they exist in reality” (p. 116). The modality of ethnography lends itself to rhetorical action, for it allows a narrative to be constructed, in and on a community’s terms, a community, like the LRGV that is on the cusp of invisibility, and far from mainstream culture. The construction of an ethnographic narrative represents the reflexive relationship between observed lived experiences in space-time and the rhetorical choices of the ethnographer to inscribe those experiences on pages. The potential of rhetorical action for change and transformation exists in this dissertation, specifically. For me, this begins by listening to the methods and methodologies of a people and tradition in the LRGV.

I see the sites that I have chosen to work in as strategic and interventional and dialectical and dialogic (see Reason, 1994; Marcus, 1995/1998). The modality of ethnography, of research, in all its incoherencies, and seemingly juxtapositions, in the space-time of which the ethnography is being created and written up, is about collaborations and co-participations. I never lost sight of
This seems repetitive, but it is important for what I am trying to do with ethnography. In addition to listening to people and culture in place, I am interested in how people make place and culture in space-time with their historical bodies and nexus of practice. In seeing subjects as differently constituted, in being mindful of differences within difference, I had to go back and be in the LRGV. I had to collaborate and participate with the community I once left behind. And, I engaged in an ethical and epistemically geared project, one that draws upon this community’s expression and display of actional epistemology.

When Dwight Conquergood (1991) argued ethnography is performative, articulating “intimate involvement and engagement of coactivity or co-performance with historically situated, named, unique individuals” (p. 188), it allowed for ethnography not only to be rethought in rhetorical terms, but also allowed for rhetoric to be re-instated as functional and operational to social action. When Aaron Hess (2011) writes about the method of “rhetorical ethnography,” he is illuminating the rhetorical concepts of kairos, inventio, and phronesis for the purposes of delineating an embodiment of advocacy and activism with and from the community under study. Hess writes that this method will call the field of rhetorical studies back to its place of civic action and advocacy, in both the textual and political realms. The two central methods Hess emphasizes is listening (interviews) and participation (participant-observation), which brings attention to the tangible elements of kairos, inventio, and phronesis in the study of the everyday. The everyday begins at the scale of human practice, it observable because culture is public, because people make practice, culture, and place in space-time. Activism and advocacy can be enacted within the lived conditions of discourse, of the nexus of practices at work in a given community. In the case of the LRGV, as the rhetorical scenes unfold, within this material-social environment, I am simultaneously attending to the exigencies in which give way to culture
and practice in space-time. I am also locating myself, as being from the LRGV, and, constantly becoming through my activism and advocacy for this community. In this way, critical rhetorical theory, as potential practice and praxis, expands this notion of “rhetorical ethnography” to listening, memory, and participation.

In many ways, what I am getting at is the affective realm of ethnography, of being and becoming, which beyond capturing the narratives of lived experiences, extends to civic and democratic participation, of rhetorical choice and re-invention in making sense of the everyday. What is missing I believe within the field is the subject, the human, the understanding of action, agency and power in which the marginalized community is included, with and within differences. Yes, the field has had a long understanding of vernacular discourse and communities. But, for some reason, we do not highlight the body too often, and for some reason we talk about space but not of time. We must push the boundaries; we must engage rhetoric as form of expression of advocacy and activism, which can destabilize normalized discourses and other systems of power. This is not just abstract, because with everyday interactions and encounters through ethnography, in the study of the everyday at the human scale, rhetoric and critical rhetorical theory become practice and praxis. That is, rhetoric and rhetorical theory may indeed stem from a different tradition that arrived in the Americas, but they have existed in different forms and for different reasons.

Listening, memory, and participation are central to my research. I came to know these methods through my own observations and participation in the LRGV during my study. All three reflect an epistemology and ethos of the region; all three contribute to the making of the LRGV as a place and geography. I conclude this methods chapter with a description of these methodological features.
In a conversation that unfolded before the start of class one day, students and I were talking about what makes the LRGV. One student said something interesting:

On the radio stations in San Antonio, Houston, or even Corpus, you can hear somewhat of the music that plays in the Valley. Most of it is static though because it is out of range. Of course, San Antonio, Houston, and Corpus have similar stations, but not really. As you get closer to the Valley, the music and the radio stations become a little clearer, but not quite. It is because you are still out of range. Once you past Sarita and see the palm trees near Raymondville, the stations and music become clearer. It is then that you know you are in the Valley, that you know what makes the Valley unique.

This statement by the student had me thinking about the particularities of place. What did it mean to be in place, to know how place is made, and to participate in this making of place? On my visits to San Antonio, Houston, or even Corpus, I have listened to the radio stations there. They play some music that is reflected of the music in the Valley, but mixed in with more mainstream music that appeals to a general Latino/a audience. But, in listening, well and deeply, the static that one gets because the stations are out of range, suggests something more significant. There in the LRGV, the music actually reflects the region, the artists are from it and the music is about it. Yes, mainstream music is mixed in, but even those songs are “mixed” with Spanish to appeal to the Spanish speaking and bilingual audience of the LRGV. But, the question I continue to ask is, why?

The development and delineation of Spanish and English together in the LRGV, as a regional dialect, is the result of two dominating phases of colonization, that of Mexico and that of the U.S. Some of this dialectical language today includes the mixing of Spanish and English
and the creation of “new” words in the negotiations between Spanish and English use. Some examples can be found in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish-to-English</th>
<th>English-to-Spanish</th>
<th>Creation of “New” words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td>Ayer fui con Andria to the mall y compré muchas cosas</td>
<td>Ayer I went to the mall con Andria and I bought a lot of things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayer Andria y yo lavamos la ropa todo el día</td>
<td>Yesterday, Andria and I washed la ropa all day</td>
<td>Washamos la ropa mañana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No hay ninguna posibilidad de que usted va a comprar a new truck.</td>
<td>There is no chance que va a comprar a new truck.</td>
<td>No hay chanza that you are going to buy un nuevo trocka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No estés triste todos perdemos a veces</td>
<td>Don’t be sad, todos perdemos sometimes.</td>
<td>No te aguites, todo está bien.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Examples of Language-Use and “New” Words**

The first and second column reflects what type of dominant-bilingual the individual is, but nonetheless, the regional dialect of the LRGV requires a degree of bilingualism. In this way, whether someone has a full grasp of the languages or not, this regional dialect relies on people being able to move between languages. I believe this is reflected in the third column. The words washamos, chanza, and trocka are neither English nor Spanish words; rather, they reflect the meshing of two languages to create a new word. The point I am making is that these are not just filler words, as Table 2 shows, this is communication with its own structure and its linguistic meaning, bounded by the attitudes and behavioral patterns in the LRGV.
Phatic Filler Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Pues</th>
<th>Pos</th>
<th>Es Que</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pues, I am going home.</td>
<td>Pos, I guess we have to go.</td>
<td>Es que I have homework I need to do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Phatic Filler Words

In walking the halls of the campus, in conversations with students, and/or observing students communicating with each other, their awareness of how others are either Spanish or English-dominant bilinguals, and how “created” words are part of the rhetorical context, demonstrates a communicative pattern and behavior that suggests, at the very least, that the dialectical language of the region has linguistic elements that are acknowledged, circulated, and expected, beyond just one rhetorical scene. What does it mean when people within a region authorize this type of linguistic behavior and pattern in a place where English is supposed to be the lingua franca? What does mean when Spanish and English are promoted in every rhetorical space and what does it mean for words to be created out of the friction between two languages? It means, at the very least, that this language is acquirable, that language users are intentionally disregarding the norms of Spanish and English, and instead, are articulating linguistic elements as they see fit. It means, that people in the LRGV have and continue to accommodate, modify, and transform speech in the everyday, making this dialectical language, its use and practice, the standard.

As I shadowed students such as Abrienda and Santana, they mirrored such language use and practices in their everyday conversations with others. In conversations with them, they expressed how they did not think often about what it meant to live in the LRGV and use language, but that they just performed the standard of language use and practice because it was normal to them. What this suggests is that what it means to be and do in the LRGV is determined
by the social circumstance of language practices and attitudes. There is historicalness to such language practices and attitudes just as there is of place and bodies. The “six flags over Texas” is not just a reference to a theme park. Rather, it reflects the very real phases of colonization that occurred, which brought many languages to the region. Nonetheless, what survive today are Spanish and English. The intentions to use and practice both suggests how a community comes to express itself, its social action and power, through language in light of social, political and economic plights.

While there may be some contention to what I am arguing is significant in the LRGV, let me support myself by saying that a whole region, which stretches 100 miles West and East and at least 70 miles North, intentionally uses this dialectical language as a mode of self-representation and as a method of being, doing, and becoming in a world that has to its very capacity limited mobility. I often wonder if this is the consequence of demarcating the LRGV as a geography of exclusion from the interiorities of Texas and the U.S. In travelling to San Antonio, Houston, and Corpus, which are some of the biggest hubs of Mexican American demographics, such language use and practice can be founded indeed. But, it is not the extent to which it changes the culture, the people, and the geography of a place. And, this is the significance of the LRGV, the embodiments, circulations, and performativity of strategic language use and practice to the extent to which culture can be and is being shaped and reshaped by its people. Like place, language does not just exist. It is created and re-invented in space and time.

When I asked the three students to explain what they meant by the fact that they just do what is normal, they all responded with, “That is how it has always been.” This is a common response actually that I received by the students, even by everyday residents. But, in my conversations with librarians, and a private group stationed in a public library in Harlingen,
Texas who collect and document the history of the region, “it has not always been” this way. The LRGV has and continues to be a story of social relations, some good and some bad. The region was not immune to the rhetoric and ideology of discrimination and racialization. In fact, white narratives of progress and development surround the stories, and memories, of the naming and blooming of the cities in the LRGV. In short, there was “no” civilization prior to white settler colonialism – as I discuss in the introduction. Yet, the significance of the private group, both to public memory and my dissertation, are the stories, those oral and published that counter such narratives. Many shared stories with me of progress and development from the “Mexican” perspective and argued that these had been absent from the official history of the cities. What had happened, with the bringing in of the railroads and the building of housing developments, was the segregation of Mexicans from Whites. Therein emerges, the vernacular tradition of Mexican Americans in the LRGV, specifically, in the form of language and subjectivity.

The historical sense of place and bodies plays out in the production of place and culture in the LRGV, through language, self-representations and mobility. That is, while the rhetoric of “that is how it has always been” is flawed, the context and situation of “being” and “doing” in the LRGV emerges out of a historical sensibility forged out of and in the cusp of forced invisibility and silence. Whether rhetorical performances have been normalized or not, their language use and practices underscores how a historical people spoke and acted back against white settler colonialism to reclaim and reshape the place, culture, and geography of the LRGV. They carry that historical memory. Their everyday acts of becoming are done within that historical memory, and while social relations have indeed changed, the realities of poverty and limited access to opportunities and mobility are a constant reminder of how the geography is designed in that way. Therefore, their everyday movement of people, of language, of ideas and
objects, circulating in and across the LRGV, destabilizes that national historiography that “those Mexicans” are stuck in space and behind in time. Instead, through language use and practices, through the meaning-making and knowledge productions circulated through mobility, their democratic and political participation in the making and reshaping of place, culture and geography is that reflective of vernacular epistemology and ethos. Such is the case then that I must refer to representation and presentation of language and subjectivity as strategic and methodological.

The points I am making about listening, memory and participation is that it orients me to an identifiable epistemology and ethos “of and in place.” The “of place” is a consequence of the historical sense of place, the remnants of historical memories that everyday reminds people of the historical past, and the continued consequence of specific material elements (e.g. colonial) in the LRGV, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation and throughout the chapters. The “in place” reflects the rhetorical dimensions of “making” and “re-making” of place, geography, and social practices; of being, seeing, doing, and becoming; and of representation, meaning, and practice that are always about movement and mobility. An epistemology and ethos “of and in place” exists as an expression. In any case, it is the people “of and in place” in the LRGV that directs me to the method of listening, memory, and participation. This is how I have come to observe, identify, and name the attitudes and behaviors and ethnolinguistic and rhetorical practices of the region, at least partially. In the next chapter, I further flesh out the methodologies I drew upon at the beginning of this chapter and use the opportunity to work through these methodologies to establish what I refer to as a mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework. In the review of literature, I highlight the themes of the dissertation, including the idea of stories we inherit, stories we circulate, and the possibility of new stories.
Chapter 3: Of Space, Time, and Historical Bodies

But until the production of space is rooted more deeply into historical materialism, into the basic definitions of the relations and forces of production, into the mode of production itself, and especially into praxis, it will tend to remain as more apparent than “real,” as epiphenomenal rather than transformational.

Edward Soja, “Socio-Spatial Dialectic,” p. 225

Culture is the constant process of producing meaning of and from our social experience, and such meaning necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved...Culture (and its meanings and pleasures) is a constant succession of social practices; it is therefore inherently political, it is centrally involved in the distribution and possible redistribution of various forms of social power.

John Fiske, “Understanding Popular Culture,” p. 118-119

It is from that perspective that it is possible to envisage an alternative interpretation of place. In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus.

Doreen Massey, Space, Place, and Gender, p. 154

We all come from a people and tradition situated within specificities and particularities.

In first-year composition classrooms, I believe the potential for deploying practical and theoretical paradigms of/for representation and presentation of culture and re-orienting the classroom and re-thinking its formation exist the highest. In the previous chapter, I drew upon methodologies, while establishing a sense of ethos and ethics. The context of that conversation stemmed from an appreciation of the importance in acknowledging that we all come from a people and a tradition situated within specificities and particularities. And that by erasing those specificities and/or particularities, we create a context and/or narrative for denying the elements of space and time and the subjectivities that emerge from the process of becoming in space and time. In this chapter, I continue along the same vein, articulating how people are shaped by meaning in space and time and in the process of shaping space and time through practice. The latter is of the upmost importance, because in recognizing that we are all in production of space and time, we can begin to see how students are not merely engaging in an assimilationist narrative nor are they coming into classrooms as novice learners and practitioners. It further bring attention to the irreducibility of movement and mobility, on the one hand accentuating the
importance of difference, and on the other hand, highlighting how difference constitutes representation, presentation, and agency differently.

In this chapter, I discuss some of my methodologies further in-depth with the intentions of highlighting the importance of one of my arguments, movement and mobility is irreducible. Many of the methodologies discussed overlap, and this too was intentional, but my intervention comes in the form of an articulation of a mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework. The reason for centralizing these two disciplinary methodologies is that they specifically focus on space and time, the construction and re-construction of subjectivities, the friction and struggles over meaning within social relations, and the relationship between being and becoming. In articulating a mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework, my first goal is to bring mobilities and decolonial studies into the work of compositionists and rhetoricians. Another goal is to propose a call to action. We cannot and should not be working from pedagogies that alienate students, even if they are progressive and political.

A Concern

I am concerned with how a global current threatens to flatten or erase the specificities of place and people. Modernity and globalization both operate at the scale of grand universal narratives and macro-historical subjects. I am also concerned with how identity politics is taken up in the academy. Pre-commitments to “Chicano,” for example, can also erase or flatten difference. A rush to instantaneous interconnection is equally as harmful as totalistic narratives of globalization. Although these two issues are on opposite spectrums, abstract universals run through both. This is where I see the struggle over meaning, articulated in cultural displays of
geo-politics, body-politics, and mobile-politics of knowledge emerging, playing out in dynamic and complex ways.

Both issues (above) increase the possibility of denying the local of its histories, trajectories, and futures. This is where I see the need to engage in the study of geo-graphical, body-graphical, and mobile-graphical expressions with space-time analysis. Both are not only central to understanding the Mexican American plight in the U.S., but also to understanding the legacies students carry within into institutional spaces. A recovery of local histories, I believe creates an epistemic break in the global and modern/colonial history that has dominated the domains of power (economic and political), knowledge (absolute knowledge), and being (homogenous). What recourse is left, I continue to ask, as I pursue this dissertation in light of a people and place on the cusp of invisibility? In undertaking a de-colonial ethos, I only hope to contribute towards the “pluri”-“versalty” of difference. This begins with understanding those structures and systems that by which have resulted in the silence and invisibility of an oppressed people such as the Mexican American community.

The historical location, as the loci of enunciations and actions, and that which is framed as epistemic embodiments (geo, body, mobile), carry the markers of spatio and temporal colonial difference and the configurations of space and time as the body engages in the production of it. Therefore, the current of globalization (and modernity) and the disposition of essentializing identity politics are but limitations to much needed visions of co-existing histories, worlds, and trajectories. An emphasis on geo-politics, body-politics, and mobile-politics, however, provides the analytics for critique and groundwork for alterative frameworks to globalization and identity-politics. Yet, the pretenses to globalization and essentializing identity politics persist because the
“local” is where things get complicated, where global places (e.g., globalization) and essentializing identities (e.g., Chicano/a) break down.

Not every borderland is created equally. Not every Mexican American will follow in the paths outlined by Chicano/as or Gloria Anzaldua. Dominant understandings and conceptions of the borderland and of Mexican American representation cannot and do not benefit all. In both cases, the inevitable occurs, no matter how ethically oriented intentions are, the “terms” change—globalization (interconnections) and Chicano/a (politically motivated)—but the content becomes one of fundamentalism and superior logic. Each local history carries with it its own place-making, knowledge-making, and meaning-making practices steeped within a historical memory, place (and geography), body and ethos. What I am interested in is how these practices offer local/regional pedagogy that can be incorporated productively and generatively in the composition classroom.

By “including” such knowledge subjectivities as those in the LRGV, several critiques may be levied against me, one in the same manner that of which I critique, strategic essentialism (or essentialist monicausality). I argue that if we listen, well and deeply, place-based rhetorics, rhetorical traditions, and rhetorical performances delineate regional identification and ethos. The ability of rhetoric and discourse to function and operate in ways that says something about how people feel implicated by, are receptive to, and willing to participate in the performativity of said identification and ethos is a powerful statement. I make the argument of an LRGV identification and ethos because this is what I have observed. What I am interested, then, is how everyday experiences, behaviors and movements, are inquirable, observable, and interpretable. The question I continue to ask myself is how can the pedagogical situation of the composition
classroom draw upon these experiences, activities, and social and cultural actions to enrich the work of writing and rhetoric classrooms?

This chapter is about modernity and coloniality, totality and globalism, spatio-temporal colonial difference, and re-orientations of space and time as space-time. I trace out the meanings that emerge within oppressive and repressive conditions, carve out a space for intervention through a series of critique within the theoretical paradigms of decolonial and mobility studies, and I argue for a mindfulness of difference and mobile-decolonial interpretive framework. I conclude the chapter by offering a working definition of literacy derived from an understanding of the “everyday.”

**Spatio-Temporal Colonial Difference: The Emergence of a “New” World System**

I am interested in how spatio and temporal dimension ultimately naturalized modernity “as a universal global process and point of arrival” that “hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of coloniality” ("Delinking," p. 67). In his multiple projects, Walter Mignolo begins his critique of spatio-temporal colonial difference by tracing the evolution of “theo-logical” and “ego-logical” politics of knowledge and understanding. It is these two principles that helped create the hegemonic frame of a modern/colonial world system according to Mignolo. Before we can arrive to this idea of a “modern/colonial” world system, it is imperative to understand space and time apart from each other, and then understanding how space and time were delineating together to construct this world system.

From Mary Louise Pratt’s (1992) insightful case studies in *Imperial Eyes*, we gain insight on a historical planetary movement centered on the teleology of “center”/“periphery” social order by Europe. As Immanuel Wallerstein (2011) explains in *The Modern World System*, core-periphery logic is a form of macro-organizing a “total” social system, which equates the “core”
to social order and “peripheral” to underdevelopment. In *Imperial Eyes*, contact literature or travel writing becomes the basis by which to name and systematize nature. In her study of such literature, Pratt discusses how this evolved into a planetary movement, one where the “other” (e.g., the barbaric) could be described, categorized and placed in space. At this time, as Enrique Dussel (1993/1995) discusses in both *The Invention of the Americas* and “Eurocentrism,” Western Europe was beginning to usurp a managerial position, wherein this “other,” delineated to space, would be the “essential alterity of modernity.” This is known as spatial colonial difference (see Mignolo, 2007).

In both “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality” and “Coloniality of Power” Anibal Quijano (2000/2007) discusses how a subject/object paradigm of rational knowledge would emerge at this time. He writes,

> The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives…These beliefs and images served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated, but also as a very efficient means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic. (‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” p. 169)

The paradigm of rational knowledge, deprived legitimacy and denied the recognition of the “other” by creating a falsified truth that the “other” and the “body” were disconnected, and therefore, should be presented in objectified ways. The role of space enabled ideological strategies of removing the “other” from history and placing them into the realm of nature (see *In Place/Out of Place*, p. 158). The “other,” therefore, could not be rational, subject by its nature and demarcating prosperities, and so the “subject” deemed the “other” as inferior (“Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” p. 172-174). The other, according to the “subject,” has not history or
future in space. Contact literature created the “domestic subject” describing the rest of the world, wherein the “other,” located in space, could be managed and controlled (Pratt, 1992, p. 39), taken out of economy, cultural and social life, and history (p. 53).

In the 18th century, a temporal dimension would be incorporated into spatial colonial difference (see Mignolo, 2007). We’d see the term “barbaric” replaced with “primitive.” In, Time and Other, Johannes Fabian (1983) provides insight into this significance. He writes, “temporalization is not an incidental property of historical discourse” (p. 78), rather an intentional practice of separateness, distinction, and distance from the knower (p. 121):

More profoundly and problematically, they required time to accommodate their schemes of a one-way history: progress, development, modernity. (p. 144)

Fabian presents the idea of denial of coevalness, which bears a descriptive and explanatory power of universal history. What he refers to as a denial of coevalness affirms, “their [emphasis mine] time is not the time of civilized history” (Fabian, p. xxiii) and ensures they (the ‘other’) are in a time apart (and further away) from evolution (see “Delinking,” p. 472/495). Temporal colonial difference, thus, would function as a measurement of human history and human beings (see The Darker Side, 2011). The fact that the ‘other’ “did not respond to the styles and exigencies of European modes of life” would provide enough rationale for describing the ‘other’ as primitive.10 Mignolo (2007) writes,

modernity has been conceived as such precisely to produce the illusion that people living in the contemporary world are ‘further away in time’ and not ‘living in a different socio-historical dimension.’ (p. 495)

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10 Walter Mignolo (2007) also argues that spatial/temporal difference is simultaneously imperial and colonial, imperial in that some people cannot be colonized but can be categorized as behind as they do not respond to the exigencies of “center” modes of life (p. 472-474).
Mignolo argue that modernity hides behind the splendors of happiness, the constant logic of coloniality. This alludes to Dussel’s concept of a “myth of modernity,” analysis of how there are claims that conquest is good for all. Yet, in marking the “other” as inferior and immature, the claim presupposes that the other is culpable for its own victimization and that the victimizer is innocent as they bring civilization and democracy (*The Invention*, p. 64-66). Dussel’s focus on Europe articulating a “reflexive consciousness of world history” and exulting “in its values, intentions, discoveries, technology, and political institutions as its exclusive achievement” is an important one for the discovery and conquest of the Americas would further articulate the myth of modernity in new ways based on this legacy established by Western Europe (p. 11).

Spatio and temporal colonial difference would create binaries—uncivilized/civilized, barbaric/humanity, inferiority/superiority—along a chronological notion of temporality—past (traditional) to evolution (modern), primitive to civilization, savage to rational. Spatio and temporal colonial difference, according to Mignolo, is simultaneously colonial and imperial. Colonial in that some people can be colonized and located in space, and, imperial in that some people cannot be colonized but can be categorized as “old” in the transitions of progress and development. Spatio and temporal colonial difference enabled a measurement of human history and human beings (*The Darker Side*, p. 153). As Henry Giroux (1992) writes, “Colonizing of differences by dominant groups is expressed and sustained through representations in which the Other is seen as a deficit, in which the humanity of the Other is posited either as cynically problematic or ruthlessly denied” (p. 130).

It is important to take time to discuss the idea of a world system before arriving to the concepts of “coloniality” and a “modern/colonial” world system. In *The Modern World System*, Wallerstein (2011) accounts for a European world-economy that emerges in the 15th and 16th
century. He defines “world system” as a “social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence” (p. 347). He writes,

It was a kind of social system the world has not really known before…It is an economic but not a political entity, unlike empires, city-states and nation-states. In fact, it precisely encompasses within it its bounds empires, city-states, and the emerging nation-states. It is a world system, not because it encompasses the whole world, but because it is larger than any juridically-defined political unit. (p. 15)

Before the European modern world-economy, the economy was structurally unstable. Yet, with the advent of capitalism, there existed a multiplicity of political systems, a multiplicity of “value systems within it, reflecting the specific functions groups and areas play in the world division of labor” (p. 356). This idea of a world system was to designate various zones of labor—the core states, the semi-periphery, and the peripheral areas—and through these designations a historical consequence has been that the core dominates the periphery. A center-peripheral relation became an efficacious way to macro-organize a “total” social system. The diffusion of these techniques secularized difference and centralized its power in transforming populations into a culturally homogenous group (p. 147).

In, “Americanity as a Concept,” Anibal Quijano and Wallerstein (1992) expand on world system theory by exploring the emergence of the Americas in the 16th century as a geosocial construct. They write,

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11 Mignolo (2007) argues that the modern/colonial world “cannot be conceived except as simultaneously capitalist. The logic of coloniality is, indeed, the implementation of capitalist appropriation of land, exploitation of labor and accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands” (p. 477).

12 Wallerstein (2011) states, “Free labor is the form of labor control used for skilled work in core countries whereas coerced labor is used for less skilled work in peripheral areas. The combination thereof is the essence of capitalism” (p. 127).

13 Cultural homogenization, Wallerstein (2011) writes, tended to “serve the interest of key groups and the pressures build up to create cultural-national identities” (p. 349).
The Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas…They offered space, and they became the locus and prime testing-ground of variegated methods of labor control. (p. 549)

Part of the “variegated methods,” which differentiated the Americas from the rest of the world, was modernity, which allowed the simultaneous destruction of the other and the construction of new economic and political institutions. This, Quijano and Wallerstein argue, became the pattern of a new “modern” world system. In this new system, the entanglements of coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and the concept of newness had severe implications.

Coloniality can be described as an “interstate system” of hierarchical layers, manifest into the integration of management and control of political, economic, and cultural domains. This created “rank order” and “sets of rules for the interactions of states with each other” (p. 550). That is, while there existed other “independent empires,” the hierarchy of coloniality, built on ethnicity and racism, allowed for a modern/rationality paradigm of knowledge—the center (Europeans, the Americas) and the peripheral (Creole, Blacks).

Ethnicity and racism, theorized and explicit, were the pillars for a more elaborate division of social groups and of labor. Features of Americanity, thus, include ethnic hierarchization, which “justifies racist attitudes without the need to verbalize them” (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992, p. 551). The elements of oppression observed—a coloniality of power (economic and political), knowledge (absolute knowledge), and being (homogenous identities)—is what Quijano and Wallerstein refer to as Americanity. Americanity, thus, stands as a reminder of the process in which the U.S. constituted (geosocial construct) itself as a nation through capitalism.

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14 Here, Quijano and Wallerstein (1992) are referring to the socio-cultural hierarchy that emerged in the binary of European/non-European.
and developed itself as a hegemonic power because of capitalism. Quijano and Wallerstein (1992) conclude by arguing:

The Americas are the historical product of European colonial domination. But they were never merely an extension of Europe, not even in British-American zone. They are an original creation…The creation of the U.S. as directly capitalist society was the basis there of a utopian of social equality and individual liberty. These images veiled of course very real social hierarchies and the articulation with power. (p. 557)

Spatio-temporal difference survives today through social relations based on race, ethnicity, and the provincialism of totality and globality. Coloniality, again, must be thought as the hierarchies, structures of power, and hegemony, which on a global scale, elaborates spatio-temporal relations of colonial difference. Thus, coloniality, Quijano argues, is the most general form of domination once colonialism is destroyed as an explicit political order (“Coloniality and Modernity,” p. 170).

Coloniality is an analytic first fully discussed by Quijano. In “Coloniality of Power,” Quijano (2000) explores how the old ideas of superiority/ inferiority under European colonialism were mutated in relationships of biological and structural superiority and inferiority.

Capitalism, according to Quijano,

produced a new mental category to codify the relations between conquering and conquered populations: the idea of race, as biologically structural and hierarchal differences between the dominant and dominated. So those relations of domination came to be considered as natural. And such an idea was not meant to

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15 Mignolo distinguishes capital as resources (possession) necessary for production and distribution, while capitalism as creation of particular types of economic, social and institutional structures (see also “Delinking,” p. 480-83).
explain just the external or physiognomic differences between dominants and
dominated, but also the mental and cultural differences. (p. 216)

New social historical identities (White, Indians, Negroes, Mestizos) were established, which did
not exist prior to the modern world-system. We know this to be based on the criteria of race and
ethnicity, wherein “whiteness” took center stage as the center of production. Today, Quijano
accounts, many marginalized groups still have just one identity and are deprived of their historic
identities (p. 219). Today, many of these single identities, their legacies, serve as a reminder of
the history of management and control of people and labor.

The efficacy of race and ethnicity, as a form of structural management and control, relied
on the ability to appear natural. Again, what allows this to happen is the modern/rational
paradigm of knowledge, “The inferior races are inferior because they are objects of study or of
domination/exploitation/discrimination, they are not subjects, and, most of all, they are not
rational subjects” (“Coloniality of Power,” p. 221). Again, in the context of the Americas,
Quijano discusses how this structural power was expressed through the homogenization of
people and identities. Whites, for instance, were part of society, while “Indians” were articulated
as foreigners in their own land and subjected as not part of society.

The analytic of coloniality, however, according to Mignolo (2012) is “already a
decolonial statemen” (n.p.). It was he refers to as modernity/coloniality, is the realization that
modernity and coloniality are united and entangled and the realizations that “decoloniality is
encroached to coloniality, coloniality provokes decoloniality and thus they are also both united

Juanita Comfort (2000) in, “Becoming a writerly self,” writes, “In a culturally pluralistic society like America,
whiteness does not exist in isolation from non-white cultural constructions such as ‘blackness’; it must exist in
juxtaposition against those other constructions. Whiteness has been a local of (often abusive) power and privilege
for those in society who can claim it and a source of subjugation for those who cannot. Certainly, part of the
advantage vested in whiteness lies in its ability to mask its own power and privilege—to render them normative,
even invisible, in the minds of most whites, in order to maintain the framework of white supremacy” (p. 549).
and separated for colonitality is the trap that modernity tend and decoloniality the projects to
delink and escape the trap” (n.p.). The epistemic and political project, then, of
modernity/(de)coloniality, as an analytic, “means working toward a vision of human life that is
not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that
differ” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 459). The grammar of de-coloniality, as Mignolo (2007) calls it,
“begins at the moment that languages and subjectivities that have denied the possibility of
participating in the production, distribution, and organization of knowledge” (p. 492). The
project of modernity/(de)coloniality, thus, is the imperative of the “other” to save themselves in
and on their own terms. This begins with place, local histories, and how both give way to
epistemic, ethical, and political geo-graphical, body-graphical, and mobile-graphical (my own
insertion) cultural expressions. Coloniality and de-coloniality, Mignolo writes, “provide both the
analytics for a critique and the vision towards a world in which many worlds can co-exist (p.
463).

Towards Decoloniality: Re-Orienting Space, Place, and Historical Bodies

Mignolo (2007) argues that there are many “beginnings” beyond Greek civilization and
many other foundational languages beyond Greek and Latin. Yet, in spatio and colonial
difference, “epistemic difference” amongst places and perspectives are dismissed (see Mignolo,
2011).17 The “myth” of modernity has kept people prisoners, denying them of their own histories
and trajectories (see Mignolo, 2000). In this section, the next step is to review critiques of
modernity and globalization and projects of “delinking,” which will then allow me to arrive to
the notions of geo-politics, body-politics, and mobile-politics of knowledge.

maintained “the imaginary of Western civilization as a pristine development from ancient Greece to eighteenth-
century Europe, where the bases of modernity were laid out” (p. 60).
Walter Mignolo (2011) argues that colonial difference is “entrenched” in globalization (The Darker Side, p. 161). Globalization has become the substance of our collective thinking and fantasies of geography and “total” integration. As feminist geography Doreen Massey (2005) argues in For Space,

The imagination of globalization as a historical queue does not recognize the simultaneous coexistence of other histories with characteristics that are distinct and futures which potentially may be so too. (p. 11)

The grand narrative of globalization is problematic, yet inevitable, as it is entangled in the narratives of modernity as progress and development (p. 84). Massey’s critique of globalization emerges at the point in which the historicity of globalization articulates power-geometries. She connects, as Quijano and others do, this image of discovery and conquest, in which space is regulated to people with no histories, trajectories, or futures. And, in the imagery that follows discovery and conquest, that of modernity and coloniality, the “cosmology of only one narrative obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space. It reduces simultaneous coexistence to place in the historical queue” (p. 5). While Massey (2005) does not explicitly say “delinking,” her idea of co-existence and co-presence articulates a “meeting-up-of histories” and “stories-so-far” that acts similarly to “delinking.” The particular value of meeting-up of histories suggests that even amidst colonization there was co-existence, while the value of stories-so-far implies the capacity for narratives to change, move, and be transformed.

In both, “The Global Situation” and Friction, Anna Tsing (2000/2005) is critical of this idea that global knowledge is monolithic and/or settled, because it suggests both a single-

Imagine a creek cutting through a hillside. As the water rushes down, it carves rock and moves gravel; it deposits silt on slow turns; it switches courses and breaks earth dams after a sudden storm. As the creek flows, it makes and re-makes its channels. (p. 327)

The imagery ties into her cautionary tale of globalism as it is articulated currently. She argues that to understand the notion of a creak making and re-making, we must be attentive to the elements that “carve” its channels of flow and establish its historical presence. Yet, she prefaces, talk about the globe has heated up to the point that many commentators imagine a global era, a time in which no units or scales count for much except the globe. (p. 328).

Tsing likens the charisma of globalization to the “charm of modernization” because of its seductiveness of absoluteness and totality. Coming back to the image of the creak, Tsing suggests that flow is valorized, while not the “carving” of the channel. She parallels this to how “we lose touch” with the material and institutional conditions and components through “which powerful and central sites are constructed” (p. 330). Tsing argues that when attention is paid to all elements, to the culture and politics of scale making, it is then that we can observe claims about units and scales.

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18 Tsing (2005) writes that colonial knowledge is knowledge that “legitimates the superiority of the West as defined against its Others” (p. 1).
19 Tsing (2000) argues that the “worst fault of the assumption of global newness is that it erects stereotypes of the past that in the way of appreciating both the past and the present” (p. 333). She uses the world flow to signify “newness” and states, “These imagined stagnant locals are excluded from the new circulating globality, which leaves them outside, just as progress and modernity were imagined as leaving so may behind” (p. 346).
Again, while Tsing does not explicitly use the word delinking, her arguments for friction and ideologies of scale and scale-making project suggest a more nuance notion of local/regional to global interconnections. In, *Friction*, Tsing (2005) introduction the idea of the “grip” of friction and encounters, that which gets in the way of “smooth” operations of global power (p. 6):

A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road…Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light. (p. 5)

With the encounters and interactions between the local and global, cultures are always co-produced in “awkward” and “unequal” qualities of interconnections across difference. So, while the rhetoric of modernity and coloniality may eschew co-presence, friction muddles absolute knowledge, subjectivity, and linearity (p. 87). Friction reminds us of how movement and cultural forms of practices are defined.

Returning back to “The Global Situation,” Tsing (2000) suggests that we need to place “flow” on a different playing field, that which allows us to see the “creek” (global) and the “moving” water (local). In re-defining local to global interconnections, Tsing insists being attentive to the coalescence between differences amongst places and perspectives and claims of locality, regionality and globality:

This task requires that we study folk understanding of the global, and the practices with which they are intertwined, rather than representing globalization as a transcultural historical process. (p. 344)

For Tsing, to articulate that difference matters theoretically, she proliferates two analytical principles to attend to defining scales and units of agency, *ideologies of scale* and *scale making projects*. Ideologies of scale suggest that place is a site of political-economic activity, which
make cultural claims about locality, regionality and globality (the state of coming into being), while scale-making projects (the state of making, rhetorical choice, and re-invention) refers to how people make “sense of events and social processes” in “relatively coherent bundles of ideas and practices as realized in particular times and places” (p. 342). These two analytical principles can help fill in the gap of absence, erasure, and/or conflation created by globalization, providing a clearer image of how places are designed and how politics emerge from its development.20

Both Mignolo and Quijano tackle this idea of people without history as they articulate the elements of local histories, colonial differences, and global designs to arrive at an understanding of delinking (and border thinking). The epistemology of a modern/colonial world system enunciated and presented absolute knowledge and being as universal designs by taking out or hiding local histories (Local Histories, p. 123). The idea of totality, Quijano (2007) reminds, elaborates an image of hierarchic order both with functional-structural relations and a historic logic of historical totality:

This leads to conceiving society as a macro-historical subject, endowed with a historical rationality, with a lawfulness that permits predictions of the behavior of the whole and of all its parts, as well as the direction and the finality of its development in time. (“Coloniality and Modernity,” p. 176)

Mignolo relies on the narratives of local histories to challenge this narrative of totality and universalisms. Local histories, he writes, project and export global design, while also adapting, adopting, rejecting, integrating and/or ignoring them (Local Histories, p. xxv).21 Local histories

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20 The point is to show varied histories that make and remake geographies and historical agents and how forms of agency are in relation to movement and competing claims about community, culture and scale. This, Tsing argues, shows that “components do not fit easily into a single story” (“The Global Situation,” p. 350).

21 Mignolo (2000) also writes that the “imaginary of the modern/colonial world system is not only what is visible and in the ground but what has been hidden from view in the underground by successive layers of mapping people and territories (Local Histories, p. 24).
reveal multiplicities of heterogeneous trajectories and identities-subjectivities. Difference, in this context, Quijano suggests, does not imply the “unequal nature” or “hierarchical inequality” of the other, rather, it implies the co-presence and the “diverse historical logic around” them (p. 177). For both Mignolo and Quijano, modernity is spoiled by coloniality. Yet, in delinking, we open up the possibilities of decoloniality.

