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Foreword
Sonia Hernández and Marci R. McMahon

Introduction:
On the Matter of Civic Morality: Testimonio Introduction 1
Tiffany Ana López

Charting History, Memory, Community, and Activism

Braceros, Mexicans, Americans, and Schools: (Re) imagining Teaching and Learning in Mexican America
Stephanie Alvarez, Samuel García Jr., Francisco Guajardo, José Ángel Guajardo, Miguel Guajardo, and Jocabed Márquez 9

Women’s Grassroots Revitalization of South El Paso: La Mujer Obrera’s Challenge to Gentrification and Urban Neglect
Joel Zapata 42

Older Mexican Americans’ Perceptions of Mental Distress.
John Gonzalez and Irán Barrera 69

Over Both Edges: Coyotaje, Militarization and Liminality in Everyday Life on Ranchos along the South Texas-Mexican Border
Lupe Flores 94

“How to Tame a Wild Tongue”: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera and the 1960s Era Speech Test and Speech Classes at Pan American College
Deborah Cole and Robert Johnson 120

Play Selection in the Department of Speech and Drama at Pan American University in the 1970s and 1980s: Twenty Years of Excluding Latino Plays
Eric Wiley 135
**Dossier – Chicana/o Literary Studies and Artistry**

Américo Paredes and His Audiences  
Lyon Rathbun  

¡Viva la vida!, Aleluya, and Pláticas con mi madre  
Javier Villarreal  

Subverting the Telenovela: Redefining Gender in Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek” and Islas’s *The Rain God*  
Marina Malli  

Five Strands  
Marianita Escamilla  

**Reflections on Pedagogy and Education**

Polite Shakespeare Only: Teaching Chican@ Texts and *The Tempest* in Texas after the Attempts to Dismantle Mexican American Studies Programs  
Britt Haraway  

Juntos Podemos: Devising Theater as Community-Based Pedagogy  
Roxanne Schroeder-Arce  

Pedagogical Conocimientos: Self and Other in Interaction  
Josephine Méndez-Negrete  

Community-Based Projects and the Performing and Visual Arts: Promoting Cultural Dialogue  
Elena de Costa  

Towards Implementing Culturally Relevant Curriculum: How 17 Words Inspired Research  
Dagoberto Eli Ramírez
Whose Latino/a Studies? Teaching Latinidad as a Güero on a Predominantly Anglo, Socially Conservative Campus
Justin D. García

Contributors
Foreword
Sonia Hernández and Marci R. McMahon

This special issue of *Rio Bravo: A Journal of the Borderlands* highlights a series of essays and creative work presented at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas Foco conference at the University of Texas, Pan American in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas in February 2013. As co-chairs of the conference, we conceived of the 2013 NACCS Tejas Foco theme—"Chican@ Studies ¡Ahora!: Community-Based Pedagogies, Scholarship, and Activism"—as a response to the attacks on Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies programs and communities in Arizona, Texas, and Georgia in Summer 2010. We therefore used the conference to create a space to showcase Chicana/o and Latina/o studies scholarship, activism, and creative work and the way such work must be informed by community-based knowledge. Such community-based knowledge counters the rhetoric of Mexican-origin peoples as outsiders to the nation and as passive recipients of historical circumstances, but instead emphasizes agency and activism. In this special issue of *Rio Bravo*, newly housed in the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas–Pan American, we bring together scholarly essays, pedagogical reflections, and creative work rooted in the production of knowledge by Mexican American peoples and communities in the Rio Grande Valley and Texas broadly; the pieces also spotlight the growing demographics of Mexican American and Latina/o communities in places including Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

The first section, "Charting History, Memory, Community, and Activism," presents Mexican-origin peoples as agents of knowledge production in the U.S. Southwest. The essay "Braceros, Mexicans, Americans, and Schools" by Francisco Guajardo, et al. emphasizes the acts that Bracero workers—Mexican contract workers who participated in an international labor agreement between the United States and Mexico between 1942 and 1964—displayed in negotiating certain circumstances specific to their work. Joel Zapata's "Women's Grassroots Revitalization of South El Paso: La Mujer Obrera's Challenge to Gentrification and Urban Neglect" turns our attention to the activist labor of La Mujer Obrera, a grassroots workers coalition in El Paso, who in 2007 mobilized to develop the
economy of South El Paso and the surrounding communities at a grassroots level by harnessing the local Mexican and Mexican American culture to create markets and art spaces. Irán Barrera and John Gonzalez’s “Older Mexican-Americans’ Perceptions of Mental Distress” centers the knowledge and perceptions of elderly Mexican Americans who experience mental distress; they argue that such knowledge must be central to health professionals approach to this community. Lupe Flores’s “Over Both Edges: Coyotaje, Militarization and Liminality in Everyday Life on Ranchos Along The South Texas-Mexican Border” explores coyotes, a community typically vilified in the media via stereotypical/nativist images as people who must be kept out of the U.S. nation-state.” Instead, Flores “highlight[s] the liminal experiences people live through as coyotaje manifests in a border region that is increasingly policed and militarized.”

The last two essays of this section specifically explore educational curriculum and institutional spaces in the Rio Grande Valley that have sought to eliminate and erase Mexican American culture and identity. Deborah Cole and Robert Johnson’s essay “‘How to Tame a Wild Tongue’: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera and the 1960s era Speech Test and Speech Classes at Pan American College” utilizes interviews to explore the speech test administered at Pan American college for several decades up through the mid-1970s. The essay “highlights the institutional biases Mexican-American students faced at border colleges in the 1960s and places Anzaldúa’s famous outcry against linguistic colonization in a more specific historical context.” Eric Wiley’s “Play Selection in the Department of Speech and Drama at Pan American University in the 1970s and 1980s: Twenty Years of Excluding Latino Plays” examines Pan American University and University of Texas- Pan American’s production history of hundred and fifty fully-length plays over a twenty-year period, from 1970 to 1990, to reveal the remarkable exclusion of Mexican-American and Mexicano experiences in the institution’s production history; his essay illuminates the historical context in which the school’s theatre faculty decided year after year to exclude Latina/o plays from their theatre seasons.

The next section, “Dossier – Chicana/o Literary Studies and Artistry,” features scholarly and creative work that centers Mexican American experiences of nation, race, gender, and sexuality within the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Lyon Rathbun’s “Américo
Paredes and His Audiences" analyzes Paredes's life and writings to explore how Paredes "acted as a cultural intermediary in addressing both Mexican and Anglo audiences." Javier Villarreal's poems "¡Viva la vida!," "Aleluya," and "Pláticas con mi madre" take inspiration from the borderlands and reminds us of the power of poetry. Further, Marina Malli's "Subverting the Telenovela: Redefining Gender in Cisneros's "Woman Hollering Creek" and Islas's The Rain God' examines how texts by Sandra Cisneros and Arturo Islas utilize the genre of the telenovela to reformulate patriarchal and heteronormative discourses. This section closes with Marianita Escamilla's poem "Five Strands" that invoke expressions of community through lived experiences.

The final section, "Reflections on Pedagogy and Education," features the work of educators whose classrooms incorporate Mexican American literature, culture, and history in educational and theater curriculum in post-secondary settings, sometimes with ease, sometimes with pain, and sometimes with affirming outcomes. These essays illustrate the way in which educators negotiate what takes place in their classrooms when engaging curricular material that centers the Mexican American experience and/or how to approach any material from a cultural perspective. Britt Haraway's "Polite Shakespeare Only: Teaching Chican@ Texts and The Tempest in Texas after the Attempts to Dismantle Mexican American Studies Programs" confronts the efforts in Texas to dismantle or defund Mexican American Studies programs; his essay argues against current political education platforms that call for a decreased emphasis of critical thinking. Instead, Haraway "calls for an increased critical engagement with history using texts such as Shakespeare's The Tempest (removed from Arizona's MAS programs) in conjunction with Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera and Alurista's Plan Espiritual de Aztlan." Roxanne Schroeder-Arce's "Juntos Podemos: Devising Theater as Community-Based Pedagogy" reflects upon a devising workshop that she and two UTPA professors facilitated with fifteen students from UTPA and UT Austin during the conference; the workshop centered, exposed, and affirmed the gendered and linguistic experiences of the diverse workshop participants. Josephine Méndez-Negrete's "Pedagogical Conocimientos: Self and Other in Interaction" illustrates the process of conocimiento in the context of instruction and at a
Méndez-Negrete explains, “Conocimiento is a process that unfolds in the context of unearthing knowledge in relationship to the daily life we engage with others as we come to Self-knowledge.” Elena de Costa’s “Community-Based Projects and the Performing and Visual Arts: Promoting Cultural Dialogue” explores student learning outcomes from a theatre/photography project for a Spanish class in Waukesha, Wisconsin (a city with the fastest growing Latino ethnic community in Waukesha County) guided by community-based participatory research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. Dagoberto Eli Ramírez’s “Towards Implementing Culturally Relevant Curriculum: How 17 Words Inspired Research” examines the rhetoric of the Texas Association of School Boards’ Update 93 in spring 2012 that calls for use of culturally relevant materials in school districts’ implementation of their instructional programs. Using a qualitative case study approach in a Texas district, Ramírez investigates how and to what degree educational leadership shapes implementation of Update 93’s culturally relevant curriculum policy. In the concluding essay to this section, Justin D. García’s “Whose Latino/a Studies? Teaching Latinidad as a Güero on a Predominantly Anglo, Socially Conservative Campus” uses Millersville University of Pennsylvania, a public state-owned university in the northeastern United States, as a case study to discuss some of the common challenges that arise when attempting to teach Latino Studies, Anthropology, and other social science and humanities courses, as well as discussing why cultural diversity is often divisive and emotional material. He also provides examples of effective classroom exercises when teaching Latinidad. Together, the essays in this section reveal the continued challenges in Mexican American, Latina/o, and cultural pedagogy, yet also point to alternatives in engaging and promoting this type of pedagogy and critical thinking.

This special issue reminds us of the historic challenges that confront the Mexican American community/ies, broadly speaking and the work ahead of us. However, as these essays reveal, there is a great need and great hope for Mexican American Studies pedagogies and critical work. Despite the attacks and despite the struggle for funding, Mexican American Studies continues to grow. To echo our conference theme and this journal’s theme, it is the community that should take center-stage in what we do in this field.
We are grateful for the assistance of Danielle López (Editorial Assistant), Beatriz Ramirez Flores, and Annemarie Perez for making the production of this special issue of the journal possible. Special thanks to Josephine Méndez-Negrete and Sandra D. Garza for their mentorship and guidance in Chicana/o studies and feminist editorial practices. We also extend our gratitude to Ismael Salinas, who created the powerful, beautiful, and illuminating designs for *Río Bravo*; we also thank Leila Hernandez for working with her students on the designs for both this special issue and the NACCS Tejas 2013 Conference. Finally, many thanks are owed to María Arrieta and Baldomero Pérez for granting us permission to incorporate their NACCS Tejas 2013 Conference logo on the journal cover for this special issue.

Tiffany Ana López

This year’s NACCS Tejas Foco conference marks a benchmark in my over two decades of attending NACCS. The location of the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) and its surrounding Rio Grande Valley brought a particular charge to the events with the university being home to the Bracero oral history project and a critical mass of scholars and students dedicated to honoring the life and work of Gloria Anzaldúa; a community renowned for its vibrant artistic production of literature, music and more recently, murals; and the surrounding region in all its geographic and cultural complexities offering a dramatic litmus paper for gauging national debates about immigration and citizenship. Together, these elements informed the palpable sense of affective, intellectual, and activist community that one perceived throughout the conference. Membership of the Tejas Foco clearly assembled together as a collective with many years of ongoing conversation underway. The conference committee appeared to consciously harness this energy in their organization of plenaries, sessions, workshops, and events strategically designed to foster and advance this conversation. I left the meeting tremendously energized by the body of work I’d encountered over the many days of conferencing and inspired by the vision presented about the future of our field, but most especially the lens that the conference organizers employed to direct that vision.

In their selected theme for the conference and in their introductory program notes, Co-Chairs Sonia Hernández and Marci McMahon affirmed community-based pedagogies, scholarship, and activism as central to Chicana/o studies, most especially in the present moment. Our communities are very much currently under siege, particularly in the realms of education, law, economics, and cultural production. Consequently, community must remain the
focal point of our work with teaching, scholarship, service, and activism necessarily placed in tandem. As we have seen with the ripple effect of SB 1070, the visibility and critical mass of Chicana/o’s are viewed by the dominant culture as agitating the status quo, which is indeed one of the major goals of Chicana/o studies as a proponent of social justice. While some cultural critics declare the contemporary moment as one that is “post-” race, gender, class, etc., for most of us, such thinking is preposterous as we are still working to fully realize not just the theory but also the promise and practice of cultural citizenship in all its manifestations. We cannot in any possible way afford to unmoor our scholarship, teaching, service, and activism from a concretely understood sense of community.

In his important essay, “The Role of the Chicano Academic and the Chicano Non-Academic Community,” composed during the early 1980s amidst debates about affirmative action and diversity in higher education, Tomás Rivera (one of Chicana/o studies’ foundational educators and creative authors) writes,

> The priority for the Chicano academic should be to become a respected member of the academy through excellence in teaching, research or creative activity, and service. Chicano academics can play any role they choose. It is important that the role be chosen carefully for effectiveness. The Chicano community is changing drastically, expanding rapidly in numbers and becoming more amorphous. It is also becoming more vigorous. The Chicano academic should get involved politically with the community. But the involvement should be principled. In the last analysis, the Chicano academic and the community will have to develop, as a priority, a civic morality. A civic morality gives clarity of action that one can hope to build a better community. *Ni más, ni menos.* (p. 43 in Vernon

By civic morality, Rivera means that our education – about the patterns of history, systems of power, and agency gained through research or creative activity – combined with our access to the resources of the university, requires that we see ourselves as morally bound to serve the community by sharing our knowledge with and among the community. He asks us to remain ever mindful of the larger impact we wish to make with our work, meaning that we remain clear why it is we ventured to the university in the first place. If the commitment is social change, then we must consistently, actively, and thoughtfully cultivate an engagement with the broader social world as a means of forging that change. Notably, Rivera writes that both “the Chicano academic and the community” (emphasis mine) together must develop a civic morality. His call asks that in serving the community, Chicana/o academics cultivate an understanding within the community that they see the university and its academics as accountable to the community. The relationship and the work must be mutually informative.

Throughout the 2013 NACCS Tejas Foco Conference, I repeatedly witnessed the contemporary incarnation of Rivera’s call that we imagine ourselves as change agents responsible for acknowledging, sharing, and expanding access to education as a platform for social justice. Plenaries on the transdisciplinary nature of Chicana/o studies, the current state of the field, radical teaching, and the testimonio invited us to both chart and disrupt academic boundaries. There were several pre-conference activities, such as writing and professional development workshops for undergraduate and graduate students as well as university faculty and teachers at UTPA whose student body demographic is 90% Latina/o. These workshops are incredibly significant as they engage in fostering the entire pipeline of Latinas/os in higher education by providing resources of information, skills, and mentoring necessary to empower
all participants to successfully move forward and, perhaps most important of all, have the specificity of experience to draw from in themselves one day becoming a workshop leader. The conference also featured sessions and events with creative artists and cultural visionaries, such as Helena María Viramontes’ writing workshop; accordionist and pioneer Eva Ybarra’s musical presentation; the multi-media testimonio based theater presentation of *Crawling with Monsters* directed by Eric Wiley; a Noche de Cultura featuring Amalia Ortiz and several other noted CantoMundo poets (http://www.cantomundo.org); and a musical presentation by Edcouch-Elsa Mariachi Juvenil Azteca. Notably, conference activities were advertised as open to the public and garnered spotlight focus with local news covering the inauguration of the new MAS space on the UTPA campus with heartening comments about the importance of MAS to the university and the community offered by UTPA President Robert Nelson, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Havidán Rodríguez, and MAS Director Stephanie Alvarez (see http://www.foxrio2.com/80663/utpa-bronc-report-513/ and http://blogs.utpa.edu/coah/2013/02/25/ribbon-cutting-and-conference/). This press acknowledged the importance of the university and its commitment to serving the needs of the community and participating in community development through Mexican American and Chicana/o studies. Overall, the conference program affirmed how as leaders, we cannot afford to become dispirited by politics, or lost in the quagmire of academic jargon, or even the splitting of institutional hairs. First and foremost, by both purposeful design and critical intent, our work must be accessible and grounded in community.

My own presentation was one of many that spoke frankly about how one’s cultural upbringing and personal experience provide the springboard for critical engagement and involvement in community building. I shared about the play adaptation I’ve authored of Rivera’s classic novel, *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, and other new projects I’m
shepherding as Professor of Theatre and Tomás Rivera Endowed Chair in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of California, Riverside, where I am director of an annual conference around themes central to the life and work of Tomás Rivera and developing new programming in Latina/o studies and the creative arts, including a recently inaugurated Tomás Rivera Teaching Assistantship as well as a community access series on Latina/o visual and performing arts for the Art and Barbara Culver Center of the Arts in downtown Riverside. As a scholar of theater, literature, and creative arts, and former editor (2005-2012) of Chicana/Latina Studies, the flagship journal in our field focused on feminist engagement, I have been interested in how writers, artists, and cultural producers create work focused on matters of trauma and violence as a means to stage a public conversation towards personal and cultural healing.

The vision I bring to my work is very much informed by my identity as a first generation college student who grew up in an economically and emotionally unstable household charged by extreme violence and dysfunction across the board. Of three siblings, I am the only one to complete high school (and barely, at that), complete college, and achieve economic and familial stability. I have a brother in prison for killing our father, and my relationship with both my brother and sister is haunted by our parents’ legacy of passing forward their wounds. This personal history has made me keenly aware of the crucially important role of mentors and publicly accessible programming in higher education as a means to tap into promise that would otherwise languish away. These are the two things that I can concretely identify as having made the greatest difference in my life. I feel extremely lucky and blessed for having been educated on the last wave of affirmative action because that programming bolstered my academic skills, developed social consciousness, cultivated a sense
of civic morality, and introduced me to the mentors who served as role models for the type of work I have engaged in throughout my career.

The connection of the Chicana/o academic to the community remains vitally important with role models and programming visionaries more crucial now than ever before as today’s Latina/o youth face increasingly embattled terrain, represented by the incomprehensibly young ages at which they are routed into the bowels of the prison system and the tragically low rates of high school graduation. When I look at the diversity of faces in the classroom at the Hispanic Serving Institution where I have been a professor for nearly twenty years, I am heartened by the growing presence of women of color but continue to be struck by the absence of young African American and Latino men. And still, decades after Affirmative Action and its modest gains, the face of the faculty does not in any way match the face of the student body. These observations represent the critical call for recognition of the need to actively serve community with an eye towards expanding the pipeline into higher education in the kind of strategic and comprehensive way envisioned by revolutionary educator and community activist Geoffrey Canada, described in Paul Tough’s excellent book about his work, Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America (Mariner Books, 2009). Canada is clearly doing the kind of work Rivera so hopefully suggested in his early writings about administrative leadership.

In my plenary presentation, I explored some of the challenges in remaining visionary within academia. As Rivera states, we must first serve the community by cultivating excellence. It is a reality that within academic institutions, our excellence must be formally vetted, a process that is both personally stressful and in many instances politically taxing. Cultivating excellence and navigating through the vetting required by achieving degrees, merits, and promotions places great demands on one’s time and spirit. Hence our need to remain mindful
that the work of cultivating excellence is part of the Chicana/o academic’s engagement with civic morality. We must also be mindful that leadership demands not just trained researchers and analysts but also creative and agile thinkers. Every movement needs its intellectuals, however these minds must be cultivated to be critically introspective, forward thinking, and inventively resourceful. This is one of the other reasons I so appreciated the conference organizers’ deliberate inclusion of the humanities alongside the social sciences branches of Chicana/o studies. (How many Chicana/o studies departments and programs have theater scholars, creative writers, or MFAs on their faculty?) We need to better incorporate the arts into Chicano studies, not just for the sake of intellectual diversity, but more so because the arts represent a very important discipline and a creative mode of thinking and, as such, help us to expand our critical repertoire while also providing an avenue that powerfully speaks to our community, one that clearly energizes students to better draw them into the pipeline of higher education.

While we have access to incredible resources at the university, we are often forced to engage in various battles that can in the end prove distracting and dispiriting. In the hard forging of socially conscious academic work, it becomes too easy to lose sight of the bigger picture regarding the relationship between institutions of higher education and community building. We need to see the resources of higher education and the university as something to creatively use and – most importantly – expand. I was inspired at UTPA to hear of the creation of a Gloria Anzaldúa student fellowship fund and their consideration of also creating a named Teaching Assistantship. Tomás Rivera and Gloria Anzaldúa share in being two creative artists and community scholars who both frankly and critically offered their life stories as a means to challenge and inspire all of us to remain visionary about what it is we might best contribute to community building through our work in higher education. The ambiente of the 2013 NACCS
Tejas Foco conference represented the tradition of such work. May you be energized, moved, motivated, and inspired by the extraordinarily generative work of the conference represented in the proceedings gathered here in this volume.
Charting History, Memory, Community, and Activism
This article examines the stories of Braceros, Mexican contract workers who participated in an international labor agreement between the United States and México between 1942 and 1964. The stories Braceros tell challenge some conventional historiographical notions that they were powerless agents and victims of exploitative labor practices. The stories shed new light regarding the kinds of agency and power Braceros actually displayed in negotiating certain circumstances specific to their work.

Ángel: Prisciliano de La Cruz and I met in 1941, when we were six years old and primary school students in a rural school in the village of San Felipe, in the northern Mexican state of Nuevo León. Our school was built as part of President Lázaro Cardenas’ rural development initiatives of the 1930s. Prisciliano and I formed a strong bond as kids and shared experiences that would last a lifetime, even though we spent time together only during that one year in school.

Prisciliano: Angel, you used to protect me from the other kids.

Ángel: This is one fond memory he recalls. He also tells stories of how through the years, after his family left the ranch, and later he came to the United States as a Bracero in 1958, he often recalls thinking of our friendship.

Prisciliano: I liked your way of being, Angel, your personality. That, and because you protected me, that’s why I often thought of you.

Ángel: I too remembered him occasionally through the years. Prisciliano and I did not see each other for almost 70 years, until this past year when by mere fate we reunited...
reconciliamos por conocidos que los dos teníamos. Cuando nos volvimos a ver fue porque yo estaba en medio de las entrevistas a los Braceros para el proyecto de historias orales, un programa entre Estados Unidos y México que tuvo lugar desde 1942 hasta 1964. Por más de casi doce años he trabajado como investigador en la comunidad ayudando a la escuela preparatoria y a los estudiantes de universidad en sus trabajos de investigación y porque dos de mis hijos son profesores en la universidad, que utilizan mis talentos para sus tareas de investigación.

Yo no tengo entrenamiento en la universidad, al contrario, mi educación formal está solamente en esa escuela rural en San Felipe que sólo fue hasta cuarto año de primaria. Pero yo era un estudiante serio y después de muchos años trabajando en la agricultura, me retiré a una vida de investigador en la comunidad trabajando con maestros en las escuelas, estudiantes y profesores de la universidad en su búsqueda de buenas historias de mexicanos que jamás se han dicho: historias como la de Prisciliano y la de mi hermano Charro, y muchas más que me han asignado.

Yo no fui Bracero, pero sí venía mucho para Estados Unidos en muchas ocasiones durante los cincuenta como mojado, así nos llamaban, o así nos llamábamos todo el tiempo. Pero yo sé cómo encontrarlos. Este artículo se trata de docenas de Braceros que yo encontré, y de otros Braceros que encontraron los estudiantes por sus familias. Este artículo se trata de las lecciones que hemos aprendido de ellos y de las experiencias de ellos como Braceros. Hay muchos más Braceros viviendo en el sur de Tejas que no hemos entrevistado porque este proyecto es parte de un proyecto que ha durado un año en la universidad en la frontera de México y Tejas, y tuvimos una fecha para terminar con el proyecto de historias orales. Encontramos a los braceros, los entrevistamos por medio de tecnología de video y trascríbimos las historias orales, producimos un documental y trajimos a los through mutual acquaintances. When we reconnected, it was because I was in the middle of conducting an oral history project of Braceros, a program between the United States and México that took place between 1942 and 1964. For more than a dozen years I have worked as a community based researcher assisting high school and university students in their research projects and because two of my sons are university professors who use my skills for research projects.

I don’t have university training; to the contrary, the extent of my formal education was confined to that rural school in San Felipe, which extended only to the fourth grade. But I was a serious student, and after years as an agricultural laborer, I retired to the life of a community based researcher, working with public school teachers, students, and university researchers in their quest to find the good stories of Mexicanos that have never been told: stories such as Prisciliano’s, and my brother Charro’s, and many more that I was charged with finding.

I was not a Bracero myself, though I did travel to the U.S. on numerous occasions during the mid to late 1950s as a “mojado,” as we were called—or as we called ourselves—all of the time. But I know how to find them. This article is about the dozens of Braceros I found, and others students found through their own families. The article is about the lessons we learned from them as well as their experiences as Braceros. There are many more Braceros living in South Texas that we have not interviewed, because this research project was part of a yearlong project at a university along the Texas-Mexico border, and we had a timeline to finish the oral history project. We identified Braceros, interviewed them through the use of video technology, transcribed the oral histories, produced a video documentary, and then brought the Braceros and their families
Braceros a una conferencia al fin del año.

Mi esposa y yo trajimos a nuestra familia a este país en los sesenta. Criamos a nuestros hijos en la frontera de Tejas y México, visitando a nuestros pueblos mexicanos durante los fines de semana y las vacaciones pero siempre viviendo en el norte para que nuestros hijos fueran a la escuela y luego a la universidad. Nuestros hijos se hicieron maestros y estoy contento al decir que el enfoque de su trabajo y su forma de enseñar siempre ha sido basada en sus experiencias vividas. Su mamá y yo hemos sido parte de eso y hemos estado contentos en participar como investigadores en los proyectos de nuestros hijos en varias ocasiones.

El proyecto de los Braceros es lo último en lo que hemos trabajado y este trabajo es para saber más de nosotros mismos, de nuestra historia y de nuestro lugar en este país que todavía estamos tratando de acostumbrarnos a. Como los Braceros, continuamos viviendo como transnacionales en nuestras experiencias, en nuestra historia, cultura y frontera social que es tanto real como simbólica.

*Prisciliano*: Nosotros venimos de Braceros para ayudarnos a nosotros mismos y a este país.

*Ángel*: Prisciliano compartió muchas historias conmigo y con nuestro equipo de investigación durante el curso de la historia oral, él siempre decía,

*Prisciliano*: “Mira nomás, Ángel, cómo no has cambiado de tu manera de ser.”

*Ángel*: Hemos aprendido muchas cosas de Prisciliano, así como lecciones importantes de los braceros en los que hemos conversado. Aún un viejo como yo tiene mucho que aprender y yo tengo mucho que enseñar también y aprecio ser parte de este trabajo y también lo aprecian los Braceros.

La conferencia del fin de año.

My wife and I brought our family to this country in the 1960s. We raised our children on the Texas Mexico border, spending some time visiting our Mexican hometowns during weekends and holidays, but always living on the north side so that our children could go to school and then the university. Our children became teachers, and I’m happy to say that their teaching approach has always placed their lived experiences as a focal point of how they do their work. Their mother and I have been part of that, and we have been happy to participate as researchers in our sons’ projects on numerous occasions.

The Bracero oral history project is the latest in which we have worked and this work is to know more about ourselves, our history, and our place in this country that we’re still trying to get used to. Like the Braceros, we continue living as transnationals in our experiences, history, culture, and social border that is both symbolic and real.

*Prisciliano*: We as Braceros came to work, to help ourselves, and to help this country.

*Ángel*: Prisciliano shared numerous stories with our research team and me. During the course of the oral history, he kept saying,

*Prisciliano*: “Look, Angel, You haven’t really changed your way of being.”

*Ángel*: We learned many things from Prisciliano, just as we’ve learned important lessons from the Braceros we’ve engaged in conversations. Even an old man like myself has much to learn, and I have much to teach as well. I appreciate being part of this work, and so do the Braceros.
Road Map

Several university classes in a border institution collaborated between 2011 and 2012 with elders from both sides of the Texas México border (see Figure 2) to construct a new narrative about the Bracero program, the international labor agreement sponsored by the United States and México between 1942 and 1964. Using oral histories and the creation of personal narratives, undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty worked with living Braceros and other elders to engage Braceros and their families living on both sides of the border to capture their stories and to make these stories public. A Mexican national with a 4th grade education, Ángel Guajardo, who immigrated to the United States in the late 1960s, led this research process on the Bracero program. Through that effort, he inspires our traditional universities to move toward greater cultural, historical, and community responsiveness.
We present a mosaic of this bi-national and border crossing experience that captures the lives and stories of these public intellectuals. We also use pictures, poetry, music, art, murals, conversations, and other artifacts and reflections to share this story with our readers. The work has been grounded in a pedagogy that deliberately liberates the stories, the experiences and the consciousness that has been latent in families for generations. This experience takes the reader from Mexico, to Texas, into the rural parts of Arkansas, the South, the West and many other places, as we privilege the stories of both hardship and celebration, and acknowledge that along the border there lives a Great Generation of Brown Patriots.

Historia y Labor

The Rio Grande Valley of South Texas has been the crossroads of social, cultural, economic, and even transnational policy developments through the past several centuries. Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca accidentally traversed the region in the early 1500s, as he negotiated relations with numerous Indigenous groups; he counted as many as 33 tribes, as he described in his Relación. More than two centuries later, José de Escandón’s planned expedition in the 1750s engaged in persistent warring with Indigenous people in his effort to tame the region. A century later, the historic 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo reshaped the political boundaries between México and the United States. Another century later the border would find itself as a crossroad through which the United States and México moved several million Mexican workers as part of the Bracero program.

The Texas-Mexican Borderland has historically been a permeable border. The border crossings of Don Ángel and Don Prisciliano constitute both formal and informal ways they traversed the Rio Grande River, or the international border. For both, the movement was natural, as they came in search of work and a better life for their families. The logic was simple: there was work on the U.S. side of the border, and there were workers on the Mexican side. From a macro perspective, the push/pull factors benefited both countries. México benefited because the Bracero program, and employment generally on the U.S. side, relieved the persistently high unemployment levels, particularly in the rural Mexican countryside. The U.S. benefited from Mexican labor because it sought to fill a labor force that was partly vacated and rerouted to serve in the war effort in the early 1940s. Both countries benefited, so both continued the program until 1964, two decades past the war.

A Brief Overview of Policy

The bidirectional mobility continued during the first part of the 20th century and was intensified by the global conditions of the times. From a policy standpoint, the Bracero
program fit squarely within the spirit of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1917, as the U.S. sanctioned Mexican temporary workers crossing the border to aide an agricultural economy that needed help. The global sociopolitical context pushed for yet another agreement, Public Law 78, which created the first Bracero program, and then a second Bracero agreement was brokered between the countries that enacted Public Law 414, which called for the renewal of Bracero labor between 1951 and 1964 (Craig 8).

The political players were multiple and varied—from partnering countries to families, from farmers to labor unions, and from local political human rights advocates to economic policy actors. The public policies that legitimized the Bracero programs were guided by values consistent with free enterprise and individualistic systems of policy formation. The stories Braceros shared during the course of this research shed a bright light on the political and policy issues that shaped their experience as international workers. The stories herein delve into some of those critical issues that include race relationships, basic human treatment, working conditions, compensation for work, health insurance, and others.

The consumption of foreign labor by the United States is not a recent phenomenon, and has had a deep and profound impact on the economic and industrial expansion of the United States. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the demand to fill jobs in the mining, railroad, and agricultural sectors of the economy increased considerably. Emilio Zamora notes that “industrialization, especially the growth and expansion of agriculture, resulted in the first large-scale immigration of Mexicans” (11). Due to Mexican nationals crossing the border in search of employment, the consumption of Mexican labor by U.S. growers persisted throughout the early 1900s. The original labor-contract program that actively sought imported labor from México was enacted in 1909, and existed only for a brief period (G. Gonzalez 32). In the same year, across the border, the United States government passed legislation that limited severely Mexican immigration, yet was later revised due to the lobbying of cotton and sugar
beet growers (G. Gonzalez 32). For the safety and protection of its workers, the Mexican government passed legislation in 1917 that ensured safeguards for contracted emigrant workers entering the United States, while ordering border officials to discourage the departure of workers without contracts (García y Griego 46). Despite these safeguards, very few of the agreements of the contract were honored. When referencing the politics of the initial program, José García states that “the program was plagued by problems, and México was more than happy to see it end on the 31 December 1919” (21). This experience prompted the Mexican government to enact more stringent legislation with the Mexican Labor Law in 1931, which forced U.S. employers to supply fixed wages and contracts to Mexican laborers (García 22).

Although the importation of Mexican trabajadores persisted during the 1930s in relatively small amounts, the demand for labor sharply rose due to U.S. involvement in World War II (Cohen 10). Needing to meet the need for both domestic and allied food consumption, the U.S. government once again turned to México to fulfill the demand for food production. The major shift in the U.S.-Mexican labor relations was highlighted with the passage of the Mexican-United States program of the Loan of Laborers (Cohen). The Loan of Laborers program, which would eventually be referred to as the Bracero program (from brazos, meaning strong-armed), was a mechanism by which Mexicans were sent to work in certain agricultural areas of the United States under a series of bilateral agreements with México that spanned two decades (García y Griego 45). Weary, and cognizant of the overt harassment and discrimination many of its citizens were subjected to, particularly those who resided in Texas, the Mexican government placed the state of Texas on its “black list” from 1942-1947 (Scruggs 255). The tension of satisfying the Mexican government’s petition to end discrimination against mexicanos and the pressure from agricultural growers to remove the ban on importing labor, prompted the state of Texas to create the Good Neighbor Commission in 1943, which sought to improve the social and economic working conditions of Mexican laborers and other
citizens (Scruggs 257). During its lifetime, the Bracero program handed 4.5 million work contracts and employed 2 million Braceros in the agricultural sector (Mize and Swords 3).

From a historical standpoint, the Bracero program narrative is frequently portrayed as the dehumanization of millions of *mexicanos* who filled the ranks as laborers in U.S. fields during World War II. The program convincingly satisfied the thirst for cheap labor on U.S. agricultural fields, and thus many farm organizations lobbied for its continuance, which ultimately existed for over twenty years (Martin and Teitelbaum 122). Much of the literature and research dedicated to studying and understanding the Bracero program has often been about critiquing its structures, processes, and policies, which led to inhumane and intolerable acts of discrimination and dehumanization. According to G. González, the “Bracero Program was identical in many respects to traditional forms of colonial labor exploitation, in that the Braceros were systematically controlled and denied the right to organize, to bargain over wages individually or collectively, to protest, and to change residence or employer” (35). Additionally, the Bracero program often suffered from lack of enforcement, regulation, and compliance. Bracero living conditions were substandard and insufficient as many men often had feelings of isolation, depression, and dehumanization (Mize and Swords 18). Ironically, it was in this same context that Braceros found themselves subject to intense control and surveillance (Mize and Swords, 5). One such example was a case where Braceros complained to authorities that they were worked from 15 to 19 hours a day and were not paid adequately for their hard work (Garcia 45).

Despite the changing cultural, social, and political climates in the U.S., Cohen observes that, “Braceros had their own reasons for wishing to migrate, ones based on conditions affecting individuals, families, and communities” (67). The desire and motivation for Braceros to leave their country, communities, and families *para ir a buscar la vida* provided a rich platform for understanding the complexities of Bracero life. The pressure of providing for oneself and for
a family proved to be overwhelming for millions of Mexican men, and the Bracero program provided an alternative to the scarcity of work in México. When interviewed by his granddaughter, Idalia Leanos, about the motives that made him leave his family and head for the U.S., Bracero Don Heriberto Eguía responded, “The motive was necessity. One had to provide for his family,” said Don Heriberto. “I left my wife in Cruz de Elorza, Nuevo León, in search for a better life.” The Mexican government’s inability to provide employment for its citizenry, coupled with aspirations to reap the benefits of working in the “land of opportunity” fueled Don Heriberto’s and millions of other mexicanos’ desire to do what was necessary to get contracted as Braceros. For Don Héctor Pérez, originally from the Mexican state of Guanajuato, his faith, economic condition, and desire to eat loaves of bread from the U.S. motivated him to find employment in the country. The Bracero program afforded him a golden opportunity to achieve his dream of working in the United States. Don Héctor asserted his determination and ambition to find work in the U.S. when he spoke about his first time being contracted to work in San Perlita, Texas in the late 1950s:

En México se vive con la pobreza y mucha hambre. Yo escuchaba lo delicioso de los panes de los Estados Unidos (EE.UU.). Yo soñaba con ir a los EE.UU. para comer ese pan. La primera vez que fui contratado, le dije a un amigo que iba a comprar comida que me comprará una barra de pan. Esa noche me comí el pan entero y nada más por las ganas que tenía de comer ese pan.

Don Héctor’s narrative has compelled us to interpret and contextualize the symbolic reference of the bread. The bread satisfied the physical hunger for many of the Braceros. The bread also represented the money to be earned by laboring long hours in intense weather conditions. For many men and their families, the bread symbolized a better life—a new life that was filled the potential of abundant educational and economic opportunities for themselves and
their families. The dynamics of Bracero life were more complex than just the monotonous, physical nature of fieldwork, but it inherently challenged their views of society and politics.

Despite the adverse conditions that most Braceros found themselves in, there were many instances in which these men displayed acts of agency and provided alternate accounts of the program, which provide a more heterogeneous account of what has become the dominant or “master” narrative of the Bracero experience. When interviewed, several men shared numerous accounts of abuse and embarrassment that profoundly affected their attitudes about participating in the program. When describing his experience as a Bracero in the 1950s, Don Héctor clearly remembers the humiliation he endured after being processed at the Hidalgo, Texas processing center. “Upon arrival at the international bridge in Reynosa,” recalled Don Héctor, “there was a person holding a pump full of dust. I had to remove my shirt, and he sprayed my underarms, private parts and head. Immediately after the spraying, I went to take my photograph for the ‘mica’ [see Figure 3] without washing myself.”

Another Bracero, Don Prisciliano de la Cruz, originally from Doctor Coss, Nuevo León, remembers the tension between mexicanos and whites when he was contracted to work in Fort Stockton, Texas in 1961. “The whites would call us ‘dirty Mexicans’ or ‘dirty Indians’ in English,” said Don Prisciliano. “There would be an occasional confrontation between us and them because we didn’t like to be called those things.” Overt forms of discrimination and racism were clearly evident to many Braceros; yet they labored diligently to complete their duties. Through conversations with Braceros, it became apparent to us that deep, personal feelings of anxiety and self-doubt permeated their minds, which were exacerbated by existing cultural, political, and social structures in a foreign nation. Don Prisciliano’s commentary provides vital insight to underpinning assumptions and beliefs about laboring in the U.S.:

_Tenía miedo porque no sabía hablar en inglés y los americanos no entendían nuestro idioma. Ése_ I was afraid because I did not know how to speak English and the White people did not
era mi problema más grande. Yo sentía un extraño con ellos y no me gustaba la forma en que nos comunicábamos, a veces a señas. Yo me sentía incapaz, no tenía potencia para usar lo que yo era en ese tiempo. El primer año no quise nada con nadie ni con el Estados Unidos. No me gustó para nada.

understand our language. That was my biggest problem. I felt uneasiness while working with them and I did not like the way we communicated with one another, at times with hand signals. I felt that I was incapable and powerless to really utilize what I was during that time. The first year I did not want to deal with anyone or anything, not even with the U.S. I didn’t like it all.

Figure 3. Bracero Mica, courtesy of Cosme González

Community Knowledge

The contributions by individuals in our communities have served to construct narratives that have the power to transform and liberate individuals and communities (Guajardo and Guajardo Transformative 20), yet in most cases they go unheard and untold. By working in a collaborative
manner, educators and students are able to develop new partnerships with the storytellers, which enrich and inform the curriculum, as well as to give ‘voice’ to individuals in the community (F. Guajardo 29). This provides students spaces to develop and construct a new reality by acting as agents of change. These elders or “conveyors of wisdom,” who have helped shape and fashion society are celebrated and lifted as public intellectuals, as opposed to being viewed as a burden to the community (F. Guajardo 33). Within this context, the “silent voices” are heard which then can be utilized to generate new knowledge and challenge existing pedagogies and curricula (F. Guajardo 33). When asked what advice he wished to share with young people, Bracero Rosario Guajardo said, “I tell everyone to study hard, because ignorance is very difficult.”

The rich testimonios shared by Braceros and their families highlighted that life-altering teaching and learning moments occurred in non-traditional academic settings. Yolanda Pérez-Sáenz, daughter of Héctor Pérez, remembers working alongside her father during her youth and how that played a crucial role in her life. “During the summers my siblings and I used to pick fruits with my dad,” said Pérez-Sáenz. “My dad would tell all of us that education is the only way out of that type of work. I really believed that and with the support of my family I was the first one out of seven siblings to graduate from college.” For Pérez-Sáenz it was her father’s lofty expectations and support that compelled and inspired her to pursue higher education. “People ask me, ‘How did I know I was going to be a teacher?’ I’d reply because my father told me I was going to be a teacher.” The narratives and oral histories of family members documented by the collective of students, professors and elders served as a vehicle for dialogue and reflection, through which students began to create a different ontology that informed their learning. This dynamic and engaged process served both learning and social processes that provided the spaces for establishing personal connections grounded in integrity and respect for the elders. Similarly, María Hinojosa, granddaughter of bracero Cipriano Gallardo, who passed
away a few years ago, also recalls her grandfather’s aspiration to construct a new life for his family. “My grandfather came over to the U.S.,” said María, “so that his family could achieve the American Dream. He always told us he did not want us to work in the fields.” Hinojosa revealed the lasting legacy of her grandfather. “He has embedded the value of education and the value of family. He told me ‘you’re going to be a teacher,’ because to him teachers were the most respected people in the world.” Collective inquiry, critical pedagogical approaches, and community as text have created new ways of thinking in which our history becomes the curriculum (Guajardo and Guajardo Transformative 4). This deliberate community-centered method, which has been grounded in the values of our local community context, has informed the way we make sense of the world, how we filter the observables collected from the research, and how we perceive teaching and learning should take place in our communities and institutions.

Moreover, their stories capture the experiences of a community that often are excluded from U.S. narratives. In turn, these stories are often lost. Upon reflection of the project, María Hinojosa, shared that “I don’t have his story captured. I never took the time to deeply engage in conversation with him . . . I never did that.” In order to counter deficit frameworks that permeate educational institutions, Ladson-Billings advises that we need to have opportunities to explore alternative research paradigms that include the voices of communities in non-exploitative ways. Otherwise, they will either go unheard or remain private (Ladson-Billings 473). “I’m going to tell you frankly,” said Bracero Francisco Márquez, originally from Zacatecas, México, “these stories, the ones I’m sharing with you right now, I’ve only shared with my children.” Recognizing that traditional research paradigms often silence and/or construct deficit narratives about immigrant communities called the researchers to tap into the resources embedded in the community that would allow for the recovery of their voices without dehumanizing the Braceros, and also honoring their stories.
Dignidad, Respeto, y Acción

Personal and intimate stories about unique experiences have truly filled in the gaps of the traditionally published literature. We firmly believe that to arrive at this juncture, efforts must be made to establish honest, respectful relationships with individuals. The Bracero narrative must not be rendered and perceived as an essentialized universal story of the exploitation of Mexican laborers, which serves to perpetuate the stereotypical notions of Mexicans as sources of cheap, disposable labor, and colonized subjects with little to no agency. Rather, it is a dynamic and vibrant narrative that necessitates the inclusion of multiple voices and identities that have shaped it, to help disrupt and shatter prevailing narratives that have been internalized as reality. Contemporary discourses of labor often lead individuals to perceive Mexican laborers as passive and docile individuals who toil endlessly without complaining or questioning their superiors’ orders. Rarely are they acknowledged as individuals who display deeds of agency and resistance, yet, historically, resistance and agency are inextricably part of their history.

In many cases, because of the program’s strict guidelines coupled with the extremely high demand for contractual work, many Mexicans were unable to be employed. For Bracero Don José Luna Vaca, age restrictions were an obstacle he had to overcome. “I lied about my age,” recalled Don José. “I was seventeen years old and I told the woman taking our information to write down that I was eighteen in order to get contracted.” The rigors of the Bracero life were complex and challenging for men, yet it produced familial strains in which women in particular often experienced anxieties due to their assumed role of head of the household and trying to manage to support the family. As such, women fulfilled equally important roles during the Bracero experience. Doña Francisca Eguía, wife of Don Heriberto Eguía, described how she managed to keep the family together and take care of her children while her husband was working in the U.S. “I had the support of my mother and siblings,” said
Doña Francisca. “I thank God that while my husband was working for a better life, I had my family there to support us. Because when your husband leaves you with children . . . it’s a struggle.”

Despite the rigid guidelines that constituted the Bracero program, Braceros often displayed the courage and agency to act on injustices that they endured. Don Rosario Guajardo, who worked the fields in West Texas in the late 1950s, spoke about the difficulty of working in the harsh environment and reasons for organizing other Braceros and protesting injustices:

*Pizcábamos el algodón chubasco, teníamos que usar tafetán en los dedos, todos hechos garras…Nos pusimos de acuerdo para regresar a Monterrey, México. Le avisamos al consulado que no podíamos trabajar en esas condiciones. El consulado nos encontró trabajo en Misión, Tejas.*

We picked “hurricane” cotton, we had to use taffeta on our fingers, which were all torn up and bleeding. We agreed to return to Monterrey, México. We informed the consulate that we could not work under those conditions. The consulate found us work in Mission, Texas.

Don Prisciliano shared with us a similar experience when describing his first time in Fort Stockton, Texas in the early 1960s, in which he proactively sought to remedy the unjust working conditions affecting himself and other Braceros. According to Prisciliano:

*Habíamos ido ahí a pizar algodón y el ranchero no nos pagaba la toda la cantidad por todo el trabajo que habíamos hecho. Éramos entre cuarenta y cincuenta en ese tiempo y yo le escribí una carta al consulado de México, en el condado de Pecos explicándole los problemas con el ranchero. Unos días después, el consulado llegó y habló con el ranchero. Nos dijeron que nos iban a pagar lo que nos debían y nos garantizaron tres meses más de trabajo.*

We had gone there to pick cotton and the rancher was not paying us the full amount for the work we did. There were about forty or fifty of us at that time and I wrote a letter to the Mexican Consulate in Pecos County explaining our problems with the rancher. A few days later, the consulate showed up and spoke to the rancher. They told us that they were going to pay us what was owed and guaranteed us another three months of work.

Don Pancho, who was contracted to work on the Galloway Dairy Farm in Edcouch, Texas in the early 1950s, described the lengths he endured to retain his job as a milkman on the dairy farm after his Bracero contract had expired:
La ley me levantaba y me llevaba al puente, me echaban por Reynosa. Para las siete de la mañana ya estaba en el trabajo. Sólo Dios y yo sabíamos que desvelado y cansado que andaba por cruzar el río. La gente me preguntaba ¿no te echó la chota ayer? Y yo les respondía, no me echaron sino no estuviera aquí. Esto me pasó cinco veces.

Law officers would pick me up and take me, to the bridge, they would send me to Reynosa. By seven o’clock the next morning I was already at work. Only God and I know how sleep deprived and exhausted I was from crossing the river. People would ask me, ‘didn’t the law deport you yesterday?’ I would reply, no they didn’t deport me because if they did I would not be here. This happened to me five times.

Such acts of resiliency are rarely highlighted in literature about the Bracero program, yet are vital to provide a holistic view of the complex nature of the program and to validate the spirit embodied by the individuals who labored for a better life.

**Creando Comunidad**

How were Braceros, such as Don Prisciliano, able to cope and function productively under such demanding and dehumanizing conditions? For many Braceros, forming and establishing social networks that provided much needed social support, proved to be a vital element for persevering in the United States. Ultimately, Don Prisciliano found strength, support, and motivation through his relationships with other men who shared many of his feelings and concerns. His personal relationships with other Braceros had a transformational and profound effect on his self-confidence and identity formation, and provided the support and encouragement needed to continue his quest to improve his economic situation by toiling the harsh, unforgiving fields:

*En el segundo año me comencé yo a juntar con otros mexicanos como yo pero nacidos aquí en Estados Unidos en Tejas. Me junté con dos de Corpus y otro de Mathis, Tejas y nos comprendimos bien los cuatro. Fueron mis amigos y ya me fui yo desenvolviendo y agarrando más confianza yo con mi modo y con la forma que yo creía de mí, porque a veces me sentía incapaz. No tenía potencia para usar lo que yo era en ese*

*The second year in the U.S. I became friends with some mexicanos who were born here in the United States, in Texas. I hung out with two from Corpus Christi and another from Mathis, Texas. They were my friends and so I began to evolve and became more confident in myself and the way I thought of myself because sometimes I would feel that I was incapable. I did not have the potential to use*
tiempo como yo me sentía y cuando me hice amistad con ellos me dio ánimo y entonces creí en mí mismo.

what I was at that time and when I developed a friendship with them it gave me motivation and then I began to believe in myself.

The connections with other individuals equipped Don Prisciliano, and presumably many other Braceros, with the necessary tools and skills for adapting and thriving in difficult conditions. Additionally, one of the more insightful observations that surfaced from the research was that several of the Braceros formed life-long relationships with their employers. Through a display of hard work and a spirit of loyalty, Bracero Don Pancho Márquez eventually earned the trust of his employer and ultimately formed a strong relationship, which continues until this day. Neal Galloway, who owned the Galloway dairy farm in Elsa, Texas, spoke about Don Pancho. “Pancho came to the farm looking for a job,” said Galloway when asked to share his recollections about Don Pancho’s arrival at the family farm. “When we sold our route to Hygeia dairy company, we sold it under the condition that Pancho was in charge of delivering the milk. He stayed with us for 26 or 27 years.” Don Pancho’s story exemplifies the work ethic, dependability, drive, and trust the many Braceros achieved during their lifetime as they negotiated social and political structures in order to construct a stable life in the U.S. Similarly, Don Héctor humbly described how he eventually became the owner of the orange grove fields where he once labored as a Bracero, now called Pérez Groves (see Figure 4) in Edinburg, Texas.
Uno de mis sueños era vivir en los Estados Unidos. Otro de mis sueños era prosperar y salir de la miseria. Afortunadamente para mí, llegué a trabajar para el señor Hender Aderhold y él me dio su ayuda y apoyo. Llegué hacer mayordomo del rancho y controlaba casi todo. Cuando decidió retirarse, él me dijo que quería que yo me quedara con el negocio. Le dije que no tenía dinero para correr este negocio. Me dijo que me iba a prestar el dinero. Todo lo que tengo se lo debo a él y a su familia. Quiero agradecer a la familia Aderhold por su apoyo.

One of my dreams was to live in the United States. Another of my dreams was to prosper and get out of poverty. Fortunately for me, I came to work for Mr. Hender Aderhold and he gave me his help and support. I became the foreman of the farm and controlled almost everything. When he decided to retire, he told me that he wanted for me to stay with the business. I told him I didn’t have the money to run the business. He told me that he was going to lend me the money. Everything I have I owe it to him and his family. I want to thank the Aderhold family for their support.
Theoretical Framework

Our commitment is to highlight the stories by using a participatory action research protocol and cultural fronts as a framework for analysis. The former privileges the voices of Braceros; these observables are supported by literature and triangulated by witnesses who lived and experienced life with these men. The voices of wives and children are woven into the narratives to expand this experience into the families that stayed behind; ancillary archives, artifacts and reports that expand the phenomena of this time and its impact on the people, the region and subsequent generations are also consulted.

We borrow the concept of cultural fronts as a framework for analysis from Jorge A. González, who argues that when different cultures meet, spaces of tension are created (4). In that same context, opportunity for innovation is also nurtured. We explore the multiplicity of this dynamic historical period in our borderland region and in the history of both México and the United States, as we also celebrate the wealth of knowledge shared through the stories of these brave families.

The strategies for data collection are predominantly dialogical and grounded in story. The pláticas (Guajardo and Guajardo Brothers 66) we’ve engaged in during this process have yielded a process that has been reciprocal in nature and given us catalytic validity (Lather 272). The action has been evidenced, as it has become the classroom for our students, a point of remembrance, and a living knowledge museum in the home of citizens who have become heroes and public intellectuals. Sharing their stories in public has catapulted their humble lives to become necessary knowledge to be privileged as it informs an important time in history.

Capturing the Stories

Braceros were actively identified through two means: (1) our elder researcher, Don José Ángel, sought out Braceros from his social networks; and (2) graduate and undergraduate students from university classes and student organizations used their personal and familial connections
to identify living Braceros. Selection of the sites for the interviews that were conducted was arranged to take place in the homes of the Braceros or at a location that was accessible to them. Assisting in the interview process were typically teams of two or three students and professors, each with specific, assigned roles. Generally, the interview sessions lasted about an hour and a half to two hours, depending on depth of the stories. At the majority of the interviews, wives and family members were present and provided valuable perspectives and reflections. These interviews were constructed by a team of students to produce a documentary, which was premiered at the “Voces de Braceros” symposium in April 2012 at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA).

Consciously aware of our ontological and epistemological dimensions, the interviews were conducted in a plática format, in which the Braceros and their family members were invited to engage in a fluid exchange of stories and experiences (Figure 5). The plática format created a different and more intimate dynamic in which the traditional ethnographic approaches and power positionality of researcher and researched were disrupted. Graduate and undergraduate students then transcribed hours of interviews into both English and Spanish text. The transcriptions were then used to develop Bracero narratives, which inform this document and will also be used in a future publication highlighting their experiences. In addition to interviews, we collected observables in the form of photographs, documents, and other artifacts that were shared by the Braceros and their families.
Once the artifacts were collected and interviews recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, the process of editing a video began. Our editing venture was a collaborative process in which several individuals worked together to view, translate, and edit the pieces which best fit the Bracero narrative. Through constant communication via e-mail, phone calls, meetings, and class discussions, video was cut and woven into a narrative that captured the Bracero experience. Selected stories from all the Bracero interviews were used in the documentary to set historical, social, and cultural contexts as well as to highlight other emerging themes that
were interpreted by the research team. Asael Márquez, grandson of Bracero Guadalupe Márquez, composed the soundtrack for the documentary to complement the stories and diverse themes of the emerging narrative. Once completed, the documentary was edited to aesthetically represent and create a space in which the narratives of the Braceros and their families emerged, were acknowledged, and celebrated.

This research project is grounded in a reciprocal mode where both the researchers and the researched learn from each other (Guajardo and Guajardo Brown 503). Through the reflective process, we placed ourselves in the middle of the research to disrupt the power dynamic that researchers bring to marginalized communities (Guajardo and Guajardo Transformative 8). These methods constructed spaces where honest, meaningful dialogue could occur. The comfort of their surroundings coupled with sincere interest in their stories allowed the Braceros to be at ease and fostered honest dialogue to occur between the researchers and the researched. By having their stories actively listened to, the Braceros and their families displayed a sense of empowerment and graciousness that was evident through facial expressions, body gestures and emotional responses to our queries. The collaborative documentary processes and practices used allowed us, the research team, to collect and document the experiences of the Braceros, but also allowed us to form meaningful relationships throughout the process. We were captivated by their stories and privileged to have chronicled them on film. “We lived very difficult lives,” said Bracero Don Alfonso Alanís. “Thank you very much for listening to our stories, it is a pleasure for us share them with you.” Their testimonios, tireless work ethic, hope and imagination help us to capture the spirit of the human experience of the Bracero program that helped to change the economic, social and cultural landscape of the country.
Impact of Process: Re-imagining Teaching and Learning

In re-imagining traditional frameworks for the production of knowledge, its analysis, and privileging, it was necessary to do the same with our teaching and learning. Traditional approaches to teaching have only marginally impacted the educational achievements of Chicana/o students. Essentially, this project called for carving out institutional spaces in which the epistemologies of Chicana/o communities are honored and imbedded into pedagogical and methodological practices (Pizarro, *Chicanas* 25; Guajardo and Guajardo *Transformative* 16). The process was grounded in dialogical approaches that allow for multiple voices, experiences and perspectives to be heard, which helped create synergistic spaces where we collectively reflected, analyzed, and co-created new knowledge and raised consciousness of ourselves and our lived worlds (Freire 79). Our cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal 563) guides us and our students as we negotiate the co-production and facilitation of knowledge that involved a handful of educators from an array of disciplines (Education, Art, and Spanish) and well over a hundred students—both undergraduate and graduate—from an even more diverse range of majors and specializations (Educational Leadership, Mexican American Studies, Engineering, Business, Spanish, Nursing, Graphic Design, and others). For Jocabed Márquez, granddaughter of Bracero Guadalupe Márquez, critical pedagogy and the collaborative research process proved to be a transformative experience that helped her develop her critical consciousness about the contributions elders have had on younger generations. “They want the young people to hear their stories and learn from them,” said Jocabed Márquez. “I realized that I was just concerned about myself, and never took the time to acknowledge what they did for us. I grew up with my grandfather and it took this action research project for me to learn his stories of hard work and dedication.”
Mi abuelo Guadalupe Márquez fue Bracero en 1959 y 1961. Yo no me acordaba de sus historias que me decía cuando yo era niña, las había olvidado. Pero su historia hizo que cambiara mi pensar que cambiara mi forma de ver la vida. Cómo laboró toda su vida en el campo, el campo siempre fue su vida, ahí pasó la gran parte de su vida, ahí derramó lágrimas de sufrimiento, pero también sonrisas al ver que su esfuerzo no era en vano. Sonrisas de alegría al ver que sus hijos tendrían una mejor calidad de vida en Estados Unidos aunque su trabajo no era recompensado como él se merecía. Serían largas horas en el ardiente sol y serían largos inviernos de frío y dolor. Todo eso tuvo que sufrir para pagar su estancia en esta tierra de abundancia. Y ahora mi abuelo tiene dolor al caminar, su espalda se ha quebrado, su cintura le es como fierros enterrados en sus músculos. Aunque no lo expresa, aunque no lo dice, vive en constante dolor físico, dolor emocional al ser marginado por la sociedad, y a veces por sus hijos y nietos. No quiero que su historia muera. No quiero que su esfuerzo sea enterrado, quiero que los jóvenes aprendan de sus abuelos, y sepan apreciar sus historias, y la educación que nuestros abuelos nos han regalado con sus testimonios. Esta es la verdadera enseñanza, la verdadera educación, la que cambia y transforma el pensamiento, y la que cambia el rumbo de nuestra vida.

The border university that hosted this research has a student population of just over 19,000 students. Eighty-nine percent of the students self-identify as “Hispanic,” the overwhelming majority of whom are Mexican American. The majority of the students engaged in the project were enrolled in a class for credit. However, a number of other students participated because of their commitment to honoring the stories of their family members and communities. The project to chronicle local Bracero stories was prompted when the Mexican
American Studies program at UTPA was to host the Smithsonian Institution’s bilingual travelling exhibit “Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964/Cosecha amarga, Cosecha dulce: El programa Bracero, 1942-1964.” Our first class indicated that we were about to embark on something both special and unconventional. To begin with, despite the ethnic make-up of our students, very few knew what a Bracero or the Bracero program was.

Nevertheless, soon after learning of the program and our intentions to conduct oral histories, the students began to look deep into their own histories, question their elders and recover this important part of U.S. and Mexican history that had been occulted from them. Most of our students began a journey that led them to uncover the often-surprising fact that their padres, abuelos, tíos and community elders participated in the Bracero program.

The educators involved have been teaching at the institution for at least seven years and were prepared for such a response. After all, in the same Fall 2011 semester the university offered almost 300 courses in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences as part of their Core Curriculum (courses required by every student at the institution), of which only four were directly tied to the students’ culture of heritage. Moreover, in both the College of Arts and Humanities and College of Arts and Sciences only two majors required any coursework, whatsoever, in the culture of heritage of the students and region. Therefore, from the beginning we were already re-creating a space of inquiry that was far removed from the norm at the institution. Moreover, we asked ourselves to move away from the books, even those that discussed the Bracero program, and instead engage in place-based participatory research (Guajardo and Guajardo Transformative 15). The hope was to engage in research, teaching and learning that was centered on an Indigenous agenda of recovery, healing, mobilization, transformation, and decolonization as imagined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (94). All those involved engaged in at least one of these processes, and some all of them.
The observables collected from this research process are vast and compelling and would require additional time and further analysis to truly understand the scope and impact the research experience has had on individuals who contributed to the work. One outcome of this research project manifested in the form of celebration on April 21, 2012, when some fifteen Braceros took center stage and gave their testimonios at the “Voces de Braceros Symposium” (see Figure 6) at the University of Texas-Pan American, in Edinburg, Texas. The day-and-a-half-long symposium was envisioned and organized by university professors, students and community elders to celebrate the efforts of the Braceros, give power to their stories, and to educate the community about the impact of the program and those involved in the process. At that moment, the Braceros were the center of knowledge, proving that “Chicana/o may deem it critical to look within their families and communities and rely on the experiences and knowledge of elders and then to reinterpret their own lives through these histories” (Pizarro, “Chicana/o Power!” 68). By actively listening, reflecting, and engaging in critical dialogue with these individuals, we are driven to map out our own narratives and reconnect with our ancestors and re-imagine how learning and teaching takes place in our schools and communities.
Impact of the Work

The impact of the Bracero program still resonates half a century after its final termination. The cultural, political, and economic impact that Braceros and many other Mexicans have made has greatly altered the social fabric of the U.S. (Trueba, *Latinos 2*). Throughout the 22 years of the program’s existence, many lives and histories were changed. The stories chronicled during this research opportunity serve to humanize and validate the experiences of these men and their families and promote them as public intellectuals residing in our communities. It prompts us to appreciate our history and the struggles of our ancestors who paved the way for us to thrive in this country. This has laid the groundwork for us to reimagine pedagogical and curricular approaches to teaching and learning. The observables collected from this research process are numerous and would require additional time and further analysis to truly understand the scope
of the program. The participative action work initiated by the Bracero project has continued to grow and has been nurtured by individuals who have been deeply affected by this work. College students, professors, and community members worked to create a Bracero mural (see Figure 7) in San Juan, Texas. The mural was conceptualized and constructed as an artistic dedication to the sacrifices made by the Braceros and their families, a celebration of our historical roots, and to serve as a source of inspiration for future generations of students to continue to embrace their heritage and work towards building sustainable, healthy communities.

Figure 7. “Braceros: A Legacy of Triumph” mural in San Juan, Texas by Raúl Valdez and community team. Photo courtesy of Stephanie Alvarez.

Through the utilization of storytelling, dialogue, and place-based education, teachers and students create the necessary spaces to have conversations about relevant issues impacting their education, culture, and beliefs. Culturally relevant and affirming pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 477) serves to provide students and others with the pathway to develop critical understandings of social and institutional structures while providing a vehicle for learning. The stories the Braceros shared have compelled us to critically analyze political, social and cultural
practices as we work to educate young minds in a complex and changing society. They challenge us to author counter-narratives in response to the dominant master narratives that have for so long provided only one interpretation of history. By challenging the traditional discourses that view our children as culturally and intellectually deficient (Valencia [SG13]), we realize that by privileging our history, we are cultivating hope for social and institutional change. We have a deeper understanding of our place in history and role in society, that we possess agency to construct new forms of knowledge regardless of the dominant hegemonic structures (Gramsci 13) that shape our reality. “We want the younger people to understand,” said Bracero Don Francisco Márquez, “how our generation lived with much sacrifice in order to live here and help serve this nation.” As Freire observed, “You cannot read the word, without reading the world [SG14].” This project has informed our practice as educators and students, but more importantly it has informed the way we view our history and our communities.

A Dialogical Conclusion Between Don Héctor Pérez and Daughter Yolanda Pérez-Sáenz

Yolanda: Mi papá vino a los Estados Unidos para trabajar y batalló mucho porque tuvo que dejar a mi mamá con dos niños chiquitos en México.

Don Héctor: Yo creo que fue una oportunidad [el programa bracero] que se los dio a muchos mexicanos y muchos de ellos sobresalieron, muchos de ellos triunfaron más que yo.

Yolanda: Yo estaba muy interesada en el proyecto porque quería documentar su historia. Yo también quería que mis hijos supieran quien fue su abuelo y de dónde venía.

Don Héctor: Para mi fue una puerta que se abrió, que salté de mi pueblo, verdad, y conocer otro lugar y ver otros lugares. Se puede [triunfar] cuando se tiene el deseo, la ganas y como digo, gracias a mis hijos y mi esposa que es muy trabajadora.

Yolanda: My father came over to the U.S. to work and he struggled greatly because he had to leave my mother with two small children back in México.

Don Héctor: I believe that [the Bracero program] was an opportunity for many mexicanos, and many of them excelled, many of them were more successful than I.

Yolanda: I was really interested in the project because I wanted to document his story. I also wanted my children to know who their grandfather was and to know where we came from.

Don Héctor: For me it was a door that opened, that I left my hometown, right, and was able to get to know another place and see other places. It is possible [to triumph] when one has the desire and drive.
Yolanda: Para llegar de dónde él llegó hasta lo que tenemos ahora es realmente extraordinario. Poquito a poco trabajando aquí como bracero, después mayordomo, y ahora dueño de Pérez Groves, es una historia que se tiene que contar a los nietos y las generaciones futuras.

Don Héctor: Entonces, mi sueño se ha realizado. Yo me siento realizado.

Yolanda: To come from where he came from to what we have now is truly amazing. Little by little working here as the farm hand, then the foreman, and now as the owner of Pérez Groves, it’s a story that needs to be told to the grandchildren and the future generations.

Don Hector: So, my dream has been fulfilled. I feel fulfilled.
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Women’s Grassroots Revitalization of South El Paso: La Mujer Obrera’s Challenge to Gentrification and Urban Neglect

Joel Zapata

In 2007, La Mujer Obrera, a grassroots workers coalition, presented Plan Mayachén to the El Paso City Council and the El Paso community at large. Plan Mayachén was meant to spur the economy of South El Paso and the surrounding communities at a grassroots level, harnessing the local Mexican and Mexican American culture to create markets and art spaces. It aimed to develop the community without gentrification or corporations entering South El Paso. However, La Mujer Obrera lacked the funds to implement their plan. Moreover, the city government and the local economic elite developed their own economic plan that called for gentrification and corporate takeovers in South El Paso, causing a wide range of individuals and organizations to challenge gentrification in the area. Amidst this story, the history of La Mujer Obrera is narrated as a basis for the organization’s fight against gentrification and community neglect. Also provided is an analysis of the obstacles La Mujer Obrera has had in implementing Plan Mayachén as well as a limited political analysis of El Paso.

Mexican origin women laborers in El Paso, Texas have traditionally been geographically isolated, politically ignored, and have been subordinated by deeply rooted patriarchy and ethnocentrism. Government and unions have often allowed the city’s employers to abuse such laborers. More so, economic neo-globalism\(^1\) has hindered the ability of women to gain suitable employment, thus further isolating them in a second-class status—due to the few jobs available to them—within an already poor and ignored border community. However, El Paso women laborers have acted to end their second-class status. From the aftermath of the 1972-1974 Farah Strike, El Paso women laborers and organizers founded La Mujer Obrera (The Woman Worker) in 1981 as a grassroots coalition that advocates for workers’ rights inside and outside the workplace.

La Mujer Obrera came into existence to combat labor abuse and indifference towards \(^2\)border women, working to holistically address border women’s issues. After advocating to improve the lives of women workers in El Paso’s textile plants during the 1980s, the grassroots organization transformed in the late 1990s to work for women workers’ self-determination in response to the North American Free Trade Agreement’s dismantlement of El Paso’s already ailing textile industry and therefore the disappearance of thousands of textile jobs. One of La
Mujer Obrera’s latest struggles in building self-determination among border women has been fighting government-led gentrification efforts in which the city government and the region’s elite have sought to redevelop/gentrify/colonize South El Paso for young professionals, the military, privileged shoppers from both Mexico and the United States, and multinational retailers. In such efforts, little concern has been given for Mexican origin workers who make up the majority of South El Paso—much less working-class women workers of Mexican descent.

**Origins of La Mujer Obrera in the Farah Strike**

As textile manufactures began to expand in the “cheap” labor market of Southwest cities with large Mexican origin labor pools after World War II and through the 1960s and 1970s, the garment industry quickly grew in working-class and traditionally Mexican American South El Paso to become the nation’s third largest garment manufacturing center and its largest jeans producing center. Textile manufactures mainly employed Mexican origin women, perceiving them be the most easily exploitable workers out of an already marginalized labor pool (Paredes). Farah, Incorporated, a locally founded and publicly traded textile corporation, personified labor abuses suffered by El Paso’s Mexican origin women workers (Coyle, Hershatter, and Honig 6-7).

Through the 1960s and early 1970s women employed by Farah, Incorporated endured unrealistic quotas, sexual harassment by an all-male Euro-American managerial staff, dismissals with no rationale or to avoid giving workers retirement benefits, unpaid sick and maternity leave that could also lead to unjustified firings, pressure to take birth control pills in order to avoid pregnancies and thus absences. Abuses also included cultural and ethnic discrimination as well as verbal and physical violence. Further, the corporation’s managerial staff punished workers for “transgressions” ranging from workers taking too-long bathroom
breaks to female workers becoming pregnant (The San Francisco Bay Area Farah Strike Support Committee 3-5).

In response to labor abuse, Farah, Incorporated employees began attempting to organize in the late 1960s. Under the supervision of the National Labor Relations Board, workers from the cutting department of Farah’s El Paso Gateway textile plant, the corporation’s largest manufacturing center, joined the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union October 1970 (Cuña 336). They stood against Farah, Incorporated’s “virulently anti-union” Chief Executive, William F. Farah (or Willie Farah), “who swore in the time-honored manner that he’d rather be dead than union” (Coyle, Hershatter, and Honig 6-7). William F. Farah was so obsessed in maintaining control over his employees that he would often ride a bicycle through his textile plants, watching over workers while they labored and assuring high quotas were met (Steinhauer).

In response to continued abuse, workers went on strike May 1972 (Coyle, Hershatter, and Honig 6-7). Women quickly became the “backbone of the strike” and “created their own group called Unida Para Siempre (Unity Forever).” To put in perspective the importance of women workers in the strike, 85% of Farah’s 9,500 workers were female, mainly of Mexican origin. These women workers also led in calling for a national boycott of Farah textile goods in July of 1972 (Cuña, 336).

In response, Farah, Incorporated employed company spies to break the strike and obtained a court order stating striking workers had to stand fifty feet apart when picketing Farah textile plants. Under order from the local Justice of the Peace, the El Paso Police Department began arresting workers who broke the court order. El Paso’s media omitted labor abuses by Farah, Incorporated when covering the strike. Then, local banks, one of which included William F. Farah on its board of directors, began denying striking workers loans (The
San Francisco Bay Area Farah Strike Support Committee 5-7). Despite the anti-worker efforts by part of Farah, Incorporated and its above-mentioned allies, the strike and boycott forced Farah, Incorporated to recognize the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union February 1974. Validating workers’ efforts, the National Labor Relations Board concluded that workers’ rights had been violated by Farah, Incorporated. However, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union leaders ended the national boycott before all the workers’ demands were met and accepted a weak contract with little impute from workers, particularly women workers. Subsequent contracts diminished the gains made by the strike until Farah Incorporated closed all its El Paso plants and was eventually bought by a larger corporation (Alaniz and Cornish 113).

The strike was not fruitless, though. Activists and writers Yolanda Alaniz and Megan Cornish describe the impact of the Farah Strike had upon participating women’s psyche. They describe women being intellectually and physically liberated beyond the workplace. In *Viva La Raza: A History of Chicano Identity and Resistance*, Alaniz and Cornish recount one woman worker’s transformation: “‘For years I wouldn’t do anything without asking my husband’s permission . . . Good grief, having to ask to buy a pair of underwear! . . . [The time of the strike was] when it started changing, all of it, I was able to begin to stand up for myself, and I began to feel that I should be accepted for the person that I am’” (257-258).

**Founding of La Mujer Obrera and its Historic Timeline**

Such liberated women, both workers and organizers like El Paso native Cecilia Rodríguez, founded La Mujer Obrera as a grassroots workers’ coalition in 1981 while the textile manufactures began to leave El Paso for “cheaper” foreign labor markets, or for labor pools that without choice accepted lower wages, with less labor regulations than that of the United States (Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez 234, 260). La Mujer Obrera’s founders realized what Chicana
historian Vicki L. Ruiz has documented, that Mexican origin women have had little success within long-established national unions like the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Unions (Ruiz 131-132).

La Mujer Obrera launched as a multifaceted organization that established it as a workers’ advocacy organization as well as a community organization—holistically addressing South El Paso’s needs. To do so, the organization aimed to further liberate and politicize women workers. For this, La Mujer Obrera established seven fundamental human rights to work for: education, health, employment, housing, nourishment, peace, and political liberty (“About Us”).

In the 1980s La Mujer Obrera started popular education programs, or adult education programs, that emphasized critical thinking skills based on workers’ needs. These education programs were centered on leadership and organizational skills such as Spanish-English translation and grant writing in order to move women towards mental and economic independence (Kamel). La Mujer Obrera also provided South El Paso residents with notary and immigration law services and distributed a workers’ newspaper in textile plants (Paredes). Among the many services the organization provided for women workers were free health screenings, literacy and English classes. Additionally, La Mujer Obrera addressed homelessness, hazardous work conditions, and deportation threats (“Fellows: Cecilia Rodriguez”).

Though La Mujer Obrera broadly advocated for South El Paso residents, much of its work still remained within the textile industry. Labor conditions in El Paso’s textile plants were much the same as before the Farah Strike. By the 1980s, though, an increasingly global economy meant textile manufactures could easily move across the border to Ciudad Juárez. Meaning, workers were less apt to protest abuses knowing their employers could simply close
shop and find a “cheaper” labor pool across the Rio Grande (“Fellows: Cecilia Rodriguez”). Therefore, textile manufactures continually practiced various forms of labor abuse like wage theft without consequence (Staudt).

To counter labor abuse and wage theft, La Mujer Obrera organized textile workers, who were still chiefly Mexican origin woman. Workers began to strike textile manufacturers and at times began hunger strikes to garner media attention towards workers’ plight. While some success was reached through the Texas Legislature making wage theft a punishable crime, the 1993 signing and 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement caused the El Paso textile industry to abandon the city at an hastened pace towards Mexico where wages were far lower and labor regulations were less. Neo-globalism had taken the jobs La Mujer Obrera’s members had strived to improve, leaving women workers on the border with few sources of sustenance (Chávez Leyva). Indeed, according to the Labor Department by 1998 at least 10,000 workers in El Paso lost their jobs due to NAFTA. Unemployment in El Paso reached two to three times the national average (Verhovek). In all, El Paso lost over 35,000 jobs because of NAFTA’s economic repercussions on the border (Paredes).

With the El Paso textile industry greatly diminished by the late 1990s, La Mujer Obrera transformed from mainly advocating for textile workers to seeking complete economic independence, aiming towards self-sustainment and self-determination for women on the border (Andrade). In 1997, La Mujer founded a daughter organization called El Puente (The Bridge). El Puente began bilingually retraining workers. El Puente sought to build self-determination for women workers while conserving El Paso’s Chicano and Mexican cultural roots (“El Puente”).
El Puente’s goal was job creation through micro-enterprise development and small business support. Local women began learning how to create their own jobs through education focused on mental and economic independence. Women were provided with basic skills training like reading, technology training, and most importantly entrepreneurial training (“El Puente”). Therefore, women could become independent of multinational corporations who had no allegiance to workers and moved their operations according to the greatest possible profit.

Once establishing its mission in post-NAFTA El Paso, La Mujer Obrera began expanding physically. Spaces in South El Paso were renovated to train women and provide employment opportunities while revitalizing the area in a non-gentrifying manner. La Mujer Obrera opened Café Mayapan, Rayito De Sol Daycare, Uxmal Apartments, and the now closed Mercado Mayapan (“El Puente”). La Mujer Obrera built various grassroots community businesses with valuable social purposes, but the organization’s flagship community-based business was Mercado Mayapan. Opened in 2009 (closed in 2012 because of budget shortfalls⁴) in a formal 40,000 square foot textile plant, Mercado Mayapan harnessed Mexican cultural heritage as an economic engine. It enclosed a Mexican styled market, a local farmer’s market, artisan booths, and a stage for performing arts. Mercado Mayapan also included a cultural museum—Museo Mayachén—and a technology center—Chicana Media Center. In effect, Mercado Mayapan provided South Central El Paso, and the community’s women workers, with a safe space where it could practice its Chicano and Mexican culture. The market was a space where local small vendors, such as women workers who launched their own small enterprises, could sell their goods (“Mercado Mayapan”). Moreover, Mercado Mayapan’s Chicana Media Center provided the surrounding community with technology access and was a space for afterschool education as well as adult entrepreneurial education (“Chicana Media Center”).