Because the Western foundation of modernity and of knowledge is unavoidable, border epistemology and border thinking are also unavoidable. In “Delinking” and “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” delinking and border thinking begin with a sense of knowledge and being—a geo-and body politics of knowledge, according to Mignolo (2002//2007).22 An articulation of the suppressed geo-and body politics of knowledge is an act of decolonization:

new subjects of knowledge and understanding that had been negated, ignored and made invisible, precisely, by the imperial by the theo-and ego-logical politics of knowledge enacted agents and agencies of knowledge and understanding located in the domain of the empire rather than in the sphere of the colonies. (“Delinking” p. 460)

Mignolo (2011) has argued that “One dwells in the house of modernity; the other in the house of coloniality” (p. 238). The struggle in changing the terms and the content of the conversation (delinking) begins then with naming different historical locations and the re-inscription of epistemic embodiments, simultaneous with unveiling principles of knowledge and subjectivity that colonize the mind and the body through modern epistemology. In this way, the grammar of de-coloniality is participation in the production, distribution and organization of knowledge.

Spatial and temporal epistemic breaks are further possible with the idea of border thinking,

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22 The ideas of geo and body politics of knowledge derive from Enrique Dussel and Frantz Fanon.
which is “not grounded in Greek thinkers but in the colonial wounds and imperial subordination” (Mignolo, 2010, p. 347).

Mignolo (2007) further argues that when we delink the rhetoric of modernity from the logic of coloniality,

the doors open to all forms and principles of knowledge that have been colonized, silenced, repressed, and denigrated by the totalitarian march of the genocidal dimension of modernity. (p. 494)

Each local history has its own politics of being, knowing, and doing. Therefore, in “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” Mignolo (2002) posits that because epistemology is not ahistorical, epistemic colonial difference limits the “assumed totality of Western epistemology” (p. 85) and “shows us the limit of any abstract universal, even from the left” (p. 90). Thus, while colonial difference is a consequence of coloniality of power, it is also the locus of epistemic location and body-graphical knowledge. Border thinking is the perspective of the subaltern, “unthinkable without understanding the colonial difference” (Local Histories, p. 6) and always working to overcome the subject/object binary (p. 18). Border thinking and epistemic disobedience are two elements of delinking and decolonialism that proclaim humanity in difference rather than humanity of the same—the pluriversality of knowing, being, and doing.²³ Border thinking, most importantly, is irreducible and actional.

One of the principle questions I continue to ask is can I describe space-time behavioral patterns and spatio-temporal interactions in time and place without precluding or flattening how

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²³ Mignolo (2000) argues that ethical, political and epistemic “pluriversality implies that projects are anchored in local histories” (Local Histories/Global Designs, p. 240). In “Delinking,” Mignolo (2007) refers to pluriversality as a decolonial project, “the pluriversality of each local history and its narrative of decolonization can connect through that common experience and use it as the basis for a new common logic of knowing” (p. 497). In this way, “possible’ and “co-existing” worlds, as inter-epistemic and dialogical, is necessary to shift towards “other-universality.”
individuals allocate their space and time in a multiplicity of ways? I have turned to space-time analysis and micro-based research to study people interactions, innovations, and dispersions of spatial and temporal weight within a region and amongst adjacent regions. What interests me is how an intercalation of political and demographic features, designed to limit movement and mobility, can be resisted by interaction and friction through linguistic and rhetorical practices. Without reducing place or people to mere simplicity, I want to propose that space-time analysis can help us see people in production of space and time, rather than being “stuck” in space or “behind” in time. This brings into dialogue mobilities and decolonial studies. The idea is to recover the notions of “historical” place, praxis, and movement and mobility. By doing so, I believe I can show that we are always in production of space and time through our movement and mobility. This, I argue, is what contributes to the “in-process” and “in-becoming” of place, geographies, and subjectivities. Ultimately, this will allow me to dive into a conversation of the everyday where I articulate a mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework.

An ideological belief and strategy, as we recall, is to locate the “other” in a spatio and temporal dimensions. In, Place, however, Tim Cresswell (2004) asks us to consider space and place as something more complicated. Cresswell uses the example of Tompkins Square Park. This park has been a space and place for the elite, the homeless, and political uprisings. The point he makes is that “You could, in others, see many manifestations of place” (p. 4). Memories, tensions, and movement are all part of place-making activities, with attachments, meanings and values. In working to define place, Cresswell uses the work of political geographer

Cresswell (1996) writes in, In Place/Out of Place, if “we did not think there was something important and unique about space and place, some set of powers and potentials in social interaction, why would be concerned about delineating its use” (p. 151)
John Agnew to describe how place is located, composed with material settings for social relations, and imbued with relationships that produce and consume meaning. Cresswell writes,

It is common place in Western societies in the twenty-first century to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local culture and produced homogenized global spaces. (*Place*, p. 8)

Naming place gives it a sense of materiality and meaning, both which derive from the way its people see, know, and understand the world. Naming place challenges the idea of global spaces, because the attachments and connections between people and place reveal how meaning and experiences are irreducible. Place is a “meaningful component in human life” (*In Place/Out of Place*, p. 51), “struggled over and re-imagined in practical ways” (p. 71). It is always entangled in the interplay between what is “outside” and what is “inside” (p. 165). To consider place in such a way, Cresswell argues, is to gain perspective not on how place is founded on subjectivity, but rather how subjectivity is founded in place (p. 50). Rather than conceiving space and place strictly in the dictations of coloniality, re-orienting place as a social construct enables an observation of how there is a politics of place based on place as lived, practiced and inhabited (p. 70).

In, *For Space*, Massey (2005) discusses how space is entangled in discovery and conquest. The way we imagine space, she argues, has effects (p. 4). However, she offers alternative approaches to thinking about space, that of simultaneous coexistence and the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space. Space is a product of interrelations constituted through interaction and relational constructedness of things. Space is always under construction, embedded within material practices, which suggest that space is always in the process of being made, “through relations, and their lies the politics” (p. 15). Massey writes,
The hope is to contribute to a process of liberating space from its old chain of meaning and to associate it with a difference on in which it might have, in particular, more political potential. (p. 55)

The significance of the “stories-so-far” imagines this politicalness, wherein space is always in process of being made, never closed, and where people are in the process of becoming. Space, in this sense, becomes more than distance, it is “the sphere of openended configurations within multiplicities” (p. 91), which is, Massey argues, the “precondition” for politics. Re-orienting space as “open” suggests that space is always negotiated and that politics is always in play because they are “collectively produced through practices which form relations” (p. 148).

At this point, to re-orient space and place further, I turn to the ideas of movement and mobility. In, On the Move, Cresswell (2006) notes,

mobility bears a number of meanings that circulate widely in the modern Western world. Mobility as progress, as freedom, as opportunity, and as modernity, sit side by side with mobility as shiftlessness, as deviance, and as resistance. (p. 1-2)

In his chapter, “You cannot Shake that Shimmie Here,” Cresswell discusses the notion of “appropriate” and “inappropriate mobility” that parallels the effects and affects of movement and mobility that play out in spatio and temporal compressions. The process of ballroom dancing, he argues, “involves a number of representational practices” (p. 124). There are representational practices that are considered suspicious and disreputable (abnormal movement), while others are considered correct (normal). The relations played out here, between socially accepted and socially inappropriate, always define an aesthetic of ideal mobility and a politics of mobility.

Cresswell (2006) argues that we need to become “movement literate,” because movement enacts our “place in society” and enacts “particular gendered, ethnic, and class positions in
society” (p. 127), while “implicated in the reproduction of meaning and power” (p. 128). Bodily movement and mobility, thus, include issues of meaning, representation, and praxis. To come back to the idea of ballroom dancing, he writes,

In this account of the codification and regulation of ballroom dancing, so called correct forms of ballroom dance were produced through two principal forms of representation—one that sought to locate freak or degenerate movements in particular moral geographies, and another that sought to produce new movement through such things as dance charts and strict tempo. (p. 142)

Cresswell has argued elsewhere that transgressions serve to “foreground the mapping of ideology onto space and place,” which can tell us something about normality. Bodily movements, Cresswell argues, are always part of the “play of representational power” (p. 145).

If spatio and temporal compressions are historical, this suggests that the politics of being and becoming are also historical. And, if bodily movement is always entangled in the play of representational power, then the struggle for power is constellated and political. In, “Towards a Politics of Mobility,” Cresswell (2010) outlines a notion of “constellation of mobility” and “politics of mobility”. He writes, “mobility involves a fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations, and practices,” which have “traceable histories and geographies” (p. 18). Mobility, therefore, combines representation and meaning and embodiment and praxis, “implicated” in productions of power and social relations (p. 20). A “politics” emerges when mobility is conceived as embodied, constructed within narratives about mobility, and practiced within material contexts.25 At once, with movement and mobility there comes different practices

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25 Here, Cresswell (2010) asks us to consider: why does a person or thing move (compelled or choice); how fast does a person or thing move (exclusivity or imposition); in what rhythm does a person or thing move (correct mobility and regular movement); what route does it take (fixing in space and channeling motion); how does it feel (experiential); and when and how does it stop (stopping as a choice or forced) (p. 22-27).
and represented meanings that “differentiate people and things into hierarchies of mobility” (p. 26) and that signal a constellation to a historical sense of movement and mobility. By constellation, Cresswell suggests that particular practices and patterns can be observed in global scales of control and regulation, juxtaposed by human movement and mobility that can lead to new knowledges and practices. In this struggle, Cresswell asks us to think of mobility as emerging, dominant, and residual (p. 29).

The idea of historical bodies and constellated politics is central to this re-orientation of bodies in spaces and places. In, *Nexus Analysis* and *Discourses in Place* Ronald and Suzanne Scollon (2003/2004) consider: the historical body of the individual social actors, the discourses in place at the time of action, and the interaction order (the social groupings) within which they occur. They suggest social actors, discourses, and actions, are positioned within a *nexus of practice*. The Scollons’ (2004) write,

We regard the persons we focus on as social actors taking action with the aid of meditational means. Each actor is observed at a site of engagement which is a particular moment of time in a particular place with particular others present in a characteristic interaction order within characteristic discourses in place. When the social action is routinely taken at a recognizable time and place we call it a nexus of practice. (*Nexus Analysis*, p. 14)

The idea of historical bodies emerges as they consider how discourses “present” relate to past discourses in place and time, that is, each of these discourses have their own history and trajectory (*Discourses in Places*, p. 206). The Scollon’s (2004) suggest that particular discourse systems are “carried” within the historical body and that the systems “carry” the person though social situations (*Nexus Analysis*, p. 103). The idea they posit is that discourse can become
action, action can become discourse, and that the cycle produced can create an “ecosystem” of discourse and action.

The Scollon’s (2004) focus on three tasks—engaging the nexus, navigating, and changing the nexus—that highlights the meditational means that enable interaction and social action. They believe that through socialization, people engage the nexus of practice, which allows them trace meanings to communities/places and actions. In developing their meditational means, people begin navigating the nexus of practice, which situates them in historical and present contexts, and are propelled through action. They refer to this task as mapping (p. 87). In this context, the historical body is being used to illustrate a set of relationships that are dialectical and meditatively learned, parsed out, and carried over through social situations over a period of time (p. 101-103). Ideas of action, the Scollons’ argue, is what can lead to the change of the nexus. If we look at places as nexuses of practices, composed and imbued with lived experiences and actions, we must also observe these practices as geosemiotic systems (indexicality, interaction, and place) of “social positioning” and “power relationship” as people interpret meaning from inside their place and outside of it (Discourses in Places, p. 7). In essence, all signs index a discourse in place, but always in relation to the material world.26

If, as the Scollon’s argue, there exist a nexus of practice in all places, then social relations of power must be re-thought. In, “Place as Historically Contingent Process,’ Pred (1987) write that place is always involved in an,

appropiation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space. (p. 279)

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26 While the Scollon’s do acknowledge there is no space “discursively pure,” it is through place and space that we understand the configurations of space and place.
There is a material continuity of people and practice, Pred notes, which must be accounted for.

He suggests that we regard all people and their construction of meaning as constantly in the state of becoming, “through their involved in the workings of society and its structural properties” (p. 280). Pred suggests that in the dialectical relation between structural properties and everyday practices, micro (everyday) and macro-level (structural) properties emerge. He writes,

The rules and power relations of social structure do not only constrain and enable human agency and practice. They also emerge out of human agency and practice. (p. 281)

On the one hand, micro and macro proprieties touches on the idea of human biographies, the notion that we are composed of external-internal dialectics that stem from biographical and place-specific histories and social contexts (p. 287). Pred explains this in terms of gender scripts. A man/woman is given a role; this role is associated to the everyday and broader macro socio-historical scripts. But, imagine a scenario where this person encounters another individual with a different set of ideas. We are situatedly defined by “past” trajectories, with power relations “underlying” those intersections, but always in the process of becoming. Pred suggests that the “web” of human movement through time-space both reveals constraints and enablements. On the other hand, then, while micro and macro properties constrain agency and practice, human agency and practice also create rules and power relations. Recognizing the latter is important in that it opens up a space to see those perceived as the “other” as power subjects, of language and of rules for participation. In local contexts, power relations can be transformed by the economic, political and social nature of the local (p. 288-89).

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27 Here, Pred (1987) defines “social structure” as that “comprised of those generative rules and power relations…that are already built into a specific historical and human geographically specific social system” (p. 281).
Pred (1981) in, “Social Reproduction and the Time-Geography of Everyday Life,” also writes that society may be defined as,

The agglomeration of all existing institutions, the activities (practices, or modes of behavior) associated with those institutions, the people participating in those activities, and the structural relations occurring between those people as individuals or collectivities, between those people and institutions, and between institutions. (p. 6)

What this suggests is that society has always been in constant state and process of becoming. The idea of structuration comes to the forefront immediately as that which depicts the dialectical interplay between structure and everyday practice. This is what constitutes a persons biography.

It is Pred’s (1981) position to identify the “specifics” of practices that occur in time and space. By doing so, he attempts to shed light on the “interconnectedness” of different biographies in specific times and places that continue working and transforming society (p. 9). He writes,

If this is so, then the details of social reproduction, individual socialization, and the structuration are constantly spelled out by the intersection of particular individual paths with particular institutional projects occurring at specific temporal and spatial locations. (p. 10)

In re-orienting society in this way, the historical, present and future coalesce to inform the dialectics of practice and structure in time and space. In the everyday (life paths), Pred notes, the general “contours” of a person’s biography play out in the external-internal dialectic, that what assemblages the individual (socialization) and that of the opportunities that remain open (p. 13). A person’s biography, however, is never really of that time, but rather a measure of their “own place and social formation” (p. 15). This idea ties back to Cresswell’s (2010) notion of
constellation. Movement and mobility are entangled in past and present spatial and temporal circumstances, consequentially effecting subsequent movement and mobility also under spatial and temporal specific circumstances.

Spatial and temporal compressions would have us believe that the “other” is just a product of colonial difference. Other scholars, however, suggest that when we attach “contexts for movement” and “product of movement” to space and time we can observe people as “agents in the production” of space and time (On the Move, p. 4). Rational knowledge is transformed by the fact that people are “experiencing” and making “meaning” in places and spaces once thought to be incapable. Place is about seeing, knowing, and understanding the world and human movement and mobility ensures that the connections we make to place and community are entangled in meanings and experiences. In this way, place is about meanings, attachments, and action and power. Cresswell (2004) writes,

Place is produced through action and action is produced in place through a constant reiterative process. (Place, p. 7).

Places, thus are “about relationships, about the place of peoples, materials, images, and the systems of difference that they perform,” place is also about how movement and mobility create meaning through which we sense place and construct “emotional” geographies (Sheller & Urry, p. 214). To this end, place is imbued and composed with meaning-and-memory-making practices that are action-based. Konstantinos Retsikas (2007) suggests that “place is not where social relations simply take place, but an inherent ingredient of their modalities of actualization” always “becoming through people’s engagements” and mediated practices (p. 971-972; see also Olwig, 1997).
The efficacy of re-orienting space and place is to show how place is at the center of humanity. And, at the center of humanity, while difference damages, it also gives way to negotiation of meaning and representation. Movement and mobility both make this possible and reveals action, politics and power. If movement and mobility are embodied and practiced, it must be conceived as an “irreducibly embodied experience” (*On the Move*, p. 4). Like rhetoric, movement is “rarely just movement” because it “carries with it the burden of meaning” (p. 6-7). And like rhetoric, mobility is enacted and experienced through the body, producing meaning and social action in space and time. I am particularly drawn, then, to the following argument:

The presumption that spaces are autonomous has enabled the power of topography to conceal successfully the topography of power...For if one begins with the premise that spaces have always been hierarchically interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected, then cultural and social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact and circulation but one of rethinking difference *through* connection (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 8)

Re-thinking difference is at the heart of this dissertation, as the origination of dialectical movement.

**The Merging of Two Fields: Towards the “Everyday”**

In this section, I draw upon the “everyday” as inquirable, observable, and interpretable, bringing into conversations geographers and the methodology of critical regionalism. In the process, I suggest why the merging of rhetorical and ethnographic studies is essential for two frameworks that I am proposing, a *mindfulness of difference* and *mobile-decolonial interpretive framework*. 
In *Situating Everyday Life*, Sarah Pink (2012) defines “everyday life” as the “way life is lived out in the home on an everyday basis” (p. 8) that has potential to illuminate sites of resistance, change, and politics (p. 44). In, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Brian Street (1984) connects everyday life to ontology and suggests that “everyday literacy practices” are themselves social products informed by political and ideological contexts (p. 65). This has brought some scholars to conceive of the “rhetorics” of literacy” and “rhetorics of the everyday life.” In their preface, “Rhetoric, Writing, and the Everyday,” Martin Nystrand and John Duffy (2003) refer to the “rhetoric of everyday life” as rhetorical characters and dynamics of language resources in everyday contexts that emerge from locales (and the material conditions of locales) and that are negotiated according to social and cultural realities and ideological meanings attached to certain meaning-making practices within cultural spaces (p. viii). In previous works, John Duffy (2007) writes about the rhetorics of literacy, the “ways in which reading and writing can be used to define, control, and circumscribe, but also the ways in which human beings can use written language to turn aside, re-create, and re-imagine” (*Writing from These Roots*, p. 18). Similarly, Ralph Cintron (1997) in *Angel’s Town* refers to “rhetorics of the everyday life” or “rhetorics of public culture” as the ways people make or display themselves in relation to and within material conditions such as systemic power, neighborhoods, and/or gestures (p. x).

Clifford Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Cultures* and James Clifford and George Marcus’ edited collection *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* and his seminal text *The Predicament of Culture* marked a departure from traditional ethnography. These were seminal works because they emphasized the semiotic concept of culture, the centrality of interpretation, and the significance of thick description.
Geertz articulated the semiotic concept of culture most significantly. In his distinction between think and thick description, Geertz (1973) suggests that the ethnographer needs to understand a people culture without “reducing their particularity” (p. 14). Therefore, the goal is not to “capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving, but on the degree to which is able to clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce the puzzlement” (p. 16). In distinguishing the wink from the twitches, the process for ethnography consists of tracing social discourse, applying terms and analysis to meaning within social discourse, and fixing interpretations into an inspectable form for other studies to build upon (p. 19). Ethnography, therefore, is about interpretations. Thick description provides the opportunity to generalize within cultures instead of generalizing across (p. 26). Geertz notes:

Our double task is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects’ acts, the ‘said’ of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belong to them because they are what they are, will stand out against the other determinants of human behavior…to provide a vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself—that is, about the role of culture in human life—can be expressed. (p. 27-28)

Therefore, with Geert’z notion of culture analysis, the role of thick description allows for the ethnographer to draw explanatory conclusions.

Clifford is best known for his theorization of interpretive anthropology that places emphasis on reciprocity—ethnography as a dialogical and polyphonic mode of discourse between cultures. Clifford (1988) states, “the time is past when privileged authorities could routinely give voice to others without fear of contradiction” (p. 7). Questions, therefore, emerge:
who has the authority to speak for a group’s identity or authenticity and how does the self and other clash and converse in the encounters of ethnography? (p. 8). The predicament of culture thus reflects the difficulty of engaging in ethnography, attempting to provide systematic descriptions of culture based on observations, at the same time acknowledging the personal and collective self-fashioning of both the research and the researched (p. 9). Clifford argues, hence, that “identity” must be acknowledged as “always be mixed, relational and inventive” (p. 10). Because the ethnographer is “caught between cultures, implicated in others” (p. 11), Clifford suggests that “experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic processes are at work” that brings to light the circumstantial and intersubjective nature of ethnography (p. 54). At all times, therefore, “There is no neutral standpoint in the power-laden field of discursive positionings, in a shifting matrix of relationships, of I’s and you’s” (p. 42). Both Geertz and Clifford epitomize the social, interpretive, and literary turn and would inform the shift of ethnographic research projects to language-centered projects.

In *Memory Against Culture*, Johannes Fabian (2007) describes the era of the social turn (towards language-centered project) as an era of epistemological revolution, wherein an emphasis on communication and language in-action “sharpened our awareness of the epistemological significance of presentation and representation” (p. 14). Fabian claims that it was the emphasis on language that complemented the epistemological revolution. In “Cultural Anthropology and the Question of Knowledge,” Fabian (2012) notes how language-centered approaches in ethnography created a shift towards a ‘what we know about how they know what they know’ discourse. Fabian believes there is a greater need of “making present the knowledge [they] present” (p. 443). This motivates ethnographers to engage with questions such as: what counts as knowledge, how does knowledge become a possession, how can [we] move towards
knowledge as activity and/or practice, and how can [we] centralize ‘stories’ capable of “making present the knowledge they present” (p. 443).

With the epistemological revolution, anthropologists revisited how the ‘other’ was being framed. Fabian (2007) notes, the ‘other’ was a term that was “so general and its very vagueness allowed us to keep talking about topics of research while avoiding expressions that had become unsavory as a result of recent decolonization” (Memory Against Culture, p. 18). With this epistemological revolution, led in part by Fabian himself, there is a reconsideration of how we “should see relationships between self and other as a struggle for recognition, interpersonal as well as political” (p. 25). This is most reflected in his critique of anthropology’s role to address alterity. Fabian claims that alterity is rooted in the “realization that we seem to require alterity for sustenance in our efforts to assert or understand ourselves” (p. 29). Fabian asserts, however, “Speaking about others needs to be backed up by speaking with others” (p. 29). This leads Fabian to his notion of co-evalness and intersubjectivity. Both, he writes “provides us with the assurance that we actually make contact when we reach out with our ethnographies, and that the discourse we are producing gives form to experiences and contents which we could not have had without such a contact” (Fabian, 2001, p. 25). Fabian (1983), as a reminder, describes the denial of coevalness as the strategy of the researcher to place “objects of our study” in a “time other than that of the researcher” (p. 36). So, coevalness, therefore, is the recognition of the “presence” of all co-participants. Intersubjectivity is the work involved in making the researcher’s presence and the “presence of those whom we study” (Fabian, 2007, p. 5; see also Fabian, 2014).

With an emphasis on language, a shift is witnessed in ethnographic practices, from a practice of studying humans and cultures to a study of local and transnational practices and ecologies of practices and how they are circulated, calibrated, and/or deliberated through
language, discourse, and environment (see Limon, 1994; Cintron, 1997; Guerra, 1998; Farr, 2006; Meyers, 2014). These studies all reveal the nature of ethnographic and rhetorical studies. As Fabian (1983) argues in *Time and the Other* states, “Only as communicative praxis does ethnography carry the promise of yielding new knowledge about another culture…one that must be carried out coevally, on the basis of shared intersubjective” (p. 148). In this way, the rhetorical nature of ethnography is inevitable.

In “Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance,” Dwight Conquergood (1992) discusses a “thriving alliance between ethnography and rhetoric” (p. 80). Conquergood states:

> If ethnographers have enriched their practice with rhetorical insights and methods, rhetoricians likewise have much to gain from ethnography, particularly understanding of the cultural constructedness of key concepts such as ‘reason,’ ‘the rational,’ ‘the logical,’ ‘argument,’ ‘evidence,’ and so forth. Further, ethnography can help unmake the ethnocentric underpinnings of the privilege of ‘reason’ that has characterized rhetoric in the west from Plato to Perelman. (p. 81)

To understand Conquergood’s frame of reference to the unilinear logic of development attention needs to be paid to the process in which imagines progress and development and rhetoric as beginning in Athens, refined with Roman-Empire building, accentuated by European Enlightenment, and finally reaching the rest of the world through the violence of colonization, the manifestation of coloniality and globalization, and the imperial expansion that manages and controls identification, knowledge-making, subjectivity, and deliberation (see also Bernal, 1987; Baca, 2008; Baca & Villanueva, 2009; Lyon 2010; Mao, 2014).

Conquergood (1992) argues that ethnography, rhetoric, and performance ‘join forces’ to resist the totalizing practices of thought (p. 81). Ethnography, therefore, is rhetoric and its
emphasis on theories of performance is rhetorical. To be clear, not only is the bringing together of two methodological approaches beneficial in hindsight for research on linguistic, rhetorical, and communicative practices, but it also presupposes that linguistic and rhetorical forms and uses be understood from colonial contexts and conditions that adds the dimension of shared knowledge, expressive culture, subjectivity and praxis, according to Conquergood. Conquergood states, “One of the reasons ethnographers must go to the field to live and interact with people is that so much cultural knowledge is embodied in gesture, action, and evanescent event” (p. 85). And, the rhetorical component—a focus on the practices and discourses as they are embodied, enacted, and performed—provides epistemological insights into how interpretations originate within cultures. The rhetorical aspect, thus, places emphasis on the importance of local practices of cultural interpretation when ‘doing’ ethnography.

Conquergood (1992) notes, “The challenge of rhetorical and communication studies, with an assist from the ethnography of performance, is to learn how to locate counterpublics and listen for and think about” the range of ‘voices’ present (p. 92). This challenge, however, can be addressed when ethnography and rhetorical studies comes together and works towards a type of analysis and interpretation that illuminates the multiple stories of ethnographic fieldwork. At all times, there rhetorical is present, from fieldwork to the dynamics of ethnographic writing; the rhetorical factor works at the discursive level where the dialectical view emerges and becomes realized in the pursuance of knowledge. It is in the interest of this study, to broaden the scope of the ‘rhetorical tradition’ that stimulates methodological diversity. Rhetoric, as an analytic and meta-discourse, inherently creates a performative cultural politics within ethnography. This demonstrates, Conquergood concludes, how knowledge is tenuous and how all action “especially that of the researcher” is politically loaded (p. 95). A rhetorical dimension to ethnography,
therefore, informs the praxis of the ethnographer. Conquergood (1991) argues we must be intimately involved and engaged in co-activity or co-performance “with historically situated, named, unique individuals” (p. 188).

If the role of ethnographers, focused on communication, is to “investigate [its] communicative repertoire in terms of the socially defined community,” as Muriel Saville-Troije (2003) argues in *The Ethnography of Communication*, then for Conquergood the need for socio-cultural politics and socially responsible practices signals a critical approach and redress from monologue to dialogue and from information to communication (“Rethinking Ethnography,” p. 182). It is not enough, then, for the ethnographer merely to say that there is rhetoric and dynamic linguistic and rhetorical praxis in a certain locale. Rather, the ethnographer must investigate what, why, and how the dimensions of individuality and collective bears down upon the performance in and with rhetoric. The ethnographer also must interpret what the values and attitudes held are pertaining to language, communication, and identification and how they are shared and transmitted. In this way, the ethnographer is never neutral.

In, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” Conquergood (1991) furthers his argument on the relationship between ethnography and rhetoric. Because ethnography, in its very essence is rhetorical—from embodied activity to the writing-up of ethnography—the acknowledgment of this alliance has the opportunity to add nuance to the ways in which we work within and with local communities. In combining these two methodological traditions and in acknowledging the social and literary shift in the academy, Conquergood suggests there is a ‘vanguard’ of critical and socially committed practices that has re-situated ethnography in radical ways (p. 180). This radical rethinking of ethnography,

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28 The nature and distribution of linguistic resources: how they are organized and structured, how they relate to the social organization, and how they function as a patterned and integrated component of the community as a whole (Saville-Troije, 2003, p. 19)
Conquergood asserts, “shifts the emphasis from space to time, from sign and vision to sound and voice, from text to performance, from authority to vulnerability” (p. 183). Conquergood claims this performance paradigm “privileges particular, participatory, dynamic, intimate precarious, embodied experience grounded in historical process, contingency, and ideology” (p. 187) and therefore the “power dynamic of the research situation changes when the ethnographer moves from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer to the intimate involvement and engagement of coactivity or co-performance with historically situated, named, unique individuals” (p. 188).

Conquergood (1991) argues, “Ethnography is being rethought in fundamentally rhetorical terms” (p. 192). First, there is the shift in interpretive framework, from semantic emphasis to the syntactic relationship of the interplay of meaning-making practices. Second, there is the shift from scientific method to rhetorical strategies. As Clifford Geertz (1988) notes in Works and Lives, the rhetorical nature of ethnography demonstrates:

the capacity to persuade readers…that what they are reading is an authentic account by someone personally acquainted with how life proceeds in some place, at some time, among some group, is the basis upon which anything else ethnography seeks to do. (p. 191)

Third, there is the rhetorical aspect that has helped ethnographers realize the politicalization of ethnography. Not only is ethnography the “empowering alignment between rhetorical strategy and political ideology” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 193), but ethnography becomes a “type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge and action” (Thomas, 1993, p. 2) with the purposes of scrutinizing “otherwise hidden agendas, power centers” (p. 3) and with a focus on “invoking societal consciousness and societal change” (p. 4). According to Jim Thomas (1993) in Doing
**Critical Ethnography**, “Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge, and action (p. 2). Ethnographers argue we can “use knowledge for social change…to expose and deal with systematic social disadvantage and unequal access to resources” (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 53). If ethnography can be used to “revise our selves and our relations with the systems in which we live and work” (Gorzelsky, 2004, p. 85-86) we can cultivate, “a keen awareness of being within the landscape” (Marcus, 1995, p. 97). This act of “being” in the landscape opens the ethnographer to “possibility.”

In, “Changing Directions: Participatory-Action Research, Agency, and Representation,” Bronwyn Williams and Mary Brydon-Miller (2004) takes on the assumption that the goal of the ethnographer is to “stand back politely, observe, record, and not get involved in changing the lives of the people in the community they are watching” (p. 241). When we invoke ethics, we acknowledge that it is of the social responsibility and accountability of the ethnographer to engage in action. The ethnographer can work with the community to identify structures of oppression and work towards tangible social change. Williams and Brydon-Miller state, there needs to be a systematic approach that “addresses fundamental intellectual and ethical issues of social change, power, representations, and the purposes and ownership of knowledge” (p. 245).

In, “Beyond Theory Shock: Ethos, Knowledge, and Power in Critical Ethnography,” Stephen Brown (2004) argues that one part of critical ethnography is the political enterprise, the altering of the “material conditions of oppression” (p. 301). The ethical imperative, therefore, encourages the ethnographer to focus on the “democratic redistribution of power through culture” (p. 30) and engage with viable methods and methodologies of research that are transformative and that can lead to cultural change. Brown argues critical ethnography expands the terrain of inquiry by incorporating the rhetorical, the symbolic, and the signifying with the
end of constructing “knowledges not as ends in themselves but as means to social actions” (p. 311). The rhetorical aspect, inherently, engages with the material, the cultural, and implicates the ethnographer not only in the study of language and rhetoric, but also in using his/her own language and rhetoric to advocate and work towards change.

Aaron Hess notes how there has yet to be a full understanding of how to use the history of rhetoric as praxis in advocacy and of how to move rhetoric back to civic action. In *Rhetorical Ethnography* and in “Critical Rhetorical Ethnography,” he argues that rhetorical ethnography can be introduced as a method for vernacular advocacy based on the rhetorical concepts of invention (argumentative strategies for advocacy), kairos (awareness of location, context, and timeliness), and phronesis (learned and performed practices) and as a methodology “that embraces both the pedagogical and activist ideas of public scholarship” (*Rhetorical Ethnography* p. 256). In describing an embodiment of advocacy through direct participation, Hess (2008) emphasis on rhetoric “returns rhetoric to a place of public advocacy in the most localized segments of society” (p. 6) and “enables scholars to be active in both scholarship and activism” (Hess, 2008, p. 255). Hess connects rhetorical ethnography to a larger ethic of social responsibility in social science research and public intellectualism (Hess, 2008, p. 14) and explores how rhetorical theory guides ethnography in reinvigorating and nuanced ways.

Hess argues that rhetorical theory has a tradition of praxis that can turn to a critical praxis. Because the study of rhetoric implicates a study of discourse in the everyday and the exigencies that of which give rise to everyday practices, Hess suggests that this calls upon the researcher to allow for a radical possibility of re-presentation of ethnography. The first possibility requires the researcher to locate themselves as action researchers. In working with and within the community, the action researcher works from rhetorical theory to engage with
advocacy, argumentation, and deliberation. The second possibility requires the researcher to acknowledge the nature of fieldwork as a site of rhetorical production. By acknowledging fieldwork as rhetorical production, this enables the critical ethnographer to “engage not only with vernacular communities, but as vernacular within the site of dialogue (Hess, 2008, p. 26).

The third possibility requires the researcher to acknowledge rhetoric as a collaborative map for co-participation, learned through working with and within the community and works towards social change. Therefore, the rhetorical concept of invention should be restored and centered in theory and practice. Embodied activity, thus, reflects how the researcher becomes an advocate for the community as part of the scene of research as “well as in the collection, preparation, and representation of data” (p. 28). This, itself, becomes a means of articulation social change. The concept of kairos hence acknowledges the “development of a local contextual knowledge through the constant interaction with participants in the research field” (p. 32) and the timeliness and appropriateness of advocating for change; each interaction opens up a space for change (phronesis). Hess (2008) notes, “To engage in dialogue about power, the rhetorician must be witness to its effects” and phronetic research thus is enacted through “the engagement in the micropractices and micropolitics of power” (p. 33). There is, therefore, a discursive process wherein the ethnographer effects and is affected by materiality of the scene and of participants.

Hess (2008) argues, “If the purpose of the rhetorical ethnography is for rhetoricians to engage in a process of becoming and learning with vernacular communities, advocating their positions against oppressive social conditions, invention, then, becomes an articulation of a public speech act where rhetorical ethnographers advocate with and perhaps against the public, arguing and deliberating on behalf of the vernacular” (p. 69). Hess (2008) concludes by asserting that perhaps “rhetorical ethnography is necessary to call the field back to its place of civic action
and advocacy” (p. 254). Hess (2011) argues, “rhetoric should be augmented with a participatory sensibility and method, through which rhetoricians advocate alongside vernacular organizations, arguing for their causes” (“Critical Rhetorical Ethnography,” p. 128). Again, the work of Hess is central here as it centralizes ethnography and rhetoric to the work of the discipline of writing and rhetoric.

In *The Politics of Pain Medicine*, S. Scott Graham (2015) sheds insight into ontological repositioning for rhetorical ethnography. Graham defines rhetorical studies as an inquiry into representation (p. 69) and suggests that a rhetorical-ontological approach is needed that can enable the researcher to focus on the study of practices. In attempting to engage with traditional inquiry “without sliding backward into post-modernism” (p. 69), Graham claims that a rhetorically-oriented form of ontological inquiry will allow the researcher to study how “epistemologies arise from their ontologies” (p. 84) and that a praxiography of representation will enable the research to study how representational activity circulates and contributes to a deeper ecology of practices in which those acts of representation are embedded, performed, interacted with, and changed (p. 85). This praxiography of representation, Graham argues, accounts for ‘effects’ rather than the hermeneutics of representation and focuses on the practices of ‘cross-ontological calibration’. Cross-ontological calibration reflects a type of meta-activity where participants of communities calibrate divergent ontologies in metaphysical, practical, and epistemological ways. It is this meta-activity that reveals deliberation, as theory and praxis, and that becomes the foundation for action. I find this central to my emphasis on geo-politics, body-politics, and mobile politics of knowledge.

Overall, to increase coherence, I use Harry Wolcott’s *Ethnography*, Didier Fassin’s “Why Ethnography Matters,” and John Brewer’s *Ethnography* to provide a rationale for ethnography as
my first methodological orientation. I need and use ethnography because it is a process that moves beyond abstractness and speculative theories of societies into making sense of “somebody else’s sense-making” practices that are unknown or obvious, which requires that I be there in person and engage in a set of activities to sub-sequentially gather, organize, analyze, and report on the observations of “everyday” life, experiences and practices. My methodology is to read across multiple sites ‘everyday rhetorics and literacies’ as they emerge within their material conditions.

I believe history and current material conditions play a central role in establishing cultural scenes (whether colonial or not) from which people present their geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge. My invocation of border(ed)lands is meant to signal both the past physical presence of colonialism (and imperialism) and the current presence of coloniality. I therefore believe epistemic and subjective decolonization requires an emphasis on the articulation of the loci to name historical locations and protest the suppression of sensing and geo-historical and body-specific locations through ‘everyday practices’. My emphasis on geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge as it relates to ‘everyday rhetorics and literacies” is a move that places emphasis on capacities for action and modalities of agency. In this way, I find myself researching and speaking back from my community to the academy.

**The Everyday, Towards Mobile and Decolonial Frameworks**

I have yet to define the everyday, so as I conclude, I do so with the intentions of creating an intervention to translingual scholarship by way of a *mindfulness of difference* and a *mobile-decolonial interpretive framework*. I want to focus on two scholars, Sarah Pink and Allan Pred, whose discussions of the “everyday” has been helpful to how I understand it. In, *Situating Everyday Life*, Sarah Pink (2012) argues that the everyday is not a given, it is something that
must be understood in and on its own terms. She offers three principles that help guide this discussion of being and becoming: 1) everyday experiences and actions are “in-becoming” of practice, 2) everyday experiences and actions are imbued and constitutive of places, and 3) representation, meaning, and practice are always about movement (mobility in this context). I flesh these principles out in my discussion of Allan Pred.