⁴ The closure of Mercado Mayapan was due to budget shortfalls, indicating financial difficulties experienced by the organization at the time. This highlights the challenges faced by community-based enterprises in securing sustainable funding.
Challenging Gentrification Efforts and Developing Community Centered Revitalization

La Mujer Obrera, as demonstrated above, has provided alternatives for a community commonly deprived of choices. When the City of El Paso decided it wanted to erase a large swath of South El Paso, including the historic and largely marginalized Segundo Barrio (Second Ward), La Mujer Obrera developed a community-centered alternative to gentrification and historic marginalization of South El Paso: Plan Mayachén, which had Mercado Mayapan as its prototype. The plan was presented to the El Paso community and to the city government during a City Council Meeting on October 23, 2007 (El Paso City Council). Since then, La Mujer Obrera has continued to combat the demolition of El Pasoans’ homes, small businesses, culture, identity, and history by the region’s economic elite.

The Segundo Barrio is a poor community in South El Paso made of families who have often called it home for generations. Residents live among or in deteriorating historic buildings. Indeed, the neighborhood is one of the oldest Mexican origin neighborhoods in the country. The movers of Mexico’s 1910 revolution lived, planned, and sought refuge in the Segundo Barrio. This enclave along the Rio Grande has been the Ellis Island for Mexican immigrants on their way to Albuquerque, Denver, Chicago, and almost any other corner of the U.S. where Mexican origin people make their homes (Welsome). Additionally, other immigrant groups have also passed through it, such as Chinese and Japanese origin immigrants. The Segundo Barrio’s historical and cultural significance continued with it being the epicenter for one of the most radical wings of the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement. The neighborhood presently remains as a center of Chicano culture and a center for the remaining breaths of the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement.

The Segundo Barrio had a population of 8,003 according to the 2000 Census, out of which 62.1% lived below the poverty line compared to 22.2% of El Paso, 15.4% of Texas, and
12.4% nationally. From those living below the poverty line in the Segundo Barrio, women made up the majority, accounting for 55.3% of those living under the poverty line. The percentage of women living under the poverty line compared to men in the Segundo Barrio outweighed the percentage of women living under the poverty line in the rest of El Paso and nationally. According to the same census the median income of the neighborhood was $10,240, but 41% of households made less than $10,000 per year. Due in large part to the poverty of the area, the high school dropout rate of the Segundo Barrio was 22.5% compared to 8.8% for El Paso as a whole, 12.5% for Texas, and 9.8% nationally. In fact, only 21% of residents older than twenty-five had a high school diploma, and only 3% of residents had a college degree (Cook and O’Rourke).

Latinos/Hispanics made up 96.2% of the Segundo Barrio, most of whom were of Mexican origin, compared to 76.6% of El Paso as a whole. Of the 8,000 plus population, 50% were U.S. born, 14% were naturalized citizens, and 36% were non-U.S. citizens (Cook and O’Rourke). Although, this number can be skewed considering that many non-citizens, particularly individuals not recognized as authorized immigrants by the government, are often undercounted in censuses. The reasons for such undercounting range from language barriers to fear of government entities (Romero; O’Dowd). This undercounted population is also a population that tends not to live in an idealized Euro-American family, economic, educational, and social lifestyle. Meaning, they are often yet to be Euro-Americanized and thus seen as an “other” who is socially undeserving to be considered in a positive light when making government policy—becoming easily marginalized.

Although this impoverished community has historically been ignored by the federal, state, county, and city governments, its “mom-and-pop shops…d[id] roughly half a billion dollars in business a year” in 2007, proving that the neighborhood’s local businesses were
thriving economically through their own efforts. However, the Paso Del Norte Group—a taciturn group that the *Texas Observer* categorized as an “organization of wealthy oligarchs, industrialists, real estate developers, and politicos from both sides of the border”—drew a plan for the City of El Paso to redevelop the historic and culturally unique community “with an arena, parking garages, condos, lofts, town homes . . . and an ‘urban retail’ outlet rumored to be a Wal-Mart or Target.” Under the plan—drawn up in secret over two years—325 acres of the most marginalized neighborhoods of El Paso, if not the nation, could be up for demolition (Welsome). The plan was built as an effort to spur economic development in El Paso, particularly South El Paso and the neighboring downtown area. Left out, though, were the working-class Mexican origin residents of South El Paso.

Democratic Texas State Representative Paul Moreno (1967-2008), who grew up in the *Segundo Barrio*, stated that the plan “does not pass my smell test. It's too heavily slanted toward a few wealthy families in El Paso.” Dallas Lawyer Stuart Blaugrund, who at the time represented a group of Downtown El Paso businessmen and who also originated from El Paso, called El Paso Del Norte’s redevelopment plan “the ‘largest land grab’ in recent Texas history.” Blaugrund saw the plan as a scheme to shutter vibrant small local businesses and transfer the land once occupied by them to another private owner—that is, to corporations and the region’s elite. One such member of the El Paso Del Norte Group is billionaire William “Bill” Sanders (father-in-law of former El Paso City Councilman turned U.S. Representative Robert O’Rourke (D), who as a politician has appropriated the Mexican name “Beto” O’Rourke). O’Rourke staunchly supported the El Paso Del Norte Group’s redevelopment plan and did not abstain from any votes the El Paso City Council cast regarding the redevelopment plan. To exemplify O’Rourke’s ties to the El Paso Del Norte Group, he was once a member, along with his wife and mother. Not surprisingly, O’Rourke opted to favor demolishing, or “redeveloping,” at least
part of the *Segundo Barrio*, which was in his council district (Welsome). In fact, when the El Paso Del Norte Group presented their plan on March 31, 2006 to the El Paso City Council, O’Rourke made the first “motion to begin the process of adopting the plan” (Rojas).

Clearly, O’Rourke was not seriously considering those who would be displaced by gentrification. Though no direct personal economic gain for O’Rourke would come from El Paso Del Norte Group’s plan, O’Rourke was positioning himself to be seen as favorable by the region’s elite. Those who would benefit from gentrification, those belonging to El Paso Del Norte Group, would be inclined to make political campaign contributions to O’Rourke.\(^6\)

Whether or not this was O’Rourke’s intention in supporting El Paso Del Norte Group’s plan, in doing so O’Rourke continued the political tradition of ignoring the best interest of South El Paso and the city’s Mexican origin population.

But the plan lacks a vital detail: where would the *Segundo Barrio*’s residents go? They were not consulted about the destiny of their neighborhood. Many residents, if not most, cannot afford to live in another area of El Paso. Many residents do not have the credit to obtain a home mortgage loan or know how to work the rent system outside of the *Segundo Barrio*. Some residents are not U.S. citizens. Other residents do not have the immigration status needed to have credit or a social security number for a home loan or to rent in greater El Paso. Moreover, the way of life of the neighborhood was ignored. Residents of this unique and historic neighborhood do not live an idealized Euro-American lifestyle. Homes are often composed of extended families and are multigenerational. The idealized and unrealistic nuclear family lifestyle, which the El Paso Del Norte Group and city government have attempted to impose upon *Segundo Barrio* residents, simply does not fit. Instead, the way of life of residents is devalued; “progress” and “redevelopment” is seen as more important, and ghettoized and restrictive government projects or displacement are seen as the answer (Chew-Smithart).
Micro-historian and El Paso native David Dorado Romo has positioned the above point in perspective to El Paso’s past. During the 1870s and 1880s four new rail lines connected El Paso to the rest of the nation. The rail lines brought a substantial Euro-American population, which placed El Paso’s Mexican origin population under its largely racist control. Romo asserts, “they moved quickly to erase the city’s Mexican identity” (Romo 215-216). By “the early 1880s, the Anglo press carried out campaigns to tear down all the adobe structures in downtown and replace them with brick buildings for aesthetic and hygienic reasons” (Romo 216). When the demolition of downtown buildings was completed, “the local press called for all the ‘mud hovels’ in the Segundo Barrio to be demolished as well. It would take a couple of decades for the local Anglos to carry out this second phase of the ‘de-Mexicanization’ of the city architecture” (Romo 216). Although, after this phase was complete, the Segundo Barrio remained a Mexican American neighborhood with a distinct culture and locally-driven economy. It was not completely “de-Mexicanized.”

Yet, the specter of destruction for working-class communities of color has never been far away since World War II and the passage of the Federal Housing Act of 1949, which was meant to clear out impoverished urban areas and downtowns to make way for gentrification, and subsequent Federal legislation. National public policy re-cast community destruction as “revitalization” so outside businesses and the middle-class—words that in our society equal Euro-Americans or at the least those who hold Euro-American ideals and culture—could occupy what were once government-neglected, working-class neighborhoods of color (Otero 101-103). What the El Paso Del Norte Group and the city government were attempting to do—gentrification without consideration towards a traditionally marginalized community—was nothing new. It was an all-too-often-repeated action seen in New York City, Los Angeles, Tucson, Dallas, Austin, El Paso, and many more cities throughout the nation for over half a
century. The end result has been to benefit a few wealthy elites who are for the most part Euro-American.\(^8\)

**The Catholic Diocese of El Paso Responds**

Knowing the hardships *Segundo Barrio* and South El Paso residents have historically faced and continue to face, the Catholic Diocese of El Paso, which holds a strong presence in the *Segundo Barrio* by providing religious services along with community building, wrote the following in an open letter to the El Paso City Council:

Downtown and South El Paso do need re-vitalization. The outcome of re-vitalization should take into account the hopes, dreams and desires of all the affected, including the poor. There is a rich heritage, a unique culture, a true sense of neighborhood and historical architecture in the affected area. The plan should consider all of these as valuable realities and not focus only on economic benefit and tax revenue. It was disturbing to learn that the present plan was conceived without any consultation with residents, area businesses, and key institutions. We are in disagreement with a re-vitalization program that was planned without public backing or the input of those affected. A planning process typically places consultation and input prior to drawing-up a plan; just the reverse of the Paso Del Norte Group’s way of proceeding (Ochoa, Stowe, and Garcia).

The open letter goes on to discuss the possibility of eminent domain for home and business owners. The open letter stated, “Eminent Domain should only be used for the ‘common good’ of the community as in the building of a public hospital, fire station, public school etc.; not for the exclusively personal and corporate profit” (Ochoa, Stowe, and Garcia). The Catholic Diocese also asked why the members of El Paso Del Norte Group were kept secret if the group
was receiving public funding, and why the names were not revealed until the El Paso City Government was forced to disclose the list under the Freedom of Information Act. The El Paso Catholic Diocese went on to inform the City Council:

\[W\text{e want to stand in solidarity with the poor, with the immigrant, with the marginalized, and with the rejected one. There is a long history of neglect and decimation with regards to the Segundo Barrio . . . we are opposed to any plan that disregards and displaces the poor, that ignores the plight of the immigrant, that divides the community, that perpetuates injustice and inadequate housing, that diminishes low-cost housing; one that seeks to enrich a select group.}\]

(Ochoa, Stowe, and Garcia)

The Catholic Diocese of El Paso has historically served the city’s Mexican population. Chicano historian Mario T. García asserts in his study of Mexican immigrants of El Paso, Desert Immigrants, that “As an institution, the Catholic Church in El Paso pursued a bicultural approach in its treatment of Mexican immigrants” since the late nineteenth century; although, parish schools’ curriculum in South El Paso included Americanization programs (García 213). Yet, the Sacred Heart School in the Segundo Barrio included “Spanish and Mexican cultural traditions. . . along with American and Mexican history” in its curriculum. Indeed, in 1919 the Italian pastor of Sacred Heart lectured the graduating girls of the school “to conserve the beautiful customs and traditions of la raza” (García 214). García concludes the El Paso’s Catholic Church “helped transmit Mexican ethnicity and, at the same time, provided lessons in English and American culture in order to assist students adjust and hopefully succeed in the United States” (214). During the 1972-1974 Farah Strike, the Catholic Diocese of El Paso also supported the workers who demanded labor justice (Steinhauer). Today’s diocese is doing much of the same. It offers social services as well as a recognized voice for the Mexican origin
community. In defending the existence of the Segundo Barrio, the Church also continued its attempt to preserve the community’s traditions amid gentrification efforts and thus the physical erosion of Mexican American history and the disappearance of the Segundo Barrio’s culture. In addition, Bishop Armando X. Ochoa, who headed the Catholic Diocese of El Paso from 1996-2012, advocated “social justice and the dignity of the person,” which has been practiced through migrant and refugee services as well as social and legal services for the El Paso area (“Bishop Armando X. Ochoa”).

Not-for-profit institutions, such as the Catholic Diocese, realized the El Paso Del Norte Group and the City Council were standing against South Side residents to further enrich billionaires and millionaires from both Mexico and the United States such as Paul L. Foster, CEO of Western Refining, and Woodly “Woody” Hunt, CEO of Hunt Building CO (“Members”). Both the above-mentioned members, like others within the El Paso Del Norte Group, are well connected within various centers of power. For instance, Paul L. Foster is a current Vice Chairman of the University of Texas Board of Regents (“Current Regents”). Woodly “Woody” Hunt has also been a member of the University of Texas Board of Regents and was once the Chairman of the Texas Governor’s Business Council (Hamilton).

Retraction

In the face of overwhelming evidence of corruption and protests, which continues to go mostly unnoted by traditional media outlets, a plan entitled El Segundo Barrio—Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy was presented in 2010 by then Mayor John Cook and then City Representative Robert “Beto” O’Rourke. The city’s Executive Summary of the plan states that the “neighborhood revitalization strategy is an initiative that is designed for the empowerment of residents living within the neighborhood” through economic and educational opportunities. However, the Executive Summary of the El Segundo Barrio—Neighborhood
Revitalization Strategy has no concrete plan for improving the neighborhood or empowering residents. It simply states goals such as increasing homeownership and housing options, particularly single family housing, improving infrastructure, and increasing policing of the neighborhood, improving youth and adult education, and improving the employment opportunities in the neighborhood. However, the plan does not include the building of libraries or schools, increasing the funding of existing libraries and schools, or the funding of any alternative educational programs in the neighborhood. In fact, the *El Segundo Barrio*— Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy has no funding or concrete plans within it. The plan states a few vague goals that seem to be far in the future with no meaningful (or the actual real world improvement in residents’ daily lives) immediate action. Instead, the *El Segundo Barrio*— Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy mainly presents the demographics of the neighborhood (previously presented in this study) and a simplified and ethnocentric history of the *Segundo Barrio* that manages to ignore the historical racism and discrimination residents suffered, and continues to suffer, from the city government and the El Paso Independent School District— just to name a few entities (Cook and O’Rourke).

Chicana historian Yolanda Chávez Leyva has noted that *Segundo Barrio* residents face high unemployment and low wages along with the lack of job training programs (Martinez-Bustos, Cantu, and Cornejo). These are all issues the city government has not addressed. These issues also do not exist in a vacuum; for residents of the *Segundo Barrio* suffer from government neglect and abuse since childhood. As previously addressed in this study, the neighborhood has a low educational attainment due to economics and the often-poor condition of its schools (physically and academically). Although, the neighborhood schools lack funding due to state and national politics, which contribute to their low student success rates, the El Paso Independent School District Administration has at times actively discriminated against *Segundo*
Barrio students and other students of Mexican origin. For instance, from 2006 to 2011 students from the local high school, Bowie High School, who did not score sufficiently in state standardized tests were pushed out of school by direction of the superintendent, Lorenzo Garcia. Hence, Bowie High School, which “had been on the brink of state intervention for years,” quickly began to turn in high test, scores (Michels). Several individuals, including a formal school trustee and formal State Senator Eliot Shapleigh, protested for years to the school administration, the Texas Education Agency, and the U.S. Department of Education until charges were finally filed against school administrators. The Texas Observer reported, “Students had been given an array of justifications for their banishment. Some had been told they’d been absent too often to stay in school, and that it would cost hundreds of dollars to fight such truancy decisions in court.” Some students were threatened and spied on by school administrators, saying, “They’d been photographed crossing the bridge from Juarez as proof they lived outside the district. One boy said his principal threatened to report his aunt to immigration if he didn’t leave school” (Michels).

This is an extreme example of mass discrimination that affected hundreds, if not thousands of students, in a system where school officials are pressured to make the grade. This study does not cover the array of discrimination, ethnocentrism, and lack of what many consider “true” or “substantial” education within Texas’s and the nation’s test based education system; however, this case does provide an example of what Segundo Barrio residents have to contend with on a daily basis. From childhood to adulthood, those who live in the Segundo Barrio face discrimination and lack of consideration by government officials and employees. In Bowie High School, school officials robbed local students of an education and of an opportunity to progress and improve their own lives, the lives of their families, and perhaps their neighborhood. They did so through the deceit and coercion of students and their families.
Returning to the *El Segundo Barrio*—Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy, the plan states that residents live within the *Segundo Barrio* due to its low rental rates and overall low cost of living. Yet, one of the *El Segundo Barrio*—Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy goals is to increase the number of single-family homes, which ignores the familial structure of the neighborhood and would mean the destruction of current low-cost housing in order to make way for new and more costly single-family homes. Moreover, no other infrastructure improvements were mentioned to be initiated through the *El Segundo Barrio*—Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy, and the few improvements that were cited were pre-existing projects such as water utilities and Texas Department of Transportation projects. The only plan that the city can implement as presented by *El Segundo Barrio*—Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy is an increased police presence, which can easily be turned into an oppressive presence in a poor neighborhood with few legal recourses for protection against police, or general government, oversteps. Again, the city purposely failed to empower El Paso’s marginalized (Cook and O'Rourke).

**Plan Mayachén**

Hence, La Mujer Obrera saw that the women they had worked to empower through labor defense in the textile industry, adult education, and entrepreneurial training after NAFTA along with their entire community and their way of life, had not been considered by the El Paso Del Norte Group or the city government. Both the El Paso Del Norte Group and the city government held heavy cultural, ethnic, and class bias that perceives border laborers in an unfavorable light when compared to or competing with corporate interests. Again, border women were ignored by those meant to work for their well-being like Robert O'Rourke and other elected officials. La Mujer Obrera has an answer: redevelop the community not with billionaires or faceless corporations in mind, but with the community members themselves.
Plan Mayachén is a grassroots redevelopment plan that seeks to enhance the quality of life of current South Side residents, not displace them. The plan seeks to rework existing power relations, building a thriving and empowering urban space for women of color. According La Mujer Obrera’s outline of the plan, Plan Mayachén is “a comprehensive community-based regional development plan linking Southern New Mexico, El Paso County and Mexico, and is dedicated to creating 3,000 jobs and more than 100 businesses on the US Mexico border through green economy and development initiatives.” La Mujer Obrera made it clear in the plan’s outline that their goals for the border were the same goals as the Obama Administration’s stated economic and community goals, such as creating a sustainable and competitive green economy, creating redevelopment that included marginalized communities, and providing affordable transportation and housing for all (“Plan Mayachén”).

Plan Mayachén seeks to develop El Paso County and Southern New Mexico by “building on the traditional assets of the border population (their cultural heritage, work ethic, work experience, and strong sense of family) to create sustainable economies and communities” (“Plan Mayachén”). The development plan focuses on Latinos, the vast majority of El Paso County and Southern New Mexico’s population. At the center of the plan is Plaza Mayachén: “a six block area bridging the Chamizal and South Side neighborhoods (two historic immigrant barrios on the border now ranking amongst the most impoverished areas in the country), and adjacent to border crossings and Downtown El Paso” (“Plan Mayachén”).

Plan Mayachén will be supported by green technology, which will include wind and solar energy and green construction and building designs. Such green technology, according to La Mujer Obrera, will power social enterprises and small businesses and thus job creation, workforce training, educational programs, public health initiatives, arts, community access to technology, and infrastructure development. Plaza Mayachén is to showcase:
restaurants and cafes; shops with quality merchandise from Mexico, local artists, and crafts people; a farmers’ market; bilingual exhibits, concerts, films and other recreational events; cultural celebrations; education and training activities; opportunities for applied research on Mexican heritage and the United States-Mexico border region (“Plan Mayachén”).

Plan Maychén is a holistic development plan that crosses generational lines, ethnic lines, labor fields, education levels, and borders, and is meant to support women and their families. Importantly, it excludes land grabs by millionaire and billionaire capitalists whose ultimate aim is profit without human consideration. La Mujer Obrera intends to create an environment, as they have done with Mercado Mayapan and Café Mayapan, that is safe for women to build their own enterprises and express their culture without being oppressed by a labor and economic system aimed at dehumanizing them physically and mentally.

**Obstacles to Fulfilling Plan Mayachén and Community Empowerment**

Plan Mayachén, however, faces an obstacle—funding. The El Paso Del Norte Group can easily find funding through its millionaire and billionaire members and through the support of the city government for gentrification projects that target the poor and people of color, which too often go hand in hand. La Mujer Obrera faces the challenge of being composed of minority women, including women who do not know English, have an unfavorable immigration status in the United States, and who are poor and do not have a college or high school education.

Like most non-profits, La Mujer Obrera has worked through the grant system. In 2003, La Mujer Obrera’s daughter organization El Puente was selected to receive a $100,000 grant along with free business consulting from the Yale School of Management (Peregrino). In 2005, La Mujer Obrera received a $500,000 state grant in order to assist displaced garment workers. According to Irma Montoya, the Director of the organization at the time, the funds were to be
used to begin a Center for Bilingual Development and Social Enterprise. However, the $500,000 was $2,000,000 short of the $2,500,000 needed to fully fund the center. Montoya told the *El Paso Times*, “It’s a start, and we’re looking for more.” The funds were meant to begin providing services for over three hundred displaced workers, but the grant system is not permanent (Burge). The above-mentioned grants are only two of various grants La Mujer Obrera has received that have not been rewarded. This means that grants are not a sustainable means of survival since they are often canceled or are simply not renewed. Moreover, since the economic downturn of the 2010s private and public grants have become more and more scarce, forcing many non-profits to close or downscale. La Mujer Obrera is no exception.

For instance, La Mujer Obrera’s model for Plan Mayachén, Mercado Mayapan, closed its doors late 2012. The question of why Mercado Mayapan was forced to close must be asked. Outside funding was/is running short, and self-sustainment is yet to be reached. Yes, La Mujer Obrera has achieved what many non-profits nationally and globally never do—actual real world impact. La Mujer Obrera has positively affected the lives of border women and the border community as a whole, the law, and politics. Unlike most non-profits, such as health providers or anti-domestic violence shelters, La Mujer Obrera is not a service organization that sees the women it advocates for as “clients.” La Mujer Obrera seeks to incorporate women into its ranks and empower women through its emancipatory discourse and action. La Mujer Obrera has sought and continues seeking for women to become their own advocates who will challenge oppressive social norms stemming from racism, sexism, colonialism, anti-worker sentiment/classism, historical amnesia, and neo-globalism. Hence, border women will independently begin building their own communities, and to an extent they have already begun doing so through the small enterprises and then women-centered community La Mujer Obrera has formed. Noting so, journalist and social activist Gloria Steinem—after touring La Mujer
Obrera’s Sol Daycare, Uxmal Apartments, and Mercado Mayapán in March of 2010—told the *El Paso Times*, “‘This is a rare organization that includes every part of the community . . . transforming a place with no jobs and a hopeless situation into a hybrid, creative community’” (Rentería).

However, the organization has yet to make its business ventures and plans economically self-sustaining (a stated goal of the grassroots organization) through the non-profit industrial complex model. Like many working-class people, living month to month, and living in danger of their physical spaces being lost means the women of La Mujer Obrera must focus their efforts on survival, leaving less time for implementing Plan Mayachén or any other large-scale social plan. What is left to ask is: how can La Mujer Obrera and other such organizations create self-sustainment? What actions can border workers, social activists, academic supporters, etc., take to ensure the continual existence, and most importantly, the success of La Mujer Obrera? What research into self-sustainment, non-corporate business models, or cooperative models needs to be done and implemented? Is a complete new economic model for the border region possible?

If such actions towards self-sustainment are not viable, then what actions should be taken? That is, if grassroots organizations cannot change El Paso alone, what can be done for government to respond? Should political lobbying and voter drives be implemented, or is the current government system too corrupt and outdated to respond to voters? If so, what kind of further political action is needed: political education to politicize working-class El Pasoans, sit-ins, hunger strikes, marches, lawsuits, or the introduction of third party candidates?

Political action must ultimately do more than simply demand for government to make a few favorable decisions or offer lip service and for the economic elite to make limited concessions. Political action must mean the permanent take-over of government for the
majority of El Paso, not a small elite as government currently stands. Hence, government would support an economic system keen on respecting workers and their families not maximizing profit for small stake holding elite. While some may consider this radical or even extreme, keeping border women and their communities marginalized and in poverty and with few opportunities is a far more cruel and extreme option. The stark realities facing border workers have not changed and seemingly will not do so without political intervention. The conundrum of how to change the economic and government systems is what border women face while attempting to build a future in an existing economic system, supported and seemingly at one with government, which insists on using their physical labor while belittling their mental capabilities then discarding them when not needed for profit.

That being said, those most capable of understanding the plight of the border’s working-class would be those within this group. Perhaps what is truly needed in the border’s political circles are not elite progressive individuals who occasionally sympathize with the border’s working-class, but individuals who have lived and continue to live, and thus fully understand, the reality of poverty and its daily uncertainty. This of course would require politicizing border residents to think critically and deeply analyze their society and to maneuver towards defending their interests—something La Mujer Obrera has laid the seeds for since its establishment. Then, fronterizos will be better able to defend their communities from destruction and government neglect. Perhaps fronterizos can then gain enough political and economic power to determine the future of their communities, creating a more just world in a border that often exemplifies injustice and human suffering.
Notes

1. Neo-Globalism, as used in this study, is the global economic system where increasingly unregulated private corporations owned by elite stockholders determine economic outcomes. Thus, private corporations choose what labor pools to use for manufacturing or management based on profitability for corporations and thus the stockholders of these corporations. Therefore, corporations will seek the “cheapest” possible labor, often with little regard to political borders, human rights, humane labor conditions, or their workers.

2. A portion of Mercado Mayapan was transferred in a downsized form to Café Mayapan, which is a social enterprise opened by La Mujer Obrera in 2001 (“Tidbits”).

3. It must be noted that communities of color, immigrant communities, and poor communities have historically been, and continue to be, undercounted by government censuses. According to the Census Bureau the 2010 Census undercounted 2.1% of the Black population, 1.5% of the Hispanic population, and 4.9% of the American Indian and Alaska Native population living on government reservations—all racial/ethnic categorizing terms used here are directly from the Census Bureau (“Census Bureau Releases Estimates of Undercount”). In all, the 2010 Census did not count 1.5 million minority members (Yen). Although, for Hispanics, which comprise most of South El Paso, this was an improvement of the 4.99% official undercount in the 1990 Census (El Nasser and Overberg). Census undercounting in El Paso is particularly problematic. Indeed, the El Paso Times reported shortly before the 2010 Census that El Paso County is one of the “50 counties in America with populations that are the hardest to count.” This is “because of language barriers, the fluid border and poverty in colonias and city neighborhoods” (Gómez). Colonias are unincorporated areas outside of cities and towns along the Texas border that usually have few to no government services.

4. According to the Paso Del Norte Group’s official website, the organization has been rebranded as the Borderplex Bi-National Economic Alliance after merging with the Regional Economic Development Corp (“Update: The Borderplex Bi-National Economic Alliance”).

5. During O’Rourke’s successful bid for Congress, the El Paso Times reported: “O’Rourke’s contributions have all come from individual donors. Much of his money has come from El Paso business leaders, particularly members of the Paso del Norte Group, which was founded by O’Rourke’s father-in-law, William Sanders” (“Challenger O’Rourke”). For easy access for specific donors and donation amounts the El Paso Times posted a “Search campaign contributions for Beto O’Rourke” page on its website. The webpage tracked donations made to O’Rourke during his 2012 bid for Congress.

6. The local Anglo or Euro-American press Romo refers to includes the still popular El Paso Times. El Paso’s only remaining English-language daily newspaper. Thus, it is also a newspaper that this study uses as a source.

7. For further reference regarding “urban renewal” in El Paso see Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Community (specifically 226-259) by historian and El Paso native Monica Perales, which studies urban displacement as a consequence of environmental injustice on the El Paso border.

8. The inclusion of the Catholic Diocese of El Paso’s relationship with the area’s Mexican origin community is strictly limited to confines of this study. In saying that, the diocese’s stance on various human rights issues such as women’s rights and Queer rights are not analyzed here.


10. To gain a deeper understanding of the modern and historical policing of People of Color, particularly Latinos and Mexican-origin people, see M. Jacqui Alexander’s Pedagogies of Crossing (233-35), Race, Ethnicity, and Policing: New and Essential Readings (435-44), and Victor M. Rios’s Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys as a whole.
11. Among President Obama’s goals, which are readily available through BarackObama.com, is doubling the nation’s green energy output by 2020, creating upwardly mobile jobs, raising wages, and assuring women equal pay for equal work (Barack Obama). In various forms, these are goals La Mujer Obrera has set for itself through Plan Mayachén and goals La Mujer Obrera has been working towards since 1981.

12. This is the not-for-profit model relying on private and government grants and donations that has rapidly risen in popularity in the United States to provide social services that other private sector entities or governments do not provide.

Works Cited


Older Mexican Americans’ Perceptions of Mental Distress

John Gonzalez and Irán Barrera

The recognition of mental distress in older Hispanics can be challenging for mental health professionals, as well as for the individual suffering from mental distress and his or her family. Hispanics have often used non-psychiatric terms to describe or label their mental distress. This qualitative study conducted in Texas focused on how older Mexican Americans perceive mental illness, and on how they identify the causes of, and assign labels to, mental distress. This study reveals that older Mexican Americans have several different names for mental distress (i.e., coraje), as well as provides important insights regarding the perceived causes of mental distress. A discussion follows which provides important recommendations directed at enhancing the quality of mental health care for older Mexican Americans.

Kirmayer (171-176) stated that somatization refers to the presence of physical symptoms for which there is no diagnosable physical condition. Using the Hispanic Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (H-HANES), a large-scale epidemiological and health survey, Angel and Guarnaccia (1233) found that respondents who had high scores on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD) rated their health as significantly worse than did the physicians who also rated them. They also reported large differences between Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in levels of affective distress; Puerto Ricans reported much higher levels of affective distress and poorer physical health than did Mexican Americans.

Jenkins (319-321) studied Mexican-American families’ characterizations of schizophrenia and found families described their family member’s schizophrenic symptoms as symptoms of nervios. The families also focused on a series of somatic complaints that tended to destigmatize the mental illness. Nervios is popularly utilized to refer to a broad and diverse range of distressing emotional states and illness phenomena. In Hispanic cultures, nervios is understood as a condition that often affects adults who are experiencing difficult life conditions. Symptoms of nervios include; headaches, trembling, heart palpitations, stomach and appetite disturbances, and trouble with concentration, sleep problems, and worrying (Guarnaccia & Farias 1226-1228). Salgado de Synder, de Jesus Diaz-Perez, & Ojeda (467) stated that nervios
should be recognized as a “cry for help.” It might be a sign of serious mental and physical dysfunction, particularly among those experiencing distress (Salgado de Snyder et al. 467).

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, also known as the *DSM-IV-TR* (APA 897-903) discusses several culture-bound syndromes in the Appendix section. Two idioms of distress listed in the DSM-IV-TR that are sometimes recognized in Mexican Americans are *ataque de nervios* and *nervios*. *Ataque de nervios*, reported among Latinos, has symptoms that include uncontrollable shouting, attacks of crying, trembling, verbal and physical aggression, fainting episodes, and suicidal gestures. It frequently occurs because of a stressful life event. Descriptions of *ataque de nervios* are similar to panic attacks and presentations of anxiety, mood, dissociative and somatoform disorders (APA 899-901).

*Nervios* is another idiom of distress among Hispanics. It includes a wide range of symptoms of emotional distress, somatic disturbance and inability to function. Symptoms include headaches, irritability, sleep difficulties, nervousness, inability to concentrate, trembling and easy tearfulness. It presents like adjustment, anxiety, depressive, dissociative, somatoform, or psychotic disorders depending on the set of symptoms experienced (APA 901). *Ataque de Nervios* and *nervios* are just two conditions from the culture-bound syndromes of the DSM-IV-TR. In the Mexican-American community other names and labels are used to describe mental distress not found in the DSM-IV-TR. This study explores older Mexican Americans in Texas and their perceptions of mental distress, including the labels, perceived symptoms, and causes.
Conceptual Framework

Kleinman’s Explanatory Model (105) is a model often used to examine help-seeking behaviors and culture. According to Kleinman, an explanatory model encompasses the notions a person has about an episode of illness and its treatment delivered by all engaged in the clinical process, based on cultural knowledge and idiosyncratic experiences. Patient, family, and physician each have explanatory models of illness. The explanatory models are informed by the popular culture, the media, health care culture, and the social network. The explanatory models of the illness experience help understand how individuals understand their health needs and decisions about treatment.

Building on Kleinman’s Explanatory Model, Green (54-56) adapted Kleinman’s explanatory model into a help-seeking behavior model. Green labeled the client explanatory model the *client culture*, and the practitioner explanatory model the *professional subculture*. The client culture includes problem recognition, problem labeling and diagnosis, indigenous help providers, utilization of help providers, and problem resolution. The professional subculture includes professional help providers, minority professionals and professional models. This study uses Green’s help-seeking behavior model as a guide for this study in particular, the categories of problem recognition and problem labeling and diagnosis.

Literature Review

Professional Culture

The professional mental health culture consists of its own language, shared values, expressions, thoughts, and traditions. Professionals bring their own culture to the therapeutic relationship. Through education and training, treatment professionals become in a sense bilingual and bicultural. They possess the culture and language from which they come and they learn the culture and language of the profession. Acculturation for the professional culture
comes from education, including medical education and public health training (Angel and Thoits 479–480; Good 436–437; Pelto and Pelto, *Medical Anthropology* 3–4).

Because Western medicine is based on evidence from scientific research it has become the foundation of worldwide health which has in turn influenced the beliefs and the traditions of Western society. Societal institutions that educate and train health care and mental health professionals have been shaped by the dominant American culture and Western medicine. This cultural imprint is at the foundation of training for Mental Health Professionals and they bring this cultural imprint to the clinical setting.

Accurate diagnosis is a trademark of Western medicine (NIH 44–46). Clinicians arrive at accurate diagnosis by determining whether the patient’s signs and symptoms significantly impair functioning at home, school, work, and in their communities. Social norms or cultural standards of behavior are the basis for this determination (Scadding 594–596; Pelto and Pelto 152–153). The norms or standards of behavior that clinicians use for diagnosis come from the DSM-IV-TR. When the clinician and the patient come from different cultural backgrounds, the potential for cultural differences in understanding health conditions is greater. Both are actors in the treatment setting. As the DSM-IV-TR puts it,

> Diagnostic assessment can be especially challenging when a clinician from one ethnic or cultural group uses the DSM-IV Classification to evaluate an individual from a different ethnic or cultural group. A clinician who is unfamiliar with the nuances of an individual’s cultural frame of reference may incorrectly judge as psychopathology those normal variations in behavior, beliefs, or experience that are particular to the individual’s culture. (APA xxxiv)

The U.S. health care system now emphasizes culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate health care. Providers have been learning patient perspectives of various cultures. It has been
shown that when practitioners provide culturally sensitive and appropriate care patients’
treatment compliance increases. This includes being culturally appropriate and sensitive to the
client’s acculturation stress, their cultural marginality and in explaining their illness (Stewart
1429-1431).

**Views of Mental Illness**

The professional culture makes sense of mental illness by using the DSM IV. It
addresses culture in the “outline for cultural formation” which includes five characteristics of
the cultural context of illness and their significance to diagnosis and care: 1) inquire about
patient’s cultural identity; 2) cultural explanations of the illness; 3) cultural factors related to
the psychosocial environment and levels of functioning; 4) cultural elements in the patient-
clinician relationship; and 5) overall cultural assessment for diagnosis and care (APA 897-896).

The Surgeon General report (NIH4-5) provided definitions for mental health, mental
illness and mental health problems. *Mental health* was defined as the successful performance of
mental function, leading to productive activities, satisfying relationships with other people, and
the capacity to adjust to change and to cope with difficulty (4). *Mental illness* refers to as “all
mental disorders, which are health conditions characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or
behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning”
(5). *Mental health problems* are “signs and symptoms of insufficient intensity and duration to
meet criteria for any mental disorder” (USDHHS 5). These definitions give meaning to mental
health and illness and are part of the vocabulary of the professional culture.

**Language and Communication**

The language of the professional culture is shaped and oriented by the education
received in schools with a foundation of Western medicine. In mental health, communication is
key in diagnosis and in treatment. Communication is the method which mental health clinicians
diagnosis symptoms, and their impact on functioning. Because of this emphasis on
communication there is potential for miscommunication when the clinician and patient are from
different backgrounds. Abramson, Trejo and Lai (22) reported that,

Issues related to the meanings and definitions of health and mental health,
attitudes toward illness and disease, and attitudes toward the use of healthcare
services, specifically contemporary Western medicine, also have implications for
service utilization and for the relationship between the client and therapist. (22)

Language, Spanish in this case, influences the bilingual client’s ability to communicate
thoughts, feelings, and emotions in English. Language, understanding Spanish, also influences
the clinician’s understanding of the client’s verbal and nonverbal communication (Malgady and
Zayas 41).

Limited understanding of the clients’ culture by health care professionals can lead to
misdiagnosis and inappropriate care (Budman, Lipson, and Meleis 367-368). Professionals face
major challenges when confronted with a client with whom they cannot communicate. The
challenges include providing diagnostic expertise, building the necessary empathy and rapport,
and providing support, comfort, and care (O'Hagan 146). Lago and Thompson (55) believe that
the professional’s task is to take the responsibility to communicate in a language the client
prefers to create an understanding which “evokes trust.” O'Hagan (164) discusses two main
factors in working with linguistic minorities: first, regard the client’s language as significant
and important in their daily lives; second, recognize that there is enormous potential for
discriminatory practice in the professional’s attitude and approach to languages other than
their own. Professionals with this awareness of working with linguistic minorities in treatment
may experience less denial, fewer delays with service delivery and more accurate assessment.
Research Design

This study consisted of a qualitative exploration of mental health service utilization of older Mexican Americans collected from clients at outpatient mental health programs in Texas. In this ethnographic study the researchers used a purposive sample and interviewed 20 older Mexican Americans 65 years of age or older, who have accessed and completed outpatient mental health services. Selection criteria required that eligible participants: a) completed an outpatient mental health program in the past 12 months; b) experienced a reduction of depressive symptoms; and c) scored 24 or above on the MMSE. The Mini Mental Status Exam is a test of cognitive functioning. The score gives an idea of the patient’s cognitive ability for participation in the mental health treatment program. The score also forms part of the assessment and clinical decision, along with completion of clinical goals that the study sites use. The staff administers this test at discharge from the program.

The researchers selected outpatient mental health programs for older adults located in the following Texas cities: Austin, San Marcos, Luling, Seguin, Del Rio, and Cuero. Data collection for this study began in April 2007 and ended in September 2007. The interview schedule was semi-structured with mostly open-ended questions. The interviews took place in the home of the respondent. Given that some or parts of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, the researcher transcribed the interviews into the language originally spoken, English, Spanish, or a combination of each. Transcription took place soon after the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio taped with the respondent’s consent.

Data Analysis

Ethnographic content analysis was used to analyze the transcripts. Ethnographic content analysis centers on concept development, data collection, and emergent data analysis
through repeated study of the content or text (Altheide 68-69). The researchers used Green’s Adapted help-seeking behavior model (54-56) to guide the analysis. Components of Green’s model were used in developing initial codes and categories and ultimately themes of the data. As the analysis progressed, the researchers opened other categories, codes and themes, which resulted in identifying older Mexican-Americans’ perceptions of mental illness.

Findings

Causes of Mental Distress

When asked “What do you think caused your problem/sickness?” respondents discussed several causes of mental distress. In describing the events surrounding their problem, respondents also described more than one issue that contributed. Along with the perceived cause of their mental distress, respondents also reported other on-going issues like health (diabetes or cardiovascular issues), or family problems (a son in prison or a daughter battling an illness). Respondents experienced multiple issues in their lives, leading them to seek help for their mental distress as described in the following examples of respondents’ perceived causes of mental distress.

The perceived causes of mental distress included grief issues, relationship issues, health problems, and physical complaints. Nine respondents reported grief of a loved one—a spouse, sister, or children. Five respondents reported the cause of their distress was a marriage problem—divorce or separation. Two respondents reported health problems—breast cancer, heart attack—as causes of distress. Two respondents reported physical complaints—stomach problems or insomnia—as their cause. One respondent reported financial worries and one reported family problems; her son was in prison.
Grief of a Loved One

One respondent grieved the death of her husband of 53 years. She missed him, and felt sad and alone. Her sons did not live with her; they had their own families, leaving her alone. She had several things on her mind, leading to anxiety. Her leg was hurting, and she was afraid of losing her leg and ending up in a wheelchair. She thought and thought about how she would make it alone.

Bueno, el problema que me condujo al programa fue de que este murió mi esposo.

Entonces me sentía sola y triste porque mis hijos no viven conmigo.

Her body started to hurt all over and she stopped eating. She would cry and cry. She had never had this problem, and did not know about depression. She was not sure if she would get better.

Another respondent’s husband passed away after open-heart surgery. She reported that it all happened so fast. He had the heart surgery and looked like he was doing well. The doctor sent him to a nursing home for rehabilitation. While he was in the nursing home, she stayed with him all day and night. Her son paid for the room. Her husband was there for almost two weeks, and she noticed that he was not making progress; he also was not eating well. Her husband developed an infection in his leg, where they took veins for the heart surgery. She decided to spend one night away with some of her friends who invited her to stay at their home.

Cuando regresó al hospital en la mañana, llegó al cuarto y ya se vía fallecido mi esposo. Cuando se fueron todos. Cerré la puerta y de plano que hago sola.

Entonces fue cuando comencé a llorar. Cuando me sentí completamente sola.

When she returned the next morning, her husband had passed away. Everyone left the room, and she started to cry. That was when she felt all alone.

One respondent’s sister, the last remaining member of her family, passed away. All of her family had passed on: her parents and all of her brothers and sisters. While she was still
married and had the support of her daughters and sons, she focused on being the last living
member of her family.

La falta de mi hermana. Ella falleció y ya me quedé sola. Toda mi familia se
murió no más yo y mi hermana. Ella se me murió mi hermana y la sentí mucho.

De atiro me callí muy triste, lloraba mucho y no más me acostaba y me dormía.

She reported growing extremely sad. She would just cry much of the time and she would lie
down and sleep. When she would think of her sister, she would roll up like a little ball and cry.

Another respondent talked about losing her son after his long battle with cancer. She
had a difficult time coping with his death, even though she had known he was dying. She had
difficulty concentrating because of her grieving. She said she felt like she “was not in reality.”
She would sleep and cry all day, and could not get over her son’s death. She said, “I couldn’t
even say his name.” She went “through all of those steps of denial and anger and asking why,
being very unsure of me and crying a lot.” Her physician recommended counseling and sent her
to treatment.

**Relationship Problems**

A problem with relationships was another cause of distress. One respondent talked about
having much stress in her life—a daughter who had been ill for several months and problems
with her husband. She also talked about having anxiety attacks with her body shaking,
something she had never experienced before. She shared that she had tried to hurt herself.
Then she had a heart attack. EMS arrived and took her to the hospital. Her daughter in-law
told the paramedics that she had also tried to hurt herself. Once in the hospital, a social worker
referred her to the treatment program, and she realized that her problem was “a marriage
problem. It is not my children; it’s my husband.” She also shared that she was grateful to her
daughter-in-law for telling the paramedics she had tried to hurt herself.
One male respondent talked about his problem separating from his wife. He had been married for 25 years. He decided to move to a new city, a place where one of his daughters lived. He was beginning a new life in a new place and did not have any friends.

He felt depressed, very depressed and could not sleep. He did not sleep most of the night. His only support was his daughter and she eventually contacted his doctor and the program.

**Health Problems**

Some respondents' problems began with a health problem like a heart attack or breast cancer, and then another problem developed in coping with that original problem. One respondent’s problem started with a diagnosis of breast cancer. Her husband had difficulty accepting his wife after her mastectomy leading to marital problems. “I got cancer and my husband rejected me.” She talked about her marriage changing after her mastectomy. Her husband changed from “the perfect husband, the perfect father, the perfect son-in-law, the perfect brother, he is perfect.” Their relationship changed, no socializing, everything felt like it was false to her. He never moved out of the bedroom. She felt depressed and very unhappy. She also considered leaving her husband. She then found help at the program.

Another respondent had a heart attack and felt coraje, anger. She was not angry with anyone in particular, just angry that she had had a heart attack, “no tenía coraje con nadien no mas con mi porque me pegó el heart attack.” The respondent experienced a big change in her way of living, “porque I was used to myself. I was used to going places.” Before the heart attack,
she was taking care of her sister; now her sister was taking care of her. She became dependent on others for help, something new for her.

**Behavioral Signs of Distress**

Respondents expressed their mental distress, with multiple signs of distress occurring at the same time. Respondents came to the treatment program experiencing multiple signs of depression, anxiety, or both. In the interviews, respondents described experiencing eight behavioral signs of mental distress. The behavioral signs were all similar to symptoms of depression and anxiety. The symptoms that respondents described included depression, anxiety and *nervios*, sleep problems, crying, isolation, lack of energy, appetite problems, loss of interest in activities, and physical complaints. The symptoms that respondents reported, however, centered on depression and anxiety, *nervios*. During the interviews, respondents discussed experiencing multiple symptoms at a time, for example depression, wanting to sleep all day, and crying. All respondents reported experiencing at least two symptoms. Thirteen respondents reported three or more symptoms of distress.

**Depression**

Thirteen respondents reported the symptoms of depression. One respondent described her depression as thinking of her husband who had passed on. She also was having problems with her leg because of diabetes. Her depression began with symptoms such as appetite problems, crying, and physical complaints.

> Entonces no quería comer, lloraba, y me sentía triste tu sabes. Estaba sola. Yo pensaba mucho porque yo creía no iba sobrevivir. Ya empecé con eso que me dolía mucho el cuerpo, no quería comer, llorar. Todo eso lo sentía y todavía no sabía que era depresión.
Her whole body started to hurt. She would not eat; she did not want to eat. She just cried. She was feeling very sad. She did not think that she would survive. She did not know what depression was at the time.

**Anxiety, Nervios**

Ten respondents talked about anxiety or *nervios*. A respondent reported always suffering from *nervios*. She would suffer from anxiety, not depression. She talked about coping with living alone, her husband having moved to a nursing home. She also talked about her sons not visiting her. In the past year, she thought she was going crazy, and experienced intense anxiety. She talked about walking around her apartment in circles.

A mí me daban los nervios, pero no la depresión. La ansiedad. Y eso no me había dado a mí. A mí me dio con fuerza. Y no sabía yo que era. Por eso yo caminaba y caminaba. Y encerrada aquí. No salía para ninguna parte.

She also mentioned two other symptoms: sleep and appetite problems. She would not stop to eat dinner or lay in bed. She was not sleeping or eating. She would walk and walk around in her apartment. She did not leave her apartment at all.

**Sleep Problems**

Sleep problems, occurring with depression, were another symptom that respondents experienced with mental distress. Seven respondents talked about sleep problems during the interview. Five of those respondents also talked about depression. One respondent wanted to stay sleeping because of her depression “a mí, mi depresión fue querer estar dormida.” She felt depressed because one of her sons was in prison. She would always think about him. This was her reason for wanting to sleep so much. She would only get out of bed when her other children visited her.
Another respondent, who was grieving her husband, reported having sleep problems, depression, and problems with her arthritis. She thought she had some illness; she did not know what was wrong with her. She did not want to go outside, just wanted to sleep. “Yo creía que era una enfermedad. No quería salir afuera, quería estar dormida. Algo así sentía yo.” She did not think there was a remedy for her condition. She just wanted to stay in bed.

On the other hand, the respondent who had separated from his wife and moved away to begin a new life, reported depression and sleep problems. He would not sleep. He stayed awake all night “no dormía. Me pasaba toda la noche despierto, se me iba el sueño.” He would spend nights thinking about his wife and his new life. He would not get sleepy and spent his nights awake.

Crying

Six respondents talked about the symptom crying, which occurred with depression and anxiety, nervios. One respondent would cry and roll up like a little ball, when she thought of her sister that had passed away, “me acostaba como una bolita chiquita. Y me dormía mucho, y ya no sabía que me estaba pasando.” Every time she thought of her sister she would go to her bed, lay down, and just cry. Her husband would tell her not to lie down but she would anyway.

Another respondent that reported depression and crying talked about crying when she would grieve for her husband. She did not know what was happening to her. She had never had this illness and did not know what it was, “nunca vía estado en una enfermedad de esas. No sabía que fuera.” She missed her husband very much.

Isolation

Five respondents talked about the symptom of isolation. Respondents would not leave their home or apartment. Four respondents who reported depression also reported isolation. Respondents talked about having no desire to go outside or leave their home. Three
respondents who talked about isolation also reported the symptom sleep problems.

Respondents reported isolating themselves from their families and friends. One respondent who was dealing with a recent divorce and complications from diabetes described her isolation.

I am the type, if I start getting depressed, I start shutting the house up. I will stay in my room back there and just don’t bother me. I won’t answer the phone, I won’t answer the door. I would not do anything but stay in my room.

She would lock herself in her room and not talk to her family or friends who would attempt to get her to come out of her room.

**No Energy**

Four respondents talked about having no or low energy. Two of the four respondents also reported depression and two of the four respondents reported anxiety. One respondent who talked about depression and anxiety had no energy. She talked about the stressors that led to her heart attack—problems with her husband, her daughter battling a long illness. She felt overwhelmed, and did not want to be bothered. She did not have the energy to listen to others or watch television.

I didn’t have energy and didn’t want to do things. I didn’t want anybody to bother me. I would stay in my room and lock the door. I would not hear everything; I would watch TV but not know what they were saying. I would only focus on the light, a small focus.

**Appetite Problems**

Four respondents talked about having appetite problems, having no desire or will to eat. One respondent who experienced depression because of the loss of her husband talked about such problems. She also experienced crying. She did not want to eat; she would cry and feel sad.

“Entonces no quería comer, lloraba, y me sentía triste tu sabes. Estaba sola.”
Loss of Interest in Activities

Three respondents talked about losing interest in activities, activities such as family time and everyday activities. [Respondents stopped participating in family activities like going to gatherings or family dinners and everyday activities like cooking or hobbies such as reading and watching television.] One respondent described such a loss. She also experienced the symptom of depression due to marriage problems. She stopped doing her regular activities with her family, like shopping and going to dinner.

I just wanted to be just by myself. I didn’t think about my children, my brothers or sisters. They would invite me to the store and I would do nothing. “Let’s go and eat mom, no, I don’t want to go.” I was so depressed with myself that I didn’t care for nothing.

She would tell her family “no” when invited to dinner or to shop. She had no desire to spend time with her children. She also talked about losing interest in everyday activities like cooking. She had a difficult time coping with depression.

Physical Complaints

Five respondents reported having physical complaints like stomach problems, and head and body aches as symptoms that occurred with depression and anxiety. Three respondents were U.S.-born, and two were immigrants. The respondents that complained of physical complaints had lower education and lower income. One respondent reported stomach problems and depression. She had pain in her chest, close to her heart and stomach.

Oh no, yo en veces traigo una cosa aquí así (she motions to her chest, below her heart and above her stomach). Como un depressed, como ahorita a las cuatro se iba ir mi hijo. Y me dijo que me iba hablar antes que se fuera por que el bus salía a las cuatro. Y no me habló. Y pues me dio . . . me sentí muy mal.
This would happen when she thought of her son, who had been to prison in the past and was in a substance abuse treatment program. She would pray for him to change his ways.

Another respondent who reported anxiety and crying talked about physical complaints. She would get headaches when she would think of her sister “en veces me dolía la cabeza por que pensaba mucho de ella.” She would spend much of her time thinking about her sister. She was the last member of her family to pass on. She could not forget her.

*Applying Illness Names (or Labels)*

When asked what name they gave their problem, respondents reported different names. Among the names used for the problem that led them to treatment was depression or *depresión*, anxiety, *nervios* or *ansiosa*, also *coraje*, *soledad*, and *tristeza* (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Illness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depresión</strong> – Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ansiosa/Nervios</strong> – Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tristeza</strong> – Extreme Sadness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Soledad</strong> – Extreme Loneliness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Insomnio</strong> – Insomnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coraje</strong> – Strong anger held inside which is hard to let go of or get over.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Eight respondents used the name *depression* for their problem, “depression was the best word to use.” One respondent talked about feeling depressed, “yo lo sentía que tenía depresión.” Six respondents used the name *depresión*. Respondents described their depression or *depresión*...
using symptoms like having no energy, no desire to interact socially with their family, and wanting to stay in bed and sleep all day.

Three respondents used the term anxiety, one used ansiosa, nervous, and five used the name nervios. Respondents described anxiety or nervios as having anxiety attacks, experiencing loss of interest in everyday activities, and having no energy. One respondent shared that she has always had nerves, “yo todo el tiempo a padecido de los nervios.”

One respondent who was grieving her husband called her problem soledad, loneliness. Another respondent that lost her sister, her last remaining family member, called her problem tristeza, extreme sadness. One male respondent used the name insomnio, “no, mi problema era no dormir. Falta de sueño. Se le llama insomnio.” He did not use the word depression or depresión in the interview. He just reported having problems sleeping.

One respondent called her problem coraje. The respondent used the term to mean more than just anger or rage. The anger she described is strong anger held inside, that is hard to let go of or get over. It is more than a feeling of anger. To her coraje is something that she has, something she is experiencing. She blamed the coraje for her mental distress. The respondent was very angry because she had a heart attack, limiting her independence. This was a big change in her life, “si, un cambio muy grande. Por eso me agarró mucho coraje.” The change was the reason she had so much anger. Her coraje grabbed hold of her. She blamed losing her independence on having the heart attack, and could not let go of this anger. Her sister told her she was depressed.

Discussion

Respondents in this study had many perceptions of the causes of mental distress and also of the behavioral signs of mental distress. Many respondents were not aware of their mental distress
until their physician explained it to them. At times, respondents somatized their mental distress, particularly because they did not understand what was happening to them.

Respondents experienced a multiplicity of issues. Along with the cause of their mental distress, respondents also had other on-going issues like health problems, diabetes or cardiovascular problems, or family problems like a son in prison or a daughter that was battling an illness. Respondents also reported several names or labels with regard to mental distress.

The causes of mental distress included marriage problems, separation, divorce, family problems, health problems, and financial problems. The behavioral signs reported were similar to symptoms of depression and anxiety (sleep problems, crying, isolation, lack of energy, appetite problems, loss of interest in activities, and physical complaints). These behavioral signs were also similar to Guarnaccia, Rivera, Franco, and Neighbors’ (354–359) study of ataque de nervios in Puerto Ricans and other Latinos. They found that ataque de nervios consists of a sense of loss of control, a threat to social order, emotions of sadness and anger, expressions of distress in the form of physical symptoms, aggressive outbursts, and loss of consciousness.

Among the names or labels used for the problem that led respondents to treatment were depression or depresión, anxiety, nervios or ansiosa, also soledad, tristeza and coraje. Respondents reported some terms not included in the Cultural Bound Syndrome section of the DSM-IV-TR. At times, the language or names of illness respondents used had multiple meanings. Respondents had difficulty with their mental distress because of loss of independence due to aging. Accepting the fact that they had grown old was taxing for respondents. They have had control of their lives for years and now rely on their children or spouse to meet their needs. Many of the respondents were females who had taken care of their spouse and children with some working full-time jobs. Relying on others and accepting help also contributed to their
mental distress. Respondents had trouble moving out of a caregiving role to a care receiving role.

**Recommendations**

As older Latinos turn to mental health services, they often face several problems in the environment, including language and cultural distance. In order to decrease this cultural distance, the social worker needs to take into account the factors that contribute to distancing, building an understanding of what is associated with cultural distance for each client and performing accurate assessments. The recommendations include expanding the workforce of bilingual/bicultural providers and Spanish speaking providers; providing community education of mental illness to older adults and families; and supplying information to help reduce the stigma of mental illness and the cultural distance between older Hispanics and health care providers.

**Communication**

A recommendation to listen to the meaning of the language spoken will help older Latinos and improve the communication between older Latinos and social workers and other health care providers. Social workers providing treatment to older Latinos also need to understand the mechanisms of cultural distancing among themselves to treat older Latinos effectively. Mental health providers need to offer services in Spanish, which is the primary language for some older Hispanics. To provide services in Spanish the workforce of Spanish speaking or bilingual/bicultural providers needs to increase. To do this we need to recruit bilingual/bicultural students to become health care providers. We also need to recruit students who are Spanish speaking, or encourage students to learn the Spanish language.

Communication is influenced by language, in this case speaking Spanish. This influences the bilingual client’s ability to communicate thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Speaking and
understanding Spanish also influences the clinician’s understanding of the client’s verbal and nonverbal communication.

**Education of mental illness and treatment services for older Latinos and their families**

Another recommendation for social work and health care providers is to supply better information on mental illness and services to older Latinos and their adult children and families. Providing this kind of education will help increase the understanding of mental illness and mental health services. For example, older Latinos and their families need education concerning the insurance benefits for which they qualify for mental health services, plus general information about mental health.

There is a need is to reduce the stigma of mental illness and mental health treatment. To do this, we need to provide community education on mental illness and mental health services. There exists confusion of what mental illness is. In the case of older adults, ageism, the tendency to discriminate against or stereotype older adults adds to this confusion. The current older adults grew up thinking that having mental illness meant, “I am crazy.” Today, we understand that mental illness is a part of life. At times in our lives we need help with transitions, particularly the transitions that come with getting older, like the death of a spouse or change in health condition. Targeting the children of older adults will help reduce the stigma of mental illness and provide the opportunity to educate the community about mental illness and mental health services.

**Addressing Cultural Distance**

With the current population growth, the barriers faced by, and needs of, older Latinos will need ongoing assessment. Helping older Latinos identify the barriers they are experiencing is vital to these assessments. Older Latinos might not identify a challenge as a barrier. In working with older Latinos, social workers need to consider the degrees of acculturation,
language skill and preference, as well as adherence to traditional customs, values, and norms of those being treated (Santiago-Rivera 14-15).

Professionals need to move beyond holding a simplistic view of culture (i.e., creating a physical atmosphere and hiring people who speak the language); to one that incorporates the multiple dimensions of culture in a more detailed way (Bernal and Castro 801-803). For social work professionals, some suggestions for moving beyond a simplistic view of culture include cultural competency training focused on the language and culture of the region. Professionals need to understand and learn that Spanish exists in different dialects, that Latinos come from different countries, and that Latinos have lived different lifestyles and have different life experiences. Understanding the language that older Latinos are using will improve services for both the professional and the patient.

To decrease this cultural distance, planners need to take into account both factors of the linguistic minority clients and the factors of the professionals who will be working with them. Professionals need to understand factors of cultural distance for each individual client, and to provide accurate assessments. Professionals providing treatment to linguistic minorities need to understand these considerations among themselves to do so effectively. In a pilot study, Choi and Gonzalez (128-129) found contributors to accessing mental health services for older minorities included physician social worker referrals, churches, former patients, and community outreach. They also noted that having a supportive family, and the treatment agency having bilingual/bicultural clinicians contributed to better access to mental health services (Choi and Gonzalez 29-130).

In social work, we are taught to meet the client where they are. In working with older Mexican Americans, there are times where there exists much cultural distance between the service provider and the client. Incorporating the values of personalismo, respeto, and familismo
into services can help decrease this distance. For example, one thing to do for an older Mexican American who has limited command of English is to translate keywords of the topic that is presented. This helps the older Mexican American feel respected because the staff took the time to personalize services. This type of service helped respondents commit to the treatment services. *Familismo* is significant in the culture for older Mexican Americans. When they find services that are family-like, adherence to prescriptions and treatment recommendations will be more likely. Adding the values of *personalismo* and *respeto* to practice makes services feel like family. The services also feel less like Western medicine and more like something traditional or something that the older Mexican American is used to.
Works Cited


Over Both Edges: Coyotaje, Militarization and Liminality in Everyday Life on Ranchos along the South Texas-Mexican Border

Lupe A. Flores

This article moves beyond stereotypical/nativist images of coyotes and migrants as smugglers and people who must be kept out of the U.S. nation-state. I present empirical data gathered through auto/ethnography and reflections that complicate negative discourses about unauthorized border crossings, social processes inherent to what scholars call autonomous international migration or coyotaje by but not limited to Mexican migrants. In coyotaje zones in Hidalgo County that I refer to as riverspaces, interpreted by media and policymakers as a places of narco-warfare littered with drug and human smuggling, more than “lawlessness” occurs. I highlight the liminal experiences people live through as coyotaje manifests in a border region that is increasingly policed and militarized. This briefly portray how I came to document dramas of border crossings to present on-the-ground observations of them; the last section addresses obstacles confronting the nightmarish imaginaries about U.S.-Mexico border spaces. Ultimately, this article calls for a rethinking of U.S border enforcement legislation and of public discourse that tends to demonize the subjects dealt with in this article.

The data and reflections throughout this essay apply the directive set forth by Josiah Heyman and Howard Campbell, who urge scholars and documenters of culture and history to go beyond issue-driven fieldwork in order to capture “insight into the more mundane but equally important aspects of economic, social, political, and cultural life on the border” (207). Building on David Spener’s groundbreaking research and interpretations found in his book Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border, I approach coyotaje with as much intimacy as curiosity. Using auto/ethnography as a guiding force, I conducted fieldwork in ranchos along the South Texas-Mexican border, where coyotaje occurs almost daily. Thus, I was not only positioned as a researcher in the field, but also as an individual enculturated into the atmosphere of border-crossings since childhood through my own social ties with participants of such practices. I rely largely on personal experiences growing up around and recording these incidences from 2008 to 2012 while a university student and scholar-in-training in anthropology.

Coyotaje is, in essence, part of everyday life en los ranchos; it is found in the realm of the mundane. But it also lends itself to post-structural analysis, as Spener shows us that social
relations and power dynamics reconfigure between migrants and coyotes as **coyotaje** manifests in unpredictable terrain (*Clandestine Crossings* 187-193, 199). He also reminds us that the U.S.-Mexico border, especially at checkpoints, at international bridges, and within the range of a patrolled South Texas landscape, is a region where state authority over human-labor mobility through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) creates a border space rampant in global apartheid (*Clandestine Crossings* 15-16). Still, one of the most interesting realities explained in Spener’s work is the performance of **resistencia hormiga**² by migrants and coyotes at the border – in zones where “dangerous and subterranean activity” (Heyman and Campbell 207) in the form of **coyotaje** abounds.

It is important to distinguish the time period in which I began documenting border-crossings to that of Spener’s. The infamous “Border Wall” did not physically exist in South Texas during the 1990s or early 2000s, when Spener did his fieldwork. Now, a little more than 17 years into Operation Rio Grande and with the Secure Fence Act of 2006 in full effect, border-crossings in zones along the South Texas-Mexican border that I call *riverspaces* are subject to evermore possibilities of detection, apprehension or injury to the social actors involved. As this article went to press, the nation’s discourse on immigration has been heightened with more and more pressure from the political right, and even the counter left, to spend billions more dollars and deploy thousands more military-trained agents to border areas in the name of American security from an “immigrant takeover” and narco-terrorism. Spener foreshadowed the “new dynamism” of crossing conditions that result in such expansive interdiction. Spener claims in *Clandestine Crossings*:

Old fording spots that had not been patrolled might now be; trails through the brush that once were free from motion sensors might now be under surveillance.

Vehicles and agents that one week were concentrated in on an area the following
week might be deployed in another. Thus, the border-crossing strategies that were successful last winter might not be in the spring. (169-170)

This change in crossing conditions was noticeable in my fieldsite. One can now observe helicopters hovering above and Border Patrol vehicles cruising the ranchos below; even sensor technologies are noticeable as more apprehensions take place in zones that, until recently, were relatively less patrolled and thus safer to cross undetected.

My overall intention throughout this article is to illuminate a different picture and suggest a different discourse on U.S.-Latin American migration and clandestine border crossings in order to complicate the governmental and public rhetoric that places migrants and coyotes on par with narco-terrorists, that constructs them as “dangerous to the body politic,” undesirable and requiring inhumane legislation to keep them, the “Others,” out, as Jonathan Xavier Inda argues in his article “The Value of Immigrant Life” (148-150). As I will show, coyotaje in ranchos along the South Texas-Mexican border takes the form of liminal experiences in a geographically liminal space where anything is possible, where a crossing can go horribly wrong and simultaneously really well despite the many obstacles that come forth in clandestinely returning individuals back to their homes or new jobs in the U.S.

This is by no means an exhaustive account of coyotaje en los ranchos; there is much to relay, but the clandestine and legally-dangerous nature of coyotaje makes it hard to apply traditional modes of ethnographic documentation, a fact I’m struggling with as I prepare to further research coyotaje as a graduate student. My methods are largely informal and rely heavily on the practice of auto/ethnography, a methodology founded in self-reflexivity in conjunction with cultural and social analysis as applied to a community the writer-observer has ties to. In addition to on-the-ground observations of border enforcement conditions on the Texas side of the Mexico-U.S. border, I observed and did participant-observation in border-
crossing scenarios. Thus, I rely largely on fieldnotes and stories that I wrote down after meeting crossers on their journey or talking with coyotes, as well as my subsequent reflections on the occurrences. My conversations with them happened intermittently, they were often short, and I did not record anything (many times I did not have an audio recorder on me). Future research methods will employ a rigorous interviewing style to incorporate in my writing life and family histories of border crossers I encounter. Nevertheless, I contend the methods used and the interpretations found here are apt in describing the liminal and subjective realities of coyotaje as it happens around daily life en los ranchos.

**Literature Review**

Scholars within anthropology and sociology have analyzed the ways in which the nation-state and a nativist public demonize the idea of Latin American, and especially Mexican, migration and practices such as clandestine border crossings, including the coyotes who help in the navigation process. Negative images of clandestine migration and the actors involved have in turn been placed into policies that racialize and criminalize individuals as “illegal aliens” and that heavily rely on border policing and militarization (Andreas; Chavez 22-23; De Genova, *Working the Boundaries* 62-63; Dunn; Inda 140; Nevins 2002; Rodriguez 28; Rosas 51; Spener, *Clandestine Crossings* 202-215, 232). In response to both the U.S.-Mexican nation-state’s intense approach to militarizing border areas, anthropologists and sociologists, through ethnographic research, try explaining the complex pictures of the social realities they find happening on the ground as they relate to topics such as migration, border crossings, militarization, apartheid, and so on. There is much to understand from the sociality that allows alternative practices like coyotaje to unfold as a resistant strategy against nation-state actions aimed at halting both legal and illegal migration. In the contexts of coyotaje, Spener and Nestor Rodriguez have both noted that undocumented migrants and coyotes more than likely share a cultural characteristics and a
working-class background, making the later more understanding toward the former as both share common economic plights (Clandestine Crossings 231; “Battle” 28). Spener mentions how the typical imaginary of coyotes as the sole guides who navigate migrants and tend to abandon and rob them at any time they please is misleading; he contends, although there are bad coyotes, this is the only image state authorities want of coyotes as they represent, like autonomous migration overall, a challenge to state authority and a “threat to the image of state bureaucrats concerned with keeping their jobs and advancing their careers” (203). He, then, suggests that “focusing analytically on coyotaje rather than on any single type of coyote allows us to expand the scope of inquiry to include a wider variety of strategies and practices that a broader range of social actors have developed to make possible migrants’ surreptitious entry to the U.S.” (94). Spener contends that such an approach retracts interests in furthering stereotypes of coyotes but leads “toward a more nuanced and realistic view of how clandestine crossing of the border occurs, both now and in the past” (96).

This article moves beyond the stereotypical images of coyotes and migrants (and ultimately the border crossings strategies enacted by them) in order to illuminate the importance of rethinking the interdiction strategies continually enforced, today now more than ever, in the South Texas-Mexican border region. Santiago I. Guerra, an anthropologist who studied drug trafficking and its effects on his community of origin, employed an auto/ethnographic approach to his work. No such approach, to my knowledge, has ever been applied to the study of coyotaje. It is my belief that auto/ethnographies of the border, what some call “intimate ethnographies” (Waterston and Rylko-Buer 405) have the potential to contribute valuable insight to the debates on migration through and militarization of the region. As more people from border areas come into scholarship and activism in order to speak out against constant demonization of friends and familiars, such critical testimonios can contribute to the
national realization that individuals subvert the law to make ends meet or to simply help a friend, a close relative, even a stranger, in need. Given the unequal economic and political structures that make up U.S.-Mexico relations, that is probably not such a bad thing, yet it is politically and publicly constructed as negative to the point of enacting discriminative legislation against whole populations.

**Intimately-Positioned Research or, How I Came to Document Border-Crossings**

Stories involving the migratory phenomenon known as *coyotaje* unfold every day in the South Texas-Mexican borderlands. Individuals with real-life problems, necessities and obstacles pass through the ranchos nestled between the Rio Grande and Military Highway, both of which stretch hundreds of miles. Running from *la migra* and toward an unclear future, these “unauthorized” individuals relentlessly attempt reaching their destination, wherever further up north that may be. Regardless the time of year, they endure scorching summer days, severe thunderstorms, *y días hasta días cuando el aire se conjela* (even days when the air freezes over). They are determined, desperately holding on to their goal of getting across the Rio Grande and the rapidly urbanizing landscape of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in South Texas.³ But first, they must reach their initial stop: *una casita por los ranchos*, to be taken in by a coyote and transported to a ciudad where they either live or want to live in.

As a young boy, I witnessed multitudes of border-crossers at once and the solitary *indocumentado* run toward the havens that are los ranchos where I spent my childhood. Today when I visit or stay over, I sometimes find myself spontaneously *conversando con migrantes*, providing hydration and nourishment to those who stop by the nearby house famished, tired, and sick from their long trek from Mexico, Central or South America.⁴ The ranchos and the scenery along the Rio Grande and Military Highway are sites rich in cultural and natural history. Despite hyper federal intrusion in the area in the form of a border wall or levee-fence,
autonomous international migration and coyotaje are historical and ongoing occurrences here (Spener, *Clandestine Crossings* 96-115; 118). Yet the force of interdiction reverberates around daily and community life by the Rio Grande. It is through this view from the river, a panoramic spot, where I can see the multifaceted reality behind the international migration story. Following Renato Rosaldo’s definition of the “positioned (and repositioned) subject” in ethnography (7), I have long occupied a “position” in a “structural (and intimate) location” on the border; this has allowed me to embody a “particular (and intimate) angle of vision” (19) from where to observe and talk about coyotaje. This essay also reflects what Mary Louise Pratt calls an autoethnographic text, a different way of representing the self and community by engaging “in response to or in dialogue with those texts” (35) already produced about conquered and colonized subjects, such as those exploring coyotaje. Not only is this essay informed by an awareness of my privilege as a researcher, I depend on another position, one of life-long connections to the communities by the river. Due to this positioning, there is no solely objective analysis of social phenomena here. It must be kept in mind that things do not have to be this way; they are made this way.5 This stretch of borderlands is no stranger to conquest, colonization, structural poverty and racism, ongoing militarization or global apartheid,6 as mentioned in the introduction. Thus, coyotaje is some of the border ranch folk’s armor against working-class wages and interdiction that affects more than just coyote actors. My positioning, then, also comes from an academically-informed culture, one that recognizes alternative imaginaries of complex sociocultural processes that might otherwise be constructed as “immoral” and as a danger to national security. Writing on the salience of borderlands subjectivities (such as sex, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste), Rosaldo enforces the idea that, even if they are outcomes of conquest and symbolic
violence, social border zones (and I’ll include the physical border) must be treated “as sites of creative cultural productions that require investigation” (208).

Suited in army-green uniforms with Oakleys or Raybans across their faces, the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents, now in their twelfth year under the control of DHS and in larger troves than ever before, litter the land of my people with their units driving to and from the levee-roads. *La migra* is clearly aware that, at times, their senses and technology fail them. At an earlier point in my life I was a little grateful for their services as I naively wrote in my journal, “for now one truly knows the ultimate intention of the crossed.”

That was until I began hearing the sincerity, desperation and longing for a worthwhile and comfortable life, or simply the desire to return home, recited through their dry, thirsty voices. It only makes sense for these people-made-migrants to partake in such bold, nomadic and humanistic moves as a means of survival (and some upward mobility) from westernized neoliberal countries that only seem to oppress the most vulnerable of their citizens. As I readily attended to their needs, I always tried offering relief by assuring them that everything was fine in the meantime, and I wished them luck once they continued their journey. Unlike the men in green, I was not there to capture them like stray dogs. I was to help their person; I was there to help them defeat another day of hunger and thirst – of possible death – so that one day they can continue generations here as did *mi abuelo* and many men and women before him.

If border agents turned their necks and spotted me amid what, to me, became just another generous deed, they would quickly assume I myself am a coyote. Perhaps, spiritually, I am. Maybe I’m just a compassionate human helper on a universal scale – something beyond sovereign government and border enforcement. Now I find myself serving another role: that of auto/ethnographer. And I find it imperative to complicate an otherwise trivial significance toward international migration and border crossings as expressed by nation-state and media
actors, even anti-immigrant American citizens, as they speak out against a social phenomenon they believe is wrong and should thus be enforced at any cost.

**Bridging Objectivity and Subjectivity, Legality and Illegality**

Before I could cite scholars in anthropology and sociology studying migration as resistant and socially-embedded strategies, I was only interested in documenting the border-crossing experience. Early on I encountered the dilemmas between objectivity and subjectivity in writing since, before 2009, I was a student reporter majoring in print journalism. While writing about border crossings before I took this undertaking as a serious ethnographic project, I struggled to silence the subjective angles since, as per my training, I had to remain objective and present both sides. Yet I constantly found muted the experiences of migrants and coyotes in the news stories. Amid failed hopes that I would eventually write human-interests stories on coyotaje for the student newspaper, something called me to anthropology. As I explored and learned to utilize the academic literature, affirmation slowly came to me as I read up on the topic all the while witnessing coyotaje unfold before my eyes. I concluded that I was researching coyotaje well before I knew I could ever do so academically, and that there was more to understand than what the news leads the public to believe. I read Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Luis A. Urrea, Ted Conover and Jorge Ramos, but none of these authors quenched the thirst in me to bridge my personal experiences of coyotaje with objective or subjective interpretations. In most of the literature, this social phenomenon is almost always handled with indifference or minimal, negative interest. Renato Rosaldo’s seminal work *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* extends Anzaldúa’s idea of the borderlands into anthropology and ethnography. It was this book that helped me realize that even the idea of occupying multiple positions alone does not make a case for subjectivity in research. That is why it is also important to develop the multiple frames of references needed to study any kind of social phenomenon. This, as Rosaldo
puts it, entails reflection on the multiple positions researchers occupy throughout their life experiences, which can enrich researchers’ understanding of the subject(s) of study, such as death and bereavement in cross-cultural context or, in my case, having personal and academic perspectives on undocumented border-crossings. He writes, “Because researchers are necessarily both somewhat impartial and somewhat partisan, somewhat innocent and somewhat complicit, their readers should be as informed as possible about what the observer was in a position to know and not know. Has the writer of ethnography on death suffered a serious personal loss?” (67). One of my inquiries is to ask if my subjective explorations in documenting coyotaje and the liminal realities experienced by border crossers can prove insightful in the present discourses of clandestine migration and border militarization.

As I stated here and in an Anthropology News article titled “An Undergraduate Perspective on Coyotaje,” never in my life did I choose this position of close proximity to coyotaje except now as an academic in training. But as I came of age and naively entered college, something inside me clicked as I delved in the literature, from literary fiction to ethnographies, though James Clifford claims neither is inseparable since ethnographers, like scientists or novelists; produce partial truths (6-7). What I once considered a burdensome feeling of knowing the reality of coyotaje as inescapable to my being, coupled with scholarly inquiry, turned into a different sense of unsettlement, an urge to find and create interpretations that fit and that do not distort, demonize or hinder comprehension of social practices, regardless of their “illegal” nature or the negative, often objective and biased representations of them. In this aspect, Spener proved influential in my overall framework: He was the first academic I read that took a chance at understanding not just coyotes but the larger network of social relations that compose coyotaje. Although his position was not so connected to his research site or subjects, his
approach was partial to their experiences and explanations rather than using a completely impartial method of documentation.