Geography is inquirable, observable, and interpretable. In the sense, micro-behaviors and movements can be mapped. In, many of his works, Pred has taken up the idea of the “everyday.” He argues, for example, that we must look at the interplay between community (and individual behavior) and experience, societal and material structures, and growth and change. In this argument, he comes to center on two concepts—the path and project concepts—to discuss the “everyday” and what he calls the “biography of a person.” The biography of a person he writes, “can be depicted at daily, annual, or other scales of observation as an unbroken, continuous path through time-space subject to various types of constraints” (“Production, Family,” p. 4), which should be seen as “resulting from a unique accumulation of everyday experiences, impressions, and memories” (“Place as Historically Contingent,” p. 287).

According to Pred (1981), the path concept, “each of the actions and events which consecutively make up the individual’s existence” has both temporal and spatial attribute,” subject to constraints in the continuous path through space and time (p. 4; see also “Place as Historically Contingent”). He defines the project concept as that which “consists of the entire series of simple or complex tasks necessary to the completion of any intention-inspired or goal-oriented behavior” (p. 4), both short and long term, which is synonymous “with the coupling together in time and space of the paths of two or more people” (“Place as Historically Contingent” p. 281). Without these two concepts, Pred (1987) argues that there are no social
practices. Without these two concepts, there would not be a sense of place, because place cannot
stand on its own, rather, it is part of the becoming of “consciousness and thereby inseparable
from biography formation and the becoming of place” (p. 292).

In, “Out of Bounds and Undisciplined,” Pred (1995) asserts that there is no situated
knowledge that can be a “detached overview” or something “constructed” onto itself. On the one
hand, he writes, local differences persist because there is “nothing which is literally global.”
Therefore, the local should always be the point of reference, the starting point. However, on the
other hand, to be purely or authentically local has never existed because “social forms have
always to some extent been synonymous with a hub of material and relational flows…has always
to some extent been produced and maintained by ways of an entangling of the exogenous and the
indigenous, by way of spatial interconnections…” (p. 1077). Nonetheless, Pred argues that that a
study of the everyday is the closest we can get to understanding the dialectical relationship
between the local and global. Moreover, in, “Place as Historically Contingent,” Pred (1987)
around local studies of the everyday are what allows us to see people and place “constantly
becoming” (p. 280). That is, as he writes, as “everyday practices generate and reproduce the
micro and macro level structural properties of [that] social system” (p. 281), place becomes a
reproduction of social and cultural forms, the formation of biographies, and the “transformation
of nature ceaselessly become one another at the same time that time-space specific activities and
power relations ceaselessly become one another” (p. 282).

Pred’s critiques are valuable. One critique is how other scholars fail to recognize how all
is bounded up in the “temporally and spatially” specificities of actions. What Pred (1981) means
is that scholars do not describe how practices in specific temporal and spatial locations fit into
the “continuity” and “transformation” of society or how the “everyday” functions and
reproductions everyday practices in space and time with social action (“Social Reproduction,” p. 7-9). The idea of transformation comes into fruition through the notion of “becoming” that is meant to hint at the role desires and intentions have with change. Pred writes that while the “individual” is rooted in the past, “the corporeal unfolding of an individual’s path in a succession of projects is synonymous with the constitution, or development, and expression of consciousness” (p. 12). That is, in the act of becoming, an individual is not only engaging in “past” or “historical activities,” rather, they are also creating society through participation and contribution to it. It is in this process of participation and contribution that “defining” and “redefining” the self affords the possibility of “new” futures.

I return to the local, because my felt sense, as Sondra Perl would say, has always thought of the Valley as a local/regional site that breaks down Western social values, systems and practice. Questions, again, that I am constantly thinking about include how are people of the LRGV in production of place, of a politic of the flesh, and of literate and rhetorical practices and what does it say about the local, region, and global that we as educators can draw upon. My research explores how Mexican Americans embody ethnolinguistic identities and perform rhetorical practices within the contexts of (im)mobility in this region and how individual and collective strategies (and ethos) emerge in and across spaces that correspondingly create a counter-narrative.

Considering all this, I want to briefly review the scholarship of translingualism and offer an intervention. In composition studies the effects of monolingual ideology persist. Much effort has been placed on developing an alternative orientation to linguality and difference, translingualism. Translingualism, Suresh Canagarajah (2013a) states:
addresses the synergy, treating languages as always in contact and mutually influencing each other, with emergent meanings and grammars. Translingual literacy is an understanding of the production, circulation, and reception of texts that are always mobile; that draw from diverse languages, symbol systems, and modalities of communication; and that involve inter-community negotiations. (p. 41)

Yet, in the crux of honoring language differences and theorizing an alternative approach, a paradoxical moment has occurred. In all this talk about honoring language differences, and theorizing translingualism, an understanding of everyday practices and experiences is limited. Bodily embodiments and mobility remain absent from the scope and content of a translingual approach. Also absent is the long history of difference and the role spatio-temporal frameworks have played throughout history.

Translingual scholars focus on how language is an “emergent” and “in-process activity” of becoming, wherein difference is both the “locus” of meaning and the “norm of language in-practice” (Horner et al., 2011; Canagarajah, 2013a/2013b; Lu & Horner, 2012/2013/2016; Horner & Selfe, 2013; Leonard & Nowacek, 2016; Canagarajah, 2016). An expression of “emergence” and “becoming” breaks from the view that language-use is merely a byproduct of conventions and norms. Rather, both signal how language is “subject to variation and change” in the co-construction (and re-construction) of meaning-making (Horner et al., 2011). The implication that language extends beyond a “right” and into something used and co-created illuminates performativity wherein language-users accommodate, revise, and/or transform

29 As compared to multilingualism, which Canagarajah (2013a) notes, “perceives the relationship between languages in an additive manner” (p. 41).
meaning from daily interactions and encounters (Lu & Horner, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013a). This, I suggest, reflects a multi-modal politics of being and becoming in space and time.

The advent of a monolingualist ideology created a mainstream/non-mainstream binary, whereby those marked as different in language-use evidenced their own deficiency (and deviancy) and need for assimilation (Lu & Horner, 2013). The ideology of monolingualism “associates language difference strictly with subordinated groups” (Lu & Horner, p. 583). The denigration of such groups influenced how agency was conceptualized. Yet, in re-thinking language differences and agency, translingual scholars propose that we think beyond the resistance/subversion paradigm, wherein students are “put in the unenviable position of seeming to have to choose between either submitting to demands for conformity...or, on the other, resisting such demands” (p. 584). Translingualist are currently drawing upon theories of structuration (Giddens, 1979), sedimentation of language and meso-political action (Pennycook, 2010), and agency, proposing a spatial-temporal framework to observe how language practices emerge and engage in processes of becoming. To this end, translingualists argue difference is the norm of language use and of all language acts, in and with power.

There is hesitation, however, towards a translingual orientation because of the potential of excess and normalization of difference (Matsuda, 2013/2014). The argument that we are always translingual is growingly a concern (Bawarshi, 2016). As Keith Gilyard (2016) response to translingualism warns, the “linguistic everyperson” gives the impression of sameness of difference. What can ensure is the flattening of language difference or erasure of historical and unresolved struggles involved in meaning-making practices and knowledge productions (Gilyard, 2016). So there are two challenges. The challenges with implementing translingual approaches, as discussed by Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner (2012) in, “Translingual Literacy,
Language Difference, and Matters of Agency,” is not reinforcing monolingualist ideologies and undertaking a political agenda of honoring language difference with the “very language ideologies responsible for producing ways of understanding and denigrating language difference against which such work is consciously directed” (p. 584). They propose developing designs invested in the “emergent character of [their] expertise,” making translingualism a more responsible way of valuing differences in language use (p. 601). There is also the challenge of not conflating and/or erasing differences. Currently, the translingual movement has continued to work through the field at such an alarming rate that it will eventually no longer be counteractive to homogeneity, but rather it will bask in the same ambience of excess as the global.

A seemingly ahistorical spatio-temporal framework of difference can be problematic. Spatial difference, for example, created a falsified truth that the “other” was absent of history or present in objectivized ways (Pratt, 1992; Quijano, 2007), while temporal difference created the illusion that the “other” was still, fixed, and out of place (Fabian, 1983; Cresswell, 1996; Mignolo, 2007/2011). Together, space and time have existed as a measurement of “being” and “becoming.” To invoke difference as “the locus of meaning,” as translingualists do, an attentiveness to local histories and everyday life is required. This is important especially for those on the cusp of invisibility and silence who everyday make their presence known. Yet, today, when no units or scales count except for the globe (Tsing, 2000; Cresswell, 2004), the particularities of the everyday, and the ways in which the local critically interacts with the global, remain absent from the scope and content of a translingual approach. An awareness of space and time, both as a framing of historical places-bodies and as indication of production of space and time, is essential to avoid universal abstraction.
A spatio-temporal framework of difference in translingual conversations must begin at the scale of human practice, the everyday, because it is observable. A nexus of practice, according to Ronald and Suzanne Scollon (2004), emerges from a historical sense of “body” and place, wherein a particular place and time, social practice is recognizable, creating an “ecosystem” of discourse and action that can lead to change. We need to go beyond how macro “social structures” constrain human agency and practice and explore how human agency and practice give way to “structural properties” through participation (Pred, 1984). This aligns with a translingual orientation that treats language as a dynamic process of structuration (Lu and Horner, 2012), but we need to extend by conceiving of meaning-making practices and knowledge productions as produced through action (Giddens, 1981; Cresswell, 2004). That is, both are always in the process of becoming because they are constantly generated and reproduced from within micro and macro level structural properties by cultural claims and expressions of everyday life (Pred, 1984; Pink, 2012). Openness to change and transformation, in space and time, is what carries consequence for the classroom and compositions.

So this brings me to some questions: what about the body in movement with language and what about historical and unresolved struggles students embody and carry with them into the classroom? I want to come back to the idea of being and becoming as corresponding with the “everyday.” Alastair Pennycook (2010) reminds me that space is imagined and created through the locality of practices such as language, “The locality of language practices is not then a stage back-cloth against which language is used, but is a space that is imagined and created” (p. 141). Language, as Pred (1987) argues, is “always becoming in the sense that its components are either very gradually and unintentionally altered through daily use in stable and recurrent institutional projects, or incrementally and sometimes radically changed through the introduction,
abandonment, or modification of institutional projects and their associated path-coupling requirements” (p. 285). The question I ask then is what about intentions and desires involved in language practice? Students are rhetorical agents, situated within stories of individual and community histories and memories, participating in meaning-and-memory-making practices that make and re-makes place, and they bring this history with them into our classes. To be clear, place is a product of interrelations and activities of action, it is always under construction, it itself a story so far, always in the process of being made.

Considering the above conversation, I propose two frameworks— a *mindfulness of difference* and a *mobile-decolonial interpretive framework*—which begins in observations of the dialectics between nexus of practice and the particularities of everyday life. A *Mindfulness of difference* requires both an understanding of student’s place, knowledge, and meaning-making practices and their geo-graphical, body-graphical, and mobile-graphical displays of expressions. To practice a *mindfulness of difference*, we must acknowledge that students are rhetorical agents, situated within stories of individual and community histories and memories, and participating in meaning-and-memory-making practices that make and re-makes places. In this way, all students are creators and makers, who deliberatively and dialectically express their agency and power in space-time in and across rhetorical sites. Without a mindfulness of the burden dwelling in colonial difference entails, there is a risk of conflating and/or erasing difference.

This leads me to the mobile-decolonial interpretive framework. The mobile element stems from Creswell’s (2006) argument that we become “movement literate.” Again, Movement and mobility are “irreducible embodied experiences” and movement is “rarely just movement” because it “carries with it the burden of meaning” (*On the Move*, p. 4-7). I too see mobility as that involving the “fragile entanglement of physical movement, representation, and practices”
which has “traceable histories and geographies” (“Towards a Politics,” p. 18). The decolonial element is complementary and generative to the mobile. It stems from my understanding that local histories and differences matter. That at the local and regional level not only are people adapting, rejecting, and/or transforming meaning, but they are also in critical interaction with the global as they display their geo-graphical, body-graphical, and mobile-graphical politics of knowledge and meaning-making practices. An emphasis is placed on geo, body, and mobile politics of knowledge because both have been negated in the articulation of spatio-temporal colonial difference.

A Conception of Literacy

At the heart of this dissertation is literacy, which is at once social practice and social action. This social perspective of literacy has been articulated, especially within the content of discourse and power (Heath, 1982/1983; Gee, 1990; Street, 1993; Barton et al, 2000). Ethnographic studies of literacy have afforded terms such as literacy events (Heath, 1983), literacy as practice (Scribner & Cole, 1981), and literacy as autonomous and literacy as ideological (Street, 1984/1988). The work of Brian Street, as well as others, has been central in defining literacy as a socially situated practice.

Heath’s (1982/1983) idea of literacy events, any “occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participant’s interactions and their interpretive processes” (p. 93) was a seminal finding in that it provided a method for analysis. But, as others contended in ethnographic studies that followed, there are cultural influences on the use of literacy that must be attended to, resulting in the idea of literacy as practice (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1988). Then, there was the idea of autonomous models of literacy and ideological models of literacy. Street defines the autonomous mode of literacy as that which “disguises the cultural and
ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can be presented as though they are neutral and universal” (p. 1), whereas as an ideological model of literacy “recognizes a multiplicity of literacies; that the meaning and uses of literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply neutral technologies” (Street, 1984, p. 139; see also Barton et al, 2000). Street views the autonomous model as a Western conception of literacy and imposition of Westernization.

In, “Limits of the Local,” Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton (2002) engage in the conversation of autonomous and ideological models of literacy as they reconsider the relationship between the local and global. They write,

Context became associated with ethnographically-visible settings (the here and now), and the technology of literacy was demoted in the relationship to the human agent who held power in assigning meaning to acts of literacy. But can we not recognize and theorize the transcontextual aspects of literacy without calling it decontextualized? Can we not approach literacy as a technology—and even as an agent—without falling back into the autonomous model? Can we not see the ways that literacy arises out of local, particular situated human interactions while seeing how it also regularly arrives from other places—infiltrating, disjointing, and displacing local life? (p. 333)

There emphasis is on distance, for “literacy is not wholly produced or reproduced in local practice but rather is a contributing actor in it and that its meanings live on beyond any immediate stipulations entailed in localizing it” (p. 353). They push and argue, based on the ideas of Bruno Latour, a “thing” status for literacy (historical, material, technological), enabling
us to “provide for and speak to the connections beyond the here and now” (p. 345). This is potentially risk and dangerous language.

It makes sense to approach literacy as that on a trajectory between local and global scenes, to theorize, as Brandt and Clinton explain, the transcontextualized and transcontextualizing potentials of literacy. Essentially, Brandt and Clinton follow the same course of critique on localism. Yet, as Street (2003) argues,

> The features of distant literacies are actually no more autonomous than those of local literacies, or indeed than any literacy practices: their distantness, their relative power over local literacies and their ‘non-invented’ character as far as local users are concerned, do not make them ‘autonomous,’ only ‘distant,’ or ‘new’ or hegemonic. (p. 2826)

Street calls for new methodological and empirical ways of taking into account Brandt and Clinton’s arguments. Brandt and Clinton have responded, “In hindsight, we would have framed our call as a need to bring the ‘thingness’ of literacy into an ideological model” (p. 256).

This dissertation, in regards to the local and global debate, positions its own argument, that while global flows and currents persist, the local, in its own capacity, accommodates, rejects, and/or transforms those global impositions of flows. Wherein student’s agencies come at the point of naming and defining use and practice of literacy, within historical and sociocultural contexts, might it not be harmful to those agencies to be undergird by claims that their practices are not local? In this age of fast globalism, might we return to the question of “how important and in what ways is literacy related or central to different aspects of life and culture” (Graff, 1979, p. 303)? Might we not benefit from asking another important question, is this rush to thingify “literacy” a tenet of Western-orientations? Surely we cannot assume the “global” to be
the answer to all of our research questions. Surely, on the most basic level of humanity, we should be hesitant to the projection of the “local” as the stopping point of flow and circulation.

There is something to be said about John Duffy’s (2003) suggestion that rhetoric and a rhetorical approach be the focal point of thinking about literacy development in “Other Gods and Countries.” He writes, “By ‘rhetoric,’ I do not mean the classical arts of persuasion or the ornamentation of elite discourse. Rhetoric as I mean it here refers to the ways that institutions, groups, or individuals use language and other symbols for the purpose of shaping conceptions of reality” (p. 42). “Use,” “symbols,” and “reality,” are three central terms here and they are inextricably linked to the expression of cultural values. If, as I have, and will continue to argue, borderlands are not created the same, then, how can it be that we can delineate local and distant in regards to use, symbols, and reality?

Yet, in many ways I agree with Brandt and Clinton, as I am reminded of Pred’s argument that the local is never fully “authentic.” But, as Duffy (2003) writes, “Rhetorics, I have argued, invite us to become and to belong” (p. 51). In the conversation of literacy, the question that I continue to contemplate is what if we all have different definitions, uses, and practices of literacy? Would this not mean we have different orientations to being, becoming, and belonging? Duffy’s work here illuminates “the ways in which the materials, content, teaching, and meanings of literacy are organized by powerfully shaping rhetorics” (p. 52). Again, what happens when rhetorics fall on the poles of non-Western and Western rhetorics, between the two poles, as I argue is the case within the LRGV? What is being suggested is that Brandt and Clinton’s work be conceived as the starting point to a longer conversation on matters of local and global literacies.
For now, a working definition of literacy is central to this dissertation. In their introduction to *The Future of Literacy Studies*, Mike Baynham and Mastin Prinsloo (2009) describe characteristics of literacy, “literacy goings-on are always and already embedded in particular forms of activity; that one cannot define literacy or its uses in a vacuum; that reading and writing are situated in the context of social (cultural, historical, political and economic) practices of which they are a part and which operate in particular social spaces” (p. 2). I align with the idea that literacy is a kind of practice, a practice that entails “bodily activities” and “forms of mental activities” that “operates less on the micro or macro end of the practice scale” and more at “some meso level though with some slippage between issues of scale” (p. 6). Too often, however, the “bodily activity” is substituted with Western dispositions of what mobility and progress mean in regards to the classroom. Too often, the body is conceived strictly in the “historical” instead of in production of something anew. Nonetheless, literacy will be conceived here as a type of practice, both indicative of social practice and social action.

In the next chapter, I look at my first site, the writing center. Specifically, I attend to the ways that the writing center community has taken up topics of race and power. Chapter four asks the writing center community to listen, well and deeply, to how they have and continue to develop anti-racist agendas. The article points to the emergence of a white/black race paradigm and considers its implications. The article brings attention to the plight of Mexican Americans, both local and global, and moves to discuss what might be afforded in accounting for Mexican American students within writing center conversations on race and power.
Chapter 4: Unmaking Gringo-Centers

It’s you, after all, who do the most important teaching—the one-with-one. You teach writing, but you also have the context with which to teach the art of conversation, of civil discourse handled civilly. We cannot remain so frightened of controversy that “pc” means “policed conversation,” turning a blind eye, safe in the silence…So when that next paper comes your way that says there is no racism, place think of the silence, expose it, looking at the Master’s Tropes. Let’s look to the language. Behind it there is a material reality—the reality of racism, still present, and not all that new after all.

Victor Villanueva, “Blind,” p. 18

…when writing centers talk with students about how literacy works as a cultural practice, we do more for them than when we pretend that it is a neutral individual skill. If we explain the cultural values, beliefs, and performance expectations that are encoded in academic practices…we are creating more choices and offering students more information about how cultural works…Writing center workers must be prepared to offer more compelling and more socially just visions of literacy…

Nancy Grimm, Good Intentions, p. 46

In this chapter, I build on the conversation of a black/white race paradigm (see introduction). I explore conversations of race and the rhetoric of anti-racism in the writing center, both from a close-reading and distant-reading approach. My intent is to illustrate how conversations on race have shifted in writing center scholarship, still however, occluding Mexican Americans in such critical conversations. This is the first site in which I consider the possibility of decolonial agendas (mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive frameworks) and democratic participation. I consider such possibilities from the framework of writing center visions and philosophies, the subject-position of a writing center consultant, and the historical bodies of Mexican Americans both global and local. I begin this conversation from a series of memories.

Recuerdos

Tengo un recuerdo. Over the weekend, I’d observe my tío work on cars. He’d pop the hood, turn the vehicle on, and listen. He’d step back and look at me and say, “Listen mi’jo to the car.” He’d lean back in and work to locate the problem. My tío taught me about the capacious

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30 This section pays homage to the importance of memory, which as Villanueva (2004) discusses, is central to understanding how the body is a corporeal vehicle of past and present.
work involved in listening, the type of listening that centers the corporeal body as sensuous within and between the physical, temporal, and symbolic. Learning to listen as such situated me in space, place, and time. My ethos and politics of being, seeing, and doing emerged from these points of references.

I was born in the U.S., raised along the frontera of the LRGV. Situated in-between the geopolitical border that separates two nations and the internal checkpoints that run parallel, I came to embody and experience the legacies behind the phrase *The Mexican*. It is a palimpsest of identity that is resounded in the mythology of normalcy and deviancy. The border/internal checkpoints and the archetypical inscription of *The Mexican*, together, function to accentuate who and what is “in place” and “out of place.” From early on, I understood what it meant to carry the burden of meaning associated with this region’s histories. You see, sin padre, raised by a single mother who was a high school dropout, I was just another statistic experiencing what it meant to be poor with limited access to resources and opportunities. But, I also learned how to practice survivance, resiliency, and agency through listening. Listening emerged in the crux of incoherencies and disjunctions. It became a form of expression that I found to be transformed and transformative. From listening, I understood that I was situated within a historical space and connected to historical bodies. In the liminal spaces created from my physical and metaphorical crossings and my awareness of how borders and internal checkpoints function and operate in my everyday, my body was thrusting the spaces between societal limitations and new self-definitions.

*Tengo otro recuerdo.* At grandma’s kitchen table I’d sit after school every weekday. “¿Cómo te fue en la escuela?” she’d ask as soon as I walked in. I believe she’d ask both out of concern and a longing for the educational experience denied to her once she crossed la frontera.
“Siéntate,” she’d say to me. On the table would be her worksheets where she’d write in English and Spanish and a recorder where she’d practice translating Spanish to English (and vice-versa). She was told she could not go to school, but she eventually learned how to read and write in Spanish and English for herself. In our exchanges, at the table and on our daily walks, by means of cuentos and testimonios, she’d look at me and ask if I was listening and if I understood what she was saying. She’d say two things, “te digo esto para que sepas y aprendes” and “no te dejes mi’jo.” Grandma was always teaching me. She was not content with the saying, “Así son las cosas,” despite her tribulations. She expected no less from me. “Te digo esto para que sepas y aprendes” underscored “no te dejes,” both educating me on what it meant to put in the work involved in listening to my surroundings, to know and learn, and what it meant to cultivate listening as a form of resolve in being heard and seen. Today, I continue to listen in these ways for the Mexican American of the LRGV remains silenced and invisible by outside forces.

Último recuerdo. I am on my way to the university on a bus. I wait at the Sarita, Texas checkpoint. I’ve been here before, but this time it was different: I was entering gringoland on my way to gringodemia. “¿Tu papeles y a dónde vas?” the agent asked. The questions were part of his strategy of “checking” me, reminding me that the interpellation of my traceable history and palimpsest of identity (The Mexican) made permissible the “checking” of who I was and where I was going. I handed him my Texas identification card and stated I was going to college. This “checking” typifies my experiences beyond the LRGV. My grandma believed in higher education, and I did too. But, as a first-generation college student, accepted conditionally at a conservative and predominately white institution, what was at stake, among other things, was being an accomplice to my own degradation. The accumulation of white student protest against diversity (and students’ treatment of people of color) and feedback from my professors had me
thinking that maybe higher education was not meant for me. I could not change my accent, mi
color, or the fact that I was not as academically prepared as others. I could not write,
communicate, or be white. I shouldn’t have had to. My tío once told me, “Tienes que enseñarles
que puedes abrir un libro y leerlo también.” I had to prove myself daily for I was always being
“checked.” I could not change who I was, but I listened as to know and learn and as to negotiate
ways to be heard and seen. Then and now, I have listened as to engage in social action.

I have turned to listening to speak and research back to an academic community that
knows little about students like me. Gringoland and gringodemia are functional and operational
terms for me, because they reflect the circulation of rhetorics of assemblage, the surveillance and
monitoring done on behalf of the hegemonic family, and the branding of “other” upon the body,
all of which are meant to heighten the internalization of otherness for people of color. In my
experiences, writing centers are not absolved from such cultural violence. The idea behind “un-
making gringo-centers” implicates the writing center in such violence, but also calls attention to
the opportunity for a community of scholars to make and re-make writing centers in productive
and meaningful ways.

A Call to Action

Writing centers function within a tapestry of social structures, reproducing and generating
systems of privilege. Even writing center mottos that are constructed with the best intentions
disguise privilege, falling short of “challenging the links between ideologies of individualism
and racism” (Grimm, 2011, p. 76). The power of whiteness continues to shape contemporary
forms of management and control of practices and writing center scholarship, in particular the
imperative to retrofit Mexican Americans into a white/black race paradigm.
The writing center community has witnessed the benefits of cultural and/or critical-race approaches. For example, Anis Bawarshi & Stephanie Pelkowski (1999) illuminate the interplay between colonial power and writing centers. At the same time, however, the reductive racial frames—black struggles and white concessions—constitute a limit to what a writing center might do and reduces the efficacy of the postcolonial turn. The failure to name students of color who are not black, to address their conditions and experiences, and to discuss their needs as an essential aspect in writing center practices and theories illustrates a type of colorblindness at work.

To this day, I know of only one writing center article that responds to the needs of Mexican American students, more specifically Mexican American students at writing centers in borderlands institutions. I want to reiterate, then, Beatrice Mendez Newman’s (2003) arguments briefly. By and large, border students are not ESL writers or speakers, they do not fit the non-traditional student definition, and they have specific needs and expectations that quite frankly cannot be approached by “traditional” instructional training. I am concerned—we should all be concerned—about how access and success can be hindered by the tendency to reduce or retrofit students of color. This concern requires an appropriate response, one that builds on the work of advocating for student voices and the work of providing pathways so that students can negotiate the academy successfully. This begins with listening, both in the sense that Krista Ratcliffe (2005) discusses it—as a code for cross-cultural communication—and as a form of actional and decolonial work.

I am interested in applying the kind of listening—para que sepas y aprendes—discussed in the previous section as a form of intervention to writing center work on race, racism, and power. Writing centers, as previous scholarship has reminded us, are not free from power
relations (see Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2007; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011a; Grimm, 1996a, 1999, 2011; Villanueva, 2006). So, I call upon the members of the writing center community to engage in transformative listening. I do my part, first, by tracing the writing center’s racial economy, quantitatively and qualitatively. Then, in resisting the retrofitting and/or reductionism of students of color, I focus on cultivating a mindfulness of difference by describing the geo, body, and mobile politics of knowledge that student’s from the LRGV carry with them. In these ways, listening is functional and operational towards actional and decolonial work that can expand the role and work of writing centers.

We have been shown and, perhaps, share a vision of progressive politics in the writing center. Unfortunately, no matter how well intentioned and progressive a writing center has been, the “center” cannot hold without accounting for Mexican Americans (and other students of color) in the heterogeneous sense. I believe we can be engineers of theory and praxis, but committing to ethical and epistemically geared projects of social justice requires the undertaking of both transformative listening and “work.” What that work entails is up to the writing center community; as for me, it involves unmaking gringo-centers and bringing into focus students from a community on the cusp of invisibility.

**Experimenting with a Macro(Analytic) Approach**

Imagine a disciplinary community of writing centers where a politics of knowledge is linked through networks and nodes. Instead of thinking of such politics as constantly being reproduced, consider how information is networked across space and time by language and ideology. Consider how writing center scholars and tutors have performed a “closed” close reading of Mexican American students and their writing. Absent some intervention into those “closed” reading approaches, they, too, function as checkpoints.
The idea of experimenting with a macro(analytic) approach emerged out of a concern for how my arguments in this article would be taken up. My intentions were to conduct a close-reading approach, but this method can be linear and, at times, limiting. As a novice to digital humanities, I undertook a macro(analytic) approach to visualize relevant topics inside and across texts, as nodes, as nodes in relationship with one another, and as nodes across a range of time(s) and space(s). I complemented my close-reading approach with computational tools that would allow me to contextualize my close-readings in new and meaningful ways.

For this essay, I collected over 30 years of writing center articles, many from The Writing Centers Research Project database and some from outside collections. I used two computational online text-mining tools: Voyant Tools for the purposes of revealing “frequency” and “distribution” of data across this 30-plus-year span and Textexture for the purposes of revealing the most influential keywords and most influential contexts of such data. The following are the results:

- 1980s: No-to-Low frequencies for keywords “race” and “diversity.”
- 1980s: High frequency for keyword “collaboration.”
- 1990s: No-to-Low frequencies for “Mexican,” “Mexican American,” “Chicano,” “Latino,” and “Hispanic.”
- 1990s: No-to-Low frequencies for keywords “race” and “diversity.”

Although not conclusive, this data is significant for multiple reasons. First, there is the incorporation of “diversity” or “collaboration” without any clear understanding or articulation of how diversity might inform the practice of collaboration or how power dynamics materialize.
both within centers and their practices. This is indicated, for instance, with the High frequency for the term “collaboration,” but Low frequency in regards to racial identities. This incoherent narrative of “diversity” and “collaboration” is evidence of the degrees in which whiteness shapes the imagining of both centers and practices as “safe” and “inviting.” That is, although the interplay of buzzwords such as “writer,” “student,” and “identity” are in play, the centering of one (white/black) and the occlusion of all others erases difference with a white/black paradigm.

A Close-Reading Approach

In this section, I look at six texts chronologically, texts that have been recognized as participating in conversations pertaining to race and take up cultural and/or critical-race approaches. This approach is not meant to minimize the contributions of other writing scholars (see Bennet, 2008; Davila, 2006; DeCiccio, 2012; Dees, Godbee, & Ozias, 2007; Denny, 2010; Diab, Godbee, Ferrel, & Simpkins, 2012; Zhang, Amand, Quaynor, Haltiwanger, Chambers, Canino, & Ozias, 2013). I use these six texts, however, to substantiate an argument that while there are pockets of progressive politics reflected in writing center scholarship, such scholarship is limited by a white/black race paradigm. While productive, theoretically and practically, current scholarship fails to attend to the conditions experienced by and the needs and interests of other minoritized and racialized groups other than African Americans, such as Mexican American student writers.

Nancy Grimm, a prominent writing center figure, in her multiplicity of works, continuously demonstrates an understanding of both the complicity of writing centers in institutional racism and the need for sustainable dialogue based on race for writing centers. In

“The Regulatory Role of the Writing Center,” Grimm (1996a) implicates the disciplinary community of writing centers:

I am going to take an unhappy approach to writing center work and suggest that we don’t always accomplish as much as we think we do and that in the long run we sometimes do more harm than good. (p. 5)

Grimm’s (1996a) work brings awareness of how the writing center’s politics of knowledge creates social order and acts in service of maintaining the status quo of academic literacy. In explaining how important it is to think beyond the “local” and move towards reflecting on the politics and issues that underlie a “global” structural system, Grimm’s (1996a) goal of developing an ideological model of literacy and an articulatory model of social change reveals how narratives of modernity as “progress” hide racist and classist agendas. In asserting the importance of confronting normalizing cultural beliefs as they bleed into a range of social spaces, Grimm (1996a) insists we must view literacy as multifarious and as possessing political and ideological significances. While not the first to establish the relationship between writing centers, social structures, and ideological processes (see Ede, 1989; Lunsford, 1991), Grimm’s (1996a) article does stand as one of the few significant writing center publications of the time to recognize that theories of knowledge are unfolding during tutoring moments and are always contextually bound to race.

Bawarshi & Pelkowski (1999) problematize the relationship between race, language, and the idea of a writing center from a postcolonial stance. In “Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center,” they expand upon the cultural theorist approach by Grimm (1996a) by articulating a relationship between colonialist agendas and the work of writing centers. As they discuss the consequences of subordinating marginalized discourses, they hold responsible
institutions and institutional spaces that force upon student writers (e.g., basic and marginalized writers) a subjectivity of “other” all the while inculcating a rhetoric of modernity as emancipation. Coded within this rhetoric is the inscription of a colonial subjectivity onto exchanges between tutors and student writers, which are always already shaped by hegemony. In proposing a postcolonial writing center, Bawarshi & Pelkowski (1999) open space in the scholarship for a more efficacious account of race and racism by emphasizing that centers should take an active role in “postmodern” positioning—guiding and translating—and in engaging critically with students to “examine the axioms upon which academic structures are formed” (p. 54). This article demonstrates a critical turn in writing center scholarship that mirrors other larger critical conversations on critical literacy, culture, and postcolonial discourse.


Colorblindness is a way of avoiding the mess of racial history by pretending that racial differences don’t exist. Students of color are supposed to write as their color didn’t matter. . . . We suspect that many writing center workers have encountered students from diverse cultures who have implicitly been expected to engage in literacy in ways that deny their difference. (p. 59)

In moving from theorizing “productive diversity” to materializing “social change” in practical ways, Barron & Grimm (2002) discuss critically what it means to raise questions about race in tutoring moments and within writing centers. Thinking about racial difference, Barron & Grimm (2002) reflect on narratives of modernity as salvation (e.g., education as the road to equity) and
progress (e.g., liberal ideology) and begin to consider how race affects almost every aspect of what we do in writing centers. They conclude that because racial encounters occur in unproductive ways every day in the writing center, the way to make transformative change is to make actionable peer tutor commitments to social responsibility within writing centers, particularly with regard to anti-racism.

In “A Call for Racial Diversity in the Writing Center,” Margaret Weaver (2006) explores the philosophical and pedagogical contours of whiteness as it manifests within writing centers. Weaver (2006) holds culpable writing center scholars for their complacency with whiteness by analyzing and applying interventionist models that illuminate the gaps and limits of writing center discourse as it pertains to race. Weaver (2006) writes:

> Whether or not we like it and whether or not we acknowledge it, White writing center administrators are enmeshed in the maintenance of a racial educational system. We must begin to interrogate what is at stake in managing racial diversity. (p. 88)

Weaver (2006) concludes by asserting directors and tutors need to avoid being the “White Center” and learn how to be the “Write Center” (p. 89). She concludes with the conviction that writing centers will continue to face ethical and complex issues surrounding race and power.

In *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*, Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, & Elizabeth Boquet (2007) explore the degree to which, on one hand, the writing center has championed itself as a site of diversity and collaboration, while on the other, has been complicit by championing practices that reproduce dominant hegemony. Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet (2007) mount an argument for “dwelling” in uncomfortable places, and in the process they implicate the writing center community of
practice in focusing too intently on safety and comfort. In combining theoretical and practical explorations, the “betwixt-and-between state” of writing centers and the everydayness of writing center work, Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet (2007) argue writing centers possess the structural authority to contribute to institutional change. Further, they call upon members of the writing center community of practice to recognize and resist the temptation to posit writing centers as politically neutral spaces. In their chapter on identity and racism, they relate racism within and across writing centers as social spaces to everyday manifestations of racism embedded within cultural logics and patterns. In discussing the deployment of racist rhetoric, aimed at an African American tutor, for example, they shed light on effects and affects of racism. Ultimately, they call for tutors and writing center scholars to become “change-agents” who actively engage in anti-racism work.

Writing Centers and the New Racism, edited by Laura Greenfield & Karen Rowan (2011a), builds on existing frameworks established by prior scholars and attempts to respond to Harry C. Denny’s (2010) questions about the importance of identity politics, social and cultural forces, and writing centers. The authors in this collection explore how writing centers are already raced (see Greenfield & Rowan, 2011b), how they are not immune to racism (see Esters, 2011), and how centers contribute to the reproduction of white privilege with center “mottos” that disguise systems of privilege (see Grimm, 2011). Learning how whiteness works requires that tutors become theorists of race and racism (see Geller, Condon, & Carroll, 2011). In this process, there must be recognition of the absence of racial harmony in tutoring moments (see Valentine & Torres, 2011) and careful attention must be paid both to the type of anti-racist agendas implemented and the local and institutional culture in which such agendas are conceived and enacted (see Ozias & Godbee, 2011). Like the previous examples, this edited collection attempts
to sustain conversations on race and racism and offers support for interventionist work in writing centers.

**The Insufficiency of a White/Black Race Paradigm**

As well intentioned and progressive as the writing center community has been in taking up race and racism, the insufficiency of a white/black race paradigm—the black subject as the default “colonial” subject and the white tutor as a functional colonizer—poses a limitation. Remember, this paradigm does not need to be reproduced overtly, because it is sustained through its affective value. Consider Ratcliffe’s (2005) description of how whiteness functions “overtly as a racial category that is privileged even if all white people do not share identical and economic privileges” (p. 12). A similar cultural logic works within a white/black race paradigm. My point is that because this paradigm is a consubstantial part of a dominant presentation and representation of race, writing centers may not be as equipped to account for how race operates and manifests. To move beyond the limits of a white/black race paradigm, and into a pluriversality of anti-racist agendas, a cultural dialogue of recognition, critique, accountability, and responsibility is needed.

Grimm’s (1996a) argument to shift from the local to the global to understand colorblindness and racial injustice is constructive. But, before we can make this shift, we have to recognize how a white/black race paradigm functions as a scalar logic that minimizes the plight of Mexican American history (see Carrigan & Webb, 2003; Delgado, 2009; Kaplowitz, 2005; Perea, 1997). Members of the writing center community should be aware and critical of the ways in which blackness in this paradigm is meant to stand for all struggles, as well as of the failure of this paradigm to account for the particularities of the experience of people of color who are not black. Grimm (1996b) writes, “Writing centers are supposed to deal with heterogeneity…and
writing centers are expected to master and control this heterogeneity rather than interpret it” (p. 524). There is now a dialogue on race, power, and the status quo, but still, there remains a gap “between theorizing about difference in higher education and working with differences in the writing center” (p. 524). To see into fruition our democratic desires we must “work” to make that of which has remained absent present—other students of color. This means acknowledging difference and recognizing the differences within difference that play out in the particularities of the local and global.