Guerra has written on the “borderlands of the law” effect between the practices of the ethnographer’s self and those of subjects from a community of one’s own with a present and history of illicit activities. Straddling legality as an anthropologist and U.S. citizen and illegality as an illegal borderlander, an “unwilling co-conspirator” to “illicit activities” that occurred in his rural Mexican-American community, Guerra learned to walk the fine line between the legal and illegal worlds he inhabits. In his dissertation and in an *Anthropology News* article titled “Becoming an Il/legal Anthropologist,” he embraced the ambiguity of his positions in what he calls “the borderlands of legality and illegality, of good guys and bad guys, of us and them, which has proven difficult for others to interpret.” His work is one of the few that masterfully combines such intimate and academic perspectives in order to portray ethnographic data from a field that is also the researcher’s home. His work assured me that applying auto/ethnographic methods during the study of events as illicit as *coyotaje*, despite the obstacles, can and must be done.

**Riverspace Geography, Coyotaje and Everyday Life en los Ranchos**

The “violence fighters” on this part of the South Texas-Mexican border cruise the land in their vehicles hoping to catch what they, the media and policymakers call “illegal aliens” in action. They find them dead or injured near the river, or eagerly catch them on the run. But these are everyday aspects of life on the border, on the last stretches of the U.S. edge with Mexico: It is demanding, risky, terrifying, ruthless and overwhelming, all the while empathy and compassion fissure within and around the social field in which *coyotaje* takes place.

The river, as admitted by migrants whom I’ve encountered and those interviewed by Spener in his book, is sometimes not the most dangerous part of the journey. By the time some
crossers reach the Rio Grande, they have already traveled on foot for days, if not migrating by bus or vehicle to northeastern Mexican states (where they further prepare for the crossing). For many, more obstacles run northbound; the prickly *chaparral* and ranchlands of South Texas are just as strenuous as those found south of the river. To an elderly person or young child, confronting a scorching, semi-arid desert environment with minimal resources can be daunting and arduous, if not deadly. Imagine what seems like endless walking only to come across a meandering gorge in the earth with two 16-foot banks to cross over and an additional 18-foot border wall to hopefully circumvent in order to reach safety.

Riverspace, or the liminal geography encompassing the U.S.-Mexico riverbank and the surrounding areas, is still an obstacle for many people. The Rio Grande, as many locals, crossers and coyotes have stated, can, at any given moment, become a dangerous place for tired bodies even when things are going well in terms of the crossing.

**Crossing Account I**

I extracted the following information from notes I took on an occurrence in a rancho in May 2012. A *coyota* (female coyote) who helped in the rescue of a fainted woman crosser provided the information the day after. In a rather bold move, the coyotes risked their invisibility to get her to la casita – to get her to safety. It was, like, many other times, a close call:

A woman and her brothers successfully crossed the Rio Grande. Once on the Texas side, the woman, in her early 50s, fainted coming up the banks [toward the safe house, a half-a-mile from the river]. Upon knowledge that there was a person missing, the coyotes sent the mechanic (who usually assists in the process) to look for her. He rode a yellow mo-ped toward the riverbank in search for the fainted crosser. Minutes passed until he found her covered with ants and what appeared like foam in her mouth. He called another participant to bring a
truck to take her to the house. They did. Once inside, they quickly gave her a cold shower, rubbed alcohol on her chest and made her smell it in hopes that she would regain consciousness. She did, but kept convulsing. They gave her two large bottles of gatorade; she quickly chugged them and started calming down. One of the woman’s brothers stayed behind and took care of her the rest of the night. This morning, just a few hours ago, they are waiting to be taken back home, where they said they would seek a doctor. All seems calm now, yet I can’t erase the image in my head: the woman lying half-dead, foaming at the mouth with ants covering her midriff and arms. And to think if BP (Border Patrol) were to stop this coyotaje instance, they would have the people involved arrested and the human crossed away in portable cages and “voluntarily deported” back to Mexico.

Not short of a tragedy, this occurrence could have ended in a person’s death or in a manner such as an earlier coyotaje instance in April 2012.

**Crossing Account II**

The following is a reworked account of my fieldnotes: A group of five indocumentados attempted crossing the Rio Grande through the same riverspace. I was not there when it happened, but managed to arrive the next day with fresh news of the occurrence. They successfully crossed and were supposed to head over the levee-fence and come down toward the safe house, but instead went straight into the chaparral – into the small section of dense mezquite and huizache brush now partially enclosed by the border wall, a slab of concrete stamped on earthen levees. The coyotes on the U.S. side explained to me how, confused, the crossers walked in the wrong direction, causing the patrolling migra to spot them. Reluctant to surrender, most of them ran further into the enclosed brush, a move that only worsened the circumstance of their crossing
as a chase shortly ensued. During the pursuit, a man ran into a wasps’ nest and became instantly surrounded and stung by them; the other man tripped coming up the levee and broke a leg. The Border Patrol called the nearest ambulance to aid in the scene meters from la casita. The coyotes could only watch, from below, the failed border crossing unfold on top of the levee-fence that surrounds the rancho residences.

Later that day, a coyote said he was fortunate local media stations were not contacted because it could have ended badly in terms of transparency. He and others in the area are no strangers to “legal” accusations of “alien smuggling.” And the area is only subject to small-scale media coverage: stories of failed border crossings labeled as “smuggling” or “trafficking,” stories of border wall and international bridge construction, and even less often, stories about the local communities and events concerning historical periods and persons in the region. The people in these communities, especially the elders, stay afloat on local and national media issues, so when they hear of certain newsworthy “illegal” happenings or memorial occasions in an area involving people they know or are related to, they tune in to the local news outlets for the coverage. The information eventually becomes their short-lived gossip. Sometimes, the process of crossing (and being crossed) is seamless, so the stories that go around are verbal retellings of actual events seen by some and only heard by others.

As Spener mentioned in his book, such clandestine activity is an “open secret” along the U.S.-Mexico border. “Strategies and tactics of clandestine border-crossing,” he writes, “are already well-known to the authorities,” such as DHS and BP (Clandestine Crossings 239). In the rancho riverspaces of South Texas and Mexico, this “open secret” is like a cat and mouse chase. When clandestine crossings occur within this particular riverspace, they do so between the realms of success and failure, arrival and capture, health and fatigue. The stories become harshly real – they become stories of possible death, of what could have happened to them (the
crossers) and us (the coyotes) if the woman would have died (and she very well could have, they assert, had the coyote helper not found her within the short time he did) or if la migra were to catch them mid act? There is always a mixed atmosphere of caution, vigilance, fear and more often than publicly acknowledged, empathy and compassion lingering in this extension of liminal geography that forms the edges of the South Texas-Mexican border.

Sometimes, as children play in backyards (as I did), a small group or couple of crossers will run downhill and pass the playing children, as a coyote signals them to quickly enter the vehicle for immediate transportation out of the rancho. Sometimes, there is no time to dry-up and change.

**Crossing Account III**

During a particular instance I witnessed one weekend in the summer of 2011, a young man and woman came running down toward la casita. I was outside, so I had a perfect view of them running down as fast as they could. Once they reached the safe house, la coyota (the one who helped the fainted woman crosser) instructed them to enter a room in the back of another house, where fresh clothes awaited them. What appeared to be a successful arrival turned into a scene of momentary panic. The woman, already changed and drinking a glass of water, started hyperventilating as she sat near the kitchen bar. La coyota sat next to her while her male co-crosser and boyfriend sat behind them in a state of exhaustion; he just stared intensely as la coyota helped calm the woman. She continuously told her to relax and to take deep breaths. La coyota massaged her arms, hands, and back as she talked to the shivering woman in a motherly tone. Minutes passed and her shivering and panting lessened. The woman began talking again. She exclaimed how scared she felt. “*Pero todo va salir bien,*” la coyota assured her. And everything was. Another coyote actor, a little over an hour later, successfully transported the couple to their destination a few cities away.
We see in this case, as in the stories before, elements of a successful border crossing laden with ambiguity, which shows how coyotaje as a social instance is subject to liminal phases – or happenstancies – that manifest during the crossing process. Coyotes and migrants can prepare all they want (i.e., use their social capital and funds of knowledge to know where to go, what to pass to get there, who will be waiting, and with whatever resources they can obtain, etc.), but coyotes and migrants are not always sure if they will make a successful crossing, let alone without fatigue or physical strain, which can prolong the crossing process or create more degrees of difficulty. Migrants many times find themselves unsure of what will happen, sometimes exhausted beyond consciousness or extremely anxious and paranoid; they always think and ask about what is happening, if they will make it at all. Sometimes, the outcomes are not always pleasant even if successful, as the stories presented thus far illustrate.

**Crossing Accounts IV and V**

The following text is an excerpt from fieldnotes I wrote in June 2010:

It was a little after 8:00 am when I awoke to the sound of people breathing heavily and whispering. Aware of the situation, I jumped out of the sofa-bed I slept on and stared blankly at the wall until I decided to ask the middle-aged women sitting on the couch next to me, “*como esta el rio?*” “*El rio esta calmo, pero esta carajo,*” she responded calmly, finally resting her exhausted body. “*Me gararon y tuve que regresar.*” The woman told me she already waited 15 days in an Edinburg home that, to her misfortune, got raided days before our encounter. She and the two others came from Guerrero where they were visiting family. Their clothes were slightly damp and ate food from the kitchen cabinets as they waited for pick up. I learned later in the conversation that they crossed with the
same coyote they contracted the previous times. Within two hours, they were taken out successfully.

This is a more positive story despite the fact that one of the crossers was caught before this attempt. She was caught, but made another attempt, where I would encounter her that early June morning. Her experiences waiting 15 days and being subsequently deported after the raid tell of the undetermined amount of time some crossers must wait to reach their destination as well as of the experience of deportability inflicted on her by U.S. law. Years later, considering De Genova’s conceptualization of how “‘illegality’ is lived through a sense of palpable deportability,” of how “migrant illegality” is a “spatialized social condition inseparable from the particular ways that Mexican (and I include other Latin American) migrants are likewise racialized as ‘illegal aliens’ – invasive violators of the law, incorrigible ‘foreigners’ subverting the integrity of ‘the nation’ and its sovereignty from within the space of the U.S. nation-state” (215), I could not help but regret my naïveté then in not asking her more probing questions about her experiences. Fortunately, as I mentioned in my short journal entry, the woman and her small cohort arrived to their home undetected. But after that I have no idea of her life story or other crossing experiences, just of my failure to ask.

I witnessed another instance in March 2012 where three individuals from Guatemala, who were bilingual in K’iche’ Maya and Spanish, waited in a Donna house. When I entered the home, they sat watching television; bags of fast food and water jugs littered the living room. Apparently, they were lost and ended up in the house of a coyota who was unrelated to their coyotaje network. They nevertheless negotiated with the young woman, and they were soon making calls to Mexico, Guatemala as well as New York. It was an intense half day waiting to see if they were going to be picked up by another group for transportation to the eastern U.S. interior. The younger male and female couple was headed for New York and the older woman
for New Jersey. According to the young woman who became their coyota, whom I knew by association, the guatemecos had been on their journey for more than two months, spending thousands of dollars trekking through three countries and crossing two international borders. Their bright, name-brand clothes were slightly damp from the warmth of the tidy house, which did not have air conditioning. I could see a slight rash on the older woman’s back, perhaps caused by the heat or the scratchy material of her pink and white striped collar shirt. It was their second day waiting at the house and the woman was charging a hundred dollars for hosting them. She acknowledged that she could ask for more, but that the crossers were not from her network to begin with, and she felt she could do them the favor of helping them get to where they needed to go at a low cost. Later that day, I constantly thought of the situation, the intensity of it all. I was blown away in a moment of romanticization as they spoke in K’iche’ then switched registers to Spanish as they negotiated their mobility on the telephone. Then I internalized the situation, remembered that neoliberal forces promote the experience of symbolic violence, which, as I observed, reverberates across populations, cultures, and borders. I learned two days later that after another day of waiting, the individuals were driven past the Falfurrias checkpoint and headed north.

**Against Militarized and Apartheid State(s): Toward a Humanistic Outlook on Clandestine Migration and Coyotaje**

Spener presents the effects of structural and cultural violence on people who live at and pass through the Northeastern Mexico-South Texas border. In his article, “Global Apartheid, Coyotaje and the Discourse of Clandestine Migration: Distinctions Between Personal, Structural and Cultural Violence,” he clarifies how these two forms of violence pursued on behalf of the U.S. nation-state and its federal employees create policies laden with ingredients for structural and personal violence committed against migrants by coyotes and state agents, which in turn
produce public discourses through the media that assume the worst of coyotes only (“Apartheid” 119): That they desert their human “cargo,” that they are greedy and capitalistic, and that they aid terrorists in entering the country. Spener postulates the focus on personal violence performed on migrants by coyotes is the preferred discourse disseminated in mass media outlets since it distracts a general, ignorant public of the larger forms of structural and cultural violence continuously performed on migrants and coyotes by nation-state actors, such as DHS employees and other privileged classes (“Apartheid” 129-136). After all, it is they who gain from a system of global apartheid designed to keep the rich on top and the poor (in this case, working-class Mexican and Latin American migrants) on the edges of U.S.-Mexican law and territory – on the edges of the Rio Grande riverspace where both countries meet.

Coyotes are aware of the stigmas and stereotypes filtered through the news about their line of work since they are consumers of television media like others in their community, as mentioned earlier. This is why coyotes try their best to remain invisible and undetected, so they will not get caught and legally assumed a purveyor of criminal activity and be charged so. Coyotes know that they are being watched, just as they study, from both sides, the Border Patrol driving in and out of el río. This dynamic creates the sense of alarm, vigilance and fear of detection present at any given moment of any given day in riverspaces where a form of resistencia hormiga takes arm. As Spener and Rodriguez have made clear, autonomous/clandestine migration may be understood by its actors as “illegal” but it is never “criminal” or “immoral” since one is performing a service for the other’s eventual entrance into life in the U.S. (Clandestine Crossings 91; “Battle” 29). Social capital is involved as well, such as mutual trust even if the actors involved are strangers. Additionally, certain cultural funds of knowledge are transferred through migrant communities, which allow individuals to consider certain migration strategies with whomever and through wherever experienced folk deem most
trustworthy and successful (Spener, *Clandestine Crossings* 171-178), like certain riverspaces in the LRGV.

Undocumented border crossing is a serious endeavor, understood as such as by both migrants and their “providers of navigation.” Thus, most coyotes I have encountered do their best in performing the service since they know handling a life, or multiple lives, is a fragile reality: fragile because of the harsh circumstances and tragedies that may befall in the process of clandestine migration and because of the “legal” and social ramifications they both face if caught. An issue I am interested in researching and writing more about is the complexity within and between different *coyotaje* networks and how some perform more humanistically (or humanely) than others in order to clarify the ways *coyotaje* manifest in various liminal geographies.

I would now like to give more, albeit brief, time to the Rio Grande riverspace, that serves as a divider of and culturally interconnected nation-states and their peoples. Spener states:

[...]

the act of border-crossing on the part of Mexican migrants represents a liminal, proto-Chicano moment for them. It is, in many ways, a rite of passage not only in geographical terms, but also in cultural and social terms. Although they may never become fully bicultural or shift their cultural point of reference of Mexicans in the United States, the act of crossing the border represents a passage into a new cultural space that will influence their attitudes and perceptions from that moment on. (“Cruces clandestinos y movidas rascuaches” 11)

Spener’s attribution of “liminal rites of passage” to border crossers entering new U.S. “cultural space” is sufficient in the subjunctive assumption that they can always successfully and
healthily cross. I believe that the state-sanctioned act of apartheid policies and policing along the South Texas-Mexican border, as well as the state’s production of “illegality” that renders migrants deportable, border transformed the Rio Grande itself into a harbinger of crossers’ liminality before and after they swim or wade across rancho riverspaces since many of them are subject to episodes such as the experiences I detailed in the earlier sections of this essay. Thus, the Rio Grande represents an ever-liminal riverspace of undetermined possibilities (positive and negative) as long as people have the option of clandestinely crossing through it in their performance of resistencia hormiga. I also believe that, since the Rio Grande has always been, and will always be located where it is at (with the exception of changes in the river channel morphology) and, because since 1848 it has been used and re-used as the U.S. nation-state’s boundary apparatus, crossers’ liminality always exists before and after they cross since they are always mentally burdened (worried, unsure) about the present and future outcome of their successful or unsuccessful border crossings. As De Genova argues, they are relegated to a social space of illegality with real and sometimes horrifying repercussions. Once in the U.S. interior, despite how far in, migrants know they are still subject to detection and deportation, a culture of surveillance and border inspections, as suggested by Spener (“Narrativas del mal” 384), Lynn Stephen (Transborder Lives 154-177), and Alejandro Lugo (Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts 115-116, 143), respectively, so exposure anywhere outside the border sometimes means a return back to it. And more than likely, migrants will re-attempt clandestinely crossing the Rio Grande, perpetuating the undetermined possibilities of a successful or failed border crossing. This is the phenomenon I am interested in, that liminal period that anthropologist Victor Turner refers to as the period individuals are “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by the law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (95), a moment “in and out of time” (96). As I have shown in the stories above, such liminal
experiences around the Rio Grande riverspace can serve as lessons about resistance and humanity, about neoliberalism and symbolic violence, which should be at the forefront of migration discourse and policies.

Concluding Remarks

Interdiction is ultimately aimed at controlling the migratory flow of working-class peoples across nation-state boundaries such as the Rio Grande and, ultimately, keeps them on the fringes of “modern” society. At the same time, media conglomerates take a nativist stance when reporting “illegal” goings-on committed by “foreign” and “smuggling” actors. In doing so, mass media reports perpetuate nation-state rhetoric (law) that keeps “Americans” in a different sociocultural and physical space from border-crossing “illegal aliens,” a space of racialized “illegality” as theorized by De Genova (Working the Boundaries 8). The Rio Grande, then, serves as one location in the low-wage regions (as opposed to high-wage regions) where mobile working-class populations are expected to remain for the sake of feeding late industrial capitalism; it is a location of global apartheid as explained by Gernot Kohler (406). Although border crossers and coyotes enact strategies that allow them to socially and culturally overcome such apartheid system through coyotaje, they are sometimes forced to return and once again survive – against all odds – the obstacles present at any given moment as they cross the Rio Grande. Coyotes, only a part of the whole social network that composes migrants’ transnational relations, are not all necessarily bad people. Until this is recognized at the federal and local level, the public, the media and the state still will likely keep their defenses up toward the resistant strategy against apartheid, militarizing regime that has no regards for the welfare of individuals engaging in systems other than its own.
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Notes

1 This paper follows David Spener’s definition of coyotaje, which he describes in his book Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border as the following: “The set of border crossing strategies and practices elaborated by coyotes at the behest of and in concert with migrants, migrants’ friends and family members, and/or migrants U.S. employers” (95). Scholars differentiate between immigrants (who move to a country to definitely settle there) and migrants (who tend to migrate back and forth from home to host country). For the purpose of this paper, I use the terms migrants because, as scholars in anthropology and sociology have shown, individuals migrating to the U.S. from Mexico and other countries develop various social ties that interconnect their community of origin to their new communities in the host country (Glick Schiller et al. 52). Although they can be referred to as transmigrants, because of limited space, I cannot elaborate on how the people I met become transmigrants as they fashion their lives and influence events in more than one country, so I will only use the term migrants. I will use the terms autonomous international migration and migration interchangeably. The terms “immigrant” and “immigration,” as De Genova explains in his 2002 article, assumes a unidirectional teleology since it presumes an individual’s permanent settlement in the migrant-receiving country like the U.S. (420-21), so I refrain from using them.

2 Spener’s conception of autonomous international migration, extracted from the one proposed by Nestor Rodriguez, is embodied by what he terms resistencia hormiga, a neologism inspired by migrant and resistance terminology as well as a few theoretical frameworks woven together. In short, the term considers clandestine migration (undocumented border-crossings) as a resistance strategy underscored by social capital (Bourdieu) and "cultural funds of knowledge" (Velez-Ibanez 163), which give migrants socially- and culturally-induced weapons with which to fight their way to a modest income, stable family, and life – weapons such as mutual trust (needed to negotiate with coyotes) as well as knowledge of whom to seek and where, and perhaps even chances to attain false papers and/or job recommendations. Mexican and other migrants’ surreptitious navigation and social negotiations to do so are forms of resistance against global apartheid performed at the South Texas-Mexican riverbank and throughout the region (Spener, Clandestine Crossings 188-199).

3 A considerable amount of literature exists detailing the obstacles migrants (who are usually border crossers) endure throughout their lifetimes of trekking across international boundaries (which causes them additional struggles once inside the migrant-receiving nation-state). For local research on the subject, see Richardson, Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados, and Richardson and Resendiz, On the Edge of the Law; for accounts of clandestine migration, border crossings, and working-class life in other or similar regions, see the work of the following scholars: Ruth Behar’s Translated Woman, Leo R. Chavez’s Shadowed Lives, Nicholas De Genova’s Working the Boundaries, Alejandro Lugo’s Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts, Gilberto Rosas’s Barrio Libre, David Spener’s Clandestine Crossings, Lynn Stephen’s Transborder Lives, and Carlos G. Velez-Ibanez in Border Visions. For an archaeological/ethnographic approach to undocumented migration, see Jason De Leon’s research article "Undocumented migration, use war, and the materiality of habitual suffering in the Sonoran Desert” published online in the 2013 Journal of Material Culture.
I have seen and heard first-hand, the stories of coyotes and crossers when they talk about who crosses and from where. Although some historical research suggests otherwise, sometimes, in this particular riverspace, coyotes refuse transporting Chinese migrants because of the apparent unusuality of the situation if seen by BP. Latino clandestine crossers can disguise themselves as everyday family members coming out of the ranchos, while people with major phenotypical differences can bring a higher level of suspicion and thus get them all caught, according to coyotes.

Since both Spanish and American empire took hold of the “border region” and within the nation-state at large, certain working-class people with multi-ethnic roots became marginalized by their elite, lighter-skinned Spanish-Mexican kinsmen and by Anglo-Americans whose progressive ideals they followed. Additionally, a marginalized section of Mexican nationals inhabit U.S.-Mexican border states as they migrate in hopes of employment unavailable in their home states or country. Because of the Lower Rio Grande Valley’s large agricultural economy, impoverished community formations such as colonias, in essence, are migrant-receiving communities. The LRGV has the largest migrant populations and thus the most colonias in the U.S.

For great discussions on recent efforts to militarize and perform global apartheid at the U.S.-Mexico border, see Timothy Dunn’s *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992*, Joseph Nevins’ *Dying to Live: A Story of U.S. Immigration in an Age of Global Apartheid*, and Spener’s book *Clandestine Crossings* and article “Global Apartheid, Coyotaje and the Discourse of Clandestine Migration: Distinctions Between Personal, Structural and Cultural Violence.” Miguel Diaz-Barriga and Margaret Dorsey are involved in current research efforts on the infamous “Border Wall,” which was strongly opposed by South Texas residents but still erected by the Department of Homeland Security in efforts to thwart migration and border violence as a result of narcoterrorism; see their articles “Border Walls and Necro-Citizenship: The Normalization of Exclusion and Death on the U.S.-Mexico Border” and “Beyond Surveillance and Moonscapes: An Alternative Imaginary of the U.S.-Mexico Border Wall.”

Spener claims that the very process of coyotaje is a household survival (as opposed to political) resistance strategy on behalf of migrant and coyote actors against U.S. nation-state policies aimed at marginalizing, criminalizing and discriminating foreign “others” and their international navigators, while keeping its native citizens at the apex of national, social and cultural hierarchies. Such policies then make way for alarmist and nativist public discourses fueled by the media (see De Genova’s *Working the Boundaries* and Spener’s *Clandestine Crossings*.) Although Mexico receives remittances from migrants working in the U.S., it has similarly attacked its native citizens (who are prone to migration) and their coyotes. And as Gilberto Rosas reminds us in *Barrio Libre*, we must not lose sight of Mexico’s own complicity in creating the political-economic conditions that force Mexican migrants to cross borders.
Works Cited


“How to Tame a Wild Tongue”: Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* and the 1960s Era Speech Test and Speech Classes at Pan American College

Deborah Cole and Robert Johnson

In her frequently anthologized chapter “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Gloria Anzaldúa refers to her experiences at Pan American College in the mid-1960s with two sentences: “At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents” (75). Pan American College is now University of Texas–Pan American, and Anzaldúa is arguably our most famous graduate. This article is based on a NACCS Tejas Foco panel presented at UTPA in 2013 to discuss the “speech test” administered at the college for several decades up through the mid-1970s. We provide a brief historical context for Anzaldúa’s description of the test and present interviews with faculty members who either took the test and the required speech classes or taught the speech classes at Pan American College in the late 1960s and early 1970s, shortly after Anzaldúa was graduated. Our discussion highlights the institutional biases Mexican-American students faced at border colleges in the 1960s and places Anzaldúa’s famous outcry against linguistic colonization in a more specific historical context.

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa was a student at Pan American College from 1965-1968. She grew up in Hargill, Texas, a small, cross-roads farming community about ten miles from the college. Her family members were farm workers, ranch workers, and migrant laborers (Anzaldúa 227). Anzaldúa matriculated at Texas Women’s University in 1962 but returned home after one year of study and eventually transferred to Pan American College. In the 1960s, few Mexican Americans attended high school, fewer graduated, and even fewer attended college. Pan American was one of the very few colleges serving south Texas and the closest to her hometown of Hargill, and its existence offered the promise of higher education and economic opportunity for the local Mexican-American community. Anne Estevis describes the importance of the college to young Mexican-Americans in the late 1950s in her short-story collection *Down Garrapata Road*. “It seemed so unreal, this idea of going to college,” says Nilda, a young woman in the collection’s final story who is finishing up high school in Edinburg, Texas. “I would be the first in my family to go to college.” When her father gives her permission to go to Pan American College, she is speechless: “I was enjoying the feeling of happiness and sense of wonder that had come over me” (118-119).
We would like to be able to write that Pan American College lived up to this “sense of wonder” in the case of Gloria Anzaldúa, and in some respects it probably did: for example, in the Spring semester of 1967, she was able to take a course on “The Frontier in American Literature,” a course that could well have started her thinking about the border issues she would later famously write about in *Borderlands*. However, her memories of the school reveal a harsh colonial aspect of her education. In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” she tells the story of Pan American College’s mandatory speech test and its effect on her, beginning with her mother’s advice about going to college:

“I want you to speak in English. *Pa’ hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent,’”* my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents. Attacks on one’s form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out. (75-76)¹

This violent colonization of her native south Texas tongue becomes the basis for the chapter’s sociolinguistic defense of border languages, and is justly famous as a liberating document for the generations of writers who have felt its influence and were empowered by her words to write in the multilingual language (Spanish, English, Tex-Mex) that was their heritage.² The dramatic example she cites above as an attack on this heritage refers to two required speech classes, and our investigations also uncovered a “speech test” (which Anzaldúa does not reference) used to determine whether or not students were required to take the classes. But what was this test and what was the content of these speech classes? Perhaps more
importantly, what were the intentions of those who administered the speech test and taught the classes?

**Taking the Speech Test: Interviews with Two Former PAC Students**

We recently interviewed two former Pan American College students who took the test in 1963 and are now professors in the School of Education at UTPA. Both are harshly critical of the ingrained racism present in the methodology of the test and testify to its longstanding psychological effects on their personal and professional development.

Dr. Alejo Salinas, Jr. began attending Pan American College in 1963. He went on to a successful career in education and was Superintendent of Schools in Hidalgo, Texas for many years. He is currently a professor in UTPA’s educational leadership PhD program. Sitting in his office in the Education School at UTPA, he described his memories of his first day at Pan American College:

> I remember coming out of high school you had this great expectation that you had met the requirements for graduating from high school, which in 1963 was still quite an accomplishment for a Hispanic student—since most of them dropped out in junior high—so you were ready to attend college. I was the first in my class and home to attend college, and when I came to register I realized I had to take a speech test on the spot and without notice. It was given by a lady named Ruth Owens.

The test, he recalls, was designed to trip up the region’s bilingual students, focusing on the pronunciation of th, sh, ch, and short i. Only Mexican-Americans had to take the test. If you pronounced these sounds with a Spanish-influenced accent—as almost all Mexican-American students did in the estimation of the test-givers—you were assigned to Speech 113X, a class
that met every day. His teacher, Miss Owens, whose “intentions” in correcting their accents were sincere, Dr. Salinas says, was nonetheless unprofessional in the classroom and abusive of students who showed little progress:

She would sometimes get very upset, and while she didn’t throw the book at me, she threw it at other students because they were not making the kind of progress she wanted. So that was embarrassing. It was a humiliating experience and not only for me personally but for a lot of students in the class. We had to take that class to graduate.

Students hated the class and most of the instructors, but there was no mechanism for student evaluation of the class and no possibility in 1963 of protesting against the test and the behavior of the more abusive instructors:

We put up with it because we didn’t know any better. Could we protest? We were not going to do anything like that. The college experience was something brand new to us. We were all wanting to have a positive experience and terrified to even complain about it to anybody because at the freshman and sophomore level you didn’t have much say so and you were just lucky to have been accepted, to be in school, and terrified that they might kick you out at any point.

The experience of the speech test and of taking Speech 113X he says was a “traumatic one” that had long-term effects on his personal and professional development:

It created a situation where I didn’t feel I could express myself openly and it kept me from being participatory in class. It wasn’t until I started my career and matured that I had confidence—that I realized I could get over all of that. But yes, it had a negative impact on my personality, on my career, on what I wanted to do and say, and when you develop this feeling of inferiority it takes a little
while to get over it and you have to have a number of successes to offset that feeling of negativity that you develop . . . it definitely was there.

Dr. Miguel de los Santos, whose office is next door to Dr. Salinas’s, also matriculated at Pan American College in 1963, and like Dr. Salinas is a former school superintendent (in Edinburg, Texas and San Benito, Texas) now working in UTPA’s Educational Leadership PhD program. His memories of the speech test and Speech 113X are bitter ones, too. He emailed the following response to our questions about the test and how students survived the experience in a “spirit of carnalismo”:

Took the oral English test as an entering freshman in 1963 and was found lacking. Don’t remember having to take Speech two semesters but was enrolled in a M-F rather than a M-W-F or T-Th course. All of us illiterate Mexicans were to become so proficient in English that semester we would want to lose our Spanish language and culture. I am convinced that that was the psychological objective of the *pendejada*. The only good thing was that my speech instructor, besides being a good teacher, was one of the few at Pan American College who I can objectively say cared about us and believed in our potential. Thank you Mrs. Dahl! Don’t remember much except feeling lesser than those who passed. Didn’t question because we were not taught to do so. Those of us who failed used to put each other down for not having “passed,” yet supported one another in a spirit of *carnalismo*, and, those who passed acted white and also jovially put us down. By the grace of God and a few teachers like Mrs. Dahl we survived PAC’s good intentions.

Dr. de los Santos’s view that the test and class had as their goal to make the students “lose our language and our culture” is remarkably similar to Gloria Anzaldúa’s attack on the speech test
in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.” Dr. Salinas, on the other hand, believes that while the intention of the teachers was to better educate the students, their methodology for doing so, for the most part, was a brutal and racist one in its overtones. Were we to interview the literally thousands of Pan American College students who took the speech test from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, we expect that their responses would reflect this range of criticism.

Initially, however, looking at the comments of these two test-takers who went on to become successful educators and who now teach at the university—making them particularly valuable informants—we can re-read Anzaldúa’s passage from “Wild Tongue” cited above and understand in more specific terms her anger about the classes and why she saw this not as a simple matter of taking proscribed courses required in her degree plan. She, along with her peers, as is evident in the interviews above, saw this as a violation of their First Amendment right to freedom of speech. She is thus quite prescient in her conclusion that the only way to “tame” tongues is to cut them out: clearly Anzaldúa and her fellow Pan Am graduates resisted such efforts in both personal and professional ways.

**An Outsider’s Perspective on the Speech Test in the Early 1970s**

To find out more about the speech test, and from a different angle, we interviewed Dr. Marian Monta, who joined the Communication Department in 1971 at Pan American College. Her job was created following the retirement of Ruth Owens, the strict professor who taught the speech class taken by Dr. Salinas. Dr. Monta, the first woman to graduate with a PhD in Theater from Cornell University (in 1971), has a uniquely valuable insight into the speech test. As an undergraduate student at Fordham University in the late 1940s, she, too, had taken a speech test. It was a common requirement in colleges back east, she says, and even across the United States. At Fordham University, the test was intended to rid the students of their New England
accents. Later, in the 1960s, Monta taught at two historically Black colleges, Hampton University and Prairie View A and M. At both schools, a speech test and class were in place to rid the students of southern or southern-black accents. At all of these schools, she says, every student had to take the test, not just a select group. She was surprised, therefore, to find that at Pan Am the test was, by and large, only required of the Mexican-American students and that the Texas Anglo students, whose Texas accent was painfully obvious to Monta’s east coast ears, did not have to take the test.

As an east coast “foreigner,” I was amazed to see that the Anglos with the thick Texas drawls, who said “git” instead of “get,” didn't have to take the test. I would have required [name omitted by editors], one of our faculty members from Texas, to take the class, but he was a test giver, not a class taker.

From her theater background, she says, everyone has accents, but “at Pan Am it meant teaching them to speak east Texan. So it was okay to say ‘git’ for ‘get’ . . . but you could not say ‘beet’ for bit.” At freshman orientation, she says, many of the test-givers wouldn’t even administer the test—they would just look to see if the student’s last name ended in a vowel. Some Mexican-American students with married names or family names that were Anglo, therefore, managed to avoid the test and the class. She recalls the surprise on her colleagues’ faces when a Mexican-American student would speak English without the influence of Spanish phonology to a test-giver: “Well, you certainly don’t sound like a Rodriguez!” Monta, to this day, supports speech classes that teach “proper” pronunciation and articulation. However, at Pan American College, she says, the experience of giving the test had a distinctly racial tone to it, compared to the many universities where she had studied and taught.

Teaching Speech 113X: Opal White and the Speech Workbook
We wanted some insight into how the actual prescribed speech class was taught, so Monta kindly gave us her copy of the workbook that had been used in Speech 113X. This book was authored by Pan American College Communication professor Opal White, who became Monta’s mother’s best friend shortly after Monta arrived in the Rio Grande Valley. White had been a high school teacher in the valley and after earning her Master’s degree was hired by the Department of Communication at Pan Am. After the death of her husband, White decided to pursue a PhD at the University of Oklahoma, partly to mitigate the grief she felt at her husband’s passing. In 1972, at the age of sixty-two, White earned her doctorate, writing a dissertation entitled *The Mexican American Subculture: A Study in Teaching Contrastive Sounds in English and Spanish*. In her dissertation, White provides a socio-historical overview of the uniqueness of this region where the steady influx of new Spanish speakers supports the ongoing use of Spanish if not for all individuals then at least for a significant portion of the population as a whole. She then goes on to provide an overview of the language teaching and learning theories that were current at the time before laying out the general differences between the English and Spanish sound systems.

White was clearly someone who cultivated connections between her pedagogy and her scholarship. Her dissertation explicitly addresses the problem of limited access to education and economic resources that the Spanish-speaking students in the Rio Grande Valley endured in comparison to their English-speaking counterparts. Her research was the first to look explicitly at the phonological aspects of English acquisition by Spanish speaking populations in the area and among the first to look at language issues with respect to Mexican-American populations at all. In her dissertation, White notes the dearth of previous research and says that she must rely for background information on a few studies of Mexican-American populations in other areas of Texas and the Southwest more broadly. The first sentence of the section
“Rationale for Study” in her introduction makes her purpose clear: “Granted the significance for educating the Mexican American, the primary rationale for this particular study is that this subject area of concern is the most neglected in the school systems of South Texas” (*The Mexican American Subculture* 9).

Not satisfied with simply describing how language presented a barrier to local students’ academic achievement, White sought to provide a tangible, practical way to improve the Mexican-American students’ ability to attain upward social mobility. She believed that helping them to acquire standard American speech would achieve this goal. She went on to author a textbook published in 1979 which was to be used in the speech classes at Pan American University, entitled *General American Speech for the Bilingual Spanish Speaking Student*. The textbook presents the sound system for American English through careful comparison with the sound system for Spanish. The method advocated in the text involves teaching students to use the International Phonetic Alphabet to describe and differentiate the relevant sounds, showing students where to place their articulators in producing the sounds, providing exercises for practicing English sounds in different positions within words, and raising students’ awareness about the distinctive differences between the Spanish and English sound systems. Although some particulars with respect to language learning and teaching theory have changed since White’s time, the basic facts of the sound differences and the general approach she used are quite similar to those that would appear in language teaching textbooks with a focus on pronunciation published today.
Classroom Discussion of the History of the Speech Test and Anzaldúa’s Borderlands

The history of the speech test and Anzaldúa’s reaction to it remain relevant to current students. The ongoing contact between Spanish and English in the Rio Grande Valley continues to provide fertile ground for research on the subject of standardization itself, how it is maintained as an ideology, and how it comes into conflict with other views of language that center on variation, like the one championed by Anzaldúa and those currently espoused by sociolinguists and applied linguists. From our perspectives as linguistics and literature professors, the particular grammatical features of codeswitching, the neurological benefits of bilingualism, and the artistic creativity of writing en dos idiomas make Anzaldúa’s position on translingual wildness a self-evident and easily defendable position. We are sometimes surprised, therefore, to hear current students, many of whom plan to become teachers in local schools, declare that (a) they believe that they themselves don’t speak any language, i.e. they don’t speak English or Spanish well, and (b) they believe that codeswitching is wrong and serves as evidence that people are lazy and haven’t learned to speak properly. Following in the footsteps of others who have found language courses to be an ideal environment to interrogate linguistic inequalities, we walk into our classrooms with copies of Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” thinking that this world-renowned scholar with local roots might just convince our students that having and mixing multiple repertoires is perfectly normal.

What we often find in classroom discussion, however, is that even a half a century later the hegemony of language ideologies seeking to tame wild tongues is still deeply entrenched. As we prepared for our presentation at the Tejas Foco NAACS, Dr. Deborah Cole took this discussion of the speech test at Pan American College into her graduate course, “Problems in dialect, grammar, and language development.” Most of these students are in an MA in ESL program and are either already teaching English locally or plan to teach English abroad upon
graduation. Having started the semester reading Rosina Lippi-Green’s classic sociolinguistic book *English with an Accent: Language Ideology and Discrimination in the United States* and engaging in open discussions about the sociopolitical implications of attempting to change someone’s accent, this seemed like the perfect topic to raise in class. The students were assigned the second chapter of Opal White’s dissertation, “Retention of Spanish in the Southwest” (White 1972), along with the introduction to White’s textbook and the pages that focused on the consonants that Dr. Salinas mentioned being singled out in the speech test. They were told about Johnson’s research on the speech test and that we wanted their input for our presentation.