Barron & Grimm (2002) do argue that race is much more complex than the historical binary construction of white and black. And, yet, there is still this false impression that Mexican Americans were not targets of white consolidation or participants in the struggle and discourse of civil rights. Members of the writing center community should be aware of the particular histories they privilege and those they simultaneously deny. Some scholars have taken up this argument, but inadequately—as if to apologize for not accounting for race beyond a white/black paradigm would be sufficient. There are alternatives to the apology. As a starting point, it is our responsibility as members of writing center communities to listen, well and deeply, in space and time, to material social conditions and social relations. This would counteract the reductionism and retrofitting of students. It is also our responsibility to acknowledge how writing centers are sites of space and place, memory, meaning, and knowledge making. The opportunity is there for cultivating relationships of difference and for strategically circulating how those relationships inform our pedagogies and contribute to the (re)-making of our centers. This involves so much more than theory, because what is at stake is the exclusion of others. What is further at stake is the opportunity to learn from the encounters and interactions that take place in our writing centers.
Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, & Elizabeth Boquet (2007) and Weaver (2006) argue race and racist legacies inform writing centers and practices and call for a writing-centered anti-racist approach. But again the writing center community lacks critical awareness of how much or the degree to which a white/black paradigm limits this call. So when Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, & Elizabeth Boquet (2007) focus on the example of discrimination against a black tutor without identifying and theorizing the experiences of other students or tutors of color, or when Weaver (2006) situates her critiques of whiteness within the frameworks of other scholarship that focuses on black subjectivity, they participate in this limiting. This occlusion, regardless of intention, continues to deny the lived experiences of racism that condition the writing lives of other students, such as Mexican Americans, as well as our membership and agency within writing center communities. What is needed is a transdisciplinary approach to the topics of race and power. This will help develop a different type of analysis, one that reevaluates the exigencies within which students are actually situated. To change the terms and content of writing center work on race and power, listening (para que sepas y aprendes) is needed in order to work beyond the limitation of a white/black paradigm. A transdisciplinary approach calls attention to space, place, and time.

Bawarshi & Pelkowski (1999) situate writing centers within a postcolonial context to attend to race, academic structures, and power. However, we must acknowledge that there are colonized subjects across the U.S. and around the globe still not living in a postcolonial world. The writing center community must be conscious of how histories of racial violence continue to be ignored and suppressed in the present. We must also be conscious of the extent to which students of color who are not black continue to suffer from this suppression. I am hesitant towards the use of contact zones. Yes, contact zones are about space, social relations, and
negotiations. Problematic, however, are the fixity of space and the absence of time. Local contexts and circumstances require a more nuanced application of listening. Students carry with them the burden of their histories and geographies, they are marked with difference, and this is a truth for which we must account. It is our responsibility then to recognize the degrees to which historical and material conditions generate and reproduce everyday practices, as well as to acknowledge how the performativity of those practices are in the production of space and time. If we listen, well and deeply, writing centers are not stable or fixed, but the degree to which we offer up this space to be changed and transformed by student writers has yet to be observed. Writing centers have spatial and temporal attributes, and because of this, they are always becoming in the sense that centers are made through the particularities of bodily movements and actions. The degrees to which these actions are attributed to student writers, as makers of space and negotiators of macro and micro contexts, have remained to be discussed.

The idea of tutors as theorists of race and racism is bold (see Geller, Condon, & Carroll, 2011). As Ozias & Godbee (2011) illustrate in their conversation on grounding discussions of racism, there are substantive frameworks for envisioning and engaging in anti-racism. But, even the most well conceived political agendas continue to be permeated by Western thought. In this global current, difference seems to matter less and less, and with the erosion of local culture due to the production of homogenized global spaces (see Cresswell, 2004), it seems commonplace to flatten and/or erase the coexistence of other histories. But, difference matters. It is not possible to enact and engage in anti-racism agendas without a more robust analysis of race and power. The writing center community is in a unique position to research capaciously and position itself as a leader of critical discourse on race and power. But, in this struggle for changing the terms of conversations—to tutors as theorists of race and racism—the content and structure of the
conversation must be revealed and altered. To attend to ideological apparatuses and structural oppressions (see Davila, 2006; Grimm, 1999), to “re-make our consciousness” (Condon, 2007, p. 30) and be “designers of a new world” (Barron & Grimm, 2002, p. 72), and to undertake a project of identity politics (see Denny, 2010) is messy work. While this work is taxing, we should rest assured that when we situate the locality of our centers and practices within socio-historical and political contexts, we are improving the ways we listen and work with student writers.

I am invested in the anti-racism movement because I believe tutors can become engineers of critical praxis and theory. The question we must answer as a community is what is our rhetorical imperative? If our rhetorical imperative is anti-racism, then our transformative task must go beyond the white/black race paradigm. I mentioned earlier that we must reevaluate the exigencies within which students are actually situated and do so through a transdisciplinary approach. In the next section I apply listening, as passed down to me and cultivated through experiences, to the historical and material conditions of the LRGV. I incorporate space-time and materialist analysis, focusing on spatio and temporal difference and local/regional expressions of action and agency. I do so to bring attention to the exigencies in which these students are situated. Such analysis is required to move anti-racism agendas in the direction of pluriversality, to re-orient the writing center to the dynamics of space and time, and through this re-orientation, begin to see tutors not only as theorists of race and racism, but also as decolonial agents.

Towards a Mindfulness of Difference and a Mobile-Decolonial Framework

In listening to the historical sense of place (e.g., the LRGV) and bodies (e.g., Texas Mexican Americans), a simple analysis of colonialism from a postcolonial lens cannot suffice. I draw upon decolonial scholars to understand the intricate entanglements of a colonial matrix of
power, spatio and temporal colonial difference, and a modern/colonial world. I do so, because even though colonialism as a political order has been destroyed in the U.S., there exists very effective means of management and control in the LRGV. I am interested in how the successive mapping of people and territories as “in place” and “out of place,” “of time” and “stuck in space and time,” applies to the Texas Mexican American in the LRGV. How, specifically, that is, does the colonial traffic in the present. I am also interested in the cultural displays of expression that adapt, reject, and/or transform global meaning. The following is not meant to be capacious in review; rather, it is meant to open up a space for a more nuanced type of analysis. I do, though, offer a list of references, parenthetically.

Race and ethnicity played an important role in the aftermath of the “discovery” and “conquest” of the Americas. Aníbal Quijano & Immanuel Wallerstein (1992) connect the discovery and conquest of the Americas with the construction of a “new” modern/colonial world system. Capitalism, according to Quijano (2000), produced a new mental category to codify the relations between inferior and superior. This new mental category would center on the idea of race—biologically and structurally—and racial classifications, creating an “interstate system” of hierarchal layers for control and rank order. The role of modernity (salvation, emancipation, and progress), uniquely, would be to conceal, and yet reproduce, imperial epistemologies and homogenous totality. Imperial epistemologies denied the dominated people their geographical locations and body-graphical politics of knowledge, while the imperial concept of totality, under the names of modernity and rationality, led to theoretical reductionism and the metaphysics of a macro-historical subject (see Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). For the Americas, race and the logic of coloniality, cloaked in the rhetoric of modernity, became the locus and testing ground for management and control over domains of power, knowledge, and subjectivity.
Decolonial scholars argue the modern/colonial world and its power differentials are unavoidable. I find this to be true in listening to the local and regional histories of the LRGV and the effects of spatio and temporal colonial difference. The LRGV was the space where the barbarians lived (see De León, 1983). The “other” needed to be saved and civilized, or so goes the rhetoric of colonization. Yet, what ensued was the ideological strategy of delineating space for the “other” and the ideological belief that the “other” should be taken out of cultural and social life (see Pratt, 1992). To ensure inferiority, a subject/object paradigm of rational knowledge would emerge, wherein the “rational” subject would characterize the “other” either as absent or present in objectivized ways (see Quijano, 2007). We see this today both in the lack of acknowledgments of Mexican Americans in history books and the legacy of The Mexican. As noted, The Mexican is a palimpsest of identity, a racialized imaginary that functions as an archetypical inscription of racial symbols and myths. The ability of this marker of difference to transcend space and time says something about how the colonial continues to traffic in the present. Nonetheless, spatial colonial difference created a social structure wherein The Mexican would remain “out of place.”

In addition to the colonization of space and construction of spatio colonial difference, the colonization of time and construction of temporal colonial difference reflect yet another ideological strategy and belief. Arnoldo De León (1983), in his study of Texas Mexicans, writes, “What whites found in Texas…was that Mexicans were primitive beings who during a century of residence in Texas had failed to improve their status and environment” (p. 12). The shift from

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32 Mignolo (2000) writes that the “imaginary of the modern/colonial world system is not only what is visible and in the ground but what has been hidden from view in the underground by successive layers of mapping people and territories” (p. 24).
33 Quijano (2000) writes, “The inferior races are inferior because they are objects of study or of domination/exploitation/discrimination, they are not subjects, and most of all, they are not rational subjects” (p. 221).
barbarism to primitive reflects an ideological strategy of temporalization. Johannes Fabian’s (1983) notion of *denial of coevalness* and Walter D. Mignolo’s (2007) *modern-time consciousness* are valuable here in that they offer insight into how temporalization meant the “other’s” time was not the time of civilized history. Fabian writes, “temporalization is not an incidental property of historical discourse,” it is an intentional practice of distance that requires “time to accommodate…one-way history: progress, development, modernity” (p. 78; 141). Stuck in space and apart from evolution, *The Mexican* would become and remain the “essential alterity of modernity” (see Dussel, 1993, p. 74).

The logic of coloniality would lead to historical and structural transformations that continue the oppression of the Texas Mexican American in the present. “The Mexican” problem took center stage on a local (and national) level. Texas Mexicans were displaced from their lands (see Carrigan & Webb, 2003; De León, 2009), politically and socially disenfranchised (see Bedolla, 2009; Rodriguez, 2007), taught inferiority both in the context of inferior schooling equipment and facilities (see Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; San Miguel, 1998; Spring, 2005; Valencia 2000) and the undertaking of a pedagogical approach (see Blanton, 2007), and exploited for labor (see Gutiérrez, 1995). Because of a white/black race paradigm, this history is ignored or forgotten. Yet, I carry the weight of civilizing *The Mexican* people and saving “it” from itself, while struggling for political, social, and educational rights. Henry Giroux writes, “Colonizing of differences by dominant groups is expressed and sustained through representations in which the Other is seen as a deficit, in which the humanity of the Other is posited either as cynically problematic or ruthlessly denied” (p. 130). The colonial wounds remain fresh, because we are still seen as the “other” in society and approached as deficient in the academy. We continue to occupy a space in the American imagination, which my
experiences can attest to, as “wetbacks” and “aliens.” I carry the weight not only of the effects of colonization of space and time, but also that of the mind and body. The inequity gap in higher education between whites and Mexican Americans is just one example of this history trafficking in the present.

What the colonizing campaign found was that in this *Tejano cultural zone*, a people refused to reject their languages, traditions, and cultural identity and that this region was a distinctive subcultural area that reinforced cultural identity to place (see Arreola, 2002; De León 1982). Now consider this. Take U.S. 77 South towards the LRGV. No passport is needed. Yet, the almost 100-mile border that edges this region to the south, and the internal checkpoints that run parallel 70 miles north of it, are features that suggest a design meant to limit mobility. A border(ed)land is created, signaling the perception that “we”—my people in the LRGV—are stuck in space and outside of time. Literally, these features create a geography of exclusion (see Peters, 1998). We are interpreted as an othered space, monitored, and deprived of resources. There is no coincidence that this region has one of the highest concentrations of Mexican Americans, with some of the highest statistics for people living in poverty and some of the lowest statistics for high school completion and literacy acquisition. We do not live in postcolonial conditions. Yet, we do not remain in our past nor are we contained by the colonial legacies behind *The Mexican*. The rhetoric and culture of the LRGV is our identity and helps form our expression of representation. We adapt, reject, and transform global flows through our geo-graphical, body-graphical, and mobile-graphical displays of expression that continues to make and re-make place and geography. What is needed in rhetoric and composition and within the writing center community is a *mindfulness of difference*, a framework that re-imagines the
common local and global distinction as a dialectical relationship and that begins at the scale of human practice and a community’s political economy (see Pred, 1995; Tsing, 2000).

The LRGV has its own language, memory, and meaning making practices, as well as its own historical and collective memories and political economy, which may or may not connect with other Mexican American community’s. It should go without saying that Mexican Americans have evolved in disparate ways. Yet, because of this global current of interconnections and universal cultural logics, Mexican Americans from the LRGV remain on the cusp of invisibility. I propose a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework to counteract this global effect of no units or scales counting except for that of the global (see Tsing, 2000). In this modern/colonial world, it is imperative for me to briefly account for how we, in the LRGV, respond to the rhetoric of stillness and fixity through place, knowledge, and meaning-making practices. This involves accounting for geo-body-and-mobile-graphical displays of expression (human practice) and how these cultural displays of expression say something about locality, regionality, and globality.

The idea of historical spaces and bodies suggests social and cultural practices and actions that are constellative (see Scollon & Scollon, 2004). This is partly central to the significance of the Tejano cultural zone and the meaning and knowledge-making practices that make it possible. In the LRGV, our integration of Spanish and English in the everyday occurs both in the physical (public and home) and material forms (billboards, documents, etc.).³⁴ This is a bilingual and binational area. Our ethnolinguistic and ethnocracial identities stem from historical discourse, but also from our experiences with macro and micro forces. They are reflective of our meso-political negotiations that are created and performed in the locality of language practices (see

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³⁴ Michelle Hall Kells (2002, 2004), in her longitudinal studies of language practices in South Texas, argues Tex Mex functions as a code, which promotes social cohesion and solidarity against the homogeneity of the English language.
Pennycook, 2010). The type of language practice that occurs in the LRGV undercuts English as the lingua franca and deserves to be studied in-depth for its structural and linguistic features. It deserves such study, because it is the circulation and flow of bilingualism that makes the LRGV a unique subcultural area.

It can be a challenge to evidence a local and regional identity, especially because I am aware and critical of the romantic essentialism that takes place in the academy. In this context, I find myself thinking about the importance of communicating and circulating stories. Judy Rohrer (2016) writes,

> We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about us, and the possibilities of new stories. I am these stories. I lived them or I inherited them, and they live vibrantly and turbulently in and around me. All stories are political; they involve power that has structural underpinnings and material consequences. (p. 189)

Stories, as Malea Powell discussed in her 2012 CCCC Chair’s address, “take place” and “practice place into space” (p. 391). The essence of storytelling is discourse and rhetoric in action. I believe it is possible for both to delineate a collective ethos and regional identity. If places are about relationships and the “place of peoples, materials, images, and the systems of difference that they perform” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 214) and if place is a “meaningful component in human life” (Cresswell, 1996, p. 51) “produced through action” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7), what is the import of a regional identity and what does it say about locality and globality? There is a phrase from a billboard that can be seen and read in and across the LRGV. It reads “Pa’ Los Que Saben,” which translates into “For those who know.” Pa’ los que saben, we say, “soy del Valle y somos Valle.” This form of self-representations undercuts the totality of
national identity and is a statement of how Western values and systems breakdown. Our bodies are constellative, evidenced in the stories we tell, but we are the possibilities of new stories too as we have and continue to make and re-make place and geography in ways that illuminate our decolonial imperative—to be seen and heard. “Valley/Valle” is a regional form of representation.

The import of “soy del Valle y somos Valle” is made possible through the flow and circulation of politics of mobility in place (see Cresswell, 2010). Micro-bodily movements have traceable histories and geographies. The rhetoric and culture of the LRGV does not exist on its own. Movement, Tim Cresswell (2006) argues, is “rarely just movement” because it “carries with it the burden of meaning” (p. 4). The gente of the LRGV, with their historical and definitional struggles over creating meaning, have made and continue to re-shape a political economy by which dissent is possible. Attentiveness to the entanglements of meaning, representation, and praxis involved in mobility illuminates, according to Cresswell (2006), how people are agents in the production of space and time. The people of the LRGV are not stuck in space or behind in time, quite the contrary. Being literate in “contexts for movement” and “product of movement,” I see the LRGV as constantly being made in ways that allow the people to be heard and seen in and on their own terms. Yes, micro and macro structural properties generate and reproduce time-space specific social systems and social/cultural practices. But, our meso-political negotiations offers insight into our residual cultural displays of human agency and practice, as well as the emergent features of our politics of being, seeing, and doing. This is where the possibility of new stories exists and where bodies thrust the spaces between societal limitations and new self-definitions to be heard and seen.

Pa’ los que saben, the LRGV has and continues to be a stronghold for Mexican values and traditions. Despite the legacies of colonization and the manifestations of coloniality, our
movement, representation, and praxis have created a kind of slippage that results in a “sad oppressor complex.” The people of the LRGV have, to some degree, flipped relations with whites who live and move through that region. The “oppressor” becomes “sad” as the “other” has understood and overcome, at least partially, their racist and material conditions. Whites continue to exert domination in this region, but their practices of domination have to be adaptive. While full decolonization has not been achieved, social relations have been changed and transformed.

Look, my point is this: the flattening of difference, the representation of sameness within difference that so saturates writing center talk about race, is untenable and damaging to people like me who come from the LRGV or from other Mexican American communities. If we are going to talk about and attend to race in writing centers, either in the historical or contemporary sense, Mexican Americans cannot be absent. Civil rights’ is so often regarded as a predominantly black effort. Pa’ los que saben, there are court cases that preceded and created legal precedent for Brown v. Board of Education (1954): Del Rio ISD v. Salvatierra (1930s), Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District (1931), Mendez v. Westminster (1947), and Delgado v. Bastrop ISD (1948). We have and continue to struggle with being heard and seen. As a site of place, meaning, and knowledge-making, the writing center is about interactions and encounters, co-existing histories and trajectories, and is always in the process of being made. Imagine, then, if we included other groups into conversations on race and power and engage in micro-scales of observation. We’d not only be able to see all students as shaped by meaning, but also obverse them in production of space-time. Our writing centers would be forever transformed for the better. Mexican Americans like me, are knocking on the door, will we acknowledge them?

35 The idea of a “sad oppressor” emerged out of conversations with colleagues at the 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication.
Decolonial Initiatives and Agents

There is impact, regardless of intention, when anti-racist writing center scholars make a call for action for members to be agents of change, and yet, in the historicizing and premising of this change, occlude the lived experiences of racialized others. Members of the writing center community need to continue to make an explicit commitment to addressing race and power. This much, prior scholars in our field have gotten right. But, any acknowledgment that does not account for differences will be insufficient. We need to change the terms and content of writing center work. For instance, there is a contradiction when the objective is to create a “safe space” and articulate an ethical appeal of anti-racism. The terms have changed, but the cultural logic surrounding the notion of “safe space” is still steeped in the dialectic of management and control. To redefine and re-orient our work, I offer the following suggestions.

Tutors need to cultivate a mindfulness of difference and be mindful of spatio and temporal attributes. The writing center was once promoted as a “safe space” or “home.” Let me remind you, this space has been historically, culturally, and rhetorically marked by whiteness and white culture (see Grutsch McKinney, 2005; Zhang, Amand, Quaynor, Haltiwanger, Chambers, Canino, & Ozias, 2013). For me, the writing center is neither my safe space nor my home. To be mindful of difference is to: call attention to the structural practices in which re-create realities of dwelling; engage in social justice goals by a retraining of the mind that works to understand capaciously how race and power influences all; and participate in a different logic that invests in a pluriversal understanding of differences. A mindfulness of spatio and temporal attributes approaches students as makers of place, shapers of subjectivities, and engineers of negotiated linguistic and literate practices. Alastair Pennycook (2010) argues that a “focus on movement takes us away from space being only about location, and instead draws attention to a relationship
between time and space, to emergence, to a subject in process—performed rather preformed—to becoming” (p. 140). I suggest that we imagine student writers as having the capacity to change and/or transform face-to-face consultations, and, having the capacity to change and/or transform the writing center as a whole. We must remember that space and place is the product of interrelations and social and cultural actions that is always in the process of being made (see Massey, 2005). I believe the writing center can be re-made from being a “white center” to being a center in the process of becoming.

Tutors need to become decolonial agents. This “work” will look and be different from tutor to tutor. Laura Greenfield (2011) in, “The Standard English’ Fairy Tale” writes,

If most educators allow their unchecked racism to guide their beliefs about language, it stands to reason that the teaching and tutoring practices long advocated in the fields of composition and rhetoric and writing center studies that are premised on these attitudes are necessarily racist, too. Included in this indictment are those contemporary pedagogies—especially those contemporary pedagogies—celebrated by those of who fancy ourselves ‘progressive’ in the world of teaching and tutoring writing. (p. 35)

Progressives continuously return to the idea of contact zones. Mary Louise Pratt (1992) defines the contact zone as a site “where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (p. 7). Consider Greenfield’s (2011) argument that tutoring practices and contemporary pedagogies cannot go unchecked. It stands too, then, that in approaching consultation sessions from the approach of “contact zones,” the projection of fixed finite sets of rules and features in space and time too needs to be checked. We cannot just accommodate differences nor should we approach
differences as that to be solved. I suggest that we consider and “check” tutoring practices and contemporary pedagogies for how they maintain center/periphery binaries and uphold other forms of management and control. To be a decolonial agent is to be ethically and socially committed to social justice for all. It is having those critical conversations that question even the well-intended progressive and leftist practices.

Tutors need to become theorists of race and racism. Cecilia Shelton and Emily Howson (2014) pose the question, “How, then, do writing centers ‘escape’—even if imperfectly or incompletely—from cooperation in racially-biased academic practices on an institutional level” (n.p.). It begins, I argue, in conversations on race and racism (blatant and micro-aggression), no matter how uncomfortable it makes us, especially in this age of celebration of diversity in writing centers. In, “Blind,” Victor Villanueva (2006) suggests, “Those of us dedicated to anti-racist pedagogy, to addressing the current state of racism find ourselves everyday trying to convince folks that there really still is racism, and it’s denied” (p. 11). He argues that “We can’t buy into the silencing of what we know is still racism” (18). I agree. Consultants must acknowledge the material reality of race and the reality of racism. But, this is not enough. I suggest that consultants add a rhetorical feature to their pursuance in becoming theorists of race and racism. So while we may be told not to worry about race of racism, with an education in rhetorical discourse, we know this to be a matter of articulation from the centers of power, rather than truth. To become theorists of race and racism, we must have a greater understanding, then of how rhetoric works.

Tutors need to engage in reflection and reflexivity. I suggest tutors become researchers of their everyday experiences and researchers of the everyday of writing centers. The idea of rhetorical listening and thick description complement each other, and so, I propose the use of
portfolios as a meditational and reflexive activity of decolonial action. Portfolio writing should start at the beginning of the academic year, with the tutor initially responding to what it means to engage in anti-racist work. With weekly or monthly reflections, it would be in the best interest of the tutor to begin describing the everyday thickly, accounting for the ways in which power, issues of race, and social relations play out. In the process, the tutor should be working towards a transdisciplinary approach in putting race and power into dialogue. This way, race and power go beyond the content and scope of writing center work and into the global issue of race and power. This way, the tutor does not only work to reveal and alter the structures that limit social justice agendas and goals in the writing center, but takes on this ethical and epistemically geared project beyond the writing center space. I see the directors playing a critical role in this type of transformative learning and praxis. The director should be the one to initiate these conversations on race and power, holding professional development sessions and monthly meetings dedicated to such topics. On the individual level, the director should hold accountable the tutor and their contributions to a portfolio. That being said, the director should open up space for the tutor to present and discuss what has been learned and practiced and what remains to be learned.

On a final note, tutors as decolonial agents should not make assumptions about students, no matter how well intended those assumptions are. Part of engaging in decolonial initiatives and action is to change the content and terms of conversations. So, in preparation for working with the Mexican American population, for example, you might read a text such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. But, tutors might also find books like Américo Paredes’s *George Washington Gomez* or José Limón’s *Dancing with the Devil* useful. This will provide a greater perspective on the dynamic and complex community of Mexican Americans. To universalize Mexican Americans in the experience of Gloria Anzaldúa, as is the case with academics, is to
perpetuate the same logic of sameness of difference, which fails to see differences within difference.

The history for professionalization by the writing center community of practice and its efforts towards sustaining a vital positionality in the academy are well documented (see Barnett, 1997; Carino, 1995, 1996; Harris, 1982; Kail, 2000; Riley, 1994; Simpson, 1985; Summerfield, 1988; Yahner & Murdick, 1991). We are now in a position to create new knowledges and practices and to create meaningful coalitions that can work together for sustainable change. To be pedagogical and epistemic engineers, new perspectival horizons must be explored, and in charting those horizons, new tools must be used. In this process, a new design must be engineered for attending to race in the writing center. At the center of this design should be a new, not merely renewed, practice of listening: listening as a form of understanding and action.

**Conclusion**

Some might say: “my writing center does not have students from the Valley.” You will. Remember, not accounting for the Mexican American community in conversations of race and power is to be complicit in a white/black race paradigm. My own academic viaje has taken me from the LRGV to Upstate New York. While my circumstances have changed as a writer, my experience of being in “white” centers with all their many manifestations of “whiteness” continues to make me conscious of being a writer and now a tutor of color. But, like my grandma used to say to me, “no te dejes.” So, when I hear some argue that race or racism does not exist in their writing center, I challenge this assertion. I’ve seen white students switching their appointment in order to work with a white tutor. I’ve heard white tutors apologize for other students’ discrimination. In those moments, I am reminded of how important it is to continue to listen. My grandma was a great mentor in this way. I carry with me those memories of sitting in
the kitchen, learning from her how to listen to the world. Listening to the world, well and deeply, is a lesson that all of us should learn, whoever and wherever we are. Like my grandma would say, para que sepas y aprendes. This type of listening will help nuance what it means to talk about race and difference(s).

In this chapter, I focused on my first site, the writing center. I considered the possibility of decolonial agendas and democratic participation from a Mexican American perspective. This site considered the global and local Mexican American student and the implications of taking into account the histories and memories they carry with them into rhetorical spaces such as the writing center. In chapter four, I work from a second site, the first-year composition classroom. I focus more directly on the local/regional Mexican American student writer from the LRGV. I too consider the possibility of decolonial agendas and democratic participation from class observations, reflections of interviews with students, and shadowing-participation with three students.
Chapter 5: Working with Students from the Lower Rio Grande Valley

If we understand the force of the name to be an effect of its historicity, then that force is not the mere casual effect of an inflicted blow, but works in part through an encoded memory or a trauma, one that lives in language and is carried in language.

Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 36

Identity is a concept not only constituted by the labels people place on themselves and others but also about how people come to understand themselves, how they come to ‘figure’ who they are through the ‘worlds’ that they participate in, and how they relate to others within and outside of these figures worlds.

Luis Urrieta, *Working from Within*, p. 28

This chapter focuses on the time I spent observing two first-year composition courses at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, surveying and interviewing as well as shadowing students (see chapter 2). In this chapter, I introduce some statistics and work to understand what the organization Excelencia in Education calls a “post-traditional” student profile. Then, I open up the chapter to some local and regional statistics, regarding Mexican Americans, covering topics of poverty, attainment, and literacy. Afterward, I incorporate observations, data from surveys collected, conversations from interviews and group sessions, and reflect on my experiences shadowing students. Finally, I reflect on how all this can nuance conversations in translingualism. I offer, as I did in the previous chapter, a critical conversation on decolonial possibilities, which for me provides a starting point for how to develop pedagogies and curricula that is attentive to student differences.

Before I begin, I want to reiterate a point made earlier. While today I speak in the register of pedagogy and rhetorical theory, before all this, my interest in praxis and language began in the intricate conversations I had with my grandma (see chapter 1 and chapter 4). In considering the opportunities for decolonial possibilities by instructors and democratic participation for students in the classroom, I deploy a method of listening to articulate models of sponsorship informed by

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36 For this dissertation I only focused on a four-year college and so the statistics I provide hereon out align with such a focus. If time permitted, it would be interesting to see the differences and similarities between two-year colleges and 4-year schools in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.
my grandma’s own words: entiendes lo que estoy diciendo (do you understand what I am saying), para que te acuerdas (so you remember), and para que sepas y aprendes (so you know and learn). This type of mentorship, in addition to incorporating culturally relevant pedagogies and materials, supports an environment invested in culturally relevant dialogue, inquiry, and examination.

**Hispanics in Education**

In 2014, the Hispanic population was the nation’s largest ethnic or racial minority according to the United States Census Bureau. According to a report for Excelencia in Education assembled by Deborah Santiago, Morgan Taylor, and Emily Galdeano (2016), about 60% of Latino students are enrolled at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and overall are the second largest students population enrolled in higher education.  

![Graph 1: Latino and White Educational Attainment](source: Excelencia, “From Capacity to Success”)

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37 Hispanic and Latino are terms most used in regards to statistics. While I do not personally identify as such, for the purpose of this conversation regarding statistics, I use both identity terms.

38 There are three main components for HSI qualifications: 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment; enrollment of high concentration of students who receive federal financial aid to pay for college; low level of total expenses for the essential education activities of the institution (Santiago, et al., 2016, p. 10).
The statistics above indicate there are discrepancies in attainment between Whites and Hispanics. The gap is most alarming under the categories of “less than high school,” “bachelors,” and “masters.” Still it should be noted that with the Hispanic population there has been improvement in the rates of college preparation and readiness, enrollment and attainment, and completion since 2011. In fact, Hispanic dropout rates have decreased from 1993 to 2014, from 33% to 12% (“5 Facts,” Pew Research Center).

According to Exelencia, college completion has also increased, resulting in a 14% to 9% drop in the graduation gap, from 2012 to 2014, respectfully. In a 2014 Pew Report, Jens Krogstad and Richard Fry (2014) suggest that more Hispanics are enrolling in college, but that they still fall behind in contrast to other demographic populations. For instance, in a 2011 report by Deborah Santiago (2011), Hispanics were less likely to have earned a postsecondary degree at 14% compared to Blacks (29%), Whites (39%), and Asians (59%).

Graph 2: Certificate and Associate’s Degree by Race/Ethnicity
Source: NCES, Degrees Conferred by Race/Ethnicity
According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in regards to degrees conferred to Hispanics, there remains an astonishing gap despite increases in degrees conferred (see graphs above). Considering that in 2011, an Excelencia report indicated Hispanics earned 16% of
certificates, 12% of associate degrees, and 8% of bachelor’s degrees, this is good. In fact, some Pew Research reports suggest a greater percentage in the category of bachelor’s degrees conferred. At any rate, the Hispanic population continues to grow in numbers, both in the context of the U.S. and student enrollment. Questions remain as to how to increase success rates amongst this population in higher education.

In 2012, I received an award from the National Conference of Teachers of English, providing me with the opportunity to develop a project focused on completion and retention rates at a Hispanic Serving Institution, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. This IRB approved project was entitled, “How to Empower Hispanic Males in Higher Education: A Focus on Self-Efficacy, Social Inclusion, and Academic Inclusion.” I was able to survey and interview male students from first-year composition courses over the course of two semesters. Both methods allowed me to gather basic information, as well as gain insight on student perspectives of institutional resources, classroom resources, and expectations and needs. While this project is not at the center of this dissertation, the information is valuable.

First, student-participants knew of their resources, both because of institutional planning and presentations centered around incoming freshman and because of first-year instructors and professors who collaborated with institutional resources such as the writing center. I was part of these collaborations and I saw personally the effects they had on student’s perception on writing. Each student-participant accessed and took advantage of the writing center although I cannot determine how success translated in actual assignments. Second, student-participants where all first-generation and were very much aware of the factors influencing their commitment to higher education: financial stress, familial obligation, new family responsibilities, and academic readiness and preparedness. On multiple occasions, I personally taught a handful of students who
either were going hungry, sleeping in their vehicles, and/or working multiple jobs. These were bright students who unfortunately dropped or failed out of school. Third, students questioned if higher education was meant for them. Reasons included not understanding materials, mentorship, and being first-generation.

Central to understanding the Hispanic profile is coming to terms with the facts. For many Hispanics, they are still first in their family to enroll in college, most likely to be low-income, work 30 hours or more a week while enrolled, and are more than likely to enroll in colleges based on location (Santiago et al., 2016, p. 9). Additionally, Latino’s are more likely to be in “lower academic tracks” in their secondary schooling and likely to have taken a remediation course (Santiago, 2011). For those of us engaging in the study and teaching of writing and rhetoric, these statistics should have implications for our pedagogies, curricula, and theories. It begs the question, as well, are we investing in student’s success and development? My personal experiences, as well as the statistics reflected, in many ways indicates a clear response—no. The solution to this question, on the one hand, poses a much larger conversation, one that is necessarily tied to developing research methods that are place-based and conducting place-based research.

Creating a Profile: Texas, The LRGV, and UTRGV

As discussed, the LRGV is located at the Southernmost tip of Texas. According to Deborah Santiago and Emily Galdeano (2014) from Excelencia in Education, Texas has the second largest Hispanic population (39%) in the United States with 48% of students populating K-12 (Latino College Completion), which is also the second largest. In a report on the demographic profile of Hispanics in Texas in 2014, the Pew Research Center found that 70% of the population was U.S. born and 87% were of Mexican descent. The Hispanic population
(39%) has not surpassed the White population (44%), but there have been and continue to be demographic shifts in Texas that are significant.

In a 2014 Baseline Report of the Rio Grande Valley, RGV FOCUS illuminates the differences of national, state, and regional levels of demographics. For example, enrollment of Hispanic students in Texas is 48% and in the LRGV 97% of student enrollment, from K to 12, are Hispanic students. 86% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. And, while this dissertation is not making claims of correlation, I do believe there is a strong relationship between poverty and attainment.

Graph 5: Education Attainment
Source: RGV FOCUS

For instance, poverty levels range dramatically in the U.S. (15%), Texas (14%), and the LRGV (33%). There is a strong relationship of attainment between the U.S. and Texas and a large gap between the LRGV and the U.S./Texas (see figure above). The contrasting differences are astonishing. There have been improvements in regards to college readiness. However, in 2011 the gap was still significant between the LRGV (47%) and Texas (57%).
In the LRGV, over 90% of the population are Hispanics, reflecting +19% of the Hispanic population in Texas. There are four counties in the LRGV—Cameron (+85%), Willacy (+87%), Hidalgo (+90%), and Starr (+95%)—with above 85% Hispanics for each county. According to the United States Census Bureau, these counties have some of the highest poverty rates—Cameron (+35%), Willacy (+40%), Hidalgo (+35%), and Starr (+36%) compared to the U.S. (15%)—and some of the lowest high school graduation rates—Cameron (-63%), Willacy (-63%), Hidalgo (-63%), and Starr Count (-45%) compared to the U.S. (85%).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
Also, according to the Texas Center for Advancement of Literacy and Learning, the LRGV has some of the highest illiteracy rates in Texas and the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, a 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy report indicated that 14% of adults in the U.S. demonstrated a “below” basic literacy level.
Image 16: Literacy Rates in Texas
Source: Texas A&M Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning

A look at the image above shows the four counties of the LRGV highlighted in red. While there are other sections of Texas that are highlighted in red, this is a whole region of Texas that spans almost 100 miles east and west, which is in red. The red indicates that over 40% demonstrate “below” basic literacy skills: Cameron (+43%), Willacy (+40%), Hidalgo (+50), and Starr (+65%). Considering that the population of the LRGV is over 90% Hispanic, these numbers are horrifying.

I am not presenting these statistics to suggest anything but the legacies we embody and carry and the challenges we face in the LRGV amidst designs meant to limit our economic, educational, and political mobility. The task of the educator to ensure the development and success of such students can be a daunting one. Hispanics are going to school in the LRGV. Currently, with the consolidation of university’s in the LRGV, the region only has one four-year institution, which is known as the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) (from 1996
to 2014, the university was known as the University of Texas Pan America (UTPA), with 2015 being the year it consolidated into UTRGV).

In 2016, UTRGV’s Strategic Analysis and Institutional Reporting (SAIR) office reported it had a headcount enrollment of 27,560 students. Almost 90% of the student enrollment was Hispanic students and almost 92% of students were from the LRGV—Cameron (27%), Willacy (.5%), Hidalgo (61%), and Star (3.2%). While the schools efforts are underway to increase graduation and retention rates, the fact of the matter is that the numbers have not been good historically.

A look at the category, “four-year graduation rate” the numbers range from 5.9% (1996) to 21% (2011). The improvements in both retention and graduate rates are significant. What concerns
me, however, are the years in which graduation rates were below 17%. Given that the majority of students are from the LRGV, questions must be posed in regards to why students are not staying in school (below 50% of students are not retained as they enter their fourth year) and graduating.

In a 2011 report, the FSG Social Impact Consultants add supporting facts and discussions of the challenges in which students in the LRGV face. For example, students stay in the LRGV because of options and resources. But, the schools in which these students are enrolling (University of Texas Brownsville pre-2015; UTPA/UTRGV), as of 2009, have some of the lowest graduation rates—UTPA (39% of the 64% Hispanic headcount) and UTB (19% of the 88% Hispanic headcount). Again, LRGV student priorities typically fall within a profile of family, work, and then school. To help students succeed, then, I believe we must gain insight on them. We must listen to their stories.

It is interesting to look at how such a university constructs its mission statement: “The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley provides a high quality, innovative, and affordable education to the students of South Texas, Texas, the United States, and the world. The university will transform Texas and the nation through student success, research, healthcare, and commercialization of university discoveries.” The university’s vision statement reads: “To be the nation’s premier Hispanic-Serving institution and a highly engaged bilingual university, with exceptional educational, research, and creative opportunities that serve as a catalyst for transformation in the Rio Grande Valley and beyond.” The contrasting differences between the mission and vision statements are significant. The mission statement hardly mentions serving the needs of the region or its people. The vision statement, however, makes such promises, especially the statement of being a “highly engaged bilingual university.” The statement itself reflects the region and the culture of the region and indicates the effects both place and culture
has had upon institutions such as UTRGV. The bilingual statement is a gesture to the needs and expectations of students from the LRGV. According to the Texas Observer, UTRGV “looks to become the first bilingual, bicultural, biliterate campus in the country” by piloting courses focuses on the historical legacy of language, identity, and literacy in the LRGV (Tyx, 2017, n.p.).