We started class with a general discussion of the readings, and then the students worked in groups to discuss the pedagogical approaches they would use in their own classrooms if they were using Opal’s textbook to teach these sound contrasts to English learners. Students were then specifically invited to add anything for sharing during our upcoming presentation. Only two students, both middle aged women from the Rio Grande Valley, took the floor to speak. The first one said that she herself disagreed with Anzaldúa, and that we should know that not everyone around here agreed with her either. She didn’t approve of Anzaldúa’s use of the word “nosotras,” for example, nor with her stance on gender in general. The other student wanted us to know that she felt that speech classes were the right thing for Spanish speakers who learned English and still had a Spanish accent. “Why not acquire a Standard English accent as well?” she asked, sounding remarkably like Gloria Anzaldúa’s mother in *Borderlands*. “I don’t see anything wrong with having a speech test for doing that,” she stated.⁷

These comments resonate with others we’ve encountered in courses where particularly undergraduates who plan to teach in local schools speak passionately about the need to keep
Spanish and English separated and to learn “correct” varieties of each. What this tells us is that though the more overt forms of discrimination (like the speech test) have gone away, forms of covert discrimination held in place by widely shared ideologies have not. If we are to engage in socially responsible teaching, therefore, we may first have to raise student awareness of the historical contexts from which current ideologies and practices emerged. Without this, students may not be prepared to critique the current status quo, much less to resist it. And as the above example reveals, even with the historical context and critical discussion of national and local ideologies and practices on the table, changing ideas about language and language speakers that privilege monolingualism remains a challenge – not just in the Rio Grande Valley but also in the wider US and Mexico national contexts. But it is a challenge worth addressing, and the history of the speech test at Pan American College along with Anzaldúa’s work on linguistic intolerance provide a rich and timely resource for helping us to do so.  

Conclusion: Wild Tongues Still Not Tamed

Sometime during the mid-1970s the speech test was phased out at Pan American College; it is now a relic of the past unknown to today’s students at The University of Texas–Pan American. Dr. Marian Monta recalls that in 1973 after they had survived their three-year probationary (tenure) period at Pan American College, she and another colleague, Dr. Jim Hawley, took a stand and refused to administer the test anymore. Lecturers were then hired to give the test and teach the classes. The test was on its way out, though: students were becoming vocal about their opposition to the test, and faculty across the college, apparently hearing their students’ complaints, began to question the requirement as well. The truth of the demise of the speech test in the mid-70s is probably less dramatic, though: changes in the curricula at Pan American simply couldn’t accommodate the six-hour speech requirement any longer. The elimination of the test was long overdue: as early as October 1967, an Anglo reporter for the college’s
newspaper, Doug Bowe, had ridiculed the speech test in an article on freshman orientation. Describing a revolt by freshmen students against the practice of having to wear beanies, Bowe quotes a freshman on football scholarship saying, “I ain’t gon wear no bee-nee,” purposefully emphasizing the Anglo-Texan’s thick east Texas accent. The next paragraph begins, “The Speech Test . . . If you said ‘peach,’ you were okeh. If you said ‘peash’ you took the Speesh. See?” Other anecdotal information shows that students understood the absurdity of allowing Anglos to speak with an accent but not Mexican-Americans. John Simon, a McAllen businessman who played basketball for Pan Am in the late 1960s, recalls that while most Anglos did not have to take the test, one of their players did—the player was from New Jersey, and “no one could understand what he was saying.” Apparently, you could be an Anglo and speak with a Texas accent, but not a New Jersey accent!

None of these asides, however, are meant to undermine the seriousness of the speech test and the obstacles it posed for Mexican-American students at Pan American College. Perhaps it is no accident that students such as Miguel de los Santos and Alejo Salinas, Jr. went on to highly-successful careers in education, inspired, perhaps, by the negative example of the Speech Test. As Dr. Salinas told us,

I’m glad things have changed, times have changed, and that the professors themselves have become more acclimated to the type of students we have and more responsive to the needs of the students, and that’s a big, big change. The teaching standards at the time and the behavior of the professors were condescending, so that’s changed quite a bit. And of course there’s so many of us now who came back to participate in the educational program [at UTPA] and we have brought in not only our own ideas and experiences but also the desire to be of true service to the students.
Today at UTPA, students speak Spanish in hallways more often than not and write freely in Spanish and in English. There is an MFA in Creative Writing offering courses in both Spanish and in English or a combination of both, and there is a thriving bilingual, trilingual (including Tex-Mex, as Anzaldúa would have it) regional literary scene. Much of the inspiration for this comes from Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” a sacred text that is passed around to aspiring local writers who are struggling to find their voice on the border. Anzaldúa was right: wild tongues cannot be tamed. The speech test failed, everyone passed it, and it's now part of the past.

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Notes

1 “To find a good job you have to know how to speak English well. What is the point of getting an education if you still speak English with an accent?” / “The Anglo with his innocent face ripped out our tongues.”

2 A number of Anzaldúa scholars comment on language suppression and linguistic terrorism in their works, many of them inspired by “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and by the specific passage on the speech classes we use as our keystone in this essay. See, for example, Lilia I. Bartolomé, “The Struggle for Language Rights: Naming and Interrogating the Colonial Legacy of ‘English Only’” and Norma Mendoza-Denton and Bryan Gordon, “Language and Social Meaning in Bilingual Mexico and the United States.” However, up to this point, no scholars have investigated the specific historical and social context of Anzaldúa’s reference to the speech classes at Pan American College in the mid-1960s.

3 According to Alejo Salinas, Jr., “Of the three people who taught the class, Miss Owens was perhaps the most harsh of them all. Next to her was Mr. Calderon, who was also a Spanish teacher, and he was very harsh. And then Dr. Arthur Hayes was the other professor, and he was a lot more professional in the way that he addressed the students and the way he taught the course; although I never took the class with him, the reputation was out there he was very professional, not like Miss Owens . . . .”

4 An earlier workbook (Self-Improvement Speech Manual) had been authored by an associate professor of education at PAC, Carlos I. Calderon. Its purpose, he told the Pan American newspaper in an interview in November of 1965, was to “correct the most common speech errors made by Spanish-speaking students who are learning to speak correct English” (“Pan” 4). Calderon also wrote articles on this subject for a teacher’s journal, Texas Outlook. His M.A. Thesis at UT-Austin in 1950 was entitled “The Education of Spanish-Speaking Children in Edcouch-Elsa, Texas.” He also taught Speech 113X, discussed above in footnote 1.

5 It is worth noting that she chose Brooks Hill as the chair of her committee. He was the first president of the International Association of Intercultural Communication Studies.
See for example recent re-definitions of “Language” as “truncated repertoires” (Blommaert 2010) and critiques of monolithic views of languages as theoretically untenable and empirically unsupportable (Hall 2013).

At this point in our research we had not recorded the dramatic interviews with Dr. Salinas and Dr. de los Santos quoted earlier in this article, and it will be interesting to see how future students respond to White’s textbook and to the speech test in the context of these testimonios.

See Denham and Lobeck (2010) for collaborations between linguists and public school teachers to raise awareness of and appreciation for linguistic diversity in K-12 contexts globally.

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Play Selection in the Department of Speech and Drama at Pan American University in the 1970s and 1980s: Twenty Years of Excluding Latino Plays

Eric Wiley

The theatre program at the University of Texas-Pan American has a long history of excluding Latino plays from its production seasons, even though the university is located near the Mexican border and the majority of its students are Mexican American. The regional population served by this publicly-funded school, which has been state-funded since 1965, is predominantly Mexican American and Spanish speaking. Furthermore, as reflected in its name, the school’s mission has included for more than half a century a commitment to advance the “blending” of the North American and Latin American cultures. This article reviews the school’s production record over a twenty-year period, from 1970 to 1990, when more than one hundred and fifty full-length plays were produced by its theatre program, not one of which was about Mexican Americans or Mexico. Selected background information is provided to help illuminate the historical context in which the school’s theatre faculty decided year after year to exclude Latino plays from their theatre on the Mexican border.

The theatre program at the University of Texas–Pan American has a long history of excluding Latino plays from its production seasons, even though the school lies just fifteen miles from the Mexican border and serves an overwhelmingly Mexican-American region of the state. The twenty years between 1970 and 1990 provide a worthwhile basis for review, first, as they constitute an extensive period during which successive waves of students passed through the program and, second, they come after the civil rights movement had already exposed and vilified ethnicity-based inequalities in American higher education. So, for the record, how many plays staged by the theatre program during this period were Latino? What percentage was Mexican American or Mexican in its authorship or thematic content? Reviewing publicly the facts about the program’s exclusion of Latino plays, at a time when the school (named Pan American University or PAU) was state-funded, is the purpose of this article. The possible motives for the exclusion are but very briefly considered, as are the methods and arguments that were used to make it a reality. Some background information is provided to help illuminate the historical context in which PAU theatre faculty decided year after year to exclude Latino plays from their theatre on the Mexican border.
We begin with the 1970s. Between the spring of 1970 and the fall of 1979, PAU theatre staged a total of sixty-seven plays (all play selection information is based on departmental archives and PAU yearbooks). Of these sixty-seven, only one appears to have had any Latino themes or authorship: *In the Right Hand of God the Father*, by Colombian playwright Enrique Buenaventura, was presented in the fall of ‘72. One of two other possible exceptions to this decade-long practice of excluding Latino works was a show in the spring of ‘72 entitled “One Act Play Festival.” As no individual titles from this festival appear in departmental records, and no programs for it were found in the UTPA theatre archives, it is possible that one or more of these short plays was Latino. However, references to one-act plays presented at about the time in question, made in interviews published in *Her story: An Oral History of Theatre in the 20th Century at The University of Texas-Pan American*, do not remotely suggest Latino themes (84-89).

Another possible exception to the practice of excluding Latino plays in the ‘70s at PAU occurred in the spring of ‘78: A Latino-themed show at the Fine Arts Auditorium entitled *La Pitahaya*. Composed by Carl Seale, a music professor at PAU, this new work was actually an opera, not a play, and originated in the music department. It was “produced by the PAU Opera Workshop” and “presented by the Division of Inter-American Affairs and International Education as a highlight of a week of Pan American Days activities” (*Pan American* 8). Theatre faculty did help to stage the opera, but it was not part of the theatre program’s usual four play season; had only three performances; and featured primarily music faculty, music students and student dancers.

In summary, of the sixty-seven, full-length plays produced during the ‘70s at PAU, only one appears to have been Latino. Even if one were to “count” as Latino both the one-act play festival and the opera (production number sixty-eight), Latino-themed works would still not make up even five percent of the plays staged over the decade. Moreover, the only play that was
Latino with any certitude was not Mexican or Mexican American, but Colombian. This means, again, that throughout the ‘70s the publicly-funded theatre program at PAU appears not to have offered its students or the surrounding community even one play dealing with Mexican-American or even Mexican culture. Students at PAU, both Latino and otherwise, were thus denied an opportunity by theatre faculty to interpret roles, make costumes, and create sets that reflected the region’s Mexican-American culture. There are many different ways of seeing the magnitude of this cultural exclusion and sensing its impact on students, their friends and their families. But the impact surely reached beyond the students and their financial and emotional supporters. What did this decade of favoring one culture over another (in a largely bi-cultural environment) do to the faculty members themselves; to the staff of the department; to the theatre patrons; and to the whole culture of the theatre program and its foundation for the future?

One must understand how ubiquitous was and is the presence of Mexican-American and Mexican culture in the border region of south Texas, as well as among the PAU students who are nearly all locals, to appreciate how emphatic was the exclusion of Latino plays by the PAU theatre faculty. Although the U.S. Census Bureau did not identify “Hispanics” prior to the ‘80s, there is no question that PAU and the surrounding region had a pronounced Latino presence in the ‘70s. As the authors of a 1984 study on Mexican Americans wrote about Hidalgo County: “The proximity to the border virtually ensures that the influences of Mexican culture and traditions will be great. There is a continuing immigration stream…” (783). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, which tends to undercount Latinos living near the border, Hidalgo County’s population in 1980 was 85 percent Hispanic (Pew Research Center) (by 1990 the Hispanic population had grown to 88 percent; by 2010, 91%).
Students at PAU, which until the mid-1990s was the only institution of higher education in the area, were mostly Latino throughout the ‘70s. In the 1984 edition of the *Bulletin of Pan American University*, it states that 96% of the students are from the local area (13). In 1989, in their proposal for a new Master of Arts Program in Speech Communication, the Communications Department (formerly the Department of Speech and Drama) at PAU reported: “The Lower Rio Grande Valley is predominantly Hispanic with virtually all of that population being Mexican American, and Pan American University is the largest predominantly Hispanic institution in Texas and the nation. With over 81 percent of its students designated as Hispanic the institution is a reflection of the ethnic composition of the surrounding region” (8). From this document we see that faculty and administrators in the department were aware that Latinos made up the great majority of the local population and of the student body at their school. It also shows that they understood how exceptional these demographics were at the state and national levels.

Despite their having constituted a large majority at the university, is it possible that Latino students were marginalized at PAU in the ‘70s *generally* and that their culture was ignored in the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities, such as theatrical productions?

While this question stirs up an important and complicated set of additional questions (that may not be addressed satisfactorily here), PAU in the ‘70s was certainly not guilty of anything resembling a blanket exclusion and marginalization of Latino students and culture. The student yearbooks from the period show a major, social presence of Latinos at the university and show them involved and Latino culture included in many events and honors. Latinos are recognized as beauty queens and as outstanding students and athletes.
By 1970, the civil rights movement had effectively challenged all kinds of institutional practices that were marginalizing minorities across the country, particularly in the field of education. This movement had reached the Rio Grande Valley and Hidalgo County.

Most notably, in 1968, there was a highly publicized walk-out of students at Edcouch-Elsa High School, located just to the east of Edinburg where PAU was located. More than one hundred Mexican-American students at the high school protested what they claimed was “blatant discrimination” and issued a set of “demands.” One of the demands made by the Mexican American Youth Organization on behalf of the protesters spoke to the paucity of content in the students’ courses relating to Latino culture: It “called for courses to be introduced as a regular part of the curriculum to show contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to the state and region, including . . . courses in Mexican history and culture” (Valley Morning Star 1-2).

This watershed protest, which was covered by more than ninety local newspaper articles between November, 1968, and January, 1969, repeatedly and urgently reminded the public that the exclusion of Latino culture at educational institutions in Hidalgo County was a grievance for the many students and their supporters.

Another outbreak of local Chicano resistance came on the evening of February 6, 1971, in the town of Pharr, just south of Edinburg (and also in Hidalgo County). Hundreds gathered downtown to protest alleged abuses by local police in their treatment of Mexican Americans. The demonstration received national press coverage, in part, because a seventeen year-old boy, Alfonso Loredo Flores, an innocent bystander, was killed amidst the ensuing violence. These public events show that there was a heightened awareness during the early ’70s in Hidalgo County of allegations of institutional discrimination and exclusion in regard to the local Latino community. Within the PAU academic community, too, the civil rights movement had arrived.
and there was a lot of high-profile work in the areas of Latin American and Mexican-American studies. Cesar Chavez himself visited PAU on February 8, 1971, when he addressed faculty, students and staff. And in March, 1973, a major “Bilingual Education Conference” was held at the university. PAU professor Hubert Miller published a series of booklets, mostly during the ‘70s, to guide teachers wanting to cover the Mexican-American heritage. And PAU associate professor Sylvia Dominguez published a full-length play that she had written in Spanish entitled *La Comadre Maria* (1973). And in 1976, an assistant professor at PAU edited a collection of eight new Chicano plays entitled *Contemporary Chicano Theatre*, which was published by the University of Notre Dame Press. Of course, none of these plays were ever chosen for production at PAU. But they serve to show that Mexican-American studies and new Mexican-American plays, in particular, were areas of highly publicized interest in the academic community at PAU in the ‘70s.

But interest in Mexican-American studies also flourished outside the circles of protesters and academics. PAU yearbooks indicate that there was during the ‘70s a pervasive interest on campus in recognizing and celebrating the bicultural and bilingual heritage of the Rio Grande Valley. The university’s 1971 yearbook, *El Bronco*, for example, begins with an eloquent nod to the bicultural identity of the region and the school (still called Pan American College (PAC) in 1970): At PAC, two cultures unite . . . each student at Pan American
represents the union of two schools of thought, of two ways of life, some choose according to merit, others choose according to bias” (17). And referring to the new architecture that was then transforming the PAC campus, the bicultural nature of the school is said to be central to the design: “The arch . . . a symbol . . . represents the fusion of two cultures . . . Mexican and American . . . . Symbolic of a culture created by the merging of two languages, two races, two ideologies . . . . Symbolic of . . . Pan American College: ‘A College for all the Americas’” (4-6).
Student organizations and extracurricular activities reflect an interest in Latino history and culture that had become prominent on campus by the early ‘70s. One student organization, the Order of Bougainvillea, had been founded (way back in 1961) with the mission to promote “the blending of two cultures” (El Bronco 1970 54). El Bronco 1971 announces that MEChA, a national Chicano organization, had arrived at PAC: “The Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán is a new organization on campus dedicated to the expression of Chicano culture in all its varied forms” (65). The goals of MEChA were stated as follows: “. . . to create a genuine awareness of Chicano culture, society and values among students. Members try to promote understanding and communication between Chicanos and Anglos” (65). And their listed activities include “presentations by the Teatro Chicano” (65). There was also El Club de México which “works to realize the goal of Pan American College . . . a blending of two cultures” (60). El Bronco 1970 reveals that theatrical works were among this club’s activities, as well: “The club sponsored ‘Teatro Club de México’ at the Carnival of the Great Pumpkin in October” (56).

In addition to the Latino theatre productions by or under the auspices of the student organizations at PAU, a Spanish-language theatre group was active in the early ‘70s. Based in the Modern Languages Department, “El Teatro Español produces two plays a year with the casts made up of Spanish students” (El Bronco 1970 140) and their plays toured to area high schools and civic organizations. El Bronco 1971 records: “El Teatro Español is active with the production of annual plays that perform for audiences throughout the Rio Grande Valley” (150). Included in the yearbook is a picture of faculty member Sylvia M. Dominguez, author of the Spanish-language play mentioned earlier, who is shown leading a “Christmas show in Spanish” (150). The image shows performers without an actual stage, costumes or other technical support, with the exception of a few microphones and microphone stands.
Latino plays were produced at PAU in the early ‘70s, but only very rarely by its theatre program. They were produced instead by student groups or as an extension of Spanish classes; in other words, outside the official theatre arts programming at the university. This was similar to the situation I encountered when I was hired to teach theatre at UTPA (formerly PAU) some thirty years later, in 1999: very few Latino plays were being done by the theatre program, but a small group from the Modern Languages Department, called Actúa, would meet once each week to plan and prepare some Spanish-language stage productions; they had virtually no budget and little in the way of expertise or other basic support, such as a reliable rehearsal space. That group has since disbanded, but a new Spanish-language group based in the same department, and run by Dr. Edna Ochoa, is currently active. French-language theatricals have also been produced in recent years under the direction of Dr. Stella Behar.

Perhaps there is a connection between the exclusion of Latino works by the theatre program at PAU in the early ‘70s and the larger academic community’s promotion of bicultural and bilingual awareness. One of the responses given to me by senior theatre faculty in 1999 (again, almost thirty years later) during my job interview, after I asked if the theatre program ever did Spanish-language works, was that they did few Latino works even in English because they were afraid that, as Anglos, they might be thought presumptuous for attempting to direct them. In other words, ethnic tensions may have played a role in sustaining an almost exclusively Anglo repertoire at PAU in the ‘70s. However, the real motives behind the exclusion of Latino plays is difficult to determine, especially over time; by 1999, and as late as 2010, junior faculty and lecturers were being advised by a senior faculty member not to propose Latino plays for the following year’s season because “Hispanics don’t go to the theatre.”

Let’s turn to the ‘80s. Seventy-eight plays were produced by the theatre program at PAU during the 1980s according to department records, but only two have Latino themes. Man
of La Mancha, presented in the spring of ‘86, is the hugely popular American musical by Dale Wasserman (book) that is loosely derived from the seventeenth century Spanish novel, Don Quixote, by Miguel de Cervantes. I think it would be fair to call this musical only superficially a Latino-themed work as it’s so firmly mainstream American in spirit and style. The other Latino-themed play, El Grande de Coca-Cola, is actually a musical revue with slapstick, written by an ensemble of improvisational, comic actors. Set in Honduras, this campy revue has the slightest of ties to Latino culture and experience. And even if we “count” both works as Latino, we still find only two out of seventy-eight plays during the decade having Latino themes, or under three percent; not one play had Mexican-American or Mexican content.

To summarize, the total number of plays in the twenty-year period was one hundred and forty-six, and the total possible number of Latino-themed plays is five, or just under four percent. Only one play, In the Right Hand of the Father, is known to have been authored by a Latino writer, which puts Latino authorship at well under one percent, and that play was produced in ‘72; in the eighteen years that followed there appears not to have been even one play by a Latino author (out of 137 plays). The theatre program excluded Latino plays in spite of PAU’s historic mission to “blend the two cultures.” PAU’s official “Institutional philosophy” appeared in the Bulletin of Pan American College for many years in the late ’60s and early ’70s. It began:

Pan American College is a democratic institution which is dedicated to the preservation and extension of responsible human freedom and to the enlightenment of the Rio Grande Valley community. / As such an institution, it is dedicated to the following: The belief that it is the obligation of Pan American College to help perpetuate the best of American cultural heritage and to blend
with it the outstanding features of Latin-American culture . . .  

(Bulletin 1971 n.p.)

In the ‘80s, a new mission or “purpose” appeared each year in the Bulletin: “the University commits itself to: reflecting and fostering the best features of the multi-cultural heritage of its location; promoting the exchange of ideas and persons to facilitate an understanding of community – local, state, national, and international; answering the needs of and encouraging service to the community . . .” (Bulletin 1983 3).

Some believe that in the old days people just didn’t do Latino plays, but this is wrong. Latino plays in both English and Spanish were produced by the Speech Department at PAU (in earlier institutional forms) for decades and were popular (Roney 58-62). Beginning in the ‘90s the theatre program began to stage slightly more Latino plays than before, but not until around 2006 did UTPA’s theatre program begin producing substantially more Latino works and with ever greater resources, and perhaps this will continue in the years to come.

But in the historical sweep between 1970 and 1990 the percentage of Latino plays actually declined as time went on, even as waves of new Mexican immigrants swelled the Latino population of the region, bringing it ever closer to its present standing at 91% (in Hidalgo County). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Spanish is spoken in about 85% of households in Hidalgo County. It seems strange that, if ethnic tensions in the early ‘70s are used to help explain play selection at the university, what would explain the continued exclusion of Latino plays throughout the ‘80s and beyond? At a university devoted to celebrating and exploring the dual nature of its community and student body, positioned as it is at the intersection of Latin American and North American cultures, why would the theatre faculty maintain a pattern of play selection that reduces one half of the duality to a tiny fraction? Why would a theatre program on the Mexican border not want its audiences to see
Latino life celebrated and represented on its stages? These questions point beyond the scope of this paper, which, now that it has reviewed the record of Latino play selection at UTPA in the 1970s and 1980s, has accomplished its stated goal.

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Américo Paredes and His Audiences

Dr. Lyon Rathbun

While scholars recognize that Américo Paredes addresses various audiences, they have not systematically discussed the communities of readers that Paredes consistently addressed as a public figure. Throughout his career, Paredes reached out to geographically opposite and culturally different audiences situated to the south and to the north of what he called “Greater Mexico.” He reached out to these divergent secondary audiences as an extension of his central ambition to restore historical memory and political agency to his own Mexican-American community. While Paredes became a beloved cultural spokesperson for his own Mexican-American community, he acted as a cultural intermediary in addressing his secondary Mexican and Anglo audiences.

Scholars generally recognize that Américo Paredes’s genius was rooted in his ability to cross cultural boundaries and to recognize the permeability of those boundaries. The very title of Ramón Saldívar’s magisterial study, The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary, suggests Saldívar’s central thesis, that by crossing cultural boundaries, in a variety of directions, Paredes developed his “transnational” conception of “Greater Mexico.” Likewise, in “Paredes, Guiding Force in Transcending Boundaries,” Olga Nájera-Ramírez asserts that by constantly engaging borders, Paredes developed “a critical double vision that generated copious innovative theoretical insights” (69). Saldívar, Nájera-Ramírez, and other scholars appreciate how the content of Paredes’s insights were rooted in his transcultural experience and imagination. However, they have not directly addressed how Paredes’s hybrid cultural experience determined the various audiences that he sought to reach throughout his life as a writer and public intellectual.

Saldívar, and many other Chicano scholars, have good reason to assume that Paredes was writing for them. In working so consistently to raise up the historical memory of the South Texas borderlands, Paredes was, most immediately, writing for his own community. Describing his intentions in writing With a Pistol in His Hand, Paredes explained in an interview, “To use legal terms, perhaps not correctly, I was writing a brief. I was being an advocate for my people. Enough had been said about them negatively that I wanted to point to
the exceptions, the remarkable ways in which their communities held together under great external pressures from discrimination and other social injustices” (Saldívar 70). Moreover, Paredes did personally inspire a great number of important Chicano scholars, such as Ramón Saldívar, José Límon, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Manuel Medrano, and many others. Yet these scholars, who received a kind of blessing through the attention that Paredes bestowed upon them, would be the first to acknowledge that Paredes was always seeking to reach an array of audiences. Indeed, Saldívar, Nájera-Ramírez, and others have been attentive to Paredes’s efforts to reach diverse audiences, especially academic and Spanish-speaking audiences. But they have not described how Paredes’s efforts to reach disparate audiences extended from his ambition to restore historical memory and political agency to his own Mexican-American community.

Paredes’s life-long effort to understand himself and his community compelled him to address Spanish-speaking audiences south of the border and a broad, English-speaking, audience in the United States. After all, the Mexican-American community that comprised “Greater Mexico” blended south into Mexico, and north into the heartland of the United States. In writing for “Greater Mexico” Paredes needed to simultaneously address the broader audiences who extended out from the border-land into which he had been born. In reaching out to these secondary audiences, Paredes was acting as a cultural intermediary, bringing salient features of South Texas border culture to the attention of an increasingly broad readership. Acting as a cultural intermediary on behalf of readers who resided south and north of “Greater Mexico” was part of his effort to win recognition that the South Texas border-land is integral to the broader mosaic of American life.

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Paredes’s efforts to reach geographically opposite and culturally different audiences cannot be fully understood without appreciating the circumstances of his early life. From a very
early age, Paredes was oriented south, towards Mexico. As a young man, alienated by the Jim Crow subordination of Mexican-Americans in Texas, Paredes thought of himself as Mexican. Late in life, he explained, “My brother and his friends made me think of myself as a Mexican rather than a Mexican-American. At the time, I thought of myself as mexicano who happened to be living in Texas” (Saldívar 125). Américo Paredes was born into a family that had long been active in Mexican politics. His grandfather had fought against the French in the 1860s; his father had moved to Brownsville, Texas, leaving several brothers in Tamaulipas, after joining the Catarino Garza revolt against Díaz in 1891. Until Américo Paredes was fourteen, he preferred to spend his summers working and playing on his uncle Vicente’s ranch, located outside of Matamoros, where he soaked up the stories and songs that he would dedicate his life to appreciating and understanding. “Everyone had little boats hidden in the reeds,” Paredes later recalled. “We would stay there [his uncle’s ranch] for three months living like a Mexican, listening to the old people tell their stories . . . there I was living in another world” (Medrano 12). These experiences were so deeply woven into Paredes’s consciousness that he dedicated With a Pistol in His Hand to the memory of his father’s adventures with Catarino Garza; likewise, he dedicated Texas Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border to the storytellers and balladeers he had heard as an adolescent on his uncle’s ranch.

With the outbreak of World War Two, Paredes was so rankled by “the way mexicanos were treated in Texas and the rest of the Southwest,” that he was tempted by the urgings of friends “to renounce my US citizenship and become a Mexican citizen.” But Paredes was as repelled by the arrogance of Mexican nationals as by the jingoism of North Americans. “I wasn’t exactly taken,” Paredes recalled dryly, “by what I saw of Mexican nationalism either” (Saldívar 91). Angered by Mexican snobbery, but tied to his own Mexican heritage, Paredes
would feel an enduring urge to explain himself, and his mixed cultural heritage, to Mexican audiences. But Paredes also felt an urgency to address English-speaking audiences as well.

Spending his summers in Mexico, Paredes was attending English-speaking schools in Brownsville, where he began seizing every opportunity for self-expression that Brownsville could offer. Even as he embraced his Mexican heritage, Paredes was intent on mastering the English language. “The protest writer that I knew best when I was a boy,” Paredes remembered, “was Perales, who wrote En defensa de mi raza in Spanish. Who read it? Spanish-speaking Mexicans. It didn’t affect the Anglos. I thought that was the reason that I had to write in English. I was trying to read a wider audience” (Saldívar 141). As a high school student, Paredes was already intent on earning a Ph.D. in English at the University of Texas at Austin (Medrano 20). Throughout his adolescence and early adulthood, Paredes was grooming himself, as a journalist, poet, performer, and scholar, to reach English-speaking audiences. Oriented in contradictory directions, Paredes eventually learned to embrace the opposing sides of his heritage and identity. It was through inventing the character Guálinto in George Washington Gómez that Paredes first developed his notion, which would become central to his later scholarly writing, those individuals, and whole cultures, could be a composite of identities that do not necessarily fit harmoniously together. Looking back, Paredes explained, I refer to it as a checkerboard of consciousness. The idea came really from my own experiences on the border. Now if I had been born on the Mexican side, never having much to do with Anglos and Anglo-American culture, I might indeed have been able to experience myself as only one personality, even if it was a personality hostile to Anglo America. But even as a young boy, I had daily contract with that other world, especially through my school teachers. Some of
them, whom I loved, showed me a great deal of respect, and affection even.

(Saldívar 136)

Paredes’s “checkerboard of conscience” was at first a painful existential burden. But as Paredes began finding his voice as a writer, the ability to see into the cultural worlds lying on either side of his border community became an asset, the basis of his deepest intellectual insights—and of his impulse to reach diametrically opposite audiences. Paredes was able to develop his hybrid view of the world because he had experienced some nurturing from both the Mexican and the Anglo sides of his heritage, an anomaly that occurred because he had grown up within the blended cultural milieu of Brownsville, Tx. – Matamoros, Mex.

Even as the population of Brownsville has been continually replenished with a steady stream of new arrivals from the interiors of both Mexico and the United States, the city also had numerous Hispanic families – the Zavaletas, the Paredes, the Garzas, the Ballis, the Treviños – that still have branches on both sides of the river and roots stretching back to colonial times. And some Anglo families, like the Stillmans, have been in Brownsville since the late 1840s. The city has been shaped by the historical development of both Mexico and the United States and has been distinguished by a significant degree of accommodation between the landed Hispanic families and newly arriving Anglos (Montenegro 35). In 1936, cities across Texas celebrated the state’s Centennial with collective expressions of state pride that included disparaging depictions of Mexicans as the racially stunted counterpoint to Anglo-Texan progress (González 29-66). In contrast, the city fathers of Brownsville inaugurated Charro Days, a holiday recognizing the city’s Hispanic heritage. Other Texan cities found collective identity through contrasting themselves to the alien Mexican “Other.” In Brownsville, citizens established a public identity through commemorating the cultural legacy that Brownsville shares with its sister-city, Matamoros. Despite being part of the Jim Crow South, the sister-city
of Matamoros could not deny its own bi-cultural heritage. Paredes himself participated in the first Charro Days festival in 1937, singing with his first wife, Chelo Silva, at the El Jardín Hotel (Medrano 32). While immediate family and friends kept him connected to Mexico, Anglo educators and journalists in Brownsville encouraged him to complete his education, to write, and to publish his work.

One of the teachers instrumental in helping Américo Paredes enter college was the Anglo dean of Brownsville Junior College, J.W. “Red” Irvine, who also served as principal of Brownsville High School. Late in his life, Paredes recalled:

Well, school ends and I get my high school diploma. That was it; nowhere to go. I was standing on a street in Brownsville with other kids, not looking for trouble, just standing around waiting for it to come around, I guess. But the dean and the principal drove by in a little Chevy with a rumble seat. And he saw me, stopped and backed up. It was late June and he called, and I went up and he said, “Are you going to college? I said no I don’t have the money, And he said, did you apply for a student assistantship? I told him, what’s that?” (Medrano 18)

Mr. Irvine instructed Paredes to submit a letter of application and arranged a campus job for Paredes that paid his $150 semester tuition.

Paredes credited Mr. Irvine, and his two years at Brownsville Community College, with launching his writing career and developing the confidence to later begin his graduate studies at UT Austin. Paredes admitted, “I would not have had the guts, if I may say, if I had not had those two years of junior college, courtesy of Red Irvine” (Medrano 43).

Upon graduating from community college, Paredes began writing seriously, drafting *George Washington Gómez*, and also publishing articles, and even some poems, in the *Brownsville Herald*. The paper’s Anglo editor, Hart Stilwell, befriended Paredes, and exposed him, for the
first time, to the high literature of the interwar era. Paredes later remembered that “It was after I finished George Washington Gómez that Hart Stilwell, the editor of the Brownsville Herald, loaned me a few books. It was only then that I first learned about Faulkner, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Wolfe, and Russian writers in the late 1930s and 1940s” (Saldívar 133). Implicitly, Stilwell held Paredes’s intellectual acuity and creativity in high regard. Paredes recalled that while Stilwell was himself writing a novel titled Border City, about the early labor movement in south Texas, “Stilwell was constantly trying to pick my mind for ideas for the book” (Saldívar 92).

One cannot imagine a Mexican-Texan publishing articles in a Waco, Texas, newspaper in the mid-1930s, any more than one could imagine a young black man of that era writing for a city newspaper in Mobile, Alabama. Yet nothing seems out of joint envisioning Paredes reporting for The Brownsville Herald, where he wrote articles about Charro Days, bullfighting and Mexican-style rodeos, Charreadas, that displayed the exquisite horsemanship and roping skills of the Mexican vaquero. At the same time, he was also singing corridos and original compositions on a weekly program at a local radio station, KWWG (Medrano 31).

While Paredes was beginning to reach a regional English-speaking audience through The Brownsville Herald, he was reaching a Mexican audience through articles, written in Spanish that were published in La Prensa de San Antonio as well as the Matamoros newspaper El Regional. Paredes recalled that he had “published some of my earliest articles there [El Regional], including a satirical piece I called ‘Diccionario modern mundial’ (‘Modern Global Dictionary’), all under the pen name of Guálinto Gómez” (Saldívar 90). The publisher of El Regional, Garza Flores, belonged to a Matamoros literary group comprised of Freemasons, intellectuals, and literary men whom were all friends of Américo Paredes’s brother who ran a successful business in Matamoros. The Matamoros reading group not only helped Paredes
publish in *El Regional*, but also keep him connected to the Spanish-speaking world on the Matamoros side of the river. “While it lasted,” Paredes recalled of the group, “we would meet to read poetry and discuss the latest in Mexican politics. We would read Rubén Darío, Amado Nervo, Federico García Lorca, Gabriela Mistral, and many other poets of the day” (Saldívar 91). Recalling that “The 1930s was the period of César Augusto Sandino’s revolution in Nicaragua,” Paredes added that he, and other members of the group, were also “very attuned to the political struggles in Latin America” (Saldívar 91).

Through his articles published in the *Brownsville Herald, La Prensa de San Antonio*, and *El Regional*, Paredes was acting as a cultural intermediary, bringing salient features of South Texas Border culture to the attention of a bi-lingual, bi-cultural audience that stretched North, from Brownsville to San Antonio, and South, from Brownsville to Matamoros. Recalling the early articles he had published in *The Herald*, Paredes explained,

... I was very much aware, that what we were taught in school at that time and what we knew in our hearts and what our elders told us was different. That our heritage was not being given the respect that it deserved so what I did in the Herald was milder, showing them, for example, that Juvención Rosas wrote “Sobre las olas” ... but more important to me was to show what had been done, the injustices that had been done to our people and the value to our heritage.

Much of that fell on deaf ears until I finally was able to come here ["UT Austin"].

(Medrano 149)

It was as a professor at UT Austin that Paredes reached a broad audience in the United States, as well as in Mexico and Latin America. But that accomplishment rested on the precedent of having reached a regional audience, on both sides of the Rio Grande, as a reporter and raconteur in Brownsville during the 1930s.
Paredes found both his voice and his subject as a budding writer and bohemian hipster, singing in local watering holes with his talented first wife, Chelo Silva, who would go on, after divorcing Paredes, to have a successful career as a popular singer, touring extensively, and also recording for Falcon Records, Columbia and Sony (Medrano 33). But Paredes had never been outside the Rio Grande Valley, and he was still constrained by the parochialism of deep South Texas. It was only when he left Brownsville to join the army in 1944, spending six years in Asia, that he gained an array of experiences that would help him navigate graduate school and establish a platform from which he could express his cultural experience to a broad national and international audience.

In *The Borderlands of Culture*, Ramon Saldívar probably exaggerates in claiming that Paredes’s sojourn in Asia was a catalyst for developing his conception of “Greater Mexico.” But Saldívar convincingly demonstrates that Paredes was transformed by his years in Asia. As Saldívar puts it, “the wartime writings bear testimony to Paredes’s own personal transformation from a border subject with regional intuitions into a transnational citizen of an emerging global system . . .” (393). Paredes never described himself as a “transnational citizen” and always clung tenaciously to his identity as a Mexican-American from South Texas. Yet in Asia, he continued to read voraciously and traveled widely – across Japan, China, and Korea. At the same time, Paredes was continuously publishing articles, in English, for *The Stars and Stripes*, along with a regular feature column, in Spanish, for the Mexican readers of *El Universal*, a paper published in Mexico City. Paredes returned from Asia as a man who was equal in rhetorical skill and worldly experience to anybody he would encounter at UT Austin.

As a military journalist and as an administrator for an international relief agency, Paredes held a social rank that he had never known in Brownsville. For six years, he interacted
with other professionals from across the United States, and from around the world, as a man of
equal social standing and authority, not as a Mexican-Texan, a disparaged member of a
subordinated community. Describing his travels across the war-ravaged cities of Northern
China as a Red Cross administrator, Paredes evoked his felt-sense of altered status in
remembering, “It was a strange experience being waked up [sic] in the morning by a boy who
called me, a south Texas Mexican, ‘Master’” (Saldívar 100). Paredes’s altered social status
dramatically enhanced the sense of authority and agency that he would exercise upon returning
to the United States in 1950.