So what should a composition course look like in this type of environment; what nuances could such students add to the study and teaching of writing and rhetoric; what pedagogies will such students bring with them that as compositionists and rhetoricians we can incorporate to help in their development and success as students and citizens of the world; how can we change the ways in which we talk about literacy, language, and identity in the discipline by focusing on the local in its social specificity and particularities; and how can we nuance the convergences of subtopics such as translingualism and decolonialism amidst recognizing difference and acknowledging the global current? The idea of responding to local places and spaces is not new to the discipline, but interest in the local has been stunted. Global thinkers have either criticized based on claims of localism and/or have lured others into the charisma of using the global as the scale of observation in scale making. Currently, I observe the discipline between two poles, that of pronouncing “difference” as the norm of all utterances and that of rushing to interconnections while conflating and/or erasing differences.

There are a few who continue to ground place making and meaning making practices and knowledge productions within a peoples cultural claims about locality, regionality, and globality (ideology of scale) and within a peoples capacity to decontextualize and re-contextualize culture as social action and agency (scale making). Richard Graff and Michael Leff (2005) have discussed how the field has turned to the local in “defining a rhetoric or a system of rhetoric to the interpretation of the cultural exigencies that enable or encourage multiple modes of rhetorical
response” (p. 23). This is important because people, culture, and place are differently constituted and it is the social relations and agencies of which are circulated and mobilized in place that illuminates how people struggle over meanings in which they participate. These meanings are differentially, dialectically, and dialogically accommodated, revised, changed, and/or transformed. Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson (2008) write, “in recent years many compositionists have grown more aware of and articulate about issues of position, location, and space, becoming critical or spatial metaphors” (p. 16). A focus on location and space is important as well because we cannot deny the struggles definitional to the making of place, we cannot refrain from observing local actors as significant to regional-to-global interaction, and we cannot transcend difference in a rush to interconnections. Rather, we must work towards interconnections across difference.

We cannot make distinctions between the local and global. We must be invested in both local and global equally for they are always in critical interaction. In, “Looking for Location” Peter Vandenberg, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon (2007) write,

Theories of location are grounded in the belief that a sense of place or scene is crucial to understanding rhetorical contexts. Such thinking also helps foreground an a awareness of the possibilities and limitations created by location, how social control or power is ‘structured’ by the design and maintenance of public and institutional space, and how often power differentials among various social actors are naturalized or held ‘in place.’ (p. 91)

True, there are possibilities and limitations created by location. But, to gain insight on student’s rhetorical contexts that create rhetorical situations and necessitate rhetorical negotiations is both a socio-political interest and an investment into rhetorical choice and rhetorical invention that
may or may not nuance what we know about rhetoric and rhetorical theory. As Mexican Americans from the LRGV continue to invest in higher education and enter major institutions, understanding that Mexican Americans are not all the same and that local and regional Mexican Americans have particular expectations and needs, can make a difference in how they develop and succeed in higher education.

**Use and Practice of Literacy, Identity, and Rhetoric**

I visited UTRGV before it implemented its initiative of bilingual education, which Professor Beatrice Mendez Newman made me aware of when I was there. My work in the two first-year composition classrooms included classroom observations and participant observation, conducting and collecting surveys and interviews, and shadowing. My goal was to observe first-year and first-generation Mexican American students (see chapter 2). I knew this was likely given the student demographics at UTRGV. I wanted to observe how students embodied, circulated, and performed their languages and literacies, identities, and rhetorics. I believed observing these courses would allow me to partially capture this. I also wanted to gain insight on their attitudes towards these topics. I deployed two ethnographic methods, surveys and interviews, to document student’s attitudes. Lastly, I wanted to see these rhetorical practices in action so I engaged in a different type of participant observation, shadowing, which allowed me to at least observe the intricacies of language use and practice amongst several students.

*Classroom Observations*

On the first day of class, I situated myself in the back of the classroom. I positioned my audio recorder to be able to capture the conversations in the classroom and my notebook close to me for taking notes. When Professor Newman entered the room she introduced me. I took this opportunity to expand by situating my ethos and purpose for my study.
As Dr. Newman stated, my name is Romeo Garcia. I was born and raised in Harlingen, Texas. Years ago, I never thought I’d be in the position you all are in. Higher education is important, right? It is, but being a Mexican American and a first-generation at a conservative university can be challenging. Imagine, walking campus and not seeing people like yourself, at least not like in the Valley. Think about how it would feel to know that you are not as prepared or ready as others in your class. At some point you start questioning how it ties into your own experiences of access, resources, and opportunities. Do you struggle now with your classes? I struggled a lot. At one point I was told higher education and the discipline I am in now was not meant for me. But, this struggle was nothing compared to the struggles I faced in the Valley. Knowing this was important because it provided drive. We are first generations for many reasons. It is important to not let them clout our visions or be the reasons why we do not continue.

I continued on with explaining why I was interested in rhetoric and composition, why I was focused on the Mexican American population and specifically the Mexican American from the LRGV, and how I would use the data collected to inform my discipline of students like them. I informed each student that I would be distributing surveys, conducting interviews, and holding group sessions focused on literacy, identity, and rhetoric for this study. I also clarified what I would be doing in their class: observations, recording of conversations, and note taking. I circulated a consent form. Each consent form was positive. I then asked students if they were interested, and if they were, they could talk with me after class. Professor Newman allowed me
to circulate another sheet where students could express their initial interests. I did this for both first-year composition classrooms that I was observing.

For the first day of classroom observations, I did not record. I took the opportunity to profile the classroom: construction, materials, and students. In the first class there were 27 students, while in the second class there were about 24. At the time, I had suspected that all but two students were Mexican American. Later that day, in conversation with Professor Newman, it was determined that all were “Hispanic,” all but one was from the LRGV, and that several students lived in Mexico because of family choices. With the first class, Spanish seemed to be the dominant language, while with the second class Spanish and English was used together more. I determined this in listening how students would engage in conversations with each other, how they would ask questions, and how they would confirm tasks with students at their table. Later in the semester, this would remain the case, although with each, Spanish was the preferred language amongst several students before classes started.

For the semester, I would arrive to the classroom early. This provided the opportunity to speak with students who also arrived early. We would have conversations ranging from music to new trends in attire to topics discussed in other subject-matter courses. After a week, more and more students started coming early to class. At any given time there were at least 10 students and myself having lively conversations in Spanish and English. The “everyday” of the classroom was filled with teachable and pedagogical moments.

[At one table]: ¿Como se escribe...?

Be| a| de| erre| e| a. [Naming the letters in Spanish, another student at the table spells out the character name]

Thank you.
De nada.

[At the middle of the room]: Mándame, tenemos que hacer everything, mam?

[At another table]: Badrea era…[The student pauses and asks aloud] Como se dice?

[Group members respond] of the majority.

[The student says to herself and others] Como que no—la mayoría. [Processing in English and Spanish the student writes in the notebook a sentence in English with side notes in Spanish]

In this bilinguistic scene student’s languages move with facility and assurance. Such students indeed engaged in code switching scenes with phatic conversational fillers (pos, pues, etc.). But, notice, in this scene, the processes of linguistic partnering. It is much more than “pos” or “pues.” At the center of this scene are student’s decisions to construct discourse, to create meaning in ways they desire, and to intentionally represent that meaning by layering Spanish and English.

When I captured this linguistic scene and latter reflected on it, I asked myself, what does this say about students’ abilities and capacities to decontextualize and re-contextualize the classroom? First, it says that students are either comfortable in being in the classroom and/or that the expectations of bilinguistic performativity is a reality that an institutional space such as the classroom cannot deny. Second, it says that students are both proactive in creating discourse and scaffolding its possibilities for reconstruction. Third, it says that the dialogue between Spanish and English does not rely on formality as a precondition to communication nor permission from professor, but rather upon the dialectics of inclusivity and appropriateness. This linguistic scene epitomizes how students accommodate, reject, change, and/or transform meaning and how they can take a site such as the classroom and engage in the production of space and time.
When I asked students in class why they use and practice Spanish and English, there were multiple responses. One response in particular stood out. Students suggested that everything around them is in Spanish and English and that it does not make sense to just speak English in the classroom. In the linguistic scene (above), for instance, there is a question asked in Spanish, a response in Spanish (naming the letters in Spanish), a response by the student who asked the question (thank you), and a response by the other who had responded (de nada). The interexchange of languages seems to support the overall consensus that a bilingual environment is inseparable from their classroom/institutional environment. Another response that students gave regarded how the professor was open to both language use and practice and how the professor understood both languages and engaged in conversations with students in both languages. This was an important factor, I believe, that allowed the semester to have many bilingualistic scenes as the one evidenced above.

On a daily basis, I observed how a community was being built in the classroom around languaging Spanish and English in collaborative projects, classroom discussions, and question and response protocols. I observed how students processed information and meaning in English and Spanish in their heads and translated all of into Spanish and English as they took notes or as they responded to prompts. For example, in the last part of the linguistic scene, the student says to herself, “Como que no…la mayoria.” There is an actual pause between “como que no” and “lay mayoria.” Como que no is actually a rhetorical question. As the student pauses and processes the information, the student is confirming how the other student responded and what she knew all along.
In this process, I witness the student (Andrea) write a sentence out in English with side notes in Spanish. When asked why the sentence in English and side notes in Spanish, the students says,

I wrote a sentence in English because I have to continue to practice English. I know English is important for school. When I think about things, I do it unconsciously in Spanish, because that is my first language. It is the language I still think and dream in. Sometimes I have to remind myself that I also need to think in English. And, it is funny, because now sometimes I do not have to continuously remind myself to think in English, it just happens unconsciously too. But, still, I write side notes in Spanish, because some things just do not translate in English. If I write something in Spanish, it helps me remember what I was thinking about at the time more clearly.

While this student may desire to communicate dominantly in Spanish, their intentions are to continue to learn and practice English. Assimilation is not Andreas’ primary goal. This is important to note, because on the one hand it speaks to individual intentions and desires, but on the other hand, it speaks to the cross-linguistic patterns and literate interactions in the LRGV that are negotiations of languages and cultures. As noted, the classrooms I observed were filled with teachable and pedagogical moments, particularly in the realm of embodied and linguistic performativity.

Data from Surveys

As I considered the intentions of use and practice of language, I wondered how students saw themselves in regards to literacy practices (and identity) and how all this translated into their compositions. In total, I managed to collect 29 surveys, interview 32 students, and hold two
group sessions with 18 students in the first and 11 in the second. As discussed in the methods chapter, my goal was to collect information on experiences with literacy and bilingualism, their attitudes in naming-practices, and their struggles involved in meaning-making practices.

Graph 9: Self-Perceptions on Literacy

I wanted to measure how students saw themselves in regards to literacy. I provided students with a working definition of literacy prior to distributing surveys and conducting interviews. In all, 29 students said they saw themselves as literate in Spanish and English. In regards to Spanish, 12 students saw themselves as fluent Spanish speakers, 16 as average Spanish speakers, and 2 as Spanish speakers with difficulty. In regards to English, 20 students saw themselves as fluent English speakers, 3 as average English speakers, and 6 as English speakers with difficulty.
I also wanted to measure how students saw themselves in regards to bilingualism. In order to gain insight on student’s intentions and desires of language use and practice, I needed to be able to determine the degrees of bilingualism. I asked students to reflect and consider instances in which they use Spanish and English. I then asked students to think about whether they used Spanish predominately or English predominately. I played an audio file that I recorded of my tío speaking to me. In the audio file, my tío speaks both Spanish and English, but it is clear that he is a Spanish-dominant bilingual. This example clarified any confusion and allowed students to answer with confidence. In all, 17 students saw themselves as Spanish-dominant bilinguals, while 12 students saw themselves as English-dominant bilinguals. It is important to note that when I played the audio file of my tío speaking some students noted that the way he was speaking was “Valley.” Therein a new category emerged. All 29 students indicated that they also saw themselves as “Valle” bilingualists.
In her chapter, “How to Tame a Wild tongue,” Gloria Anzaldua (1999) categorizes the use and practice of Spanish and English as Chicano Spanish. She writes,

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally… For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? (p. 77).

Anzaldua connects Chicano Spanish to identity, realities and values of the borderland, a language “that are neither español or ingles, but both” (p. 77). She goes on to list other languages that this heterogeneous people, the Mexican American community, speak: North Mexican Spanish dialect, Tex Mex, and Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations). I wanted to be able to measure how students named their language
practice and I borrowed some of the categories from Anzaldua. I gave students options they could select from and talk about: Tex Mex, Spanglish, Chicano Spanish, and Other. In all, 5 students named their language practices a Spanglish, 1 as Tex Mex, and 23 as other. I did not include the category as Chicano Spanish because no student identified with it. It is interesting to note how the category “Valle” transferred over from self-perception of bilingualism to naming practices.

Graph 12: Naming Practices, Identification

I believed that it was important to measure how students self-identified. Too often, the assumption of Mexican American students, and pedagogical approaches, is undergirded by an ideological attitude (and approach) of Chicanismo, which may or may not take into account local and regional differences. I gave students options they could select from and talk about: Hispanic, Chicano, Mexicano, Mexican American, Latino, and Other. In all, 12 students identified as Hispanic, 0 as Chicano, 5 as Mexicano, 8 as Mexican American, and 4 as Valley. The emergence
of the “Valle/Valley” category continues to resonate with students and so I included it in the graph because that is how students were identifying.

Graph 13: Naming Practices, Region

Lastly, in addition to naming practices for language and identification, it was important to establish and gain insight into how students where seeing the LRGV and naming the region as well. Too often, scholars have named the region a borderland, as conceived by Gloria Anzaldúa, referred to it as a Mexicanized American region, and even a Tejano region, which may or may not capture the essence of the LRGV. I gave students options they could select from and talk about: Little Mexico, Mexicanized American region, American region, Tejano region, Mexican American region, and Other. Students, began conflating “Little Mexico” with the category Mexicanized American region so that is what is represented in the graph. In all, 4 students identified the LRGV as a Mexicanized American region, 2 as an American region, 3 as a Tejano region, and 20 as a Mexican American region.

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39 Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) writes, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (p. 25).
Implications

I have and continue to be concerned with the ways in which the academy understands the complexity of Mexican American community’s and the ways in which local and regional Mexican American students are taught. In, “Bridging Rhetoric and Composition Studies,” Jaime Mejia (2004) implicates the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition for failing to incorporate the ethnic identity and culture of Mexican Americans. He writes, “assignments asking Mexican American composition students to analyze Mexican American literary or cultural artifacts are rare” (p. 46). Mejia argues that ignoring the Texas Mexican American ethnic identity will have adverse effects on such students. He advocates for Texas Mexican Americans by calling upon the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition to work to better understand this population and construct better culturally relative and critical pedagogies. Yet, I still know of very few programs that focus on differences within the Mexican American community.

I have and continue to be concerned with arguments that propose Mexican Americans are deficient (see Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 2005/2008/2010). Whenever Mexican Americans are not successful, a rhetoric of deficiency places the blame on supposed deficiencies such as language deficit and cultural barriers (see Arana et al., 2011; Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Bartolome, 2003) or “lack of interest” or value in education (see Valenzuela, 1999; Valencia & Black, 2002). It is concerning how this perpetuation of deficiency, and the advent of deficiency rhetoric, has created a master narrative that is complicit with colonial projects of management and control. As a rhetorican, I also find it concerning how such projects support this myth of rhetoric (and modernity), which imagines both civilization and rhetoric beginning in Athens, refined with Roman empire-building, flourishing during European Enlightenment, and reaching the rest of the world through Western globalization (see Bernal, 1987; Baca, 2008; Baca & Villanueva, 2009;
Lyon 2010; Mao, 2014). The consequences of such rhetoric are reflected in monolingual education and pedagogies and privileging of Western culture.

This grand narrative of deficiency rhetoric is extended in a rush to label students (nontraditional, L1, L2, ELL, ESL, etc.). In, “Centering in the Borderlands,” Beatrice Mendez Newman (2003) argues that while Hispanic students in borderlands institutions share similarities with non-traditional and ESL students (e.g., linguistic, ethnic, and preparatory differences), they “fit neither the traditional ESL nor non-traditional student definition” (p. 44). It is indeed easier to classify borderland student writers as ESL because of their linguistic familiarity with the “Standard” language. When their home language interferes with such “standards,” it is easier to label them as English Language Learners. As, Michelle Cox (2016) writes in, “Identity Construction,” ESL and numbering the “languages a writer uses can be problematic, as some writers will use more than one ‘first language’” (p. 57), while L2 is also problematic because it “implies that English has more status than other languages” (p. 58). It is, however, easier to convey the purpose of pedagogy when the goal is to ensure students “master” the “Standard” language rather than to “work” towards observing meso-political negotiations.

What this rhetoric of deficiency does is impact how students view themselves as writers. The writer comes to equate error with mistakes, illuminating their linguistic shortcomings in the construction of a sentence. As a consequence, the student writer internalizes their linguistic otherness and feels this otherness in their struggles to create meaning through discourse. Powell (2012), in her CCCC Chair’s address, writes, “how so many of us believe they should be ‘saved’ from their lowly, savage lives” (p. 401). This is partially the impact of labels. Even the English Language Learner label is problematic because it suggests in-proficiency in the “standard” language. The work of Newman (2014), however, suggests that not only do students at border
site institutions negotiate two cultures and languages, they also “develop patterns of adaptation that enable them to reconstruct the college landscape through transcultural and bilingual negotiation” (p. 2).

What are needed are local and regional studies on Mexican American students. Below, I offer interpretations of the data collected from surveys (above) and incorporate discussions from student interviews and group sessions on the topics of language and identity and value of naming practices. Again, my goal, like Powell (2012), is about “recognizing all available knowledge-making practices as real options” and “representing them as viable and valid in our classrooms and our scholarship” (p. 401). For me, insight on literacy, language, and identification offers such a possibility.

*On Learning Literacy*

Learning literacy takes place in different settings and with different literacy sponsors. When students were asked to recall where and when they first started to read and write, initially, they thought of a school setting. When asked if family members read to them, they began recalling how influential certain members of the family were. There was a pattern that I observed. For the majority, the role of literacy came through from women. While it was the father in most cases that insisted on Spanish as the mother tongue, it was the women who determined whether Spanish and/or English would be transmitted. The men insisted on Spanish because of cultural traditions and values, but they did not have a dominant role in learning literacy because of they were working long hours every day.

Every student recalled how Spanish was the first language they learned. Another pattern would emerge in this context. For the most part, female students recalled experiences with family members (and themselves) reading something biblical. I thought this was interesting because
they were experiencing a particular type of ideology that was passed down from one woman to another. Later in our conversations, especially in regards to gender scripts and expectations, this would be a moment of realization. For the most part, male students recalled experiences of stories told to them about their family and how they came to the U.S. In many ways, I found this to be tied to gender expectations, wherein it was up to them to continue the “progress.”

All students received formal schooling, many in the U.S. and a few in Mexico. Those who received education in the U.S. were expected to know English, while those in Mexico were expected to know Spanish. The degree to which they learned literacy in such years is unknown. However, I do know from students that they struggled with language. This struggle, I believe, in many ways was tied to the expectation that Spanish remain and be the dominant tongue. In some cases, the mothers helped their children with English, but I believe this was so because they too wanted to learn and practice the language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Family Education Level</th>
<th>Literacy Skills of Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Class (28)</td>
<td>Never Attended High School (2)</td>
<td>Bilingual Preferred (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class (1)</td>
<td>Never Attended School (2)</td>
<td>Spanish Preferred (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GED (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dropped Out (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High School Diploma (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational Certificate (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associates Degree (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Socioeconomic Status and Educational Experiences

As the table shows, the highest level of education attained was an Associates degree (2). This is important because as students recalled who was most influential in their literacy learning, the consensus was teachers. It was in the classroom where they learned and practiced literacy the most, according to students. Some students stated this was because their parents refused to learn
English and so it caused more difficulty for them in school. Some students stated that sometimes their parents were too busy working that there was not enough help in the house. Nonetheless, it was interesting to hear how students spatialized their literacy learning.

In one of our writing sessions, I asked students to consider their literacy experiences and think about people or places in which such plays out. The following are snippets of their responses:

- **Andrea:** My parents have both played as a huge role in my life. Both of my parents are very traditional. They were born in Mexico and were always taught to be respectful towards people so growing up they made sure their kids will also respect their elders. My grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles have also contributed in my language. At my grandparents house, we all speak Spanish due to my grandma only understanding that language. My cousins and I speak to each other both in English and Spanish and sometimes even Spanglish. My friends vary, some speak only English, others speak only Spanish, but most of them speak both languages and very well. The stores, restaurants, and my job have also influenced my literacy practices because the stores and restaurants have become more “Spanish” speaking places. In order to get jobs nowadays we have to be fluent in both English and Spanish. With my parents being strict on many things, my ability to experience certain things were limited. My parents would teach me right from wrong in a Mexican type of way.

- **Clemencia:** Throughout my life I have had many “instructors” that have influenced my ways relating to my Spanish culture. Since day one I have always had my mother and grandmother teaching me the ropes, educating me of my heritage. From our family history to my Spanish tongue. With out them I would have never known who I truly am, never known the basics of Spanish, or just be who I am now in general. Apart from my family, another person who strengthened my Spanish culture would have to be my high schools Spanish teacher. She taught me general Spanish and how to properly use it. Though my family has always encouraged me to speak Spanish, it was never the proper Spanish needed in the workforce. I began getting lazy with my Spanish tongue until I enrolled in her class for 3 consecutive years.

- **Delia:** I was born into a Mexican-American family. Both my father and mother provided me with the knowledge of the Mexican culture since that was what they both were experts in. My father provided me with little knowledge of the American culture but he taught me to appreciate it. I received most of my American knowledge in school. The American literacy was so dominant that I wasn’t as fluent in the Spanish language anymore. I felt like I was betraying my Mexican culture at a young age. In public I was introduced to the literacy of combining the both language and
culture of Mexican-American. I remember driving down a road and signs were in Spanish and English and no one seemed bothered by it, it was natural. This is exposed to the combining of both literacies even more. Some teachers and advisors would speak ‘Spanglish’ or ‘Tex-Mex’, the combining of both English and Spanish in conversation like that was more natural, no question or judgment about it. Being Mexican-American has helped me experience restrictions of balancing both cultures.

- **Abrienda**: The people who has helping me with my literacy, were my parents, they always thought me how to express myself using the right words, in Spanish. But when I moved to the US the people who thought me about literacy in English were my Teachers, Mrs. Brenda Rodriguez and Mrs. Mary Rodriguez, they used music in English to help me understand and to gain more vocabulary. They would read to me some books, then they would show me the movie, just in English. Without these people I wouldn’t be able to express myself with others, to have the education I have right now, and I believed I wouldn’t be the person I am today. My parents thought since I was little but my teachers thought me how to face the American school, and society. My teachers always encouraged me to learn new activities even when I didn’t know English very well, they always made me feel that I was smart enough to learn quickly and that was my main motivation.

These are some of the thoughts students expressed in their writing on the topic of literacy experiences and literacy sponsors. Each spatialized their experiences in a range of ways, but each talk about the importance of learning literacy in two languages. Some experience this later in life and some experienced it early on in life.

*On Naming Language*

Understanding students naming practices is important because it reminds us how language is tied to identity. In, “Linguistic Contact Zones in the College Writing Classroom” and “Understanding the Rhetorical Value of Tejano Codeswitching,” Michell Hall Kells (2002/204) focuses on the bilinguality of first-generation South Texas bilingual Mexican American students, which she suggests have their own ethnic and linguistic features connected to their identity. Kells (2002) writes, “Tex Mex functions as a kind of rhetorical/sociolinguistic glue, a code that promoted social cohesion and solidarity and at the same time resists historical Anglo/Euro-American ethnolinguistic and sociopolitical domination” (p. 15). Kells argues that teachers of
composition need to consider student’s naming practices that are historically, politically, and economically informed.

Her work on South Texas Mexican American bilinguals brings attention to how discourse and meta-discourses within institutional spaces, such as the composition classroom, “implicitly and explicitly reinforces language and literacy myths” (p. 36). Ultimately, Kells (2004) argues for sociolinguistically informed pedagogies and calls for “new ways of talking about the performance of identity through discourse” (p. 25). As she refers to it, Tex Mex has symbolic and metaphorical values that are particular to a South Texas discourse community (p. 36). It is Tex Mex and the legacy of the South Texas region, Kells argues, that disrupts the status quo and challenges linguistic hegemony.

To recall, 5 students named their language practices a Spanglish, 1 as Tex Mex, and 23 as other (Valley/Valle talk). Language is an important part of student’s identities. While students did not overall identify with Tex Mex, as Michelle Hall Kells refers to it, Valle talk has a familiar import.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example:</th>
<th>Spanish-to-English</th>
<th>English-to-Spanish</th>
<th>Creation of “New” words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ayer fui con Andria to the mall y compré muchas cosas</td>
<td>Ayer I went to the mall con Andria and I bought a lot of things.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayer Andria y yo lavamos la ropa todo el día</td>
<td>Yesterday, Andria and I washed la ropa all day</td>
<td>Washamos la ropa mañana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No hay ninguna posibilidad de que usted va a comprar un nuevo trock</td>
<td>There is no chance que va a comprar un nuevo trock</td>
<td>No hay chanza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No estés triste todos perdemos a veces</td>
<td>Don’t be sad, todos perdemos sometimes.</td>
<td>No te agüites, todo esta bien.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tex Mex Words</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Tex Mex (Spanish Dominant)</th>
<th>Tex Mex (English Dominant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lonche</td>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>Queres comer some lonches?</td>
<td>Do you want to eat unos lonches?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushar</td>
<td>Push</td>
<td>Hey, no me puschas</td>
<td>Hey, no me puschas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metchas</td>
<td>Matches</td>
<td>Tienes los metchas por los candles?</td>
<td>Do you have the metchas por los candles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parquear</td>
<td>Park</td>
<td>Tengo que parquear mi trock behind the building.</td>
<td>I have to parquear my truck behind the building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Examples of Spanish-Dominant and English-Dominant Bilingualism

Truly, Spanglish, Tex Mex and Valle talk are similar. However, the idea was to see how students name language practices and place value into naming practices. The graph gives several examples of words created from Spanish and English and several examples of what it might look like to be Spanish-dominant or English-dominant bilingual. While Tex Mex can be said to be the regional identifier, I see Valle talk as the local signifier, which reflects, I’d argue, how people have come to know themselves and their social material world through place (and place-making practices).
I was able to put together the above table sets thanks in part to shadowing Abrienda, Erica, and Santana and walking the school. Every corner we/I walked there was a student in dialogue in Spanish and in Spanish and English and never solely in English. The students that walked these spaces, “these vaqueros as they say,” they made the campus into their own, just as they do the classrooms, if allowed. This says something about the LRGV, but also about the capacity of students to make place out of their knowledge and meaning-making practices in institutional spaces. Every day I walked these halls, sometimes with Abrienda, Erica, and Santana, and other times alone as I took in the environment of UTRGV.

Abrienda, Erica, and Santana gave me some times that worked for them just to shadow them for a whole day. Most of their time was spent on campus daily. For Abrienda, once classes were over, she’d go the store and pick some personal things up and then go to a restaurant and pick up
some food before her trip to Mexico. This was a daily commute for her. For Erica and Santana, both lived close, so once classes were over they went to eat or hang out with friends. The tables’ reflect what I observed in regards to language use and practice. It does indeed shed some insight into what I mean by Spanish-dominant and English-dominant bilingualism.

In addition, I asked student’s to document literacy practices in space and time. So, students would take images in time and space, and talk about what it means in a time-space specific contexts. They would then connect meaning in and across rhetorical spaces and reflect how different contexts require different literacy and rhetorical practices.

**Image 18: Example of Student Recognizing Language Use**

In, “Making Composing Visible,” Julie Lundquist et al. (2010) reminds me of the importance of “time-use diaries,” an emphasis on “forms of work” as happening and becoming in time and
space (p. 209). The idea is to yield a microanalysis of literacy practices as they occur in various forms of exchanges and interactions and habituated and contested in the everyday and in space and time. Notice the time-stamp, the opportunity to tag, and the task at hand for students. In this case, I asked students to “Capture through words and images what it means to be from your city, neighborhood, and the Valley.” In the same description for the task, I mentioned the previous conversation students and I had about ways of being, knowing, seeing and doing.

Image 19: Example of Student Response

One of the limitations of this assignment was participation and students familiarity with technologies. Most students preferred writing into an online document (image above). For example, Abrienda offered a reflection on one of her entry. I have provided a snipped of that reflection, which is date-stamped. Here, Abrienda provides some insight into what it means to be from the Valley and speak Valley. Abrienda, in this case, recognizes the language use and practice as Tex Mex. What is important to take away is Abrienda’s argument, “We create our own words…We create our own…food.” I also find significant her claim, “Even when it’s a
word in Spanish all the Americans (gringos) know what a raspa is.” In our individual interviews, as well as our group sessions, I asked students to expand on what one student said:

**Santana:** In conversations it’s easy basically natural to mix Spanish in English. In class, home, work, everywhere both are used. The whites (gringos), they have to know it.

In our group session, the following conversation played out, which was both lively and informative:

**Question:** In our conversations you all talked about how white people were unbothered by Tex Mex or Valle talk and you all pointed to the fact that they had to know it too. What does this say about the Valley and how does it make you feel?

**Response:** I think they are bothered.

**Response:** How so?

**Response:** Just because they use it does not mean they are unbothered.

**Response:** It says that we are all Mexicans [Laughter].

**Response:** It says that we are from the Valley. If you don’t know Spanish you best learn. And those gringos do.

This conversation is significant because it says something about how students see and know their world through language. I found it interesting the points of contention and the use of “gringo” as an identifier of white people.

*On Naming Identification*

Gaining insight into how students self-identify and self-represent can make a difference into how teachers of composition approach students such as Texas Mexican Americans. In,
“Toward a Rhetoric of Self-Representation,” Ellen Cushman (2008) distinguishes between identity politics and self-representation: “self-identification is a claim about one’s identity that needs no other evidence” and “self-representation, on the other hand, is an identity claim that includes evidence of identity markers valued by multiple audiences” (p. 323). Cushman’s conversation is in the context of Native Americans and identity politics that “can ignorantly take on the very mantles of oppression present in racist thought that construes identity by phenotype alone” (p. 325) and is a call to the discipline of rhetoric and composition to “better understand the complexity behind Native people’s disclosure of tribal affiliation” (p. 324). While Cushman argues that the identity politics of Native scholars are different from other scholars of color (and I agree), as I have discussed in previous chapters (see chapter 1), the identity politics and self-representations are contentious as well within the Mexican American community. I am inclined to agree with Cushman in that a gathering of narratives on self-representation might improve cross-cultural understanding and action. While my intentions are not to compare the situation of Native Americans and Mexican Americans, I am interested in how students provide evidence in self-representation to support their identity claims (e.g., Tejano, Mexican American, etc.). I am interested in the facets of being and doing attached to the framework of self-representation. The question I contemplate is, how amidst rhetorics of cultural deficiency and stereotypes, do local/regional Mexican Americans negotiate identity and self-representation.

Kells (2002) provides an overview of identity labels used to discuss persons of Mexican origin and descent:

- *Hispanic* [Emphasis mine] is a generic or ‘umbrella’ term propagated by U.S. Census Bureau researchers within the past 20 years, a catchall for people who have a Spanish surname and who speak Spanish. (p. 15)
• *Mexicano/Mexicana* [Emphasis mine] has been in use in South Texas since the colonial period. It is the standard label for peoples of Mexican, signaling strong political and cultural ties to Mexico by individuals on both sides of the border.

• *Latino* [Emphasis mine] is more frequently adopted by Cuban and Puerto Rican individuals…although this label appears to be gaining prevalence as a cover term within popular culture and academia. (p. 15)

• *Chicano/Chicana* [Emphasis mine] functioned as a mobilization term by the Mexican American civil rights activists, intellectuals, and academicians during the 1960s…Although it remains popular among Mexican American intelligentsia, it is less frequently adopted by working-class and young Mexican Americans. (p. 15-16)⁴⁰

• *Mexican American* [Emphasis mine] designates identification with the United States as well as distinguishes citizens of Mexican origin from Mexican nationals. (p. 16)

Kells (2002) argues, “I believe that the failure to recognize the fine linguistic and ethnic distinctions of Mexican-origin individuals has hastened the exodus of culturally and linguistically complex students from the American educational system” (p. 16). The exigencies in which students from the LRGV find themselves in, I believe, results in particular viewpoints of the world, with a consequence of a functional and operational ethos that is itself in the production of knowledge and meaning making.

⁴⁰ Gregory Rodriguez’ (2007) brief exploration of identity terms in a 1980s opinion survey reveals that the term Chicano/a was mostly in use by academics (p. 220).
To recall, 12 students identified as Hispanic, 0 as Chicano, 5 as Mexicano, 8 as Mexican American, and 4 as Valley. As noted, I gave students options in regards to identity terms. One student, Efrian, stopped me in mid-sentence during the questions and asked, “What is Chicano,” while others such as Mariana asked, “Do people actually say Tex Mex?” While students had indeed heard of “Chicano” or “Tex Mex,” they posed these questions because they were foreign to them. Many students indicated that the only times they came across “Chicano” was when they were in class and being taught by someone who was not native to the LRGV or who was White.

Efrian was born and raised in the LRGV (Weslaco) but had the experience of living in Houston for a year before he moved back and settled in San Benito. These were his thoughts:

Here in the Valley, they don’t use Chicano/a. I lived in Houston for a while. There, they used that term for sure. When I first used it here in San Benito, everyone looked at me. I used the term because it has a certain ring to it. Like, don’t f***k with me…or something like that.

In a conversation with Efrian, he stated that he was thinking more and more about the use of Chicano. He began to appreciate the term, but felt that it still seemed foreign. From my own experiences, Chicano is not commonly used in the LRGV. But, that is not to say that is how it has always been or that it is not the case today.

I want to highlight the significance of the identity-term Hispanic. 12 students identified with Hispanic. When asked, “Is Hispanic how you would identify at home with your family,” 100% of the participants stated no. At our group session, I brought it up the choice to self-represent as Hispanic once again:

Question: Why say, Hispanic?
Erica: Sir, I use to hate working at Peter Pipers when the Winter Texans would come because they do not like Mexicanos. One time, some guy and his wife came up to me and asked if I understand English—DO YOU…UNDERSTAND…English (with hand gestures). I would respond in two ways. But, I speak back sir. ‘Que miras’…‘or ‘Puedo hablar Inglés’ gringo…

Olivia: When people hear me say I am Mexican American, all they think about is how I am Mexican. That is what they hear first. And, to add, I am from the Valley, so I am nobody to them, because both Mexicans and the Valley has a bad “rep” you know. When I say I am Hispanic they do not look at me or treat me differently. It means I can go places, without having people speaking to me dumb or speaking down to me.

Santana: I have not forgotten where I come from or who I am, but I understand what people think of us, of me. I am proud to be Mexican. But, in school we are taught to use Hispanic so that way we have more opportunity. I use it for that reason.

The consensus was that Hispanic meant mobility. The question I kept contemplating was, what does it mean to respect how students self-represent? All along I had been of the conviction that we should not be assuming students identities, but I too have done the same with assuming that all local/regional ethnic Mexicans would resonate with Mexican American. As students of this study show, they are indeed engaged in strategic negotiations, but maybe not in the ways I had always assumed. I see students choice of representing themselves as Hispanic as a rhetorical strategy of dexterity and not that of devaluing their embodied and lived identity. These rationales
reveal how they interpret their everyday movement and mobility and how they associate certain values, meanings, and attachments with identities and subjectivities.

On Naming the Region

Understanding how students see their material world can provide opportunities for teachers of composition and rhetoric to develop place-based pedagogies. Mejia (1998) calls attention to how Mexican American students in Texas have refused to assimilate because of a historical embodied and circulated “naturalized” resistance that emerges out of the material and cultural conditions of the region. He writes, “most are fluent and functional in English and Spanish, yet their experiences have not been systematically addressed by rhetoric and composition scholars. These bilinguals are not, however, as many argue, living in a postcolonial world” (p. 123). Mejia goes on to argue:

Within English studies, we have choices about what kinds of assignments to create and what kind of effect these assignments will have on our students’ thinking about the world and the cultures they originate from. (p. 114)

Texas Mexican Americans have indeed responded to conditions, inside and as well as outside of the academy, with place-making, knowledge-making, and meaning-making practices. Gonzales (2008) suggests these practices are reflective of both a construction of region and identity, which should center “people as agents in their lives even if restricted by outside forces” (p. 195). This was the impetus for asking students how they see and would name the LRGV.

To recall, 4 students identified the LRGV as a Mexicanized American region, 2 as an American region, 3 as a Tejano region, and 20 as a Mexican American region. One student brought up the idea that the region could be considered a little Mexico in our group session. The following is how the conversation played out:
Question: Some of you have expressed that the Valley is a like a little Mexico, would you all agree with this?

Response: No! You cannot even compare.

Response: Yeah, can’t.

Response: Well not a little Mexico, but pretty close.

Question: Why not?

Response: We have better living conditions, first, and second, just because we are all Mexicans and speak Spanish doesn’t mean we are a little Mexico.

Question: Would you all say that you are Tejano?

Response: [Laughter] No.

Response: We are all Mexicans but we are American too. Were both and that is how the Valle is.

This conversation was significant because it reflects a type of critical consciousness, in not feeling or being secluded in one’s own material world, and recognizing the differences, and similarities that enable a distinction between the LRGV and ‘el otro lado.’ More importantly, it reflects how the LRGV has been made in a way that does not allow students to feel they can disconnect one from the other.

On Student Writing

I collected a copy of each student assignment over the course of a semester. I wanted to see how their knowledge and practice of two languages effected their compositions. I focus on sections of Abrienda’s essay, which as discussed (see chapter 2), worked closely with me during my study.
I was born in Weslaco, TX but I was raised in Rio Bravo, Tamps. MX. I moved to the U.S.A. on January 3rd, 2011 with the idea of persuading my dreams. I was only 13 years old. I took the decision by myself; I told my parents and they didn’t like the idea but I didn’t care because I knew my future depended of my decisions and not theirs. I always thought that I had the right of having a better education in the USA then in Mexico. After begging my mother for a week to let me go with my aunt “Susy” in Weslaco, TX (worst idea ever!) she finally agreed, even though my mom and dad thought I was wasting my time. Living with my aunt was a horrible experience, she had a grand-daughter named “Maria” which is my same each and a nice named “Rebeca”, which back then was 16 years old; either they liked me or not I had to live with them. The first day living with them was terrible, my aunt Susy gave me a mattress not a bed, just the mattress! She placed it outside the restroom in the hall, I had no privacy, or a closet; I had to put my clothes on plastic bags, next to the old mattress; besides no privacy Rebeca used to inspect my bags and take my earrings, necklaces, or anything she liked that was mine, all she said after I found that she did that was “I'll give it back to you, don’t be mean”, but that never happened.
Abrienda’s objective was to write about an object that has and continues to be motivational. For Abrienda, this was her CNA pin. In the first section, “Moving between Frontiers,” the choice of word is interesting. While I cannot speculate what Abrienda was trying to say, I can say that the
choice of word is interesting because typically the word “frontera” or “borders” would be use in this context. As I continue to read the paragraph, I notice some language interference in regards to sentence structure. There are some editing issues—name (instead of each) and niece (instead of nice)—and this continues to be true throughout her essay. But, overall, I can follow what Abrienda is trying to communicate: she moved to the U.S. at 13 years old and experienced some struggles.