Exercising an exhilarating new sense of social clout and freedom, Paredes was
continuously sharpening his rhetorical skills during his years in Asia. Between December of
1945 and August 1950, Paredes wrote at least seventy-four major articles and feature columns
(Saldívar 349). Through these articles, as well as through fiction and poetry, Paredes was
progressively enhancing his ability to massage the expectations of radically divergent
audiences. Paredes wrote an entire series of short stories, the “Johnny Picadero Stories,” as an
experiment in inventing Hispanic characters who would engage the interest of educated Anglo
readers. Paredes recalled, “There was a small group of ex-soldiers who had stayed on in Japan
after the war working in different capacities. They were all very good friends of mine. I’ve
mentioned Horse de la Croix, I believe. It was for people like him that I wrote those stories.”
When this particular audience of friends was no longer available, Paredes stopped writing the
series. “Once I was away from that group,” Paredes explained, “I lost interest” (Saldívar 132). In
effect, Paredes wrote the “Johnny Picadero Stories” as a playful exercise in conveying aspects of
his own Hispanic heritage to the kind of cosmopolitan Anglo readers that he would engage so
successfully when he returned to the United States.
Astonishingly, even as he was learning new ways of connecting with a broad audience of North American readers, he was finding new ways of establishing rapport with Spanish-speaking readers in Mexico. While writing for *Stars and Stripes*, and later working for the Red Cross, Paredes wrote two columns, “Desde Tokio” (“From Japan”) and “Desde China” (“From China”), for *El Universal*. For his Mexican readers, who had themselves experienced conquest by North American armies, Paredes could accentuate the destructiveness of the American war machine. Stating that “the specter of hunger haunts the streets of Tokyo,” Paredes explained, “Hunger is an offshoot of the insane war that bled Japan for fifteen years, changing the land from an orderly and tidy nation into a demoralized country, that is indescribably filthy, completely finished off by unrelenting bombardment . . . a land pulverized by the “American B-29 Superfortress” (Saldívar 359). Paredes could never have described the war as “insane,” or emphasized the destructiveness of American bombing, to the readers of *The Stars and Stripes*. Indeed, when Paredes did write an article about the trial of Hideki Tojo, the supreme commander of the Japanese army, that hinted at Tojo’s humanity, a Lieutenant in charge of publicity for the trials, “a prissy man with a venomous desire for revenge on the Japanese,” gave what Paredes described as “the dressing-down of my life – right there, in full view of everyone – accusing me and by implication the other newspapermen present, of being apologists for the Japanese criminals” (Saldívar 99). If this lieutenant could read Spanish, how would he have responded to Paredes’s depictions of American aerial bombardment for readers of *El Universal*?

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Paredes’s six years in Asia prepared him for the final phase of his career, as a university professor, when he would make his greatest contributions as a folklorist – and his greatest breakthrough in reaching a broad audience that reached from Mexico to the United States, and from college classrooms to middle class living rooms. When Paredes began his graduate work
at Austin in 1950, Mexican-Americans could still not even enter a barber shop in the commercial district near campus (Nájera-Ramírez 73). Yet from the beginning of his graduate studies, Paredes interacted with his Anglo professors with the sure-footedness that he had developed working with a wide circle of Army and Red Cross professionals during his years in Asia. He entered the university as a worldly veteran, with experiences – and publications – that made him, in human terms, a peer of the professors who mentored him through his graduate studies.

Excelling as a student, Paredes recalled that he was “encouraged by a number of people in the faculty to do a PhD.” His first advisor, Alex Sackton, became “a close personal friend” who suggested that Paredes take a course with the department expert in ballads and folklore, Robert Stephenson. It was Stephenson who first suggested to Paredes, “why don’t you work on songs from your own background” (Saldívar 109). The result, of course, was his doctoral dissertation, later published as *With a Pistol in His Hand*, a virtuoso work of scholarship that continues to inspire Mexican-Americans and that gave Paredes the stature to reach broad audiences in both the United States and in Mexico.

To publish *With a Pistol in His Hand*, Paredes had to win over initial readers who could easily have rejected the manuscript as inflammatory: His subject was a Mexican folk hero, eulogized in a ballad written in Spanish, who challenged the normative assumptions of Texas Nationalism and Manifest Destiny. Yet the compelling importance of Paredes’s manuscript was evident – even to Anglo readers who might have rejected the work on ideological grounds.

One important reader who endorsed Paredes’s dissertation for publication with the UT Press was Dr. Stith Thompson, head of the folklore program at Indiana University, and perhaps the preeminent folklorist in the world. Paredes remembered Dr. Thompson as “Mr. Folklore” in both the United States and Europe, whose endorsement of the manuscript for
publication “was almost like un dedazo [a divine appointment]” (Medrano 54). It is impressive, but not surprising, that an eminent Midwestern Folklorist would endorse With a Pistol in His Hand for publication. But it is stunning that Paredes’s manuscript was championed by Walter Prescott Webb, whose books had helped establish the hagiographic legend of the Texas Rangers.\(^4\)

Frank Wardlaw, the director of the UT Press, explained in a letter to Paredes that his “penetrating analysis of the border country and its people,” along with his analysis of the role that the Texas Rangers had played in subjugating the Mexican people, “would be of great value and interest to the general reader.” Wardlaw went on to explain that Dr. Walter Prescott Webb, then chairman of the faculty advisory board, had endorsed the book, “despite finding himself the villain of the piece at several points.” Wardlaw explained that Webb “has always considered it a weakness of his book on the Texas Rangers that he was unable to give the Mexican attitude toward the Rangers, and their side of the border conflict, with any degree of thoroughness.” Although Paredes’s “presentation of the Mexican side of the border conflict will undoubtedly be heartily resented by many old-time Texans,” Webb had concluded that “it is a story which should be told” (Medrano 55). If With a Pistol in his Hands could win a sympathetic reading from Walter Prescott Webb, then the book was capable of winning a place for the Mexican-American experience in the historical imagination of the nation at large.

In writing With a Pistol in his Hands, Paredes was acutely aware that his key rhetorical challenge was to win the assent of socially established Anglo readers who were inclined to identify with the nationalistic version of American history. In a candid interview, Paredes explained:

The thing was that most of what our people knew was in corridos and in legends and oral history. And I wanted to bring those things to the majority because I
felt there were enough people of good will among the Anglos, which if they saw our side, they would really react. And in a talk I gave at Sacramento State . . . I said that the people who had awakened to a new era were the Anglos. Because it was about that time that Anglos of good will began to see our side, and we needed their help to be able to make ourselves heard. (Medrano 150)

As Paredes’s most widely read work, *With a Pistol in his Hands* did enable many “Anglos of good will” to recognize the Texan-Mexican experience as integral to the nation at large.

In relation to its North American audience, *With a Pistol in His Hands* functioned as a vehicle of cultural mediation, bringing the experience of the Mexican-American community to the attention of a broad national readership. But for its Mexican-American readers, the book did something more profound: it restored cultural memory that helped empower the Chicano community with new collective agency. Describing his education in Brownsville during the 1950s and 1960s, Saldívar remembers that “references to Mexican-American history . . . had been altogether erased from our Texas and American history lessons” (8). It was only after the publication of Paredes’s seminal scholarly works that the borderlands of South Texas became recognized as an integral part of the American cultural tapestry.

Providing a heritage that Mexican-Americans could embrace, *With a Pistol in His Hands* helped to make Américo Paredes beloved in his community. Manuel Medrano, another Mexican-American scholar from Brownsville, writes that Paredes had “sung and written for my mother’s generation and his literary courage had inspired my generation . . . . What he had done for many of us for so many years was nothing less than heroic” (135). Clearly, Paredes’s work left its deepest imprint in the minds and hearts of Mexican-American readers. But as was true during the opening phase of his career, Paredes could not address his primary audience
without simultaneously seeking to influence the contiguous communities of readers that lay north and south of “Greater Mexico.”

Throughout his career at UT Austin, Paredes was continuously corresponding with north American folklore scholars who could promote the study of Mexican folklore (Nájera-Ramírez 85). At the same time, he addressed a broad English-speaking readership about the place of the South Texas borderlands in the broader national culture. In “The Mexican Contribution to Our Culture,” written for a non-academic audience, Paredes uses the pronoun “We” and “Our” to create an inclusive national perspective, arguing that English-speaking writers – as well as average Mexican-Americans – are ignorant of the Mexican contribution to the American Southwest. In his conclusion, the pronouns “we” and “us” and “our” refer to Americans at large. He writes, “We can justly call the Southwest our own; we can look back with pride at the part our Mexican forebears played in its evolution. It is part of us, made up as it is of so many different peoples and with so many points of view that have here met and mingled into something worthy of being valued, something that is our own” (“Mexican Contribution”). Emphatically, Paredes was seeking to show readers unacquainted with the Southern borderlands that the region has made an important contribution to the whole nation.

Even as he was networking with North American scholars and extending himself to North American audiences, Paredes was also maintaining an active correspondence with leading folklorists in Mexico, promoting the study of Mexican folklore, and seizing opportunities to enlighten Mexican nationals about the Chicano experience. Through Folktales of Mexico (1971) Paredes explored a broad spectrum of Mexican folklore while providing a comprehensive survey of folklore scholarship in Mexico. Olga Nájera-Ramírez, who has studied Paredes’s interactions with Mexican and Latin American scholars, notes that Paredes regularly published reviews of Spanish-language publications and “made frequent mention of Latin
American scholars and their scholarship. This is but one way in which Paredes served as an interlocutor between Latin American and United States folklorists” (83). Paredes was acting as a cultural intermediary with his Spanish speaking audience, just as he was with North American readers.

In reaching out to Spanish-Speaking audiences, Paredes was particularly keen to promote greater understanding of the Chicano experience among Mexican nationals. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Paredes participated in conferences about “la problemática Chicana” that convened in various locals around Mexico. After attending a seminar on Chicano Studies in Mexico City, accompanied by an entourage of Chicano scholars and students, Paredes wrote his wife that he was amazed by how “things I used to say ten or fifteen years ago, received with polite tolerance, are now enthusiastically received by Chicanos and Mexicanos alike” (qtd in Nájera-Ramírez 86). Presumably, Paredes was gratified that his Mexican interlocutors were increasingly receptive to his well-known assertion that folklore in border regions springs from conflicts over inequalities and injustice. But Paredes remained rankled by Mexican haughtiness and never lost the urge to explain himself, and his community, to Mexican nationals.

In 1990, Paredes was awarded the Orden Mexicana del Aguila Azteca, the highest honor Mexico awarded foreigners – non-Mexicans – for their contribution to Mexican society or culture. The award both gratified, and needled, Paredes, who resented being considered “non-Mexican,” and used his acceptance speech to prick the perceived aloofness of his Mexican listeners. Telling his listeners that others had done more than he to improve the lives of “our people,” he went on to explain:

And we, the ‘Mexicans living on the other side’ as we are colloquially known, have existed since 1848. And for the better part of this period of almost a
century and a half, we Mexican-Americans have been objects of scorn, of social and economic discrimination – of abuses that sometimes have culminated in legally sanctioned murder.

Listeners, expecting the familiar story of Anglos abuses, must have been startled when Paredes singled out Mexicans, not Anglos, as perpetrators of injustice toward Mexican-Americans.

With evident emotion, Paredes continued:

> We Mexican-Americans have lacked, until very recent time, the moral support of Mexican intellectuals . . . . During the second decade of the present century, while the rural police of the State of Texas was butchering hundreds of defenseless Mexican peasants in South Texas, José Vasconcelos was busy branding us as ‘pochos’ because of the way we spoke Spanish and ‘barbarians’ because we liked (and still do) to roast our beef over an open fire.

Showing how Mexican-Americans had endured abuses from both their Northern and Southern flanks, Paredes concluded his speech by defending the honor of Mexican-Americans, who had fought in four major wars during the 20th century, who “had never ceased to meet their obligations as American citizens.” Paredes did not need to mention that he himself was a veteran who had served the United States in wartime.

In his final words, Paredes poignantly expressed the unresolvable tension that had always undergirded his “checkerboard consciousness,” his identity as a Mexican-American. “I am North American. Nonetheless, my ancestors – who colonized what is today the south of Texas in 1749 – bequeathed me a deep affection for Mexico and her culture. It is then a double honor for me to have been awarded the Order of the Aguila Azteca” (quoted in Nájera-Ramírez 77). The award, like his identity as a Mexican-American, was a double honor – and a double burden.
As a man born between two worlds, Paredes could never stop trying to explain himself to the cousins, the neighbors, the fellow citizens who resided on both sides of the divide into which he had been born. Those explanations, in all their multifarious forms, are the gifts that Américo Paredes has bequeathed to all of his readers, present and future, which still have so much to learn from his well-lived life.
Notes
1 For example, throughout *Borderlands of Culture*, Saldívar shows how Paredes influenced folklorists, and other students of culture. He also shows how Paredes used different rhetorical appeals writing for the Mexican readers of *El Universal*, and the North American readers of *Stars and Stripes* (344-395). In “Encaminándonos: Américo Paredes as a Guiding Force in Transcending Borders” Olga Nájera-Ramírez describes Paredes’s sustained efforts to extend himself to Mexican and Latin American readers (69-90).
3 Scholars generally agree that Paredes’s seven years in Asia were significant, but differ, quite dramatically, in assessing how his sojourn in Asia affected his later life and scholarship. In *The Borderlands of Culture*, Ramón Saldívar sees Paredes’s years in Asia as essential for developing Paredes’s conception of “Greater Mexico.” In contrast, José Limón argues that there is “no evidence anywhere” to support Saldívar’s assertion that Asia was “crucial” for Paredes’s conception of Greater Mexico, or “that his sojourn in Asia gave Paredes a ‘more richly textured’ understanding of the cultural and political conflict in the US-Mexico borderlands” (Limon 599-600).

Works Cited
¡Viva la vida!

**Javier Villarreal**

¡Qué bonito ser,
por un momento, el sol!
Hijos, familiares y amigos
congregados en mi honor.
¡Ochenta años de vida!
¡Qué más puedo pedir!
Pero incesante es la vida
y en sus corrientes
se disipan los lazos,
se escabulle el sentimiento,
y presurosa entre sus aguas
se esfuma la ocasión
y me arrastra, una vez más,
hasta el bendito sillón.

Un arco iris reposa en mis sienes,
diadema de mariposas y fantasías,
incrustada de frases redundantes,
respuestas inconclusas
y un crónico yo también.
Además en un costalito rojo
sujetado al corazón
conservo chupamirtos fragantes
gestos, sonrisas y estampitas del Señor
que por arte de magia
transforman mi semblante
y de esta manera finjo
mi serenidad.
Y cuando pasa el tiempo
y cuando al fin se van,
y ya me quedo sola
y no interrumpen más,
hago mis comentarios
con lujo de detalle
y luego sin reproche alguno
les doy mi bendición.
Entonces, a mi familia,
alabo complacida
y de su gesto
me siento agradecida.
Luego, ya rumbo a la penumbra
como tantas otras veces
desde muy adentro digo
¡Mil gracias a la vida!
Aleluya

Javier Villarreal

Hoy,
al auscultar el día
al asirme a la vida
al abrevar los ojos
al armonizar la voz
al acentuar el auricular
al adivinar el equilibrio
al acoplar las extremidades
al asentar el paso
al animar el semblante
al ahondar la respiración
al atropellar mi mundo
¡A… le…lu…ya!
Apareces tú.
Pláticas con mi madre

Javier Villarreal

¡Qué bonitas son las flores
su fragancia es sin igual!
Mis hijos las enviaron
para el día de mamá.
Ojalá que lleguen pronto
como quisiera platicar,
pero el tiempo ya no pasa
se paró en este lugar.

El inglés no lo digiero,
me causa siempre indigestión
y cuando llegan a casa
reverbera hasta el rincón.
Entre mis hijos y nietos
es como único sazón
y es entonces que me siento
plato, mesa y hasta sillón.

Por senil me tienen todos,
¡Se me olvidan tantas cosas!
Hago nudo las palabras
y los nombres hago bolas.
Dizque la paso con mis plantas
y mi perro hablando a solas,
recordando a mis muertitos
los que nunca me abandonan.

El paso de los años
se me enreda entre los pies
y con estas manos raras
y mis ojos no sé qué hacer,
pero un tesoro llevo
que les quisiera heredar
vivos recuerdos del alma,
de la vida y de mi hogar.

Entre las flores despierto,
¡No sé cuando me dormí!
Afuera no veo a nadie,
no siento a nadie aquí.
Ojalá que llamen pronto
ya yo quiero descansar,
pero el tiempo ya no pasa
es eterno en este lugar.
Subverting the Telenovela: Redefining Gender in Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek” and Islas’s *The Rain God*

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*This paper examines the works of two Mexican American writers, Sandra Cisneros and Arturo Islas, and the way they can be read through the popular genre of the telenovela. Given that the central position of the telenovela in Mexican American popular culture and the way it ascribes gender roles from a patriarchal viewpoint, “Woman Hollering Creek” reforms the structure of the telenovela, giving the genre a feminist approach. Cisneros transforms Mexican American popular culture in an attempt to feminize the society as a whole. Similarly, The Rain God may also be seen through the prism of the telenovela. This reading helps to understand the novel as a critique of the traditional family structure. By focusing on adulterous heterosexual relationships, the novel challenges the discourse of heteronormativity as it exposes the potential disloyalty and sinfulness of patriarchal heterosexual families.*

The telenovela is a genre most are familiar with, regardless of cultural background; it has been the sine qua non of Mexican popular culture for many decades. This immensely popular form of entertainment is the most widespread form of melodrama. In recent years has become popular outside of Mexico and Latin America in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Ana Uribe writes that the Mexican telenovela has been exported to about one hundred countries (33), while Melixa Abad-Izquierdo maintains that telenovelas became Mexico’s favorite pastime as early as the 1950s and 1960s (93).

According to Uribe, the Mexican telenovela reproduces the values of Mexican society: the nuclear family is presented as a social model, while Catholicism and the worship of La Virgen de Guadalupe are emphasized (132). Uribe points to the melodrama as a central element in defining Mexican national character that historically has been present in many genres in the Mexican culture, one of them being the telenovela (60). She also states that telenovelas contribute to the formation of Mexico as an imagined community (borrowing the term from Benedict Anderson) as they provide social unity through shared beliefs and values (56).

Furthermore, Uribe underlines that in Mexican telenovelas the love affair is always central, with the family used as a model of an ideal society and as a factor of social cohesion. She also emphasizes the sexual conservatism present in the genre and the stereotypical, “machista”
representation of women, who are either virgins or already married, and who are completely faithful and devoid of sexual desire; they are devoted to and identify with the La Virgen de Guadalupe (69). Melixa Abad-Izquierdo also discusses this stereotypical representation of genre. She writes that the traditional plot of the telenovelas during the 1960s and 70s maintains “a puta/virgen dichotomy.” She continues,

Characters were Manichean with female roles constantly replicating the puta/virgen dichotomy, while male characters were very masculine in appearance but often weak in character and easy to manipulate. Often the plots revolved around a love triangle. This triangle featured either two male suitors competing for a woman or two women competing for the love of a man. In the latter triangle, the women were represented either as the ‘good’ virginal maid or the ‘bad’ femmme fatale . . . In the end, the ‘good’ and ‘love’ triumphed over evil and the good woman always got the man. (98-9)

This stereotypical plot and patriarchal gender roles make their appearance in Arturo Islas’s novel The Rain God in the chapter “Compadres and Comadres,” to which I will later devote my attention.

Concerning the appearance of the telenovela genre in the writings of Chicanas/os, a number of scholars have published pertinent studies. Eva Fernández de Pinedo Echevarría writes about the significance of the telenovela in Chican@ writing and the representation of the genre in literary works by Chicanos/as. She recognizes the important role of the telenovela in Mexican American culture as well as its contribution to the formation of a national identity. She writes, “The representation of Mexican popular culture is currently the focus of much Chicano/a writing. In the work of Gloria Anzaldúa or Sandra Cisneros art forms, such as folk stories, are articulated as counter-narratives to official versions of history and culture, as well
as expressions that assert a Chicano/Mexican culture.” She continues by saying that “in the work of some Chicano writers, telenovelas are posited as a vital part of Chicanos’ transnational identity, suggesting that this popular genre should be perceived as something more significant than a television serial” (126). Apart from Fernández, Belkys Torres discusses the use of the popular genre in the writings of Chicanas/os, who have adapted the genre, creating “hybrid text[s].” She elaborates, “Some recent narratives either read like telenovelas or parody the genre, creating a hybrid text impossible to define as either ‘purely’ literature or serialized melodrama, and in fact are best referred to as teleNOVELa” (200). Torres refers to writers Sandra Benitez, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros and Eduardo Santiago, and specifically to Castillo’s *So Far from God*, which “employs a unique adaptation of telenovelas to engender a hybrid narrative which is neither serialized melodrama nor ‘high’ literature”; this is what Torres calls “teleNOVELa” (207-8). I discuss this kind of hybridity and incorporation of popular culture elements as well as the re-inscription of popular culture as a whole in the writings of Cisneros and Islas.

In this paper, I look at the works of the two Mexican American writers through the prism of the Mexican telenovela. My point is that aspects of the Mexican telenovela are present in the writings of Chicanos/as, who have utilized and reformed the genre. I argue that “Woman Hollering Creek” by Cisneros and *The Rain God* by Islas both incorporate elements of the telenovela, and that they employ the genre in order to challenge gender ideology embedded in Mexican popular culture. They do this in distinct ways: “Woman Hollering Creek” serves to reform the structure of the telenovela, thus giving the genre a feminist approach. *The Rain God*, on the other hand, challenges the view of homosexual relationships being sinful as it exposes the potential disloyalty and sinfulness of patriarchal heterosexual families.

“Woman Hollering Creek”: A Feminist Telenovela
Cisneros’s short story “Woman Hollering Creek” has been analyzed by many critics as a feminist transformation of the legend of La Llorona, the weeping woman (Wyatt; Doyle; Phelan; Simerka; Saldívar-Hull). Cisneros reclaims the figure of La Llorona for women by transforming the icon from a weeping woman to a hollering woman. In this way, she reconfigures Mexican American mythology in order to counteract the patriarchal discourse inherent in it. Cisneros’s story alters the image of the passive wailing woman who is the embodiment of failed motherhood into a hollering, vibrant woman, who is not afraid to break conventions and take charge of her life without a man.

In terms of the popular genre, the plot of the short story could be easily imagined as a telenovela since it resembles the “Cinderella story” now commonly associated with telenovelas (Abad-Izquierdo 102-3). In “Woman Hollering Creek” the reader is presented with a pitiful character found in a miserable situation, which she cannot escape, and the reader is called to empathize with her. The protagonist, Cleófilas, is a Mexican woman who is tricked into marrying a man who lives on the other side of the border, who is believed to have a good job and a considerable amount of money, and who promises her a life like she saw on television:

*Seguín, Tejas.* A nice sterling ring to it. The tinkle of money. She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*, like Lucía Méndez. And would have a lovely house, and wouldn’t Chela be jealous . . . He has a very important position in Seguin . . . New paint and new furniture. Why not? He can afford it (45).

However, when Cleófilas goes to Texas with her new husband, she realizes that life is not as ideal as she had expected, as her husband does not have a nice job or a nice house. Instead, the protagonist is placed in a poor house with “doorways without doors” and with a husband that beats her (49). Cleófilas contemplates the hopelessness of her situation and she rejects the idea of going back to her father’s house because of the shame her return would bring (50). The
protagonist falls under the category of the poor girl in need to be saved, and her passivity along with the dramatic aspect are elements of the telenovela that the story uses. “Woman Hollering Creek” expresses the ideals Ana Uribe associates with the Mexican telenovela, namely, the centrality of the patriarchal family and the obedience of the female protagonist. Cleófilas is the stereotype of the good wife; she is passive and faithful, and does not react or strike back when Juan Pedro hits her. She submits to male authority, and continues to tend to her wifely duties: cleaning the house, cooking, and “chang[ing] the baby’s Pampers” (49). She becomes a kind of martyr who endures male domination while fulfilling the role society has assigned to her.

Richard T. Rodríguez claims that “the archetypal Chicana would necessarily provide a feminine spirit of maternal consolation (in spite of her suffering) while ensuring the procreation . . .” (2). Cleófilas complies with the idea of passive domesticity and with the image of the suffering mother who satisfies everybody’s needs but her own. At the same time, in the context of the melodrama, she is a kind of Cinderella awaiting the prince who will save her from the villain. In the story, Cleófilas’ doctor also exclaims her surprise at Cleófilas’ life resembling “a regular soap opera” and adds, “Qué vida, comadre” (55).

There are a number of additional aspects of “Woman Hollering Creek” that facilitate the association of the short story with a telenovela. First, the connection is created in the mind of the reader as the protagonist often draws a parallel between her life and the lives of the women in the telenovelas. There is frequent reference to telenovelas and the major role they play in Cleófilas’ life as well as to another popular genre that favors the melodrama, the romantic novel. In the short story, the reader can see the importance of the telenovela in the life of women of Mexican descent, especially those of the working class. When Cleófilas lived in Mexico, one of her few sources of entertainment was the telenovela, which also contributed to the formation of her social identity and raised her expectations about passion and romantic love.
When Cleófilas goes to the U.S. her wish to watch her telenovelas to remind herself of home and to escape from her bleak everyday life is not granted as her husband does not own a TV set. Cleófilas can only visit her neighbor Soledad to catch a few glimpses of the telenovelas. Cleófilas herself associates her life with a telenovela: “Cleófilas thought her life would have to be like that, like a telenovela, only now the episodes got sadder and sadder” (52). Besides, the only women that have served as role models she could identify with were those she saw in the telenovelas, especially since her mother was deceased (45). In this way, her life mirrors a telenovela, and the reader of the short story becomes the anxious TV viewer who longs for a better life for Cleófilas.

A second aspect that links the story with the telenovela is the protagonist’s name. When Cleófilas compares her life to a telenovela, she is disappointed with her unpoetic name, and she thinks that if she were to be a protagonist of a telenovela she would have to change her name to “Topazio, or Yesenia, Cristal . . . something more poetic than Cleófilas” (53). However, her unique name prevents her from being lost in the crowd, and separates her as an individual. The name Cleófilas has a Greek origin and it means “he who loves glory.” In fact, names in “Woman Hollering Creek” are not without significance. Cleófilas’ neighbors are named Dolores and Soledad, and these characters are indeed alone and suffering. On the other hand, the name of Cleófilas’s doctor, Graciela, and of Felice denotes happiness, as their bearers are independent women, who have escaped the traditional repressive role of women. This leads us to believe that Cleófilas is not an ordinary girl; her name gives poor Cleófilas heroic dimensions, making her a woman with potential and not one of many. Cleófilas is the kind of woman of whom stories are written. The fact that a male name is used for the protagonist could be seen as an attempt to redefine gender through a feminist interpretation of heroism.
Thirdly, “Woman Hollering Creek” is a short story that is meant to be easily read and understood and to speak to hearts of the readers, much like a telenovela. Sandra Cisneros in her introduction to The House on Mango Street claims that she did not mean for her writing to be difficult to read; she talks about herself as a writer, “she doesn't want to write a book that a reader won’t understand and would feel ashamed for not understanding” (xvii). She also dedicates her writings to women (Doyle 53). The short story is then mostly directed towards women much like telenovelas are.

Nevertheless, Cisneros reconfigures the genre by offering an unconventional ending to her “telenovela.” Instead of the customary happy ending with a wedding, the short story offers a more realistic resolution in which Cleófilas is “saved” not by a man but by another woman: Felice takes Cleófilas in her pick-up truck and drives her to San Antonio so she can leave her abusive husband and return to her family in Mexico. In this way, the text replaces masculine power with female solidarity; it stresses the independence of women and their ability to save themselves without the assistance of a man. Uribe points to the existence of moral justice in the Mexican telenovela, in which good triumphs over evil (68). In this case the evil villain – Cleófilas’ husband – is “defeated” by women working together for each other. It is significant that the plan to save Cleófilas is not conceived or realized by a man, but by two women. Furthermore, Sonia Saldívar-Hull mentions that Felice “could even be figured as a Chicana lesbian” (106-7). This idea is reinforced by the fact that Felice has no husband, drives a pick-up truck, and curses, while Cleófilas says she is “like no woman she’d ever met” (56). Felice plays the role of the prince and substitutes man in the “happy ending” of the story, so her view as a lesbian is plausible; however, I do not think that there is a need to specify Felice’s sexuality. Maylei Blackwell tells us of how women who participated in the Chicano movement of the 1960s were branded as lesbians if they challenged gender stereotypes (71). Even though I do
not suggest that Saldívar-Hull intended this, it could imply that all independent women who can afford to buy their own cars and are not married are lesbians or that women can have power only when identifying with men and assuming male roles. Felice is a feminist in practice and crosses gender boundaries, whether she is a lesbian or not.

My claim is that Cisneros’s text does not only transform Mexican folklore which promotes oppressive ideals and models of conduct for women, such as the legend of La Llorona, but also feminizes Mexican popular culture by offsetting the patriarchal elements present in the telenovela. Fernández de Pinedo recognizes that in the story “telenovelas are posited as one of many narratives that comply with the dominant ideology” (130). In addition, Sonia Saldívar-Hull observes how popular culture along with mythology unite in order to dominate Mexican women: “[i]n the cuento, ideological manipulation through mass media – the romance novel, the fotonovela (photo novel) and the telenovela (soap opera) – as well as through the male construction of woman in the folk figure of La Llorona collude to keep women submissive” (106). Cisneros in her story works to undermine both these agents of subordination. Many critics I have already mentioned have elaborated on the ways La Llorona is viewed from a feminist angle, and the model of a passive, wailing woman is transformed into an active, hollering woman that takes charge of her life. Barbara Simerka claims that Sandra Cisneros along with other Chicana writers “offer a compelling vision of the rites of passage which Chicanas undergo as they seek to gain control of the cultural imagery that plays a critical role in defining and determining their lives and the lives of all marginalized groups” (56-7). The telenovela is – as mentioned above – an essential part of Mexican culture, and is yet another aspect of the cultural imagery that Chicanas seek to take over. “Woman Hollering Creek” is a type of feminist telenovela that overthrows the conventions found in the genre and challenges the view that women’s sole purpose is getting married and having children, and that is the only
“happy ending” they can expect. Cisneros’s writings attempt to counteract the sexist discourse located in the whole array of cultural production and feminize the means of identity construction and, among them, the telenovela, which is one of the factors that help to shape Mexican and Mexican American identity. Finally, Saldívar-Hull points out that the ending of the story “offer[es] . . . the possibility of social change through communal female solidarity” (117). By using a genre the reader is familiar with and writing in a style that is easily comprehensible, the short story has a social role of speaking to women – Chicanas, Mexicanas, and all women in general – and giving them an alternative to the story they are used to hear. The story urges them to alter their way of thinking about themselves and about their roles as women.

In a relevant study, James Phelan further argues that “Cisneros writes an anti-telenovela” (228). He claims that Cisneros’s “high art” counteracts the discourse of mass-produced television serials. Phelan explains that Cisneros’s writings differ from the telenovelas in different ways; for example in the short story Cleófilas performs a circle and “ends where she began.” This stasis is juxtaposed to the constant change in telenovelas (228). He concludes that “In this way, Cisneros fights fictions of the mass media with her own, high cultural narrative” (224). My argument is not that far from this. I also suggest that Cisneros utilizes the modes of popular culture in order to counteract the ideas present in it. She creates a feminist telenovela, which, for the same reasons, functions as an anti-telenovela, i.e. an example of high art that invalidates the patriarchal narratives of popular culture.

**The Rain God and the Patriarchal Family**

Isla’s *The Rain God* seems to be more concerned with the formation of identity of Chicanos rather than Chicanas. Men’s sexuality, social and familial roles are located in the center of the narrative. It is no surprise, then, that the majority of literary critics would focus on the
characters of Miguel Chico and Felix, and discuss issues of homosexuality and its disapproval by the Mexican American family. In my paper, I focus on a slightly different aspect of the novel and I argue that the text uses the telenovela in a different way than “Woman Hollering Creek.” Not unlike Cisneros’s story, The Rain God employs the popular genre to challenge gender roles in the Mexican American society, and also to expose the discrimination against homosexual Chicanos and their exclusion from la familia.

The Rain God is a novel in which the narrator Miguel Chico begins to tell the story of his family and its “sinners” (4). It is composed of six chapters dedicated to the “sins” of the Angel family members, thus making the novel a sort of family saga; however, it is much more than just a historical novel (Márquez 4–5). The title of first chapter, “Judgment Day,” suggests the critical eye Miguel Chico will have in reminiscing about the members of his family and their comportment. Each chapter is dedicated to a different tale that comprises the history of the Angel family. A central episode in the novel is described in the chapter “Rain Dancer,” in which Miguel Chico’s homosexual uncle, Felix, is murdered by a young soldier whom he tries to seduce in a desperate attempt to express his sexuality. Felix’s family – with the exception of his daughter Lena – refuses to seek justice for his murder out of fear of having his homosexuality revealed. What is more, Lena’s voice is silenced by her uncle and Felix’s brother, Miguel Grande. After Felix’s death, the reader watches as Felix’s son JoEl becomes a drug addict and his life deteriorates. Felix is a crucial character in the novel that is used as a device through which Miguel Chico expresses his own homosexuality. Another central character is Miguel Chico’s grandmother, known as Mama Chona. She is the family’s matriarch and the carrier of tradition and propriety. In the final chapter of the novel, “The Rain God,” Felix makes a spectral appearance as the Rain God in Mama Chona’s deathbed. Mama Chona takes him in her arms and symbolically restores the fallen member of the Angel family as she whispers “La
familia” (180). In this way, the family of “sinners” is reunited in the end and all its members accepted and embraced by the matriarch.

Isla’s novel has been seen as a critique of Chicano nationalism and its exclusion of some of its members, such as the homosexuals and the disabled (Minich 697-700). The novel is viewed as an attempt to incorporate marginalized Chicanos into la familia (703). Moreover, John Alba Cutler argues that the character Felix is the surrogate for Miguel Chico’s sexuality, and that Miguel Chico serves as a surrogate for Islas’s sexuality (15, 19). Cutler also sees Felix’s murder as “a kind of ritual sacrifice” for the sins of the whole community (16). Most critics have focused on the characters of Miguel Chico and Felix, and the inclusions and exclusions of Mexican American family and society (Minich; Cutler; Ortíz; Jesús Vega).

Considering that the theme of homosexuality is central to the novel, it is expected that the majority of critical reception would focus on the chapters that refer to Miguel Chico and Felix. Consequently, less attention has been paid to the story of Miguel Chico’s parents. The chapter “Compadres and Comadres” is the third and longest chapter of the book and it tells the story of Miguel Grande’s affair with Lola, his wife Juanita’s best friend. The scenario is rather commonplace and is in accordance with the traditional love triangle theme Melixa Abad-Izquierdo identifies in Mexican telenovelas of the 1960s and 1970s (98-9). Miguel Grande cheats on his wife with her best friend. When he is discovered, he promises to set himself straight and make amends, but he returns to his lover. His wife Juanita considers leaving him, yet she mostly misses her best friend than feels betrayed. At the end of the chapter Juanita stays with her husband, while jokingly admitting that she is indeed “too good to be true” (110).

While the whole body of the novel could be read as a telenovela as it presents the full spectrum of a family melodrama with intriguing stories of love affairs, illegitimate children, homosexuality, murder, and drug abuse, “Compadres and Comadres” is the most lighthearted
story with a very commonly exploited theme that truly reminds the reader of the plot of a
telenovela. In fact, Sonia Saldívar-Hull analyzes a fotonovela published in ¡Casos Reales! that has
a similar plot, in which the woman remains faithful to her repeatedly cheating husband, and
decides to devote herself to her children and to her role as a mother (110–4). Saldívar-Hull uses
this example to emphasize the patriarchal stereotypes embedded in popular genres, like the
fotonovela or the telenovela. Apart from the melodrama and stereotypical plot, another element
of the telenovela found in Islas’s novel is the strong presence of Catholicism, greatly manifested
in the character of Mama Chona and her preoccupation with purity and sin.

A major aspect of Mexican culture present in the telenovela that is also present in The
Rain God is the family. Many critics have emphasized the significance of the notion of the
family. Richard T. Rodríguez’s Next of Kin is an excellent study of the representations of la
familia in Mexican American culture and the way it determines societal structures. La familia
possesses powerful imagery and assigns roles to individuals: the man is the father and head of
the family/society and the woman is the mother who is subservient to the father. Motherhood
is emphasized and appears to be the major – if not the only – role of Mexican women. Cherríe
Moraga stresses that the Virgin “represented the Mexican ideal of ‘la madre sufrida,’ the long-
suffering desexualized Indian mother, and Malinche was ‘la chingada,’ sexually stigmatized by
her transgression of ‘sleeping with the enemy,’ Hernán Cortez” (Last Generation 157). This
dichotomy can be very clearly seen in The Rain God with Juanita as la Virgen and Lola as la
Malinche. Juanita is the epitome of the good Mexican wife, who stays loyal to her husband,
withstands his infidelities, and – most importantly – keeps the family together. Lola, on the
other hand, is the promiscuous woman with no moral constraints. She is the femme fatale who
breaks down households and controls her lovers. Both female characters are particularly flat
and stereotypical, and remain static, while the title of the chapter, “Compadres and Comadres,”
suggests that this is the typical relationship between men and women. *The Rain God* would appear to reproduce the conservative and patriarchal discourse found in the telenovela; nevertheless, this viewpoint is refuted if one takes into consideration the following observations.

Family imagery is essential to the culture; however, it does not only serve as model behavior for its members, but also it marginalizes those individuals who do not or choose not to observe it. A group of people who seem not to “fit” in the traditional patriarchal family are homosexuals. Cherríe Moraga emphasizes the exclusionary tendency of the Mexican family. She notes that Chicano gay men are more marginalized and more susceptible to violence as they are deemed inferior by a culture that celebrates machismo. Homosexual men, and especially those with a more effeminate appearance, cannot fulfill the role of the macho and therefore are not able to project the typical Chicano identity and be admitted into the society. Since la *familia* is a concept that contributes to the distribution of roles among the members of the society, homosexual men, who do not fulfill their role as the father/head of the family, fall out of the category of “men” in the Chicano community. As Moraga puts it, “lesbians and gay men were not envisioned as members of ‘the house’” (*Last Generation* 159); the family cannot include members that do not carry out their assigned roles. It is significant that in the novel Miguel Grande’s “sins” are more or less socially acceptable, if not somewhat expected. This is another manifestation of machismo inside the family. The narrator comments that “the family chose to ignore [his sins] because it relied on him during all crises” (4). Nevertheless, Felix’s “sins” are a taboo, and are so unacceptable by society that the family even refuses to seek justice for his murder, lest his sexuality is revealed to the public. Felix seems to become trapped in the machista family structure. Felix is married with children, not unlike Miguel Grande himself. He has to fulfill – even though superficially – his role as a man and protector of the family. He
works to bring in money, and he is a good husband and father. Nevertheless, the conventional societal structure does not allow Felix to express his sexuality, and causes him not only to pretend, but also to turn to dangerous sexual behavior that eventually leads him to his death. The novel makes it clear that, out of all the family “sinners,” Felix is the most socially shunned, thus making homosexuality the utmost horrible and absolutely unforgivable act. Critics have argued that homosexuality is so unacceptable in a Mexican family that even the narrator, Miguel Chico, does not openly admit to it, but only hints it through his association with Felix. Manuel de Jesús Vega comments that Chicano gay men can only vaguely refer to their sexuality. He says, “It is no secret that in Latino culture fear of the stigma of homosexuality is a powerful deterrent. Patriarchal gender relations and established family values directly militate against the emergence and acceptance of a gay identity” (112).