While I did not include the second and third paragraph under the same section, it does take Abrienda a little bit to get to her point: in high school she took a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class and became motivated to be successful. Abrienda continues to talk about her struggles at home and how the realities (e.g., drug abuse, Rebecca getting pregnant, etc.) around her motivated her as well. The next image I provide is the paragraph that follows. Abrienda does a great job recalling the question she asked Mrs. Zavala and it adds rhetorical effect as Abrienda asks, “When is the certification test?” Once again, there are some sentence structure issues, which I would address with Abrienda by suggesting separating one sentence into in order to communicate ideas more clearly. But overall I can follow Abrienda from start to beginning: Abrienda moved to the U.S. because she wanted to pursue her dreams of education in the U.S, she struggled in the process because of familial support and personal struggles, but found inspiration because of the CNA pin, which motivated her to continue school and pursue a nursing career.

I believe that Abrienda was successful with the task at hand. At the end of her essay, she writes, “My pin is the reason I’m studying at UTRGV today and persuading the nursing career. Without my pin I probably would be in Mexico. My pin saved my life.” She is clearly conveying her points, she is persuasive with how influential the CNA pin has been in her life, and the
content is useful in that it supports her points. As noted, there seemed to be some language interference and editing issues, but not enough to point where we could label Abrienda as an ESL student, even though her first language is indeed Spanish.

When students like Abrienda write they do so from their material social world, from their embodied and bodily experiences. In reading Abrienda’s essay, it is clear that she is writing passionately, but sometimes writing from the body does not translate in regards to “standardized” academic writing. This is partly the reason Abrienda expressed her sense of otherness as a speaker and writer of English. Instead of marking up the essay or talking about sentence structure issues, I would treat Abrienda like the writer she is. The degree to which she negotiates and deploys rhetorical strategies may vary, from one reader to another, but Abrienda is clearly communicating a coherent idea. We see how her spatial and temporalizing exigency intersects with newfound agency that leads Abrienda to new knowledges and meaning making practices. This assignment is an important one for Abrienda because it allows her to cast herself, and authorize herself, to take ownership of both her writing and experiences.

I chose Abrienda’s work because her writing is similar to the others that I collected. To a degree, it may reflect how one’s context of linguality and discourse influences compositions. I believe the everyday “crossings” borderland writers perform has and continues to powerfully inform their constructions of linguistic, social, and political spaces. This type of mobility, this type of reconstruction of self through language, positions students in the micro and macro discourses of location and relocation, decontextualization and recontextualization. Moreover, I observed that this shared sense of mobility—amongst the students I worked with the majority of them were first generation, all of them were from the LRGV, and many self-identified as coming from working class—allowed them to change and transform difference into inclusivity. The
classroom was not this fixed or stable space. Difference became both the catalytic for inclusivity and transformation of the classroom.

**Decolonial Possibilities and Democratic Participation**

Place matters. Difference matters. There is always the question on how politically oriented the curriculum and composition classroom should be. We know from scholars and educators such as Ira Shor, Henry Giroux, and Paulo Freire that education is never neutral. From the role the educator assumes to the subject matter shared and ideas articulated to the subject-position the student authorizes him/herself to take, there are social and political consequences. Too often the myth of democracy and modernity has resulted in oppression and internal colonialism because of misunderstandings of such consequences of education. Some of us engage in the political and ethical endeavor of understanding the consequences of the construction of society and people in order to orient students to the politics of being, seeing, doing, and becoming. In this way, our presumptions are that discourse and learning are expressions of social action, of being and becoming in a world, in the making of the world, wherein place making, knowledge making, and meaning making take place from both the top and bottom. Our expectations for social justice and equity vary, but are always (or at least should always) defined locally initially. Emancipatory pedagogies and projects have been well intended in the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition. However, too often, even the most progressive of those pedagogies and projects are cloaked in the same logic of institutional ideology. We must change the content and terms of pedagogies and projects. Difference matters. Below are some suggestions in how to engage in decolonial possibilities and open up spaces for democratic participation.
As educators we must be open to the pluriversality of differences through a cultivation of mindfulness of difference. In, “Teaching Writing at Hispanic-Serving Institutions,” Beatrice Mendez Newman (2007) states, “Compositionists with little or no experience at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) quickly discover that traditional training in rhetoric and composition inadequately addresses the impact of many Hispanic students’ sociocultural, socioeconomic, and ethnolinguistic makeup on performance in the writing class” (p. 17). While schools across the nation indeed have a Hispanic demographic, the question remains, “Are the institutional and programmatic goals adequate enough to acknowledge and recognize differences within difference?” I suggest an openness and mindfulness to difference, and the ways in which place and culture inform student’s experiences, which can help establish a community of learners wherein “teacher and student collaborate to read new understandings about writing, self, culture, and identity” (p. 34). I define a mindfulness of difference as the acknowledgement that students are rhetorical agents, situated within stories of individual and community histories and memories, which participate in place, knowledge, and meaning-and-memory-making practices.

In her discussion on the possibilities of translingualism and decolonialism, Cushman (2016) writes that approaches “need to envision difference as heterogeneous, as differences, better thought of in the plural…Understanding the differences within difference as the norms of all utterances can help imagine one type of epistemic delinking that invites a pluriversality of knowledges and languages” (p. 238). I believe that a mindfulness of difference can help see this into fruition.

As educators we must be open to the students constellation and politics of mobility, which has led me to argue for a mobility-decolonial interpretive framework. As discussed, place is made possible through mobility; mobility is political and actional. Tim Cresswell (2006)
reminds us to attend to the “contexts for movement” and “product of movement” wherein rhetorical agents are in the production of space and time. Cresswell goes on to argue that movement is “rarely just movement” because it “carries with it the burden of meaning” (p. 6-7). I believe in the ideas of nexus of practice, historical bodies, and historical places, which informs how I conceive of student’s mobility as constellated. I also believe in the idea that Gee (2004) advances, “When people learn something as a cultural process their bodies are involved because cultural learning always involves having specific experiences that facilitate learning” (p. 35). So therein lies the predicament of what Allan Pred calls the predicament of biographies and life paths. In the process of being and doing, becoming becomes inevitable, either aligning with that which has been produced over and over or aligning within something anew. Experiences can change a person’s biography and we must be open then to how students’ conceptions and performativity of mobility signals the processes of being, doing, and becoming. I am reminded of Alastair Pennycook (210) who suggests a “focus on movement takes us away from space being only about location, and instead draws attention to a relationship between time and space, to emergence, to a subject in process—performed rather preformed—to becoming” (p. 140). In being cognitive of this, of the ways in which rhetorical practices invoke place making, we open a politics of mobility up to the capacity to be in production of space and time. Mobility, in this way, is residual and emergent.41

As educators we must be open to coexisting heterogeneities and space as always under construction and production. This idea is informed by Doreen Massey’s (2005) conceptualization of coexisting trajectories and space as a “simultaneity of stories-so-far”:

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41 I am reminded of Juan Guerra (2004) concept of transcultural repositioning. He defines it as a “rhetorical ability that members of our community often enact intuitively but must learn to self-consciously regulate, if they hope to move back and forth more productively between and among different languages and dialects...different ways of seeing and thinking...” (p. 15).
• First, that we recognize space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions. (p. 9)

• Second, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. (p. 9)

• Third, that we recognize space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. (p. 9)

The idea of “stories-so-far” is central to decolonial possibilities. It simultaneously values the past, local histories, and the possibilities of futures anew. Not only does it apply to students, but also it translates to the construction of the classroom as a place. What gives a place its specificities are the mobilities of people, ideas, and objects that run through it. Students are makers of place, shapers of subjectivities, and engineers of negotiated literacies and rhetorics. To see this into fruition, I suggest cultivating an environment and developing pedagogies and assignments that allow the student body to be seen and heard. In doing so, I believe that we can inspire students to see how literacies are connected to bodies in space and time and how sociocultural and political contexts necessitate productions of space and time in place. In essence, a theory of the flesh is already intact for students, but we must develop pedagogical practices and theories that subscribe to writing from the body. Stuart Hall (1992) writes, that our “ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are” and that it is important to recognize “that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular
experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position” (p. 202). Imagine if students can come to that conviction in our classrooms.

As educators we must be open to the possibility of both classrooms and writing as spaces that are “radically contingent” and “radically situational” (Olson, 1999). Gloria Anzaldua (1999) wrote, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (p. 81). For students of color and marginalized communities, this argument by Anzaldua rings true. In, “Toward a Post-Process Composition,” Gary Olson (1999) talks about the idea that all communication is “radically contingent, radically situational” (p. 9). He suggests that we “move away from a discourse of mastery and assertion toward a more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive, nonassertive stance” (p. 14). In this way, both the dialogic and dialectical nature of writing, of situating oneself within the performativity of composing, enables the student writer to see how all activity is contingent upon the material environment and situational to ideology. I believe that too often we say we are doing one thing and really doing something else. To open the classroom and composition assignments up to radically contingent and radically situational spaces, I suggest we invite students to do more than just reflect on the materiality of space and place. We invite them to read, interpret, and make meaning from the meaning-making practices they produce on a daily basis. Spatial metaphors are just one component. There must be the element of time as well. This way, reflection is the site of memory making, while the classroom and compositions are the sites of production of being, doing, and becoming in space and time that are an extension of reflexivity. That is, the body does not exist apart from space or time.

As educators our pedagogies must be flexible and adaptive. Specifically, I say this within the context of student feedback. Newman (2007) writes that one of the biggest mistakes
compositionists can make is mark every mistake and overlook the message being conveyed. With borderland students, for example, every “mistake” may seem like an error, because the context for composing is informed by the sense of “good writing” that is inevitably tied to some conception of “standard academic writing.” Of course, I am not suggesting that when L1 interference occurs at a level to which the message is incomprehensible to ignore it. However, I am suggesting that we be flexible and adaptive with our pedagogies. As Newman states, “Students like knowing that their writing matters to the audience they are addressing. As composition teachers, we need to look at the writing from our students’ point of view, identify the ideas that are viable, show them how to turn inadequate writing into power writing” (p. 31). What Newman suggests is that we take a more directive approach.\footnote{Newman (2007) writes that a nondirective approach can be frustrating for students wherein the teachers ask “questions that are supposed to lead the writer to self-correct his or her text” (p. 31).}
My first experience I remember regarding my bracelet begins: when I took the bus out of my house and it took me to school, then when I arrived at school and I was getting off I noticed many of my friends and many students that I didn't know were there waiting for me with balloons and posters. They were congratulating me for the triumph that I had the day before. My team Atlas soccer Academy had won the Atlas International Cup. It appeared on TV, in newspaper, and even magazines here in the valley and many parts of Texas and Mexico. Many classmates of my high school saw me on TV then they were very excited because they wanted to see my bracelet and my medal and also wanted to interview me about my experience during the tournament.

I had brought my bracelet on my left hand, and one of my best friends from high school, Vianey Martinez Perez told me that I should change my bracelet to the other hand because it is good luck, left hand is bad luck. So I changed my bracelet from right hand to my left, and something magical happened. Maybe you won't believe me, but the most beautiful girl Silvia Cristina Hernandez from my school congratulated me and kissed me on my cheek, my face blushed for a reason and I kissed her back. (Silvia became my girlfriend, and every time I see her it reminds me my soccer bracelet) I had grabbed my bracelet just a day before and many girls wanted to conquer me. they wrote me letters and some very good poems. When I got home I showed the letters to my mom and she wasn't happy, because she didn't like the girls when they tried to hang out with me, yes, my mom is a little jealous.

**Image 21: Students Writing, Angel’s Writing, Unit 1**

Take for example this text (above) in which Angel is reflecting on an artifact that he was proud of. In the introduction, Angel identifies the object—a soccer bracelet—and states that it has taught him to be goal oriented. I am concerned, however, with the organizations of ideas and the flow of paragraphs. I would point out the rhetorical strategies I noticed (and talk about their rhetorical effect), focus on what Angel is trying to convey in the paragraph (and ask Angel to mark instances in which he accomplishes it), and if there were truly syntactic issues we would
address those by scaffolding (and then practicing self-editing). Newman writes that she wants her students “to think of themselves as writers” and to not do so would result in them always seeing “themselves in the position of supplicants, of students who want to do only what the professor wants so that they can pass” (p. 32). I agree, if our goal is to provide access, we must always support development and success that will ask us to be flexible and adaptive with our pedagogies.

As educators we must work towards decolonizing projects. First, we must not accept the notion that rhetoric begins with the Greco-Roman tradition. This means that we should not think of the rhetorics students bring in with them, especially those from marginalized communities, as “alternative.” Second, hegemony must be discussed critically and responsibly. Victor Villanueva (1993) writes, “there is more to racism, ethnocentricity, and language that is apparent” because there are “long-established systemic forces at play” (p. 12). As Derrick Bell (1992) writes, “racism lies at the center, not the periphery, in the permanent, not in the fleeting” (p. 198). Hegemony ties into the domains of power, knowledge, and being. An important question to consider is how has hegemony been justified and explained through rhetoric and composition, policies and policy-making, and other rhetorical practices. I mention “responsibly” because it is not enough to invite new ways of exploring, critiquing, and interpreting place making, knowledge making, and meaning making practices amidst and within historical and cultural legacies. If democratic participation is the ultimate goal it begins within cultivating dexterity in the classroom through invention, re-intervention, and social action. Third, we must work towards continuously building lines of cross-cultural understanding and social action. We

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43 Here, I am thinking about Robert Connors (1992) who writes, “But we in composition studies have a history. It’s murky in places so far, and much of it has not been well explored. But it exists. We are part of a discipline that is twenty five hundred years old, and our continuity from Aristotle and the earliest rhetoricians cannot now be doubted by anyone” (p. 35)
cannot operate outside of hegemony and the reality is that “all institutions and their agents are always operating from within ideological perspectives and according to specific interests” (Olson, 2003, p. 212). Words such as literacy sponsor and gatekeeping come to mind. Yet, we have the opportunity to focus on communication, as operational and functional in society, the opportunity to engrain a type of rhetorical education into communication that is politically, socially, and ethically oriented. We must, however, change both the content and terms by which we teach by focusing on place making, knowledge making, and meaning making practices students embody, perform, and are in production of.

**Entiendes, Para Que te Acuerdas, Para Que Sepas y Aprendes**

Entiendes, para que te acuerdas, and para que sepas y aprendes are phrases I heard growing up. With everything there always seemed to be a lesson to be learned. I am grateful for that. The translations are as followed: entiendes = do you understand; para que te acuerdas = so you remember; para que sepas y aprendes = so you know and learn. My pedagogical approach, of listening and caring, has so often worked around these phrases. I believe mentorship like this places responsibility both on the educator and student.

¿Entiendes?

I am interested in critical dialogue. I have often sat in lectures where information seems to be dumped, with no inclination by the educator to check if the information makes sense. Entiendes is both a declarative and an inquiry-based phrase. On the one hand, the word is used to make sure that one is understanding what is being communicating, while on the other hand, the word is used in a way that provides the opportunity to one to ask questions. With every class meeting, I purposefully make it point to ask. We must not lose sight of students needs and
expectations to feel authorized to use the classroom as a platform from which to speak from and participate in.

*Para Que te Acuerdas*

Memory and participation are at the center of my pedagogical approaches. I have often sat in lectures where information is discussed one day and never returned to thereafter. *Para que te acuerdas* works from the pretenses of memory making. Whether students are writing about their family’s literacy experiences, individual literacy experiences, and/or archived literacies, my goal is to provide the opportunity for students to both participate in memory making and reflect on how those memories are residual and emergent. We must not lose sight of student’s needs and expectations to feel and know that their knowledge and meaning making practices matter.

*Para Que Sepas y Aprendes*

I want students to leave my class knowing how to communicate in effective, persuasive, and ethical ways. I have often sat in lectures where I do not what I need to learn or the reason why I need to learn it. I have made it a pedagogical approach to make every class meeting a lesson to be learned. I do not have students just read an article nor do I have students just engage in collaborative projects. While there are larger underlying goals stemming from student learning outcomes, my overall approach is that learning is a form of social activity and action. Students become familiar with genres, research methods and citation styles, and argumentation and persuasion not so that they can conform to standards, but so that they can shape and re-shape discourse and meaning. The “so you know” mentorship is supported, initially, with a reading of my literacy narrative at the beginning of the year, and is supported throughout with reflections of student’s own struggles. The “so you learn” mentorship is supported, initially, with the realities about marginalized community’s success in higher education, and is supported throughout with
“andale” moments. Andale has several meanings—go, way to go, or you got it—and I use it to convey encouragement and possibility.

**Some Thoughts On Translingualism**

Translingual scholars have raised our awareness on how language is an “emergent” and “in-process activity,” wherein difference is both the “locus” of meaning and the “norm of language in-practice” (Canagarajah, 2013a /2013b; Lu & Horner, 2013; Leonard & Nowacek, 2016; Canagarajah, 2016). There has also been deep reflection on the extent by which decolonial approaches can come into focus as a scope and content of translingual approaches to the undertaking of difference as the norm (Cushman, 2016). In all this talk of difference, one would think that attentiveness to the material and historical conditions, epistemological and ontological complexities, and space and time-elements that surround students would be at the forefront. And, yet this is where I see translingualism and decolonialism diverging, insofar that replacing “one content” with another (e.g. difference) does not automate a pluriversality of knowledges and languages.

I am drawn to Jay Jordan’s (2015) “Material Translingual Ecologies” and Keith Gilyard’s (2016) article, “The Rhetoric of Translingualism.” Both are a cautionary tale for translingualists. With Jordan (2015), there is the risk of replacing “one set of linguistic heroes…with another” (p. 365). His call for action comes by way of the “understudied agency of ‘novice’ language users and the still understudied material complexity of language contact situations” (p. 366). My goal, from the onset of this dissertation has been to layer the material context and exigency in which students from the LRGV are situated. The purpose of these interviews and surveys is to at least begin to shed insight into how students enter and re-enter, shape and re-shape meaning across scale and materiality. I believe this has implications for translingual scholars. As Jordan writes,
“A vital step beyond recognizing cultural and linguistic diversity already in classrooms is recognizing the ontological diversity there as well, in which not only is the classroom open, but students and teachers are susceptible too” (p. 379). One of my goals of a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework (see literature review) has been to focus on the residual and emerging aspects of mobility that at all times connects the corporeal body to rhetorical activity and social action.

For example, Erica is a first generation Mexican American and college student from a colonia. This is her point of reference. Colonias are known for their lack of basic infrastructures such as reliable electricity. Erica’s family came from Mexico and found residence in a colonia. From her point of view, she sees, feels, embodies, and carries with her the meaning connected to her historical and material conditions. Erica once told me,

There was no expectation for me to continue after high school. I believed in this until I met a teacher who said I could make it in college. I struggle, and at times I want to quit school, but I remember where I come from and I remember how strong I have become because of those experiences.

Erica believed that her story was fixed. She struggled because her historical place and body came into focus in spaces and places not entered by her family such as higher education where her differences brought into perspective her own hesitation to see beyond the colonias. Her struggle to learn English was a constant reminder for how higher education might not be a viable option. Yet, as she recalled for me how her mom would ask her to look at the billboards in and across the LRGV because they were in Spanish and English or how her mom would play a CD on daily drives that translated Spanish to English and English to Spanish in musical ways, she herself was becoming a researcher of her stories so far.
Abrienda, as we recall, against her parent’s wishes moved to the U.S. Against the norms of correct mobility, which is simultaneously hegemonic and patriarchal, her visions of pursuing higher education in the U.S., created a politic of the flesh, yet, she felt a sense of “out of place,” from her family and the institution of learning. However, she continued because she believed in the power of education. She now lives in Mexico, as she continues to make amends with her family, and drives every day to the university. Her material reality is one of constantly crossing, how can we deny this multi-modality of living. In our multiple conversations, she would stress, “No quero parar.” The idea of not wanting to stop is significant, when we think about how immobilities surround Abrienda. She would also say, “Everyone has their own expectations for me, but I have my own too.” We cannot and should not ignore how the affective materiality benefits the use and practice of language and literacy. I believe we have a lot to learn about developing the “metalinguistics and meta-rhetorical dexterity” of students (see Guerra, 2016).

In, “The Rhetoric of Translingualism,” Gilyard (2016) expresses, “I am concerned on this occasion with the flattening of language differences, the notion of language as an abstraction, the danger of translingualism becoming an alienating theory for some scholars of color, and deeper study of powerfully translanguaging students” (p. 28). While Gilyard does not contend with the fact that “we all differ as language users from each other” (p. 286), he does add caution to the possible “consequence of positing a sameness of difference” that devalues the “historical and unresolved struggles of groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in the academy and suffer disproportionately in relation to it” (p. 286). Again, the purpose of the surveys and interviews was to show how students name practices and attach value to it. My goal with highlighting student’s narratives was to show that there is no formulation to analysis or translingualism. However, another goal of a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework (see
literature review) was to situate students within historical and local histories and illuminate how their residual aspects of being resulted in a self that was and continues to be emergent. Their naming practices, I believe, reflects a degree of decolonialism that we can draw from. I have attempted to respond to Gilyard’s call for action—“we need the stories of struggle…and those should include tales of triumph” (p. 288)—by highlighting student’s narratives of “stories so far.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on my second research site, two first-year composition classrooms. My goal was to bring attention to a student politics and sense of ethos. I attempted to highlight what it might look like to work with students from the LRGV, both within the context of the LRGV and beyond it. I did this through the stories communicated to me by student participants. In this way, I have once again worked towards my goal of visibility. In part, working towards visibility brought me to a critical conversation on decolonial possibilities and student democratic participation. In the next chapter, I consider the opportunities for historicizing student agency, which is a continuation from chapter 1, in this vein.
Chapter 6: Epideictic Archives and Archives of Enunciations

Decolonial archives operate through an understanding of time immemorial that belies the imperial creation of tradition marked along Western timelines. They operate by relocating meaning in the context of its unfolding that opposes the imperial archive’s penchant for collecting, classifying, and isolating. They operate through the co-construction of knowledge based on interactions between storytellers and listeners that counter the imperial archive’s insistence on expert codification of knowledge. And they operate through linguistic and cultural perseverance rather than the imperialist agenda of preservation of cultural tradition as hermetically sealed, contained, and unchanging.


History isn’t a dead and remembered object; it is alive and it speaks to us.
Malea Powell, “Dreaming Charles Eastman,” p. 121

De memoria. At the onset of this dissertation, I began from memory. The cuentos and testimonios I recounted, they have been fundamental to the formation of my identity. My ways of being, seeing, doing, and knowing arises from living in place (e.g., the LRGV) and partaking in a nexus of practice. But, my emergent identity is a consequence of my lived experiences in this world and a vision for social justice and equity. In this way, my identity, ways of self-representation, and use and practice of particular rhetorical practices are social and political. The same applies for students as evidenced in the interviews conducted (see chapter 5).

I have looked at two sites, thus far, wherein I consider the possibility of decolonial agendas and democratic participation. Along the way, I have done this work “in memory” (en memoria) of the people, culture, and place of the LRGV. I have at last arrived at my last site, the archives. My intent is to explore how archives historicize the potential for student agency and democratic participation. I explore three sets of fieldnotes, and I intentionally involve student participants in the process. I deploy a “para que te acuerdas” and “para que sepas y aprendes” model of sponsorship. Such aligns with the words from my grandma: so you remember (para que te acuerdas) and so you know and learn (para que sepas y aprendes). This is part of a memory I am reclaiming, that I am retaining.
It is from gente like my grandma that I know a counterstory exists. Victor Villanueva (2004) writes, “The narratives of people of color jog our memories as a collective in a scattered world and within an ideology that praises individualism. And this is all the more apparent for the Latino and Latina, whose language contains the assertion of the interconnectedness among identity, memory, and the personal” (p. 16). The purpose of getting students involved in archival explorations is that I believe we share at the very least a constellation of genealogy. On the one hand, this constellation of genealogy is expressed in a historical memory, a palimpsest of identity of sorts, wherein our bodies are inscribed with myths and undertones of inferiority. Yet, on the other hand, this constellation of genealogy is one engulfed in the memories of speaking back (oral and written). The possibility of new stories begins in the exploration of how we inherit histories and memories.

I believe that the site of archives presents the opportunity to reduce the distance between the historical and present. The colonizer attempts to create distance, in hopes that we forget, in justification of the erasure of memories. We must remember that the classroom is not the student’s point of reference. No. Their point of reference begins at the particularities of a community and its social, political, and historical context. Ellen Cushman (1996) in, “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change” writes, “if we see ourselves as both civic participants and as preparing students for greater civic participation, then activism becomes a means to well defined end for approaching the community” (p. 12). I was born and raised in the LRGV. I carry this community on my back into every rhetorical space that I enter. It is my ethical obligation, my civic purpose, I believe, to lay out the accomplishments and achievements of a people, such as those in the LRGV, unwilling to forego their own obligation to engage in civic and democratic participation in the making of community and society. The intimacy between the historical and
present shrinks when memory can transcend space and time and stand at the nexus of collective and community praxis.

The archive, as a site of histories and memories, is a scene of invention, which too often satisfies temporal constraints. Barbara Biesecker (2006) suggests that archives are not sites of truth and that they cannot speak on their own behalf. Instead, they are scenes of invention in which it is important to explore how they have been situated and strategically used to depict a particular history. Shannon Carter and Kelly Dent (2013) argue that formal archives often underrepresent historically marginalized populations. I find this to be true as archives, again, reflect social and cultural practices of modernity (see Steedman, 2005). I introduce students to three sets of archives, which I have stitched together, because it is important to show how our history in the LRGV has been framed and how our people have garnered agency while on the cusp of invisibility. Robert Connors (1992) writes that all historical research can do “is tell us stories, stories that may move us to actions but in themselves cannot guide our actions…” (p. 31). Histories, according to Connors, rely on reliability and persuasiveness. I pose questions, as I introduce these archives to students, because my intention is to enable students to question the reliability and persuasiveness of a history that occludes and/or presents Mexican Americans in objectified ways. These artifacts, that which allow me to put together the three sets of archives, are meant to enable students to think about the historicalness of their place and their bodies. These artifacts are simultaneously literacy, rhetoric, and political.

Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch (2010) suggest that when our sites of analysis shift to nontraditional archives we “confront new questions about and new possibilities for archival recovery, archival methods, and historiographic invention” (p. 18). It is interesting indeed to be

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I am aware of Lynee Lewis Gaillet’s (2010) claim that “The researcher becomes a filter and a lens—an integral and recognizable component of archival research” (p. 37).
able to acknowledge a difference between institutional archives and local archives. The question I continue to ask myself is how are the representations in each archival site indicative of the representations embodied, circulated, and performed in the everyday of the LRGV. My work in the archives is short of being complete; it is and will always be partial, for there cannot exist a single archive. My goal, however, has been to observe how histories converge and diverge, how they fold (and unfold) and feedback into each other. Barbara L’Eplattenier (2009) writes that one of our responsibilities is to “develop a greater sense of trust in the history” narrated (p. 73-74). This is another goal of mine, listening, well and deeply, to archival artifacts, and to participate, and co-participate with others, in ways that allows for a wider perspective of history.

Below, I introduce my three sets of fieldnotes that contain what I refer to as archival materials. In the process, I bring into conversation the last interview I had with students. This is the time that I introduced students to the archives. It is also the moment where I develop a “para que te acuerdas” and “para que sepas y aprendes” model of sponsorship. I conclude this chapter with a conversation on what it would mean to deploy decolonial initiatives in response to archives engulfed in the myth of modernity, what it would mean to open up the archives to the possibilities of democratic participation, and what it would mean to develop an assignment based on the opportunities afforded in archival research.

Fieldnotes about The Rio Grande Valley Hispanic Genealogical Society

My felt sense urged me to follow Sonia’s advice (the lady on the phone from the chapter 1). I did not automatically though. I kept searching through the boxes, trying to find and gather more archival artifacts. I did gather more artifacts. I noticed how these artifacts were ordered in a very linear way. With every material artifact gathered, which related in some way to progress and development, I kept thinking, where were the Mexicans and Mexican Americans. I

45 The images in the first two fieldnotes section come from a personal camera and not from an archival box.
continued to feel frustrated. I knew we where there. On my grandpa’s side, my family had been in the U.S. since the late 1800’s.

Image 22: Santos Rubio Gravestone, My Great-Grandma

Image 23: Santos Rubio and Family
But, the question I continued to contemplate on was where were we? Where were we in this linear history of progress and development? We were there. Sonia assured me that if I attended their meeting this would be clear. I called her on a Friday and asked if I could meet up with her in Harlingen, Texas at the Harlingen Public Library. She asked if I wanted to interview her. I responded with a yes and we set up a meeting time for the following week.

I closed the lid to those boxes as Sonia from the Rio Grande Valley Hispanic Genealogical Society had advised. There was something compelling in what she said to me, to come and listen to them. I am not sure what to expect, but I very much look forward to it. Sonia scheduled our interview the same day as one of their meetings. I got to the library before our meeting so that way I could look around. I had not visited this library since I was 13 years old.

**Image 20: Example of the Genealogical Society’s Work**

In waiting for Sonia, I take a walk around the library. Above is a picture of the type of work that the Rio Grande Valley Hispanic Genealogical Society does. I see Sonia in the distance and she is
waiving at me to come meet up with her. In our hour-long interview, before the meeting, I ask Sonia a series of questions about: 1) being born and raised in Harlingen and the LRGV in the 1940s, 2) memories passed down from her parents, 3) archival materials collected about her family, and 4) why she does archival work.

Sonia remembers having conversations with her mother, when she was little, about being a Mexican woman, and about being active in supporting one’s people. Her mother was a member of a political organization (LULAC) that expanded from the LRGV to Corpus Christi, Texas. “My mom would always say that it is important to support each other,” Sonia states. When asked to expand, she spoke about how whites were discriminatory to Mexicans and Mexicans Americans and how they did not want to live near them. “They had their buildings on their side and we had ours,” she continued. Sonia explains that while there was no rule stating they could not shop in the “white side” of town, it was something they did not do to avoid feeling shamed or being embarrassed. “My mom would say that we need to stand up for each other and she was involved in that way.” When asked why she does archival work, she responded with, “Like you expressed to me, there is a history of these cities in the LRGV that tells only one side. The reason why we do this work is not only to display our family genealogies and see whether or not there are overlaps, but it also to collect information on how long our families have been here in the U.S. Many of our families had ranches and businesses that are not mentioned in more formal histories.”

I am sitting in this large open space. It is a very familiar space to me. This is where my sister performed a dance rehearsal when she was 6 years old. I am sitting alone at one of the tables. I told Sonia that I was going to set up. I do need to set up, mainly to observe everything around me. Behind me are pictures, maps, and writings, some framed and some pasted onto a
cardboard, on the wall. On a table behind me, there are stacks of books, some for sale and some for display.

Image 21: A Book at the Table

These are books on the history of the cities in the LRGV, written by these folks that have organized today’s meetings. As the subtitle of the book above states, they are “Family Stories of the Rio Grande Valley In Our Own Words.” This is a powerful statement that suggests a sense of social and cultural action through historical narrative and through composing the “historical body and place” on pages.

I am listening to Sonia and others talk about the purpose of the organization, for newcomers, such as myself. They talk about why they are doing this work: to preserve the histories of their families within cities such as Harlingen, to offer a narrative that may or may not be acknowledged, but that is important to the cities of the LRGV, and to add perspective to what
their families contributed within their time whether it be ranch work or businesses. Most importantly, for them, is being able to trace their lineage, their heritages, and seeing where they overlap with others. They believe that many of the residents in the LRGV are related to each other. The genealogies behind me are some examples of the work the society have put in to trace those relationships.

Another group member joins the podium at the front; her name is Alejandra, and through her study and tracing of her family’s lineage, she announces that she is actually related to one of the members in the audience.

![Image 24: Announcement of Relationships](image)

Many are in shock, some celebrate, and others shed tears of joy. I am about to make my rounds now that the presentations are coming to an end; this will allow me to take a look at the pictures, maps, and writings behind me more closely. People are glad that I am here. During my walks around, many ask me what I am working on. They had asked me to grab some tamales, which I did, and I sat with some of them talking about the importance of archival work. Sonia, the
woman who invited me says to a group of members: "Romeo [with a Spanish accent] told me he was concerned about what he was finding, so I told him to close those boxes and come talk with us." I smiled and explained how happy I was to join them.

I learned a lot today. I learned that we have and continue to be present in so many ways even if the mainstream narrative of progress in the LRGV does not recognize our community’s accomplishments. I learned that my felt sense was correct. The day that I opened up the first archival box, I knew that there had to be a different story to that of white and right history. Not to discount the archives at the institution, there is a lot of valuable material, I just wish there was more stuff about us.

Linda Ferreira-Buckley (1999) argues, “Historians of rhetoric need to return to the archives” (p. 577). In returning to the archives, I found a stark difference between the archive at the local institution and the archive collected by the Rio Grande Valley Hispanic Genealogical Society. I realized, in a very real way, there was an ideology attached to history making in both contexts. With the Genealogical Society, they saw themselves as agents of change through recovering historical experiences that had not been in their “own words” or on their own terms.

In returning to the archives, my felt sense told me I must look to other spaces beyond the institution. Yet, I could not ignore the stance of preservation and articulation of origins in both archives. Both archives allowed me to stitch together space and time, revealing foldings of materials and discursive conditions where historical subjects and bodies lived. Both through analysis and interpretation, these archives spoke back. They told a story of colonial projects, of people stitching and piecing together fragments of their culture in the shaping and re-shaping of their everyday, and of survivance and resilience against the backdrop of change and transformation of geographies and social relations. Somewhere between the fissures and gaps of
space and time, my history, our history, was unfolding in the contexts of situations and contexts of cultural practices, and therein, I realized how the archives were not only an extension of the past, but an extension of the people in the present who have and continue to understand their world within colonial conditions. I decided to bring the archives to the students who I was working with.

As mentioned (see chapter 2), I worked with 32 students, and conducted 2 rounds of interviews. With the second interview, I asked students a series of questions, two of which I want to highlight: 1) “Did you have the opportunity to learn about your culture?” and 2) “If you had input on the curriculum, what would be some of things you would like to learn about?” The consensus was that they were allowed to write about their experiences and families.

More Than Just a Photo

“All of your struggles, obstacles, and hard work will be worth it in the end,” is something I have always been told growing up. Everywhere I go, no matter where I’m at, a picture of two committed and productive individuals is always near me; a picture of my parents. Every time I come across the picture of them, it reminds me of their past and what it took for them to get to where they are. My parents’ experiences have taught me that hard work is the key to success.

Their Story

My father, Ernesto Rodriguez, was the fourth child of seven children in total. He was born in San Benito, TX. At the age of seven, my father started working at my grandfather’s bakery, La Reynosa, along with his other siblings on their free time. My father only got an education until 11th grade in high school where he then dropped out after becoming ill with Typhus fever. He then moved to Houston to work at another bakery.

My mother, Pilar Rodriguez, was the second child of ten children in total. She was born in Reynosa, MX. My mother started working at the age of fourteen as a
Students from the two first-year composition classrooms I observed praised their professor for allowing them to write about their experiences and families. For the majority, this was the first time that they were able to do so. However, the consensus was that this was not enough. After the first assignment, they went into conversations about race, but never really covered how race related to them or their community.

With very little hesitation, many of the students stated that they'd like to learn more about their own history.

- **Jose:** In class we learned about Black history a lot, and while we focused somewhat on [our] history, it was not enough. I want to know more. The majority of conversations on race are always focused on Blacks. Why?"
- **Maria:** I know that Blacks have been treated badly. We learn about this in high school and now here in college. But, as my dad has said to me, we have been treated badly too.”
• **Santana:** I learned in my history class that we also suffered, my professor, he was really passionate about this subject. But, with this class, we learn about the slave trade, we watch clips on Blacks, and we have to write about it too. I want to write about what I learned in my history class.

Jose, and the others, wanted to learn more about their history because, as Maria stated, "We have a history too you know." Maria is right, there indeed is a long Mexican American history in the U.S., and, the history of the LRGV is an important one as well. This history involves the tenets of race and racism, colonialism, imperialism, and cultural violence and erasure.

What I decided to do was deploy a “para que te acuerdas” and “para que sepas y aprendes” model of sponsorship that celebrates the need to remember, know, and learn. It is a saying, as I discussed in a previous chapter, from my grandma who’d always say that I needed to listen as to know and learn. I deployed these two models of sponsorship, first, by showing students my fieldnotes on what I observed as I “walked” around Harlingen, Texas. All of the students were familiar with the local cities of the LRGV. I told students that I am limiting myself, and this discussion, to the city of Harlingen, Texas, for the purpose of this research project. Second, I asked students their thoughts on what I was presenting to them. The idea was to have them participate both in the reflection of what I was presenting to them and critical conversations of remembering.

**Fieldnotes about Harlingen, Texas (11/02/2015)**

My grandma would talk about how the family used to pick the crops. I took this photo during my walk of downtown Harlingen. The photograph is significant. It is significant on a personal level because it reflects the history of my family’s work ethic in the United States. My
family picked the crops in the LRGV and in Northern states. It taught them, as my grandma would say, to work “con los manos.”

Occasionally, we’d pass some of the crops in Harlingen, Texas, and my grandma or tío would say to me, “mira.” They’d start reflecting on how they’d work early in the morning till late in the afternoon for little to no money. They’d talk about the struggle and how the work took its toll on the body. My grandma would say, “Mira mis manos,” and she’d hold out her hands, and they would have cracks and calluses still that had healed over those before. My grandma, till the day she passed, maintained a garden where she would plant and harvest.
I have a memory, one where the sky would turn charcoal grey, where ashes would fall from the sky, and where the smell was sweet, it was the burning of sugar cane in the distance. This photograph (above) is also significant because it reflects the history of the LRGV. In many ways, it reflects how we as a people have been able to survive by any means necessary. I look at this photograph, and I cannot help but think of the backs that we stand upon, from past to present, in this region, a region where many of us learn what it means very early in life to be “un buen trabajador.”
We are part of place as much as place is a creation of what we make of it. I think about how on my right arm, La Virgen de Guadalupe is inked into my skin, and around my neck a faded rosary hangs permanently. These tattoos represent the type of culture that I come from. In the image above, you see the accordion and guitarrra, they are staples of Valley music. It melts our hearts and sometimes causes a grito, sometimes out of happiness, sometimes out of sadness. The ranchero culture, our ancient culture, our indigenous culture, we cannot deny who we are in the LRGV. This is what this image reminds me of, all that we are here in the LRGV, a blending of cultures that we have come to recognize in and through “El Valle.”
I continued my walk downtown until I reached my neighborhood. There I found a community garden. I introduced myself to the group of people tending to the garden. They were not hesitant. Indeed, some of them knew my grandma and family, some of us connected on our memories of our family growing and harvesting, and some of us connected on the meaning associated with community gardens. These were members of the community, of the neighborhood, who came together for the purposes of living off the land “como hicieron antes.”

Cecilia states, “No queremos estar en esas líneas pero tenemos que comer.” Cecilia, as she is stating this, points to the community pantry building behind us, where people stand in line to get food. What she stated was, “We do not want to be in those lines, but we have to eat.” She insisted that they created a community garden so that they could provide relief, even in the smallest ways, to people who need food. It is a sustainable way of living, something our ancestors did.

In the second round of interviews, what became evident was that students had begun talking with their parents and family members about their experiences talking with me. The
experiential experience of the interviews and group sessions had now expanded into family conversations about living in the LRGV, facing discrimination and racism, and rationales for not attending higher education. The stories pointed to a narrative of struggle, survivance, and resilience. We were connected on that basic level of humanity.

In conversations with students such as Jacky, she talked about how her dad opened up about his own experiences with racism and discrimination between Alton, Texas and Mission, Texas.

**Jacky:** My dad wanted to know what we were talking about and what questions you were asking me. So I told him. He took me on a drive later that afternoon to his old neighborhood. He showed me where he used to live and then drove down a block to where the “white” people lived. It made him emotional to talk about the things they would call him and the way they treated him and his friends. He told me, “Las cosas no han cambiado mucho. Ahora nos tratan mal los dos.” What he went on to say was that not only did white people treat us bad, but also our own people.

This was important to me, because often in conversations about discrimination and exploitation, we do not reflect on how this goes on between people of the same race and/or ethnic background. What became evident in the second round of interviews, in addition to students wanting to know their own history, was that their parents had brought them up to be strong and have good work ethics, even though they were not direct with them as to why.

The students, however, were very much aware of the presence of discrimination and racism. They too had experienced it in varying ways. So, I decided to bring in some more fieldnotes. In addition to the archival materials incorporated in the introduction, I showed them
other materials collected at the university, the public library, and a private network that I am a part of. In gathering these materials and writing up my fieldnotes, I had such students in mind.

**Fieldnotes on an Archival Collection (11/18/2015)**

The history of the LRGV is an interesting one. It is one filled with strife. In the early 1900s, students from Harlingen, Texas attended the Benito Juarez School (West Ward Mexican School), which was for Spanish-surnamed students, while white students attended a separate school. Later, in the 1930s, the Booker T. Washington School replaced a hurricane-damaged school, dedicated to serving the “negro children.” The history of Harlingen is captured through images in Eileen Mattei’s (2009) book, *At the Crossroads: Harlingen’s First 100 Years*. Some of these images are reflected in the narrative below. Much of the history though, depicted below, comes from the archival materials and very brief scholarly conversations of the making of Harlingen, Texas.

Many believe that the LRGV was immune from racism and discrimination, but maybe, it is just something we do not talk about much because it is a reminder of a past in which we are still healing from. We’d like our history to be one of progress and development, as the images below depict.

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46 In this section, there are a mix of archival materials some that came from a local archival box, some that come from Eileen Mattei’s (2009) book, and some that I collected from other sources.
Image 29: 1908, Lon C. Hill with Sugarcane Crop

Image 31: Cotton Gin of Harlingen
And, surely, there is no doubting that there was a history of progress and development, but it was entangled in a history wherein the Mexican American was placed on the cusp of invisibility. The history of say Harlingen, Texas is one wherein such progress and development is wrapped up in a white narrative.

But, it takes “work” to recover what has been marginalized. In 1906 Santos Lozano opened the first general store in Harlingen, Texas and in 1910 Julian Villarreal opened a dry goods store. We were there, as my felt sense suspected. We were and are a critical part of the history of Harlingen, Texas.

But, our presence was overshadowed by the threat of white domination. We were and continue to be a threat to the fabric and tapestry of society. Remember, Harlingen, and the surrounding cities needed to be made safe from “The Mexican” and Mexican bandits. The presence of the Texas Rangers and the deployments of the military in the coming years, between 1900-1920s, represented the next phases of militarization of the LRGV.
Along with the military, the LRGV also witnessed the presence of the KKK, which in a predominately Mexican American region, is astonishing and disheartening.
The cities of the LRGV have not been immune to cultural violence caused by white domination. The KKK held meetings, ran weekly ads in the local newspapers, and engaged in propaganda against “crooks” and “negroes.”

But, as noted earlier (see chapter 1), the community of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the LRGV understood their situation and responded back. For example, Gregorio Garcia created *El Procusor*, the first Spanish language newspaper in Harlingen, Texas. And, then there was also *El Cronista Del Valle* from Brownsville, Texas.
In these newspapers, the publishers talked about issues facing the Mexican American population. Such newspapers also published literary prose, which given more time, I could analyze these prose for their rhetorical address and effect.

Image 37: El Cronista (El Hogar)

As also discussed (see chapter 1) the Mexican and Mexican American people engaged and held conferences to combat racial violence and discrimination. We have never been silence, although we have been on the cusp of invisibility. In conducting archival research, I have learned to listen to my felt-sense, to dig deeper, and look towards other spaces where “we” may be present. I have learned to challenge the myth of modernity.

I have and continue to be interested in how communities understand their situation and respond to it. By recovering materials from the archives, and offering some reflection, my only goal is to show the importance of historiographical recovery, and the work left to be done. When
I asked students to reflect on the archival artifacts presented, some students responded with the following:

- **Abrienda**: I never knew the KKK was in the Valley.
- **Oscar**: The photograph of the people picking in the fields reminds me of my family. You see the fieldworkers everyday out in the fields along the highways. No one else is going to do that work.
- **Jacky**: Do you have more on the personal writing in the old newspapers?

In this work, I have called attention to bodies, race, and rhetoric. The purpose of showing students these archives, and my fieldnotes, was to remind them that our stories are constellated and historical, that our stories are not only of survivance, but also rhetorical action. Students showed interest in something in these archival artifacts. Students connected to them out a desire to know more, they connected to them because they were familiar, and the connected to them to learn from the history.

The burden of meaning of which we carry is and continues to be undergirded by the historicalness of place and bodies. So, in many ways, our stories have not stopped, those of colonial situations and discourses, those of decolonial practices and actions. I wanted students, ultimately, to be able to see how their literacy and rhetorical practices are tied to a sense of historical place and bodies, expressed and performed through a nexus of practice, and engulfed in memory and participation.

**Decolonial Possibilities: Epideictic Archives and Archives of Enunciations**

What I attempted to do was create an *Epideictic Archive* and an *Archive of Enunciations*. In the second round of interviews, I presented these archives, as I progressed from one question to another, and at the end of the conversation, after they concluded their reflections, I gave each
student a copy of the archival materials and my fieldnotes. The idea of the *epideictic archive* centers on the vernacular sensibilities that I have observed within the LRGV that make epideictic functional and operational. I presented the archives to students to show how they are located, how they can be read, and how the historical body is central to an understanding of ethos and epistemology in the LRGV.

As we discussed ways of being, doing, seeing, and becoming, my goal was to show through archival materials the exigencies from which the people of the LRGV have and continue to participate in the making of society and democratic spaces. In showing students these archival materials, I placed emphasis on the important aspects of memory, listening, history, and participation in the changing and transformation of place, geography, and rhetorical practices. The epistemology, and the emergence of a vernacular ethos, within the rhetorical context of the LRGV, I argued, gave way to rhetorical imperatives that were always a matter of rhetorical choice and rhetorical imperative. This became clear as students and I discussed what makes the LRGV (i.e., language, subjectivity, etc.). What makes the LRGV possible is the movement and mobility of language, subjectivity, and rhetorical practices that has and continues to rely upon an ethos and epistemology that is rooted in survival, perseverance, and resiliency.

These rhetorical strategies, of presentation and representation through language and subjectivity, which are constantly on display, do not just happen to appear in the moment, I insisted to students. Rather, they are part of worldviews that are connected to a historical sense of place and bodies that is shaped and reshaped in and through meaning-making practices and knowledge productions that are in every way a response to political, social, historical, economic, and material conditions. As I asked students to listen to the archives and reflect deeply, I insisted
that such rhetorical strategies are forms of negotiation and performance, which require a collective to acknowledge, adapt, and circulate such meaning in order for it to mean something.

I pointed to the images of progress and development, to show them how some of these narratives occluded the Mexican American. I implicated them, essentially, as I asked them to continue to listen and reflect on their own experiences. Students such as Jorge and Santos shared their lived experiences of struggles without hesitations, sharing with me how they are made to feel inferior in certain spaces. I noted to students, whether they acknowledge it or not, they are participating, and performing, a nexus of practice; within social, political, and economic realities, they are negotiating and navigating the currents of globalization and social relations of power. It is they, I asserted, who continue to struggle for political, social, and economic rights. I made clear, as well, that the course of colonial projects has changed because of social action (e.g., language and subjectivity) and our people’s ability to accommodate, revise, change, and/or transform meaning.

I came back to the one of the questions I asked students in the first round of the interview process and the same question that I asked during the first group session, that pertaining to identification and self-representation. I recalled the discussion.

Question: How do you self-identify and represent?

Response: We are Mexicans…Mexican Americans…

Response: But, sometimes I say I am Hispanic.

Response: Why? You are not Hispanic! Your Mexicano!

Response: Yeah, but sometimes the gringos, that is all they hear, that is the first thing they think about, you being Mexicano.
I asked students once more, why is it important to delineate Hispanic and Mexican American in certain instances?

Response: We are always Mexicano sir…

Response: But, sometimes we just have to self-represent differently. We have to show that we are not like those negative things they say about us, or they think about us.

What became evident was that Hispanic was an effort of/for persuasion. They needed to convince others that they belonged and that they did not embody the negative characteristics associated with “The Mexican.”

There was indeed regret in identifying as Hispanic, especially because a display of Mexicanness constituted a performance wherein they could not participate in democratic spaces in, as well as outside academia, for they were seen for the negative attributes associated with Mexican. Specifically, they expressed, these were spaces not where other Mexican Americans had occupied, but rather spaces in which the acknowledgment of their bodies relied on them being able to give the illusion of assimilation.

Yet, what was clear in individual interviews and group sessions was that these negotiations were deliberate, that they had not forgotten where they come from, but that they had mastered, to a certain degree, the ability to engage in rhetorical practices that would give utility to their movements and mobility within certain spaces. They contributed this to living in the LRGV, to what I am calling a vernacular ethos and epistemology, based on embodiments and interpretations of meanings, of enunciations within place. Vernacular life in the LRGV was expressed in the very use and practice of language and subjectivity that constituted rhetorical practice.
For example, Abrienda talked about the rhetorical exchanges of language in some of our conversations.

**Abrienda:** Whether I am on my phone, at school, at home, or at HEB, I know that I cannot speak the same to everyone. If I am texting my mom, even though it is on my phone, I use proper Spanish. I do not want her thinking that I have lost my Spanish. But, when I am with Sandra, a friend of mine, I can talk to her in both Spanish and English. It is different with Jennifer who understands Spanish, but does not like to speak Spanish. With her, I only use a little bit of Spanish, and mostly English.

What becomes evident in her response, as well as others, and in addition to my own observations, is that there is a sharing of discourse that is circulated and performed because it is persuasive. It is part of the vernacular life, wherein language is a code for participating in the world they have created. Scale making projects bridge the past and the present, allowing people of the LRGV to see how they have interpolated themselves along a continuum of time.

In this way, of colonial interpellations and agentive interpolations, there emerges both a Valley ethos and Valley rhetoric, that which has and continues to remain on the cusp of invisibility. In this case, Valley is a trope, which is not meant to suggest sameness, but rather, to illuminate how rhetoric and ethos, that of which dwell in the ambivalences of the local and global, can create and safeguard a collective consciousness that grows out of the loci and the familiarity of and with conditions and situations. When students such as Christy, Allejandra, and Jose say “somos del Valle, somos Valle,” it may just seem that they are self-representing through the name of the region—El Valle/The Valley—but to me, as a rhetorican, it is a means, and mode, of a people to claim and define their world. In this global current of instantaneous
interconnections, it is inadequate, and ethically wrong, to assume their exist a universal Mexican American ethos. The history of the LRGV, the discourse that has and continues to respond, and be undergirded by the overtones of trauma and preservation, is one that has resulted in a strategic response that does not outright resist, but rather, accommodates, changes, and/or transforms meaning through rhetorical choices and re-invention practices.

The Valley, as a trope, is a synthesis of the symbolic and the material, of the physical and the metaphorical, that, which in its very essence as a geography and place, is in-between two poles of governances, between two parameters of being and becoming, and the tenor of being and becoming, thus, is an exercise of discourse and performativity that has and continues to be identified as “Valley” in space and time. The rhetorical practices of this place, in space and time, are reflective of subjects as differently constituted, subjects of which, through rhetorical expression and re-invention, engage in difference making as part of their social action and capacity to express agency in modalities of ways. So, in essence, the Valley is more than just a trope, it amounts to ethos and social/cultural action.

The re-creation, and celebration, of historical and vernacular events, provides a discursive parameter for being and becoming in the LRGV, one which at the very least acknowledges a history of survivance and resiliency, one that at the very least undergirds the opportunity of transgressions and dissent that has and continues to create slippage in the colonial management and control over a people and region. There is a recognizable “Valley” aspect of being and becoming that deserves much more attention. Indeed, as I told students, we may feel the effect of being fixed into space and time, yet, as I asserted, our sense of differences, our ways of being and doing, our discursive practices of creating community and society, serves as a reminder of
our awareness and capacity to create language, culture, and geographies that has and continues to maintain a “Valley” identity and ethos.

By arguing for the epideictic, as functional and operational, this provides room to foreground my idea of archives of enunciations. In regard to arguing for the epideictic, what I mean is that there exist an audience (students) that is both taking in a situation and responding to and performing within a particular situation. In this way, I believe a collective ethos can and does exist. The archive of enunciations is premised on everyday rhetorical practices of an individual and community. It is something created, as a means to remember, to know, and learn from one’s participation in enunciations of knowledge and meaning-making practices. In the process of conducting interviews and distributing archival artifacts, what I was getting student-participants to think about were their own literacy and rhetorical practices. My overall objective was to provide the opportunity for student participants to name and define their practices. By allowing students to name and define their practices, by asking them to consider how such practices converge and diverge from and with others, students can begin to be more aware of the ways in which they strategically engage in democratic participation.

**Decolonial Agents**

I believe that as educators we can become decolonial agents. The rhetorical context, and rhetorical situation, of archives, begs for an analytical and interpretive framework, one that lends itself to both critical reading and critical theory. The idea of decolonial agents emerges at the particular intersection of history and memory. The ways in which we enter archival spaces, the ways in which we read archival materials, and the ways in which we theorize them say something about our own frameworks and agendas. Prior scholars in our field have acknowledged that traditional archives are something of a limitation to an understanding of
history for it projects a particular linearity and historical thinking. If we want students to get something out of archival research, we must change both the content and terms for such “work.” That is, many educators have asked students to visit the archive to engage in archival research and to dwell within the memories and histories of the archive. But, the cultural logic still remains, a complicity that is, to the linearity of archives and the historical thinking embedded within such. Below are some suggestions about how to work from institutional archives with students whose community histories are situated in.

Educators must prepare students for doing critical work. Students must be educated and mentored on the work involved in going to and entering the archives. As educators, we know, because of our background in rhetorical theory, how to collect, assess, read, and interpret materials. And, while students do indeed know how to read and interpret critically, going to and entering the archives is a different circumstance. Students must be mindful that someone curated such archives, incorporated archival artifacts they believe is a meaningful representation of history, and that overall the archives reflect an ideology and historical way of thinking. I suggest that educators work with students in how to move beyond merely “going to” and “entering” the archives to a subject-position of performativity in the archives. Victor Villanueva (1993) in *Bootstraps* argues, “to study rhetoric becomes a way of studying humans” (p. 77). This idea is relevant and applicable to the studying of archives. What is the rhetoric of archives and what does it suggest of humanity? These are two important questions to have students consider. But, other questions to consider also include: what is familiar? how can one re-imagine the familiar? and can the artifacts direct behaviors in opposition to what is being represented?

Educators must be prepared to engage with students in the messy work of delinking the historic logic of homogenous totality from modernity. Anibal Quijano (2007) warns:
history was conceived as an evolutionary continuum from the primitive to the civilized; from the traditional to the modern; from the savage to the rational (p. 176)

According to Quijano, we must extricate ourselves from the “linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality” (p. 177). In removing ourselves from such linkages, we open ourselves to what totality excludes and occludes, differences and the possibility of other totalities. Walter Mignolo (2011) reminds us how power is carried out in the “views of languages, of recording the past, and of charting territories” (The Darker Side, p. 5; see also Local Histories/Global Designs, p. 24). I suggest that students engage in reflection and reflexivity involving the practice of decoloniality. I see decoloniality, similar to how Krista Ratcliffe (2006) treats rhetorical listening, as a means for cross-cultural communication. With reflection and reflexivity, students can engage in border thinking as a critical method for engaging in what should be a political and ethic endeavor. I also suggest that students be educated on the importance of location, for each local history, as Mignolo (2007) argues, has “its own language, memory, ethics, political theory, and political economy” (p. 498). Students will know this from their own embodied and lived experiences, but they will need assurance that this matters as they “go to” and “enter” institutional archives that may or may not be a representation of their culture or community.

Lastly, educators must be committed, ethically, to addressing the vulnerability of marginalized students such as those from the LRGV. The students I worked with, for example, are first-generation, and they face factors such as familial obligations, economic challenges, and cultural tensions. Such students, in many ways, struggle with internal colonialism. In confronting institutional archives, such as the ones I worked within, which projects a historical way of
thinking about progress and development, an uncomfortable feeling can arise. I suggest an increase in critical dialogue with students focusing on why archival work, the significance of what is being recovered, and rhetorical strategies for exploring and interpreting archival artifacts. Students need to know that in the process of memory-making and history-making, they have the choice to accept, reject, and/or negotiate meaning.

**A Possible Assignment**

In many of my first-year composition courses, I have spent considerable time thinking about how to expand and nuance the idea of a literacy narrative. For students, at times, it is difficult to explore, collect, and interpret what counts as a literacy artifact. I have approached the literacy narratives, many times, from an ethnographic perspective. In taking into account the ways we embody and perform literacy and rhetorical practices, the archive of enunciation is a great way to consider both the performance and meaning attached to literacy artifacts and literacy scenes. Below is a sample assignment incorporating both the epideictic archive and archive of enunciations for a first-year composition course. This would be in conjunction with a major assignment such as the literacy narrative or could stand-alone.
Course
Semester/Year
Unit 1 Overview
Archive of Enunciations and the Epideictic Archive

In Unit 1 we will:
* Become researchers of our everyday lives and environments
* Study and document ways language, identities, and literacies are used/practiced
* Collect literacy artifacts
* Practice and critical rhetorical analysis and interpretation

Description
We all know how to negotiate with language, identities, and literacy practices. What influences the degrees to which we negotiate includes our awareness of the scene/environment and norms for such scenes/environments. Most often, however, these negotiations happen out of habit. Have you ever taken time to consider the “why”? Have you considered these negotiations to be strategic or rhetorical? Whether you have or have not, these negotiations are inextricably tied to our community and place and revised and/or transformed according to how we wish to represent ourselves. That is, our embodied and lived experiences within our community and place provide us with mental maps of how to use and practice language, identities, and literacy practices. But, the ways in which we use and practice such can always change.

This assignment asks you to consider how you use and practice language, identity, and literacy. You will be asked to recover, document, and interpret what you believe represents a literacy artifact. You will want to be conscious of when, where, and with who you use and practice language, identity, and literacy. Also, you are tasked with interviewing two family members, preferably from two different generations. The idea is to gather enough information, and possibly additional literacy artifacts, to talk about how your use and practice of language, identity, and literacy follow, or not, a trajectory.

Additionally, there is a collaborative component. You will be asked to work with other classmates to consider how you use and practice of language, identity, and literacy is similar and dissimilar to others. You will create both a physical and digital map with your classmates, marking points of similarities and dissimilarities. You will provide a rationale to why or why not use and practice are similar or dissimilar. The idea is to see if there is a collective or community-based way of using and practicing language, identity, and literacy.

Writing Components
1: Analytical Memos—As you begin to gather and collect literacy artifacts, you will want to remember the when, where, why, and how. Analytical memos are useful because they allow you think about your awareness of space and time, as well as your thought processes in space and time. They can be short or long, whatever helps you remember the when, where, why, and how. These analytical memos will be helpful as you begin to reflect on what concepts, patterns, or themes emerge. That being said there is also a reflective component.
2: Reflective Folder—I am asking you to put together a collection of your literacy artifacts and analytical memos. By collecting and reflecting upon samples of your own work you will be able to draw conclusions about your understanding of your everyday lived experiences and environments and how they inform your use, practice, and negotiation of language, identity, and literacy. This will lead to a reflection wherein you will consider the impact of this research process and your understanding of language, identity, and literacy.

I believe that if provided the opportunity, students make place and create community around language and identity. As students are mapping, tagging, and considering the degrees of rhetorical re-invention, I’d ask students to put together a collective archive of rhetorical choices and practices to see what interconnections and discontinuities across the class exist. The epideictic feature is not meant to conflate or erase, but rather, establish interconnections across difference. The archive of enunciation reaffirms that displays of expression are epistemically meaningfully, dialectical and deliberative. Such a task would function as a repository of literacy artifacts that can be used as evidence in supporting claims in the literacy narrative.
Chapter 7: Conclusion: Implications for Study and Teaching of Writing and Rhetoric

I have argued and continue to argue that the LRGV is on the cusp of invisibility. In returning to a place I once called home, I must admit, one of my limitations was assuming that this “work” of recovery would be stress-free. In all three sites—the writing center, the classroom, and the archives—delineating the circumstances in which the LRGV culture is represented and displayed has been a challenging one. In my conversations about the LRGV at national conferences, I have relied upon memory. But, in re-turning to the LRGV, I learned quickly that memory was not enough. I had to engage in listening, memory, and participation to illuminate students’ attitudes towards rhetorical practices and activities that shape their ethnolinguistic identities. If my goal was to prove that a Valley ethos and a Valley rhetoric existed, and to advance an argument that the Valley could stand as a trope for such ethos and rhetoric, I needed to deploy a mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework. Even then, deploysuch such frameworks evidenced differences within difference. The scope and the content of this dissertation, simultaneously, was a recovery project and a strategic point of reference for the “work” that remains to be done as I continue past this particular point of my career. As I conclude this dissertation, I focus on implications and where I see my work intervening.

In this dissertation, the focus has been on use and practice of language, self-representation, and literacy practices. Collectively, these itimes constitute rhetorical practice. In essence, I was trying to capture a praxis of and within the LRGV that in every way reflects the type of social action and agency that goes on in this region; that reveals a vision of change and transformation through democratic participation. Throughout the dissertation, I kept asking myself, why the LRGV, what is the significance of the LRGV, and how could this field that I am a part of benefit from this work.
By no means have I offered a complete picture of the LRGV. I do not believe this is the purpose of ethnography or historiography. This project is a beginning, a partial account of the co-participants of this study and me engaged in and through listening, memory, and participation in the LRGV. There are three sites. In each site, I imagine the possibilities for decolonialism and student participation. Together, each site contributes to the wholeness of this dissertation, which is specifically focused on a population and demographic that has remained on the cusp of invisibility in higher education and institutional spaces. One of the limitations of this project is the fact that I sought to work with students from a lower and/or working class background, who may or may not offer different visions of ways of being, seeing, doing, and becoming. But, I did so because I am from this socioeconomic status. There is much more promising and rich work to be done with such a population.

Another question I have asked myself centers along the lines of praxis: Could there exist a “Valley” pedagogy? Some may consider these students nontraditional or novicse in need of assimilation. The problem with applying such constructs in the context of bordered writing is that for the apprentice writer, error equals mistakes (see chapter 5). Throughout the study, students point to the limitations imposed by the novice/expert and entering/assimilation binaries. True analysis of bordered writing involves replacing the error-as-evidence-of-need-for-assimilation with individualized attention to the meaning-making practices and knowledge productions that the bordered writer is constructing. True analysis, moreover, should account for how students relocate their linguistic and literate practices in the classroom, in lieu of assimilating, and consequently re-imagining language-use on the pages. These borderland students demonstrate through their negotiation of multiple languages and identification that assimilation is not the primary goal. In this way, I do believe a “Valley” pedagogy exists, one
that places great emphasis on inquiry, negotiation, and navigation. These three characteristics are at once functional and operational, and while similarities exist in and across other communities, a mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework helps to reveal the struggles students face as they do so, as they are differently constituted in space and time.

In this dissertation, I have argued for the importance of a locally responsive pedagogy. At the onset of this dissertation, I discussed my own experiences of struggle and resilience inside and outside of the academy. Believing that the students of the LRGV have something to teach us, to teach me, I am insisting that local pedagogical approaches be developed, extending to curricula and theory. The rhetorical contexts and situations, and the exigencies in which they are located, illuminates the importance of being attentive to space and time. But, it also highlights two things. First, that student’s own praxis is not only situated within place, in space and time, but also situated in ideas of democratic and political participation, involving the shaping and re-shaping of place. Second, it also highlights how pedagogy, when truly “responsive” to local conditions and student’s needs and desires, is never neutral and always political. I believe that I have exhibited this first point in my journey through the academic pipeline; as for the second, I continue to “work” towards it, balancing institutional goals with the desires and needs of my students.

Before, I continue, I want to make something clear again. There are many places in the LRGV like that of Skyline on Grimes. Yet, our movement and mobility are irreducible: Jumping into dumpsters around the apartment complex to collect cans was embarrassing. “Embarrass is when you steal,” mom would say. One of my first recollections of reading and writing was to a father I knew only through letters and pictures. “I want you to be better than me, stay in school and do good,” he’d say. I often worried as a child because I felt like I was seeing and
experiencing the world differently. “There is no manual for how to raise a child as a teenager,” my single mom with barely a high school diploma would tell me, as she’d try to soothe my concerns. I turned to writing at a young age in attempts to understand my situation. I remember, as if it were yesterday, those paddling’s I’d receive every time I visited the principal’s office, on the cusp of being suspended and/or expelled. Ironically, it was my principal who reminded me of the accento on my last name, as I would sign those referral papers. She’d say to be proud of my Mexican heritage. I remember never staying at one daycare, because I was always getting kicked out, stressing my single mother out. I remember my tío picking me up from jail, he giving me a lecture about how not to go down that road, and hearing my grandma cry in the kitchen, when she thought I could not hear. I remember how hard I tried not to be like him, a person who I never met, a person I only knew through letters, yet a person who I was just like. I remember feeling alone, not feeling like anyone believed in me, no longer being able to see a future beyond the LRGV. This is the type of student I am advocating for. For many of us, school does not work out, things just do not go our way, and we begin not being able to see ourselves out of the Valley or our situation. But, we have hope. We believe in change and pursue change even when statistics tell us we have not changed.

It is a scary feeling, when you can no longer see yourself out of a place, when you feel that you can no longer get yourself out of your circumstances and conditions. 2828 East Grimes was removed from Ona and Cora Street in Harlingen, Texas. My mom saw it as progress and a new opportunity. Yet, what I learned from my writings/reflections was that my friends and I teetered between what was and what could be, never without the overriding sense of knowing our place and knowing our differences, the differences that for some of us would make all the difference between “what was” and “what could be.” 2828 East Grimes may have been removed
from the barrios, but we were not. It is for students who experience this type of reality that I
write this dissertation for—that is for those students where there are no expectations for them to
attend higher education, who feel alienated and displaced by the fact that they are misunderstood
because of their socioeconomic status.

A Reflection: First group session. There we were, in a room that was so familiar
to them, for it was the same room their composition class was held in. I was
wearing shorts and a shirt, my tattoos revealing themselves. A student comes in
early and we start talking about the age I received my tattoos. He shows me his:
the name of his neighborhood and his gang. Others start to gather. There we
were, a group, and we all shared at least two things in common: 1) We were
brown and from the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In our introductions, one girl says
she is from Peñitas, another from Mission, and another from La Feria and 2) “We
are here,” was the consensus from a question I asked regarding the “biggest
accomplishment so far.” Some expressed concern for how long they would stay in
school, very few believed they would actually make it through, and two were
determined that they could overcome any obstacle.

We ate some taquitos. “It’s not that we do not want to succeed,” one
student said. We could familiarize with each other on that level, we connected. “I
just don’t know how, I don’t know if I can,” another said afterwards. I kept
thinking to myself, si se puede. They started talking about where they were from.
Some of us were from the barrios, from the colonias, and some of us were
between lower and middle class housing. “We want to be here,” was the
consensus, I responded with a nod and a simple response, “I know.” I kept
thinking how we could never be outside of hegemony. These statements reflected how hegemony had an effect on the mind and body.

“What do you think?” This was a constant question asked to me throughout our conversation. “I think that we are the first in our families to go to college; I think we have seen ourselves here, but have never considered how we would stay; I think this is one of our biggest challenges, yet nothing new from our reality of survival,” is something I wish I would have said as I responded to the question the first time around. Instead, I said, “you must be strong and remember all your experiences, because that is what has gotten you here today.” For me, at the time, this was more important, for it conveyed that their experiences mattered and that they have indeed partaken in real experiences that has created a space for them to carve out, to make their own, and to re-shape.

Some asked for another taquito. “This is us, that is what we do, we taquitos you know,” one student responded as I asked, “another one?” “So, what do you mean, this is us, that is what you do,” is the question I followed up with. This became a reoccurring theme for us during our one hour and a half conversation. We were all form the Valle, and that is how the conversation started, in naming where we were from and who we are—Somos del Valle y somos Valle. No one could really define what this meant definitively, but it was constantly reiterated. But, the significance was that on the level of humanity, of living, of being and becoming, EL Valle became a constitutive part to their ways of seeing, knowing, and doing.
If we are serious about acknowledging differences within difference, we must focus attention on communities in which make and display rhetorical practices in their everyday. If we are serious about creating spaces for student-centered pedagogy in our classrooms, we must be open to our students shaping and reshaping that space. If we are serious about being ethically and socially responsible in the teaching of all students, then this “work” begins with attending to student’s needs and desires and agencies and actions. At the onset we must work to cultivate such through curricula and assignments that allows them to demonstrate their rhetorical practices of inquiry, negotiation, and navigation. They can teach us about democratic and political participation, about rhetoric and literacy, and about history and memory that coalesces with ethnolinguistic identities and self-representations. In this way, we could have a pluriversality of epistemologies and ethos in which the vitality of rhetoric and composition can flourish, not strictly in the context of resistance and subversion, but rather, in the contexts of inquiry and interrogation, interpretation and social action, and cultural expression and democratic participation. Below, I talk about the implications of my research and I offer a potential assignment and task that calls attention to space and time.

Implications

The question that emerges in all this work on language, literacy, and rhetoric is what are the implications of my work? David Gold’s (2008) work in *Rhetoric at the Margins* is significant in that he calls attention to the need for locally responsive pedagogy. I have alluded, and sometimes insisted throughout, that any local/regional pedagogy begins with an understanding of place, culture, and people in space and time. I’ve argued that attentiveness to micro-human movement and mobility can illuminate the rhetorical contexts and situations in which people embody, participate, and re-invent and re-shape identity and subjectivity and language and
rhetoric. My own embodied and lived experiences have taught me of the importance of place and space. It is in place and space that I understand, and by which I can articulate as well, what the “local” means to me. The meanings, as I have discussed, are rooted in local and community, as well as individual histories of struggles and achievements.

In the context of space, the field of rhetoric and composition has engaged in what some scholars call a “spatial turn” (see Reynolds, 1998/2004; Dobrin & Weisser, 2002; Hawk, 2007; Grego & Thompsons, 2008; Gold, 2008/2012). Yet, in regards to Mexican Americans and the borderlands, the field has appropriated a singular identity term (e.g., Chicano/a) and a universal abstraction of the “borderlands” in the studying and teaching of Mexican Americans. I cannot say this enough, Mexican Americans have evolved in disparate ways, and, borderlands are not created equally. In regards to the enterprise of methods and methodologies, the girth of interests has remained on space. Such interests, I must profess, undermines efforts to see differences within difference, and rather, maintains an essentializing discourse about Mexican Americans that has for so long been inattentive to class and local/regional spatial and temporal differences. And, before the essentializing argument is pitted against my study of place, culture, and people, let me respond by insisting that what I have illuminated, and worked to do so, is the ability of rhetoric to delineate a collective subjectivity and ethos from shared embodied and lived community and individual experiences. At least, that is, this is what their narratives of struggle and engagement in rhetorical activities suggest. Indigenous and Caribbean scholars have articulated a similar argument in recent years for acknowledging and recognizing differences within difference (see Cushman, 2008/2016; Lyons, 2010; Browne, 2013). I follow in the same tradition, but within a different context.
The girth of discussions on methods and methodologies should be on space and time, together, the same way that critical rhetoricians are attentive to how colonization and the manifestations of colonization move in and across space and time (e.g., coloniality). This, essentially, is the misstep that has been made in the field. In rushing to understand Mexican Americans, and articulate writing pedagogies, for the study and teaching of Mexican Americans, concepts such as the “contact zone” and the “borderland” have been appropriated, without hashing out how, or perhaps merely assuming, how “time” fits into the equation. Consider the implications of Mary Louis Pratt’s (1992) concept of contact zones, and Jose David Saldivar’s (1997) transfrontera contact zones, that which depicts single, and simplified, sets of principles and abstract configurations of space. Much of the field’s missteps are not strictly in adopting these terms, because they offer insights into the dimensions of social relations. No, the missteps are in, as Wendy Hesford and Eileen Schell (2008) remind us in their introduction to College English’s special topics, the romanticizing of terms and tokenizing (and monumentalizing) of individual writers.

Gloria Anzaldúa is a prolific writer and someone whose work, and she herself, has been appropriated. So, let’s consider the Mexican American and the borderlands in the context of Anzaldúa’s (1999) work in Borderlands/La Frontera. Gloria Anzaldúa defines “pocho” as a cultural traitor, wherein the “cultural traitor” (the Mexican American) now speaks the oppressor’s language (e.g., English), distorting the Spanish language. As Anzaldúa explores the emergence of “Chicano Spanish” in periods of colonization and the manifestations of “Chicano Spanish” as it is articulated amongst the people within the region of South Texas, what becomes

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47 Jose Saldivar (1997) defines transfrontera contact zone as a “social space of subaltern encounters…in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multi-voiced aesthetics” (p. 13-14).
clear is that this “bastard language”—a border tongue that developed from the de-
territorialization and reterritorialization of la frontera and continues to be enunciated from the
hyper-transient space of la frontera—is a cultural production in space.

In this space, Anzaldua begins to articulate a new consciousness, one that destabilizes
traditional and cultural dichotomies of oppression. In this space, the borderlands, “The U.S.-
Mexican border es una herida abrieta where the Third world gates against the first and bleeds”
(p. 25). Anzaldua goes on, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the
emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (p. 25).
Anzaldua traces the consequences of war, colonization, and the infusion of white culture upon
Mexican land and territory, while offering a personal dissent on sexuality, identity, and language.
The borderlands come to stand for a “vague” and “undetermined” place for Anzaldua.

In this “vague” and “undetermined” place, Anzaldua works to theorize a new
consciousness; one that Ana Louise Keating refers to as mestizaje ecriture and Andrea Lunsford
refers to it as mestiza rhetoric. In her (Anzaldua) definition of such a consciousness, la mestiza
“constantly has to shift out of habitual formations” to “divergent thinking” in a “pluralistic
mode” (p. 101). This is an important concept, because essentially “la mestiza consciousness” is a
liminal space wherein history, cultural symbols, and ways of seeing and thinking are re-
interpreted and changed. Essentially, what la mestizo consciousness occasions is a bending of
time. The idea of “mestizo/a” is an important aspect of Anzaldua’s theorization of subjectivity,
one that confers in the identities associated with Mexican, Indian, and Black culture. This
subjectivity, an indigenous one, represents an oppositional consciousness, one wherein the
subjugated people are informed, dignified, and housed in a Chicano/a architecture struggling to
survive and struggling to overcome.
Anzaldua, however, has stated that the content of *Borderlands/La Frontera* was meant to be a representation, and not strictly, a reality of borderlands (see Lunsford & Ouzgane, 2004). Yes, *Borderlands/La Frontera* was a representation of language, of place and space, and of subjectivity, but it was not meant to simplify transgressive identities nor create the illusion of a universal space such as the borderlands. As Chandra Mohanty (2003) has constantly reminded us, we need to be able to illuminate the interconnectedness of histories and experiences of struggle, while attending to the ways in which difference is inherent in local culture and historical contexts. So, I ask, as does Hesford and Schell (2008), why is it “our first impulse as scholars” to “monumentalize the individual writer rather than redefine the field’s terrain and its objects of study” (p. 462)?

Many scholars have offered voices of contention and dissent against the identity-term Chicano/a and against the discourse of Chicanismo, because there are very real concerns about fixed categories of social identities and the ability of discourse to be absolute and deterministic. There are some who argue that the work of Anzaldua risks the collapsing of transgressive identities into vacuity and abstraction (Perez-Torres, 2006, p. 26), who argue and point to the issue of “utopic undifferentiation” and “indistinguishability” (Jagose, 1994 p. 152), who argue there is no sense of a “tightly localized, specific, richly ethnographic assessment of one specific part of the border” as Americo Paredes does in his works (Limon, 1998, p. 157), and who contest the use of mestizaje itself as it fails to acknowledge differences (see Saenz, 1997; Sanjines, 2004). The field of rhetoric and composition has not reframed from the use of naming students or rhetorical practices as Chicano/a nor has it considered the ethical implications of such strategic essentialism. Many have asked me, why not begin the dissertation with Anzaldua. My response is simple, Anzaldua may be your point of reference into understanding Mexican Americans and
the borderlands, but my point of reference is situated within my own embodied and lived experiences in the LRGV.

The misstep of misunderstanding Anzaldúa’s work is observed in the extent to which a politics of knowledge is circulated and produced as the penultimate understanding of Mexican American peoples, signifying the temporary departure of both an identity (e.g., Chicano) and language (e.g., Chicano Spanish) into a state of consolidated metaphysical hierarchy, an ossification of fixed identity and rhetorical practices, that reflects a shift from provisional to determinism. As I argued in the introduction and elsewhere, this deterministic discourse has both undermined civil rights discourse that occurred prior and had resulted in the denegation of self-representations that fall outside the fixity of this ethnic identity. Beyond, then, strategic essentialism, there is the need to deconstruct such essentializing spaces (Fuss, 1989 p. 58), for strategic essentialism should “never be a part of the immediate, social, historical, and political conditions in which one lays claim to a particular identity” (Ritchie, 1990, p. 262), because inevitably the valorization of some voices over the others constitutes instruments of regulatory regime (Butler, 1993, p. 19). I do not begin with Chicano/a as my point of reference, because I have a different experience with and through language, identification, and self-representation. This is important because identity-terms should not be and cannot be static or fixed.

One of the correctives I have attempted to make of such missteps is centering and focusing on the constitutive nature of space and time. This is significant especially within a context that gives an impression that we—my people—are represented as stuck in space and outside of time, but in which I count with saying that we—my people—have shown that we are indeed makers of place, shapers of subjectivities, and engineers of negotiated rhetorical practices. So, one might look at a collective assemblage of texts surrounding Mexican American
identity and borderland culture from authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Americo Paredes, and Jose Limon. From such works, we can gain insight on how identity and place are constructed in a particular period and locale, how these notions of borderland identity and place change over space and time, and how the narratives themselves are in production of space and time. This is important, because these three texts illuminate the complexities of a borderland and identity, providing at the very least a limitation to the often framing of borderlands and identity as simply: a narrative of opposition towards Anglo domination creating a binary of colonized and colonizer; a narrative of homogenous identities (e.g., Chicano/a, mestizo/a) that disregards internal differences; and a narrative of monolithic cultural contexts. This is typically what happens in Chicano/a methodologies concerned with the effects of globality on local culture. In such renderings, we learn very little about space itself, about how spaces and places are changed and transformed, and/or how spaces and places are about specificities and particularities that offer insight into the varying complexities of local and global critical interactions. Yet, attentiveness to time might offer us insight into everyday lived experiences, intentions and desires, and social action and modalities of agency that in everyway is within and in friction with globalization.

I am not arguing that resistance is not inevitable, rather I am suggesting that as we continue to define our field’s terrain and objects of study, we do so in the context of space-time, within the rhetorical situations of place, culture, and social relations. That means that no matter how progressive a Chicano/a agenda or framework may be, the instructor is responsible in effectively responding to the actual exigencies in which students are situated. That means no matter how well intended the deployment of strategic essentialism is to the instructor, he or she must be mindful of difference, mindful of how identity politics is a politicization of place and people in space and time. In my own embodied and lived experiences in the LRGV, in working
with students from the LRGV, I know how important it is to recognize the differences within difference. In the next section, I consider ways to re-envision new horizons, creating an environment in which students can engage in the production of classrooms, pedagogies, and assignments. This is not done strictly within spatial metaphors, rather, in the interworking of space-time.

My findings from data collected—interviews, group sessions, shadowing—has a number of implication for rhetoric and composition. First, there is pedagogical value in understanding the intentions and desires behind student’s linguistic and rhetorical practices. Their attitudes say something about the local contexts and local exigencies in which they are situated. Their use and practice of linguistic and rhetorical practices also suggest an expression of social action and agency that requires instructors to engage with, on a local scale of observation, in order to serve such a historically marginalized and racialized student population and community. The reality that borderland students face provides a unique opportunity for instructors to deploy pedagogies, develop curricula, and incorporate culturally relevant and responsive texts that can truly serve the needs of such students. This may indeed require a transdisciplinary approach, one that I have attempted to weave throughout, which calls upon the disciplines of history, geography, and rhetorical studies to understand the contexts of cultural practices and contexts of situations in the LRGV. The point I am making is that the field needs to be more invested in locally responsive “work,” work that recognizes and respects differences within difference. In order to ‘understand the interplay between local and global patterns,’ as David Gold (2008) writes, I believe that we must have a fuller understanding of how language, rhetoric, and literacy are entangled in representations, meaning-making practices, and praxis. I believe this requires, to a degree,
research by faculty, at the level of human practices. This at the very least necessitates scales of observation.

This study has implications for faculty research in writing and rhetoric. In the spatial turn in rhetoric and composition, what has been absent is time. All bodies, geographies, language, and rhetorical practices are tied to space and time. In many ways, what we need to do is call into question the scalar logics of globalization and universalism as descriptors of all, and instead, re-orient to relevant scales of observation, wherein the social praxis of the local and the flow of the global contribute to changed and transformative meanings. I argue that we must be researchers of our institutions, our classrooms, and our students, which calls attention to discourses of scale, specifically, ideologies of scale and scale-making projects. Academic language and discourse of difference has often been clouted by a popular imagination of instantaneous interconnections. This imagination absorbs the rhetorics of the everyday, everyday language, and everyday consciousness and experiences. Difference, hence, becomes flattened, and people are observed not as differentially positioned, but as one of the same in the struggle for civil, political, and economic rights.

So, I propose that we scale down, to the flows and circulations of meaning, made possible through movement and mobility, and re-think how we present and represent people and culture in space and time through constructions of scale. The questions we should be asking in such research are: how are place, geographies, and rhetorical practices made, whether it is to protect, maintain, or reinforce ideologies of a local community; what are the implications of transgressions that challenge the historiography of a nation-state and that revise, change, and/or transform the construct of a national identity into something that reflects the vernacular community; how do classrooms become a representational and material mode through which
particular identities and social relations of power are privileged; and, how do student’s everyday lived experiences transfer into the classroom, where their beliefs and ideologies are contested, where they are constantly negotiating in a discursive construction of space and time, and where their bodies are written into and onto pages? The question of scale is always a matter of mobility, which is always located and materialized. I must ask, are we allowing bodily co-presence of our students in space and time, because whether we acknowledge it or not, students are active in both developments and performances of becoming.

This study also has implications for cross-disciplinary work of rhetorical studies, composition, mobilities, and decolonial studies. Decolonialism is not about one site or one author, it is not about humanity in sameness, but rather, the pluriversality of differences that creates humanity. Under a modern/colonial world system, people share a struggle and plight for being heard in and on their own terms. Their geo and body politics of knowledge emerges from dwelling within this system, which cannot be universalized. Micro-movement and mobility is not about global scale of flow and circulation. Rather, it is about the entanglement of movement, representation, and praxis that occurs at the local level, which shapes and re-shapes place, geographies, and culture. Mobility is an irreducible embodied experience, which “carries with it the burden of meaning” (Cresswell, 2006, p. 6-7). Under a modern/colonial world system, those framed as “out of place” are characterized as being stuck in space and behind in time. Their constellation of mobility reveals how “others” are shaped by space and time. Yet, their politics of mobility illuminates how they are very much in the production of space and time. Together, students such as those from the LRGV have a geo, body, and mobile politics of knowledge that has the potential to change the classroom and transform the performativity of creating compositions.
Together, in converging mobilities and decolonial studies, what we might be able to observe are the decontextualization/recontextualization of language, the relocalization of rhetorical practices, and the interplay between a grounding of established knowledge and “reconstructing” of local knowledge “for contemporary needs” (see Canagarajah, 2009). This is why I have created a platform to engage in a multi-sited ethnography in the future. Because, in order to break from the idea of students from the LRGV being stuck in space and behind in time, it is important to participate in their own movement and mobility to illuminate how they move in and across social and rhetorical spaces. For example, the LRGV is known for its strong Mexican culture, but this is so because of the mobility of people and their practices. The classroom, in another example, is conceived as this fixed and stable space, yet, in observing the movement of language and bodies, what becomes evident is how these classrooms can be shaped and re-shaped. While I have indeed argued there exist a collective ethos, it is in being attentive to students’ intentions and desires of attending school, of using and practicing language, of self-representing, that we gain insight on the pluriversality of differences. Imagine, if we could create an environment, a culture, in which we allow these differences to be written on pages. By enabling students to re-shape the scenes of writing that serve their own intentions and desires, we could illuminate their multi-sites of participation, wherein they inquire, negotiate, and navigate meaning. This, for students, can prove valuable, as they are able to draw upon their own experiences of moving in and across space and time, and possibly being able to make connections to scenes of writing in space and time.

**Correctives Towards New Horizons**

One of the correctives I make in this spatial turn, in this continued theorization of spaces, third spaces as well, is attentiveness to time, for the local is always oriented in and by past and
present dimensions. The field, and theory of space, has gotten it right, in that space is the loci of being. Students such as Alex enunciate from the LRGV, giving way to the importance of space.

**Alex:** Soy del Valle Romeo…He tenido buenas experiencias y malas también… pero sabes que… esta es mi tierra… entiendes… aquí es donde mi familia vive, aquí es donde crecí, aquí es donde aprendí todo y por eso digo “Soy del Valle.”

In the statement above, Alex is offering a testimony of sorts, of the importance of space and place to his sense of being. His sense of ethos and ethics, as a rhetorical agent, is displayed briefly in his statement of how he has had good and bad experiences in the LRGV. In this way, these experiences, to some extent, have shaped his ways of being and seeing in the world, which is importance because they stem from being in the LRGV.

Yet, when I read writing assignments from students such as Daniella, I am reminded of the importance of time, as a past and present dimensions.

**Daniella:** The day of graduation reminded me that I’m setting a new norm in my family. I am the middle child in my family and my mother never finished high school, my dad didn’t finish school but did go to college although he didn’t get his degree due to complicated reasons and my sister dropped out but later on earned her G.E.D. Knowing that as I graduated with honors, something that the previous generations before me hadn’t and that my little brother will and does look up to me is something I pride myself in.

Whether Daniella directly acknowledges it or not, her presence, and submission of an assignment in a first-year writing course was/is contingent upon her “setting a new norm.” Daniella is from the LRGV, and like Alex, expresses the significance of space and place. However, what is different in this instance is Daniella writing her body onto the page, engaging in a type of
reflection that points to the rhetorical activity of doing and becoming. “Setting a new norm” is due in part to her sense of mobility, her sense of space-time in which “previous generations” before her had not entered into higher education. So yes, space and materiality is still important, but her rhetorical practices, although shaped by space and materiality, are also engaging in the production of space and time as well, “setting a new norm,” a new knowledge production, and giving way to new meaning-making practices. And, in the process, she breaks from any perceived conceptualization of fixity within the familial structure; she herself is undergoing, and participating in, her own processes of change and transformation.

I want to make another corrective. Instead of giving priority to the global current, and articulating this rhetoric of limitations of the local, especially in the context of borderland students such as those from the LRGV, how about we begin from local embodied and lived experiences, from *ideologies of scale* and *scale-making*. I see the merit in Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton’ (2002) “Limits of the Local” and Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner’s (2009) “Composing in a Global-Local Context” wherein the argument is that the local is shaped by global forces. But, there is a misstep in both contexts, that of articulating the word “limits” and associating it with the local, further eroding the local (see Cresswell, 2004), and that of arguing the nature of the local being “shaped” by the global instead of articulating a dialogic and dialectical nature between the local and global. We use the rhetoric of the global current and apply it to pedagogy, theory, and curricula without a full understanding of how it truly affects the local. The field is drawn to the simultaneity of interconnections, missing how the local accommodates, revises, and/or transforms global flows. It is this oversight that enables social and cultural violence.
In “Limits of the Local,” Brandt and Clinton (2002) propose a limitation of arguments on local literacies while placing emphasis on the capacity of “technologies of literacy” to travel over time and space (p. 344). They animate the role of “objects”, based on Bruno LaTour’s notion of actors and agents, and posit a parallel relationship between literacy and “objects,” wherein literacy accumulates layers of meaning that consequentially negates meaning as it originated within context. The “locale” and “local interactions,” Brandt and Clinton claim, go on in and across local situations, and thus, is a ubiquitous framework of “confinements.” In their effort to “repair” the break between the local and global, they propose a re-thinking of the relationship from a global perspective, from an analytical frame of “networks” that expands across time and space and threads both “into and out of local context and other contexts (p. 348). In systematically prescribing to an analytical frame of networks and agents, Brandt and Clinton highlight the importance of interconnections and interrelationships, between local and globalizing contexts, as they inform literacy and literacy events (and achievements) and have a role in production itself (e.g., a thing-status to literacy). They write, “globalizing connects are regular actions in reading and writing” (p. 352), and suggests similarly that because people and things “fold-in” over temporal and spatial extensions, “literacy is not wholly produced or reproduced in local practice but rather is a contributing actor in it and that its meaning live on beyond any immediate stipulations entailed in localizing it” (p. 353). Clinton and Brandt ascribe to “de-localizing meaning” and assert their argument that “when groups are really left to devise their own literacy practices out of local resources,” this may not necessarily signal “empowerment” (p. 354).
I am reminded, however, of Anna Tsing (2000) once more, who in “The Global Situation,” articulates the dialogic and dialectical nature of the local and global with that of the image of a creek:

Imagine a creek cutting through a hillside. As the water rushes down, it carves rock and moves gravel; it deposits silt on slow turns; it switches courses and breaks earth dams after a sudden storm. As the creek flows, it makes and re-makes its channels. (p. 327)

Tsing argues that to understand the significance of the creek, we must be attentive to the elements that “carve” its channels of flow and establish its historical presence of circulation. Tsing suggests that we valorize flow and circulation, but are not attentive to the “carving” of the channel. She argues that “we lose touch” with the material and institutional conditions and components through “which powerful and central sites are constructed” (p. 330). Ultimately, we lose touch with the ideologies of scale and scale making projects that are always in the context of the global, and, always about local critical interactions with the global.

I am reminded, further, of Allan Pred’s work, which asks us to consider the interplay between community and experience, societal and material structures, and change and transformation. He writes that in observation of roles and actions, from their sequential and locational context, social practice is not possible without a society generating and perpetuating structure itself. In re-orienting scales of observation, Pred critiques scholars for treating individuals and objects in a “thingified” manner, in a reductionist and “piecemeal fashion.” He asks, where are those “cultural meanings” that are “divorced” from social and economic practices, removed from “embodied-corpo-real” subjects? His point, “local differences persist for there is nothing which is literally global” (“Out of Bounds,” p. 1075). Pred does not argue that
there are not influences of local (indigenous) and nonlocal (exogenous) origins, for there is never a pure or authentic local, but in the face of disappearing geographies, he stresses the importance of local distinctiveness and difference. Because the structuration of social systems occurs in time and space (see Giddens, 1981), and, because the “material continuity both of the people who participate in that process and of any natural and humanly made objects employed in time-space,” all is inseparable from the unfolding of the everyday (“Place as Historically,” p. 280). The nature of being, doing, and knowing cannot be globalized.

It was interesting when I asked the question, “how do you see the Lower Rio Grande Valley and how would you characterize it,” in the first round of interviews. Many have travelled beyond the region, and offered reflections of difference:

Jose: I’ve been to Michigan and Florida, but it is not the same like el Valle. It’s different. We speak differently, we dress differently, we eat different kinds of Mexican food.

Abrienda: I went to San Antonio with my boyfriend recently, its way different that here. It is very touristy, expensive food, and its not like the Valley, maybe because it bigger, but it just didn’t feel the same.

Daniella: I know we are not “real” Mexicans, or that’s what they say about us. But, I’ve never heard of anyone calling themselves “Tex Mex” or Latino or saying this is a Tex Mex place. To be honest, I’ve never thought about what I call myself. But, if I had to, I would say this is a Mexicanized place. It is our own world, its been like that forever, right?

It was interesting to hear student’s fumble on how they would characterize the LRGV, but found it easy to say that the region was different from others. The people of the LRGV have a way of
accommodating, changing, and/or transforming place, geography, and social relations, and perhaps, this is what Daniella meant by saying this is a “Mexicanized place.”

If today’s central problem of global interactions is the “tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (see Appadurai, 1990, p. 221), then we must account for the residual, prevalent and emergent aspects of cultural and social forms expressed within place and geographies, which carry their own spatial and temporal attributes. The notions of historical bodies and historical place play out and emerge from place-specific historical and social contexts, but subjectivity and social action is never fixed, it is always in the act of becoming. Therefore, although the flow of human conduct and the mobility of humans makes place, in the local context, we must be keen to how intentions and desires determine the becoming of place and people, which is always a matter of critical interaction with the global. It is with an attentiveness to time that we can truly begin to understand how people, place, culture and language is always becoming through ideologies of scale and scale-making projects. That is, there is no place and no culture without human interaction. Becoming, in the sense of accommodations and modifications, change and transformations, and corporeal actions and intentions, is performative, within and at micro and macro levels, but inseparable from social action and everyday practices. In this way, I see people in the LRGV changing and transforming the world, which again takes place in specific spatial and temporal locations, but always within the context of the global. If we nuance interconnectedness by recognizing how difference is delineated in place, or as Walter Mignolo calls it, the pluriversality of differences, society can be transformed through these ideologies of scale and scale-making projects.

Homogenized global spaces, as Tim Cresswell (2004) notes, are a result of the loss of the sense of place in a global current. In this rush to globalizing students and classrooms, we forget
how important it is for students to know their history, to know themselves within that history, and to associate their mobility of historical and community meanings as a reflection of politics. If we ignore how place is the loci of being, seeing, doing, and becoming, we lose sight of the ways in which our students engage, as rhetorical agents, in the making of place, the shaping of subjectivities, and the engineering of being and becoming. Ultimately, we lose sight of the intentions and desires of students in using and practicing language and rhetorical practices.

In conversations with students, Beatrice Mendez Newman argued that “If students are not allowed to talk about their home, where they come from, they will struggle with locating their voice, which is situated within this community, and this is a disservice, because they have a lot to bring to the table, a lot to offer in terms of meaning.” Student’s indeed found Newman a responsive educator, with a consensus that “she was always there, willing to help, guiding us, and offering a lot of example on how to analyze, critique, and interpret.” Yet, students, again, were a little disappointed on how limited there was of a focus on their community and their people. “We matter too,” Jose stated in our last interview, “I am not sure why we had to focus so much on the African American community.” It is important, as we each discussed in our last interviews, to be able to know our history, where we come from, and how we engage in the making of our place, geography, and society.

Another corrective, I’d like to add comes by way of Western models of resistance and subversion. As I discussed in the introduction, there is a stark contrast articulated between representations of Mexican American and representations of Chicano/a. What a model of resistance subversion does is permit the validity and authenticity of one set of representation at the expense of the “other.” As I showed in the introduction as well, in the communications between Hector P. Garcia and those of the Chicano/a movement, visibility and silence becomes a
matter of survival even amongst those in which there is a shared ethnic background. On the other hand, in many ways, the construction of the Westerner identity is contingent upon agencies tied to resistance and subversion. That is, if the student is not seen resisting and subverting they have no real agency. What I argue we must do is focus on social action and participation. The question must be asked, are we, as rhetoricians and compositionists, providing the type of sponsorship that allows students to see the meaning, and shape and re-shape that meaning, of their own cultural systems, in and on their own terms? Are we, that is, creating an environment in which students can produce and perform in the production of space and time. This, as I argued elsewhere, demonstrates the importance of *mindfulness of difference* and a *mobile-decolonial interpretive framework*.

**Of Literacy Narratives**

The body is always implicated in the words produced on paper, for the body, and the bodily experiences that inform the creation of word upon the page, cannot be separated from the performance of composing, nor, removed from the space and time in which it does so. However, in the process of re-creating and re-inventing something anew upon the page—from body to words and from body to pages—and in the epiphanies of the body’s own acknowledgment of spatialization and temporalization, the body produces for it only knows how to inspire to speak back. However remised the body may feel, within these spatializations and temporalizations, it knows all to well how “literacies are positioned in relation to the social institutions and power relations which sustain them” (Barton et al., 2000, p. 1); the body speaks back in space and time out of recourse. And, out of recourse, a theory of the flesh (see Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2015) emerges, capable of breaking the norms of spatialization and temporalization, bending space and time, wherein the body can exist in the interceptions of multiple spaces and varying times, of
metaphorical, material and physical realities. It is this capability and capacity that which points to the significance of bodily and mobile production in space and time. The question is how can we move students from this liminal space to the actualization of such agency and social action?

First, I am proposing a mobile literacy mapping exercise to function in conjunction with a literacy narrative. I am concerned with how the “everyday” is assumed to be a given and how difference is overlooked. At the heart of such a mapping exercise then is listening. In her chapter, Maps of the Everyday,” Nedra Reynolds (2004) talks about geographies of rhetoric and writing. With an emphasis on “spatiality” and spatial practices she writes, “Mapping…contributes to geographic rhetorics by insisting upon the real and imagined production of space and more complex ways of represented places and spaces” (p. 109). Reynolds has students listen to the relationships between space, belonging and exclusion. Yet, what I want to propose is that students listen to the mutually constitutive dimension of space and time. On the one hand, a mapping exercise would build on previous work that links literacy to visual representations (see Cintron, 1997; Reynolds, 1998/2004; Barta-Smith & DiMarco, 2009; Gallegos, 2013). On the other hand, to account for space and time is to challenge notions of the everyday as self-evident or movement as neutral. As Alistair Pennycook (2010) writes in, Language as a Local Practice, a “focus on movement takes us away from space being only about location, and instead draws attention to a relationship between time and space, to emergence, to a subject in process—performed rather preformed—to becoming” (p. 140). Remember, in, “Making Composing Visible,” Julie Lundquist et al. (2010) reminds us of the importance of “time-use diaries,” an emphasis on “forms of work” as happening and becoming in time and space (p. 209). The idea then is to create an environment, which will yield a microanalysis of literacy practices as they
occur in various forms of exchanges and interactions in space and time. Second, I am proposing we re-think literacy narratives in the context of space and time.

There is plenty of scholarship on literacy narratives. In this section, I review two pieces of scholarship pertaining to narrative and literacy narratives. In the first close reading, Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen focus on the elements of historical bodies and space, in place/out of place binaries, and rhetorical agents in the production of meaning. In the second reading, Mary Soliday situates the student body as text—as read, as accessed, and as performed and translated.

In, “Reading Literacy Narratives,” Eldred and Mortensen (1992) write that literacy narratives offer a way into studying the social process of language acquisition and literacy. Their close reading of Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion as a literacy narrative, and how it is constructed out of a “literacy myth,” is interesting. Henry, a central character, is the educator, a “creator of something from nothing,” invested in ‘inventing new Eliza’s’ at the expense of Eliza’s cultural and social displacement (p. 515; 518). Eliza, the other central character, is the subject of Henry’s obsession with control and power, a sponsor of literacy (Brandt, p. 167-168) and a gate keeper, who “writes in a code intelligible to only a few” and who “inscribes language according to an exclusive standard in order to make it ‘properly’ readable and in order to represent its deviant qualities” (Eldred & Mortensen, p. 517). Eliza’s vernacular body, language, and literacy are suspicious and seemingly empty of knowledge and meaning, at least from Henry’s perspective. Eliza is “caught between old and new selves” because of Henry, but eventually begins to contemplate at what expense (p. 519).

The close reading illuminates several important factors about language acquisition and literacy. First, identity, language, literacy, and region (and place) are bound together. Yet, the question of “where to locate them” and what “to say about them” highlights the undertones of
colonial tendencies of situating who/what is in place/out of place. Eldred and Mortensen write: “regions, like maps, describe space: they enclose homogeneity and thereby mark difference” (p. 524). Second, language, literacy, and identity are shaped by space and time. Yet, the impact of spatial and temporal colonial difference reinforces literate/illiterate spaces just as they reinforce the absence of bodies or bodies present in objectified ways. Eldred and Mortensen write: “Henry believes in a primitive/civilized distinction…he is Culture, and Eliza that savage Other” (p. 527). Stereotypes have affective value because they rely on “historical narratives about identities and human characteristics” (Wingard, p. 21). Lastly, people are shaped by space and time, but they too are rhetorical agents in production of it. Reading literacy narratives, Eldred and Mortensen write, is to focus “on a battle over language” and “movement into multiple literacies” that “are rarely isolated, uncomplicated” (p. 530). While language and literacy are in polylog with and intertextualized in histories and memories, I also believe Eliza’s movement draws “attention to a relationship between time and space,” where the corporeal body (and consciousness) and language are always becoming, created out of “purposively or habitually adding action elements” that helps define, renew, and/or redefine the self (Pennycook, p. 140; “Social Reproduction,” p. 12; 19).

In “Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives,” Soliday (1994) states that literacy narratives are told in “ordinary people’s conversations about their daily lives” (p. 511). Her focus is on the “passages between language worlds,” the “liminal crossings between worlds,” and the possibility of literacy narratives as “sites of self-translations where writers can articulate the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds” (p. 511). Soliday believes literacy stories can offer a lens by which students view language as unusual. This approach, she contends, enables students not to see language as natural but as
strange. She argues: “When they are able to evaluate their experiences from an interpretive perspective, authors achieve narrative agency by discovering that their experience is, in fact, interpretable” (p. 512). The arch of Soliday’s essay relies on this argument that student’s stories matter, that they are interpretable, and that they provide the opportunity to explore and interpolate the interplay of their dialectic and deliberative performances. The latter offers the occasion for students to be in polylog with and intertexualized themselves in histories and memories of language and literacy acquisition in and across the dialogues of other classmates’ literacy stories. Soliday emphasizes how students are constitutively shaped by and shaping meaning.

Soliday believes that literacy narratives can be a site where students consider rhetorical choice and re-invention. She writes: “Stories of self-translation involve representing difference, and the representation of difference is at the core of today’s struggles” (p. 513). This belief not only applies to curriculum, but also to students’ own struggles over the very meaning they participate in creating. For Soliday, literacy narratives offer a space for students to enter, evoke specific experiences, and render those experiences as socially and culturally shaped and produced. Essentially, making the common uncommon and the familiar strange. The disposition of looking to the past to understand the present and foresee a future anew ensures “a dialogical account of one’s experience rather than a chronological report of verifiable events” from the “vantage point of a critical present” (p. 514-515). To illuminate all this, Soliday focuses on two written texts by a student named Alisha. Alisha exhibits the performativity of languaging across affective borders, edging and challenging “neutral truths” about language. Astonishingly, and what often is overlooked, is how students like Alisha make distinctions between hybridizing

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48 Merril Swain (2006) writes that languaging is a “means to mediate cognition” and a “process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (96; 98).
and assimilating language, between strategic approximation and assimilation. In negotiating the “complex demands of her cultural situation” (p. 518), Alisha reveals how she is a multiply-situated subject, shaped by historical and material conditions, an engineer of negotiated languages and literacies, and a rhetorical agent in the production of place, knowledge, and meaning-making.

There are concerns regarding assigning literacy narratives. There is the reality that acquiring literacies and languages come with some kind of cultural and/or social sacrifice (Corkery, 2005, p. 62). Are students prepared to come to terms with this sacrifice? There is the reality that some educators do not acknowledge difference in generative or productive ways. As a result, there can be both a “polarizing rhetoric of difference that turns on a reductive view of culture” (Soliday, 1994, p. 522) and a “[d]evaluing of the historical and unresolved struggles of groups that have been traditionally underrepresented” (Gilyard, 2016, p. 286). Are compositionists and rhetoricians, whether “right” or “left,” able to “check” their agendas and acknowledge students desires and intentions with languages, literacies, identities, and education? For me, this is a matter of social and ethical responsibility.

Literacy narratives are not created equally (Lindquist, 2010, p. 180). To assume otherwise is propose the “everyday” is a given, by either conflating or erasing differences. I am interested in literacy narrative for its transformative possibilities, of encouraging students see and practice literacy, language, and identity in their everyday lives (Eldred, 1991, p. 697; Tinberg, 1997, p. 287; DeRosa, 2002, p. 2-3). I am also interested in: how people organize experiences and memories “of human happening” in the form of narrative; how we view them as a “set of procedures for life making”; and how to locate them “to make them comprehensible” (“The Narrative Construction,” p. 4; “Life as Narrative,” p. 692; “Self Making,” p. 72); how the
dialectical relationships between individual, community, and society influence practice and social structures (“Social Reproduction,” p. 9-12; “Place as Historically,” p. 280-284); how a nexus of practice is connected to our historical bodies, spaces, and local histories that enable forms of social and cultural action that are tied to body-graphical, geo-graphical, and mobile-graphical expressions (Scollon and Scollon, 2003, p. 14; Mignolo, 2007, p. 460-461; “Towards a Politics of Mobility,” p. 18-20); and, how writing provides the opportunities for social realities to be constructed in space and time, wherein “complex identity negotiations and discursive positions” (Hesford, 1997, p. 149) can be recognized and wherein self, place, knowledge, and meaning-making can be told in literacy stories as a transformative process (see Royster, 1996, p. 35; Williams, 2003-2004, p. 345; Berry, 2013, p. 156). I am particularly interested in how these ideas affect our pedagogy for Mexican American students, specifically, the Texas Mexican Americans whose exigencies of preservation, survival, and resiliency heighten their awareness of social and cultural action.

As the Scollon’s, Bruner, and Pred adamantly remind us of, it is from this sense of belonging (being) that social action and deviation (transgressions) plays out from; in the production of space and time acts of becoming are evidenced. Together, the “being” and “becoming” illustrates place and world making. This dimension of inquiring what has been shaped in space and time, and discovering the agency and power to be in production of space and time, is instrumental to imagining approach and redress, action and change. This captures, I believe, the meaning associated with “turning points” (see “Self-Making”), which I imagine as irreducible and attached to historical bodies and places. As Beth Daniell (1999) writes, “For learning to occur, there has to be some kind of change in the learner. No change, no learning.
And significant learning requires that there be some kind of lasting change that is important in terms of the learner’s life” (p. 30). I believe this is possible with literacy narratives.

Negotiation, possibility, action and change—narratives in action—is central to an understanding of being and becoming (See Berry, 2014; Berry et al., 2014). The literacy narrative can set the tone for offering support beyond an entry point to literacy discourse. If, as Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996) has argued, narratives represent “vital layers of a transformative process” (35), would it not be in our interest to muster a community of learners whose point of references matter, whose import of praxis are contentious and suspect, yet, essential to a critical disposition of “becoming” in space, place and time? So no longer can traditional approaches to writing, wherein the homogenous situation of the writing is the expectation to use Standard English, stand (see Horner et al., 2011). Rather, as Suressh Canagarajah has suggested, we need to introduce students to rhetorical strategies that enable students to “shuttle” between linguistic and discourse communities (see Canagarajah, 2006a/2006b).

Storytelling cannot be underestimated. I believe storytelling actualizes bell hooks (1989) argument that it is a “necessary aspect of self-affirmation not to feel compelled to choose one voice over another, not to claim one as more authentic, but rather to construct social realities that celebrate, acknowledge, and affirm differences, variety” (hooks, 1989, p. 12). I want to come back to Judy Rohrer (2016):

We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about us, and the possibilities of new stories…All stories are political; they involve power that has structural underpinnings and material consequences. (p. 189)

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49 Berry (2013) states, “While we must challenge naive claims about literacy’s power, we should not underestimate the modest and not-so modest ways in which writing changes the lives of both teachers and students” (p. 156).
What is at stake when students are afforded the opportunity to enter literacy discourse and stake out a position on what literacy and being literate means? Researching and speaking back, engaging in meaning-making, memory-making and self-making are what are at stake (see hooks, 1989; Smith, 2012; A. Martinez, 2014). To assume a position of response and articulation is a powerful statement. As the student creates a position from which to speak, perpetuating existence and contours, and establishing a foundation of negotiation of political meaning and representation, they challenge assumption of social relations and fixity (see Brodkey, 1989; Vivian, 2000; Phillips, 2006).

To re-think the literacy narrative as community and experiential work, to value praxis and the possibilities of action and change, we must not only account for space and materiality, but also time. The constitutive nature of space and time allows students to connect to their practices as they have and continue to be performed, circulated, and mobilized. The literacy narrative, in this way, has the ability to enable students to create visual representations, ones that are physical, material, imagined, and metaphorical. Whatever they collect to put this literacy narrative together, we must see as literacy artifacts contributing to their own archives of enunciations and epideictic archives. These literacy archives are part of meaning-making practices and knowledge-productions, which are re-invented in space and time through bodily compositions that mark constructions of new meanings and new knowledges. The significance is that students can recognize and acknowledge their co-presence outside as well as inside the classroom as they continue to interpret and re-interpret meaning through literacy, language, rhetoric, and self-representation.

In “Cultural Politics and the Crisis of the University,” Henry Giroux (2000) argues difference “opens up both a space of translation and the conditions for struggling to renegotiate
and challenge the ideologies and machineries of power the put some subjects in place while simultaneously denying social agency to others” (n.p.). Students form the LRGV know all too well the effects of ideological beliefs and strategies of situating people as stuck in space and behind in time, but they also know all too well how to develop and cultivate tactics to speak back from their own sense of historical place and bodies. In the process of developing and cultivating tactics, they create mental maps of when and where to use language and rhetorical practices, and in the crux of negotiation and navigation, they also create a form of praxis that allows them to translate their sense and expression of “being” and “becoming” in the shuttling between communities, places, and cultural practices in space and time. I think this is what is missing in pedagogy and the genre of literacy narratives, that of students working to reveal how they accommodate, change, and/or transform meaning.

Literacy narratives provide students with a lens to inquire about literacy and its relationship to literacy practices and development, cultures and communities, and identities and ideologies (see Brodkey, 1987; Soliday, 1994; Brandt, 1998a/1998b; Scott, 1997; Corkery, 2005). Susan DeRosa (2002) writes that as students develop a sense of narrative agency, they “become participants in the development of their literacy in action” (p. 2-3). If, “all ethnographies begin in stories” (Brodkey, 1987, p. 26), literacy narratives are fundamentally an experiential experience situated in action. Students do not need to assimilate or mimic academic discourse to enter it. What mobilities and literacy narratives show us is that we are always in production of space and time. This brings me to my next point. The university and genres are made through dialogue and interaction. Neither is fixed or static.

50 In, The Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha (1994) reminds us that mimicry is the “most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (p. 85).
In the classroom I observed, the “everyday” of the classroom was filled with teachable and pedagogical moments where students move with facility and assurance between discourses, spaces, intentionality’s, and possibilities. The use and practice of language epitomized the confluence of spatial, temporal, and linguistic borderings toward discovery of new spaces of individual empowerment and authority. The scenes epitomized the ways that bordered writers transform difference into inclusivity; transform the seemingly stable spaces and fixed temporalities of the classrooms into a site of productions of space and time. We must be capacious in our ways of accounting for difference, then, because it is irreducible, yet catalytic. Students are makers of place, shapers of subjectivities, and engineers of negotiated linguistic and literate practices. We must be open to this possibility. We must be open to the possibilities of building on the “literacies that students already have” and we must open ourselves “to learning new literacies that could teach us more about human discursive practices” (Hawisher et al., 2004, p. 676). I believe this is possible with literacy narratives.

I am not inclined to believe that students are not aware of their social material world or that they are in need of consciousness-raising. For students like me whose languages, literacies, and access are denied, literacy narratives matter. What is scalable in literacy narratives is human practice that is in polylog with and intertextualized in histories, memories, and stories. Literacy narratives ask students to wrestle with ideas of being and knowing and doing and becoming, of translating and shuffling between selves, through language and literacy differences. I learned and experienced this transformation with my grandma in her cocina and on our walks. Her stories situated me within histories and memories and today I participate in meaning-and-memory-making practices that keep those words of my grandma—“entiendes,” “para que sepas y aprendes,” and “no te dejes”—alive and a viable strategy for agency and social and cultural
action. Literacy narratives require students to interpret and communicate those experiences within an appropriate genre and with a strategic stance, and to develop a form and style of narrative that is suitable for potential audiences. What the rhetoric of literacy narratives occasions is listening, well and deeply, para que sepas y aprendes. This is what this dissertation is about, what my research is about, listening, well and deeply, as to know, as to learn, and as to begin to move towards an articulation of critical redress.

**Conclusion**

We all come from a people and tradition situated within specificities and particularities. Yet, we are never isolated. That is not the point I am making in this dissertation. As I attempted to articulate a mindfulness of difference and a mobile-decolonial interpretive framework, one of my goals was to highlight the importance of the stories we inherit, the stories we circulate, and the possibilities of change. Another goal was to bring attention to how our movements and mobilities challenge any notion that we are fixed or static human beings. This has implications regarding the Lower Rio Grande Valley and marginalized students. Most of all, it calls out institutional spaces and educators that are complicit with power structures and framework. Case in point, the writing center, which makes an argument that they are engaging in anti-racist agendas. However, as I have argued, we cannot talk about race without talking about the Mexican American community. Another case-in-point is the idea of archives and the ways in which they represent and present knowledge and culture. As I demonstrated, the argument is not with the ideas of progress and development, but how a narrative of modernity creates a myth that either creates a context in which the “other” is absent and/or objectified in said narrative. A central goal of this dissertation was to consider decolonial possibilities and ways to increase student participation. There is much work to be done. I look forward to that next step.
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