The chapter “Compadres and Comadres” serves to counteract this heteronormative discourse by emphasizing the failure of the patriarchal family even in heterosexual relationships. While the chapter could appear to reaffirm the values and ideals imbedded in the telenovelas, a more careful reading of the chapter in association with the rest of the novel and its characters reveals the chapter for what it is, a critique. Islas utilizes the telenovela genre in order to expose and criticize the culture’s attitudes towards gender and proper familial roles. The chapter functions to counteract the discourse of heterornativity that glorifies heterosexual relationships and imposes them as the only norm. If this notion of heterormativity is combined with that of la familia, it creates the image of an idyllic and romanticized idea of household utopia. The Rain God seeks to repudiate this ideal. The patriarchal family is malfunctioning and it harbors betrayal and emotional pain for its members. Rodríguez writes that the family is viewed as a “romanticized haven” that protects its members from the outer world (1). This exposure of the imperfect patriarchal family in combination with an extreme intolerance for
homosexuality that reaches the point of not punishing murder, acts as a critique of the patriarchal family. Islas’s writings use the means and sources of the culture with the purpose of critiquing it. In this way, he subverts the telenovela and opens the way for a reevaluation of the culture and inclusion of all its members, including gay Chicanos.

Islas enters the discussion among other Chicanos/as who have attempted to queer heteronormative narratives and patriarchal family structures in order to make way for a broader and all-encompassing Chican@ identity. Such scholars include Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and José Esteban Muñoz, who have dealt with issues of heteronormativity and hybridity in the Mexican American culture. More specifically, Gloria Anzaldúa in her cornerstone *Borderlands/La Frontera* celebrates hybrid identities that are the result of the merging of multiple cultures and identities. On a similar tone, José Esteban Muñoz is concerned with the representation of minority subjects and their own formation of identity that inevitably clashes with normative discourses; “subjects whose identities are formed in response to the cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny” (5). Cherríe Moraga is also actively engaged in the creation of a more inclusive Chicano identity through her concept of “Queer Aztlán”: “A Chicano homeland that could embrace all its people, including its jotería” (emphasis in the original; *Last Generation* 147). Moraga explores different aspects of identity that separate themselves from prescriptive norms, such as lesbian motherhood in her *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood*. Islas’s novel too contributes to this subversion of exclusionary identities. By utilizing the discourse of patriarchy found in the telenovela genre, *The Rain God* works to undermine traditional machista identities, like the one of Miguel Grande. Furthermore, the end of the novel and the symbolic acceptance of Felix in la familia serve to queer the family structure. Finally, the inclusion as well as
subversion of elements of popular culture in the novel itself gives it a hybrid identity that integrates old and new elements of the Chican@ family.

**Mexican American Writers Reforming the Culture**

My examination of the works of two Mexican American writers demonstrates how the underlying patterns of the culture are evident in their writings. Both Sandra Cisneros’s and Arturo Islas’s narratives are influenced by and infused with Mexican American popular culture. Even though their writings involve different experiences, they both seem to utilize the telenovela in some way. More importantly, they both attempt to reform the culture by embracing its elements and at the same time fusing them with new constructs and transforming them into new hybrid entities.

It is known that Mexican Americans try to form an identity that is distinct from both Mexican and American, but somehow a combination of the two. In constructing a new identity, people have to respond to the influence coming from the old tradition originating from Mexico, and at the same time need to accept or reject values and attitudes. Both the short story and the novel I have examined deal with characters located – for one reason or another – in-between cultures and are called to choose which elements to keep and which to discard. The telenovela is one of those elements that is created in Mexico and brings with it ideals and perspectives, some of which are exclusive and oppressive to certain groups of Chicanos/as. Writers are, therefore, not only influenced by Mexican American popular culture, but also attempt to change the underlying patterns and ideas found in it. They seek to enhance Mexican American popular culture as well as replace the forms of entertainment and identification for Chicanos and Chicanas. By creating feminist telenovelas, or works that undermine the discourse of the telenovela, Chicano/a writers create a new point of reference for Mexican Americans in particular. They reject the aspects of the Mexican culture that are disadvantageous to some
members of the society, and they help to shape a new popular culture for Chicanas and Chicanos.
1. The seclusion of the woman in the domestic sphere and her exclusive devotion to the family is particularly relevant to traditional Mexican family structure. “First, women’s social functions and values are encoded and located in private or domestic spaces, which are the spaces of familial and communal reproduction, as opposed to the masculine domination. Second, women are passive social actors whereas men are regarded as active social agents, including, as some commentators suggest, in the sexual sphere” (Allatson 153-4).

2. From Ancient Greek κλέος [clēos] = glory, and φιλῶ [filó] = love. The masculine name Κλεόφιλος [Cleófilos] exists in Greek. There are numerous Spanish names with a Greek origin, such as Atanacio, “immortal,” or Anastasio, “resurrectional.”

Works Cited


Five Strands

Marianita Escamilla

Juarez cops handed them over—
five strands of hair
they formed a sort of a disc
similar to a communal host
were they shoved in,
placed carefully
or accidentally left there?
curiosities rarely get answers

my hand reached for the
tightly wrapped package
all cops carry evidence in sealed envelopes.
the claim
— to preserve the integrity of the material.
i found envelopes cut
down the ick
factor. Seriously, who wants to the touch torn
and soiled items of strangers?
this stranger?
thirteen-years old
raped
beaten
left naked
in a dumpster with those five strands of hair
in her mouth—an incident.

ty they ask, “how much pain did she feel?”
narcissism masked for concern.
what else can it be?
death doesn’t change

before
the two Mexican cops came to my laboratory
I knew nothing of the murders happening
just fifteen minutes away
she
one of many…
so many

in 1998 five years had passed
since the first victim was noticed

13 years later

so many
more

before she opened her mouth,
releasing all she knew
nothing had ever been found.
time
exposure
wore traces of anyone away
save the victim
—not true—
many
others have gone missing
Las Desaparecidas
sounds so magical in Spanish doesn’t it?

i’ve heard the cops de alla don’t care
son pagados
asustados
cobardes,
incopetantes

i saw none of that.
only five years of sorrow,
death clung in their eyes
their noses held the
sweet
putrid scent
that chokes
they spoke of los cadaveres while focused
on a non-existent spot on the floor.

in their ears
muted screams
common for little kids who whack their heads
and parents who forced to identify daughters’ corpses.

my skill only compared
found against known.
no magical piece of evidence existed.
spirits of the dead didn’t guide me.

the frail, light brown strands
belonged to no one I compared them to
if it were that easy
the number of pink crosses
wouldn’t rival the desert sand granules.

this is one of the many many reasons
i left my life of crime-fighting.

first there was no
cool spandex outfit, but no
real fighting happened.
we collected the artifacts of chaos.

i was tired of
sifting through the refuse.

i scrubbed my hands at the end of my days
in the lab
still, the aromas
latex
blood
sweat
lingered
Polite Shakespeare Only: Teaching Chican@ Texts and *The Tempest* in Texas after the Attempts to Dismantle Mexican American Studies Programs

Britt Haraway

This pedagogical essay confronts the efforts in Texas to dismantle or defund Mexican American Studies programs, and it argues against current political education platforms that call for a decreased emphasis of critical thinking. This article instead calls for an increased critical engagement with history using texts such as Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (recently removed from Arizona’s MAS programs) in conjunction with Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Alurista’s *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. Post-colonial and feminist readings of these texts, along with an analysis of the current efforts to dismantle MAS programs, provide a model for an increased critical discourse. The article makes the assumption that the predominantly Mexican American student body at the University of Texas–Pan American can not only benefit from a critical discourse with history, but can also benefit from reading literature that is culturally affirming. Even teachers (like the author of this essay) without a scholarly background in Chican@ studies should find creative ways to bring Mexican American history and literature into their classrooms.

In William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* there is the image of a powerful man, Prospero, a wizard king of a newly ‘discovered island,’ who gains a great chunk of his power from his books. Audiences can almost see his books in his cave home, all stacked together in the corner of his male library, gleaming with a kind of energy. We imagine him clutching them all at once, telling Caliban, his slave and an indigenous resident of the island, “These are MINE.”

It makes sense to Prospero (and us) that one who possesses the record of knowledge can shape the course of knowledge to come. Near the end of the play, Caliban attempts to seize the books and Prospero’s wizardly robes and hold them for himself. He seeks unfortunate allies in his attempt, which may speak to his desperation and the fog of living so long with racism. Caliban expects a magical transformation to happen with this unfettered access to the books (to history), and that perhaps, once he can see a thing directly, he will emerge from this cave and will not be a slave.

In an essay on colonialism and *The Tempest*, Moslem Zolfagharkhani discusses how a conquering force seeks the re-education of a conquered people as a central, important effort in cementing a long-term reign:
In *The Tempest*, Prospero’s magical power and knowledge can be associated to Foucauldian reading of history. By accepting Prospero’s connection of knowledge and power, we can recognize the way in which Prospero’s book learned magic is necessary to his rule on the island. His island does become a cell, laboratory, and classroom, where the isolation and manipulation of characters allows authority to “carry out experiments,” “alter behavior,” “train” and “correct” individuals. (13)

It is the fear of many educators that heavy-handed policy makers in Arizona and Texas are attempting to manipulate and isolate student bodies through book removals and by dismantling ethnic studies programs. As such it is imperative teachers and colleges insist on a more critical, open engagement with history and literature, even as Texas politicians seek to close off questions and inquiry that will manipulate and overly ‘correct’ the thinking of our students.

**On the Attempt by Texas Legislators of Defunding and Banning Ethic Studies**

We have legislators in Texas who are attempting to control the “gleaming” books and information that reaches our students. They appear afraid of students’ critical engagement with history. While no one in Texas has successfully removed Shakespeare or other texts from classrooms, they continue to try. We have seen the affects effects of this top-down legislation in Tucson, Arizona where the school board, its financing threatened by the state government, has removed Chican@ literature, history books, *The Tempest*, and other elements of the Chican@ studies program from district classrooms.¹ In the face of this, I would like to discuss how *The Tempest* can be used to engage in this current policy debate and how it can be used for the positive development of critical thinking skills, introducing important inquiries about colonialism and its lasting effects. The community, including the academic community, must continue to fight for intellectual freedoms, which are a core part of our democratic process and
part of the duties our “forefathers” understood to be a part of an informed citizenry. Rather than ban these programs, educators of many disciplines, not just instructors of Mexican American studies, should work into their curriculum a sustained analysis of U.S. history and colonialism. The irony is that the attack on Mexican American Studies justifies the study itself as a necessary discipline.

I teach freshman composition, creative writing, and British literature, and in all these classes, I teach Chican@ literature and the inquiries found in its pages. It’s my hope that more of my colleagues, even those who, like me, do not teach in our Mexican American Studies program at the University of Texas–Pan American (UTPA), will find creative ways to critically engage our students using Chican@ literature and themes. Not only will this literature satisfy student learning outcomes that promote critical thinking, but it will also increase student proximity to the literature and may, ultimately, lead to cultural affirmation.

A Review of the Schemes to Ban Ethnic Studies in Texas

Texas legislators like Dan Patrick attempted to import Arizona’s banning of ethnic studies programs in Texas with his bill SB 1128 (Planas). As happened in Arizona, the bill threatened academic freedom and critical inquiry and may have led to similar book removals or revisionist histories. Fortunately, it appears that that Dan Patrick’s bill has been defeated (Lopez). SB 1128 was not the first attempt of the Texas legislatures to change curriculum, as many know. In an earlier attempt, the Texas Board almost succeeded in their plan to remove a great deal of the contributions to U.S. society made by César Chávez (Stutz).

This attempt to banish ethnic studies or to separate them from “legitimate” inquiries is a community problem, a political problem that comes down to voters in local battles that are significant nationally. Valerie Strauss reported on the platform of the Texas Republican Party, which made their vision of history and education clear:
Knowledge-Based Education – We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (values clarification), critical thinking skills and similar programs that are simply a relabeling of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (mastery learning) which focus on behavior modification and have the purpose of challenging the student’s fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority.5

This thinking runs counter to nearly every pedagogical discussion we have had at UTPA in both composition and literature committees. In fact, what we see is the opposite: faculty members trying to come up with innovative ways to further develop critical thinking and writing skills, a top priority of the Student Learning Outcomes required on syllabi in UTPA’s English department. At a time when many educators are seeking more critical discourse, the approach championed by Texas Republicans, who currently hold all branches of state government, specifically “opposes” critical thinking.

At UTPA, a group of faculty went even further in the pursuit of a critical engagement with history. Some were in favor of a new core requirement which had students take one course exploring diverse histories, experiences and texts. This requirement would have required one course in Mexican American studies or gender and women studies or environmental studies, or Latin American studies, or African American studies. The list was long, giving students many options. One requirement of the courses is that they have a high-level critical engagement with the dominant discourses in the U.S., and no doubt explore fixed beliefs and the fixed systems. The intent of such courses is not the “behavior modification” feared in the platform above, but rather to present students with alternative histories and discourses and create discussions and visions of American history that are more full and democratic.

As a general body, the faculty did not implement this requirement. Faculty had many different reasons for supporting or voting down the requirement, and without getting into the
particulars, I do want to discuss one attitude that was brought up in a department meeting. A colleague in English said that UTPA students may not need the courses, because our student body, being predominantly Mexican American, already knew about Mexican American history and culture.

This comment assumes that, by virtue of their ethnicity and place of birth, the students would automatically have access to Mexican American literature and culture, and have already covered some post-colonial perspectives in their high school work. I have not found this to be true. When I teach Tino Villanueva poems about *Giant*, a 1956 film by George Stevens in Composition and Creative Writing, I rarely find that students have read Villanueva’s poetry, and many appear quite shocked as they witness Texas segregation through Villanueva’s eyes. I use the textbook *Hecho en Tejas: An Anthology of Texas-Mexican Literature*, which has a couple of his poems. In “Scene from the Movie GIANT”, the speaker talks of feeling “local looking” and being a “flickering light” “locked in the backseat row” after witnessing Sarge’s racism (196). Turner Classic Movies has posted a clip from *Giant* of the fight between Sarge and Benedict that destabilizes Villanueva’s identity. It’s easy to closely read the film as well as the poem and examine how their languages interact. The class usually deals first with the movie’s critique of 1950s segregation, getting a full experience of Jim Crow Laws as we see an example play out. On the screen, Bick Benedict finally adjusts his fixed beliefs of racial superiority and his fear of miscegenation. Sarge asks rudely if little Jordy, whom Sarge calls “that little papoose” because of his brown skin, is his grandson. Benedict, Rock Hudson’s character, says, “Yeah . . . come to think of it. He is.”

This critique might seem commonplace to some scholars, but many students have not dealt with a sustained critique in a classroom environment of the civil rights era and its manifestations in Mexican American communities in Texas, and the class, aided by Villanueva’s
human, vulnerable experience of it, usually has an important exploration of racism using the film and the poem. Although, once a student did not agree that the movie was in fact *against* Sarge’s segregation (and the larger Texas Anglo community that Benedict’s unstated fears represent). My colleague may be right that some students are aware of this history, but there are many who seem a bit stunned and read this particular text and see this vulnerable reaction to it. Moreover, some students (and this may have happened to the student referenced above) fall into a trap of being so proud of America that they lose their critical distance, producing a stubbornness of thought that will not serve them well. This one-track thinking seems to be the goal of the Texas Republican Party’s platform on education; it should not, however, be a guiding principle for our teachers.

The other layer opened up by Villanueva’s poetic expression is the effect of representation. We do not merely review history in the course, but witness how texts influence identity, and how, in post-colonial terms, a subject experiences their image and definition by a dominant discourse that posits them as “the other.” At this point in the course it is helpful to introduce Edward Said and discuss how a dominant culture (Benedict’s Texas or the larger U.S. culture as filtered through a major Hollywood film) might find it culturally expedient to represent the Mexican American as weak, quiet, and meek. In her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa discusses this convenient narrative arc in American experience and its profound effect: “[i]n the Gringo World, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation,” which, she suggests could be the cause of machismo and “a deep sense of racial shame” (105). The effect on Villanueva is different than the one Anzaldúa describes here, but it is important to see and recognize how a dominant discourse can influence identity.
Even when critiquing racism in 1950s America, *Giant* maintains a kind paternalistic stance. Villanueva is keenly aware that Juana and the Mexican American patrons have a feeble kind of body language as they are discussed and ultimately need to be saved by the Big White Guy. In other poems from *Scenes from the Movie GIANT* not in *Hecho en Tejas*, Villanueva looks at himself as seen by the film and reports, “I carry nothing to the fight” (36). Rafael Pérez-Torres sees this kind of reflection as key to Villanueva’s book, exploring “the voicelessness imposed on the mestizo by the film” which serves ultimately to “subordinate mestiza/o figures” by representing them with a “lack of agency” (53).

I find this examination important for my students. I know that I need to learn more and am by no means an expert in Chican@ studies, but I have an assumption that must be shared by the teachers in Tucson’s La Raza Studies program that increasing the students’ proximity to the places, cultures, languages, and themes in a literature or writing class will increase the students’ involvement in their own learning. The high graduation rates coming out of these Arizona programs validate these educators’ choices and planning. A study by the University of Arizona about the Tucson Program reports the following: “Students who took MAS courses were between 51 percent more likely to graduate from high school than non-MAS students (2009) and 108 percent more likely to graduate (2008)” (Cabrera et al. 6). By this measure, the program is (was) an amazing success.

Likewise, at UTPA we also need to boost our retention rates for sophomores and freshmen, the students I teach as a lecturer. It is my hope that teaching Chican@ literature in all my writing classes, and even including some Gloria Anzaldúa into the Introduction to British Literature course is a way to increase student retention.
Polite Shakespeare Only!

William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* was on the list of those texts removed from Arizona curriculum when Tucson dismantled the MAS programs. My sense of the media coverage of Arizona’s policy makes me believe the removal of Shakespeare got more national and global attention and reaction than the removal of Sandra Cisneros or contemporary Chicana poets like Lorna Dee Cervantes, which is a bit strange.  

Perhaps the interesting thing about Shakespeare is that he traditionally has had a secure place in the canon, and one would think that even those who believe in maintaining “fixed beliefs” and “parental authority” would argue to keep Shakespeare in the classroom. Therefore, maybe it got more attention because its removal provided the media with the most immediate irony of professing democratic principles while creating policies that enforce a heavily state-controlled discourse. Incredibly, taking *The Tempest* out of the class increases its immediacy and reminds us how literature can be powerful (even scary), complex (the opposite of fixed), and that Prospero’s island is not simply imaginary, or a once-upon-a-time place, but somewhere tangible.

Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* takes as one of its fundamental questions the idea of “country founding” and of colonialism. After all, Prospero lost his dukedom in a corrupt coup. Obviously there is an interesting mirror and relationship developing when Prospero talks about how difficult it is to lose one’s country while simultaneously taking Caliban’s. Caliban, the indigenous resident of the island, asserts, “This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,/ Which thou takest from me” (I.ii.332-33). In the simplicity of its terms, his argument is effective in the Occam’s razor sense; he doesn’t need to get complicated to stake his claim. Whereas Prospero has to invoke God’s plan, and the “well this pain and slavery is really for his own spiritual and intellectual good” kind of logic. And, it is likely that Shakespeare himself may have shared some
of the prevailing assumptions of his time and place. Obviously, though, Shakespeare is doing ‘dangerous’ critical thinking as well, challenging some of the fixed beliefs of his time. Deborah Willis, discussing how much of Prospero is Shakespeare, writes

“Though Prospero dominates this play in a way few Shakespearean characters do in others, the play cannot be said to endorse fully Prospero’s most blatant expressions of colonial ideology. It invites us to look at Prospero from other angles, Caliban’s especially, and draws our attention to questionable aspects of Prospero’s conduct and beliefs in ways that seem to be a function of the play’s design. (279)

Despite a happy ending, when Prospero forgives and frees his slave, we must have a critique of Prospero—his choices and demeanor must be weighed, his use of power, questioned. Even this freeing at the end has the feeling of Washington ‘freeing’ his slaves in his will but only after his wife’s death, when the generosity was much more economically convenient. By removing the play from classrooms, some Tucson board administrators stripped the students of the opportunity to make this necessary inquiry. In his essay on The Tempest, James Fleming believes Prospero is guilty of being “monologic” (455) and, likewise, it feels as if legislators prefer this kind of one-sided account rather than dealing head-on with both claims upon the island.

Looking back at my class, I wish I had gone to the University of Michigan’s website and read Alurista’s El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, which in part reads,

“We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, the sweat of our brows and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those that plant the seeds, water the land and gather the crops, and not to foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent.
The lived experience with and of the land is a clear argument. It must be assumed that the instructors in Arizona could bring these two perspectives to students, allowing a couple of things to happen. Arizona students, whose government attempted to increase the powers of the police to determine citizenship with SB 1070, will be able to question the authenticity and intention of this policy. It stands to reason that one’s lived experience in a country, which dates back in history, is at least on par with this new legislation or divine plans and interventions in the Manifest Destiny philosophy that helped determine many of the U.S. government policies regarding citizenship. Secondly, Alurista’s labeling of the continent as “Bronze” uses a language that runs counter to representations of Mexican Americans as inferior or weak. It has the snap of Marcus Garvey’s “Black is Beautiful,” speech — an entire reconfiguration of history by reconstituting the negative representation of the other. Had Villanueva encountered “Bronze” representations of his community in big Hollywood, there may have never been *Scenes from the Movie GIANT*. Villanueva could have written about Washington’s cherry tree and there would not be a need for Chican@ studies in my British Literature class and American history would be polite6.

In *The Tempest*, Caliban’s demand for ownership is inspired partly by his reaction against Prospero’s threats of violent repression enforcing his discourse. We hear these threats from Prospero’s own mouth:

For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,

Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins

Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,

All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch’d

As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging

Than bees that made ‘em. (I.ii.325-330)
There is a kind of Quentin Tarantino violence to this poetry. Modern readers can’t (and shouldn’t) read these threats without thinking of the violence and slavery that accompanied colonial expansion in the Americas.

In Prospero, Shakespeare wrote a bully, a man out to establish hegemony in this “New World.” Consider his treatment of Ariel, the other indigenous resident, a magical sprite. With a weary voice, Ariel asks, “Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,/ Let me remember thee what thou hast promised,/ Which is not yet perform’d me” (I.ii.242-44). Prospero responds to Ariel’s legitimate desire to be properly rewarded for labor with the following threats: “If thou more murmur’st, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails till/ Thou hast howl’d away twelve winters” (I.ii.294-46). The abusive language Prospero uses is intentionally intense and Shakespeare acknowledges that Prospero’s source of power is his ability to exact violence and to further cement a master/slave relationship through his use of language. Again this demeanor is part of the fabric of the play. To teach the play is to deal with this language. The only way to avoid confronting the abusive demeanor of “masters” in the master-slave relationship so common to colonial experience is to remove the play.

Some Arizona legislators defended the book removals with the suggestion that students could still access these books in the library. However, to do the kind of sustained analysis of the texts and connect them to each other, students need the formal structures of class, group discussions, and experienced instructors (and even tests and quizzes). As a student, I needed these things, never once checking out a Shakespeare play during my free time. Likewise, I was never assigned a work of Chican@ literature in my high school classes, undergraduate classes at the University of Tennessee or my graduate classes at the University of Southern Mississippi.
As a teacher in South Texas, I find it important to highlight the language issues brought out by *The Tempest*. Arizona teachers may feel similarly. Prospero and his daughter Miranda brag about teaching Caliban their language and theology. But Caliban finds this brag flat, and the reader engages this debate. Caliban says the following: “You taught me language; and my profit on’t/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!” (I.ii.363-365).

Certainly the loss of one’s native language is a part of colonialism in the Americas and elsewhere, and these language issues have an important contemporary history that South Texas students can explore and deconstruct. In this way, *The Tempest* is about Texas, participating in the experience of post-colonial writers and communities to identify with this play. In class, after a Wikipedia search, I showed my students how more contemporary writers such as Aimee Cesaire and Roberto Fernández Retamar placed *The Tempest* plot in Haiti and Cuba respectively.

Why could the acquisition of a new language be dangerous to Caliban? Consider the following quote from Prospero: “Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take,/ Being capable of all ill!” (I.ii.352-54). At other moments, he labels Caliban “savage” (I.ii.355) and all of his ancestors “thy vile race” (I.ii.358). The strongest example of this language comes after Prospero recalls how Caliban tried to “Violate the honor of my child” (I.ii.345). Because of this rape attempt and Caliban’s unwanted attention, Prospero believes Caliban has earned his slavery (Fleming 454).

First, it’s important to discuss in class that, in Caliban, Shakespeare creates a complex character who has volition and makes choices. Our class critiqued his behavior, because he seems to believe that as a man he has some claim to ownership of Miranda’s body, despite her wishes. Still, many of Caliban’s poorest judgments come amidst a culture that has always
labeled him inferior, and the corruption that racism brings to his sense of identity may create a kind of fog where pride and self-assurance is, at best, tenuous. If Caliban asks, ‘could the dominant culture (that of Miranda and Prospero) ever find me to be a legitimate suitor for Miranda?’ If his answer is no, and it must have been, he has no legitimate channel for his desire to have a family.

Additionally, there is something of fear and sensationalism in Prospero’s reaction to Caliban, who says that if he had not been stopped Caliban would have, “peopled else/ this isle with Calibans” (I.ii.350). While it is clear Caliban did not pursue Miranda in a way that gave her agency, the shock and disgust at his desire seems coated with fear of miscegenation. Faced with the man from a “vile race,” Prospero is horrified and wants to protect his daughter’s “honour.” By contrast, with Ferdinand, Miranda’s white suitor and fellow aristocrat, Prospero practically arranges their marriage. We hear his fear clearly at a moment when he is not in a rage but talking more casually with Ariel about Caliban’s birth: “Then was this island—/ Save for the son that she did litter here,/ A freckled whelp hag-born—/ not honour’d with/ A human shape” (I.ii.279-82). Caliban’s gender will be discussed later, but among the other word choices, “litter” is problematic because it strips Caliban of his humanity, equating him with other lower animals, a key representation throughout American slavery. Certainly this attitude, which is expressed about a moment (that of his very birth) outside Caliban’s attempted crime, makes the possibility of Caliban and Miranda’s children abhorrent to Prospero.

The other problem my class discussed is that Prospero labels a whole people “thy vile race” based on the one action of one individual. He calls Caliban’s mother a “hag” (I.ii.268). The cramps, physical violence and demarcation of land are all part of the colonial process, but equally important (and perhaps more lasting) are the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) of the English (Italian?) language and the re-education/re-spiritualization of Caliban.
From Caliban we can see how the new language could be a plague, a disease that could corrupt his very identity. In fact, in *The Tempest* Prospero justifies and seems to maintain the enslavement of Caliban with his command of language:

Though thou didst learn, had that in’t which
good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock,
Who hadst deserved more than a prison. (I.ii.359-62)

It is important for students to learn how language can affect identity and pride. There is an important dialogue to have about contemporary attitudes towards the Spanish language and other languages that were or could be lost in colonial processes.

Again, bringing in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, we connect Caliban’s situation to Anzaldúa, who labels the taking of language “Linguistic Terrorism,” and says that for her “linguistic identity is twin skin to ethnic identity” (81). She worries further that those living with the effects of colonialism will suffer a cycle of shame, “pena,” internalized by a subject from the dominant culture delivered through Ideological State Apparatuses like language. In class we looked at the experience that she reported of being at grammar school in the Rio Grande Valley and being told by a teacher “If you want to be American, speak American. If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong” (76). These moments of language are keenly felt by both Anzaldúa and Caliban, and carry with it the risk of permanently harming their identities, unless they can find a way to resist this prevailing mentality.

It wasn’t difficult in class to connect these language issues to contemporary government policies such as SB 1070 in Arizona, where police might have been trained to hear the Spanish language as an indicator of crime. A colleague in the MAS program at UTPA also pointed me
to CBS News video of the 1968 Edcouch/Elsa Walkout, where students protested that they were not allowed to speak Spanish on school grounds and were punished if they ‘got caught.’

Only ten miles away from the campus, these towns ground Caliban’s and Anzaldúa’s resistance in UTPA’s local history. In the next conversation in class we compare the 1968 realities to their own experiences. Most of our students went to high school in the Valley, and they have relevant experiences. Some tell stories about their parents, who encountered a similar punishment for using the Spanish language. Conversely, there are students who grew up attending the many bilingual programs here, programs that seemed to be called for in Anzaldúa’s essay and the more open attitude from administrators demanded by the Edcouch/Elsa students. Rather than intense desires for a bloody revolution (the stated concern out of several legislators like John Huppenthal and Michael Hicks11), my students observe how Anzaldúa and the Elsa/Edcouch students participated in the democratic process and were able to positively affect their communities and American history.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa analyzes another problem with the language of the dominant culture that sets up binary hierarchies that dictate the culture’s understanding of gender. In Prospero’s quote above, you may have recognized the use of patriarchy to justify his superiority and ownership of the island over Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, who gets the brunt of his language. In class, we asked questions about the representation of women in these texts and feminism. Norma Alarcón discusses feminism in the anthology *This Bridge Called my Back*:

“Feminism is a way of saying that nothing in patriarchy truly reflects women unless we accept distortions – mythic and historical” (qtd. in Nelson 3). We wonder, of course, if Prospero’s historical account of Sycorax can possibly be fair. Prospero’s western thinking tends toward binary thought, which sets up a system that privileges the white (male) magic and denigrates the female (black) magic. My class asks: “what is the truth . . . can we really trust the reports
from Prospero? Can men, especially of an old school, Eurocentric bent, ever be trusted to fairly represent powerful women?” That Sycorax is not European is a second reason to question Prospero’s representation, causing the class to consider how the indigenous modes of spirituality were typically represented and understood by western art. It’s important at this point to bring in some of the image reclamation projects that exist in Anzaldúa and other places. George Hartley reads this impulse even in Anzaldúa’s children’s book *La Prieta*:

A Christianized synthesis of indigenous healing practices from Arab Africa, Europe, and the Americas, curanderismo made possible a mode of practical consciousness that offered indigenous peoples (including mestizos) a concrete yet discreet means of resisting the colonizing impact of the Spanish Conquest and with it the initial moment of modernity-coloniality. (137)

One wonders whether Caliban might have one day been able to reconstitute the images and practices of his mother and understand this as a power outside of Prospero’s control. Such thinking may provide him a more productive form for expressing his resistance. There must be a way to read Sycorax’s magic outside of Prospero’s western discourse. Of course, we never really meet Sycorax in the play, but we do see several moments of Caliban having a particular spiritual connection to and knowledge of the island. This could be labeled “pagan” by Prospero, Caliban’s knowing where to eat, get water and how to read the land, but the reader can and should feel plenty of distance in order to read Prospero’s label critically. Prospero is intensely motivated to establish a hierarchy in which his magic is good, hers evil, a convenient binary.

James Fleming puts Prospero’s labels of convenience this way: “Prospero constructs his interlocutors in accordance to his own interests: Ariel is a ‘brave spirit’ when cooperative (1.2.206), a ‘malignant thing’ when not” (454). After all, we could have had the image of nice magic, the Oz blonde lady descending in a pink bubble, but, not surprisingly, we get the
WITCH/HAG comments from Prospero, because the representation is also affected by Sycorax’s ethnicity. Possibly a white witch might get a different treatment. Anzaldúa reminds us in “Speaking in Tongues” that white feminism and feminism by people of color can have their differences. In a collective voice ‘we’ that speaks for women of color, she tries to understand “why we are dangerous beasts” subject to representations such as the one Prospero offers, writing

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\text{[w]e revoke, we erase your white male imprint. When you come knocking on our doors with your rubber stamps to brand our faces with DUMB, HYSTERICAL, PASSIVE PUTA, PERVERT, when you come with your branding irons to burn MY PROPERTY on our buttocks, we will vomit the guilt, self-denial and race-hatred you have force-fed into us right back into your mouth. We are done being cushions for your projected fears. We are tired of being your sacrificial lambs and scapegoats. (185)}
\]

Her reaction to Prospero-like characterizations of women of color provides students with a way to read the play outside Prospero’s demonized representation, apart from the rubber-stamp HAG he puts on Sycorax.

Furthermore, women in the play are either praised for their innocence (Miranda) or discredited and punished with language for their power (Sycorax). A dichotomy of feminine representation is maintained throughout Shakespeare’s play and never really challenged. It is not unlike the Virgen/Puta dichotomy Anzaldúa discusses in Chapter 2 of *Borderlands/La Frontera* (53). Many of the students said that they had also observed this dual representation of women, and Anzaldúa’s analysis along with *The Tempest* provided a way to see and critique how gender is perceived in U.S. culture.
Not all college instructors believe that a student’s ability to relate to the issues is an important factor in building a class, but the instructors in Tucson’s MAS program seemed to feel it important in designing their courses, trying to find a way to pull in students who may have struggled in their previous schooling in their literature or history classes. School settings that do not consider the audience expectations and experiences are in danger of keeping the students away from the material, or at least not providing enough of an invitation into it. The “I’m going to teach them Dante’s *Inferno* whether they like it or not” attitude from teachers may reinforce misguided beliefs in students that literature is not of them or for them.

No matter where the students stand politically at the end of our discussion of *The Tempest*, I find them knee-deep in a discussion of literature and history, which is a personal student-learning outcome of mine and most teachers I work with. There were even two students in my British literature class who wrote about how they approved of Arizona’s management of history, an opinion they arrived at and argued for using the text. After all, it is not my goal to have behavior modification in my class, except to the extent it means they are encouraged to closely examine reality.

A second goal for me teaching predominantly Mexican American students is that reading these texts and these kinds of critiques may help combat the stigma that has built up in the course of U.S. history that Mexican American literature is not really literature. I believe this is a stigma that Anzaldúa encountered when she “had to ‘argue’ with one advisor after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus” at UT-Austin (*Borderlands* 82). Indeed, Anzaldúa says she felt “pure joy” at reading “poetry written in Tex-Mex” (82). Even this month, a MAS faculty member at UTPA was contacted by a graduate who is now an English teacher in a high school in the Valley. This former student referenced this affirmation process she felt after reading Sandra Cisneros’ *The
House on Mango Street in her letter. She is trying to find ninety copies of The House on Mango Street so she can teach the book to her freshmen. A Mexican American herself, she wrote that until she read this book early in college she did not know her people’s stories could be literature.

If you listen to the teachers in Ari Palos’ 2011 documentary Precious Knowledge about the ethnic studies programs in Arizona, you hear something similar: not a tone of bloody revolution, but one that emphasizes individual pride and self-respect. When I watched this film I felt humbled to see these instructors’ practices were so much more innovative than some of the techniques I learned in graduate school. It certainly inspired me to try harder.

As such, it is important that Alurista labeled his community a bronze people and that the students read this identification. Similarly, Anzaldúa redefines and embraces la mestiza in ways that resist the traditional western binary arrangements that labeled her race, gender, and sexuality as inferior and/or with disgust. The Tempest highlights the stakes in this identification process. Not long after Prospero refreshes Caliban’s status of slavery through his language and threats of violence, we see Caliban trade Prospero’s slavery for Trinculo’s and Stephano’s, two working class whites who were also shipwrecked. All three, Caliban and Trinculo and Stephano, fall quite ‘naturally’ into a pattern that posits Stephano as the superior master and Caliban as the inferior servant. We may wonder whether at this point in Caliban’s slavery, if he would be able to redefine or reconceive himself outside of the terms set for him by the dominant discourse. Access to Sycorax’s knowledge and vocabulary may be what he needs, but all he is getting is disgust and hate from Miranda, Prospero, Stephano, and Trinculo.

It feels like several governing bodies in Texas and Arizona are trying to control important re-examinations, such as perhaps ones that could benefit Caliban. It’s nice to know that they may have failed in Texas with SB 1128, although the future of these kinds of efforts is
not yet clear. Groups like NACCS, the Librotraficantes and others will no doubt continue the fight for academic freedom and a quality, open education system, but action and thoughtful pedagogy are also required of all instructors, especially in Hispanic-serving institutions, even us who are not Chican@ scholars.

The defensive and apologetic posture of those banning books makes it clear that many politicians haven’t yet come to terms with our past. It was only February 19, 2013 that Mississippi, where I’m from, officially outlawed slavery. That’s reflection at glacial speeds. We should all be praying that our teachers, like the ones in Arizona, can help speed up the reflection process in our students and communities. Perhaps, the politicians who are eliminating programs or advocating the elimination can enroll in a few ethnic studies courses where they might benefit from some badly needed critical thinking skills. As a nation, we should all be ready to add new faces onto Mount Rushmore of our “founding fathers”: Alurista, Gloria Anzaldúa, and César Chávez among them. Because, we will never truly change as a country until we give our students access to their stories and their books and observe with the students how they shine.
Notes

1. Marci McMahon, a Chican@ literature scholar at UTPA, clarified this for me in an email.
2. “Latino activists are protesting a bill filed by Conservative state Sen. Dan Patrick that would disqualify ethnic studies courses from counting toward core history requirements. SB 1128 would instead require students to take general surveys of U.S. and Texas history in order to graduate.” huffingtonpost.com. The Huffington Post, 18 Mar. 2013. Web.
3. Jose Antonio López of the The Rio Grande Guardian reports: “In formulating his Senate Bill 1128 to enact Arizona-style, anti-Mexican culture legislation on this side of the border, the Senator wants students to learn only post-1836 Texas (Anglo) history and not early Texas (Spanish Mexican) history. Because of opposition by groups of concerned Texas citizens, he has decided to temporarily halt the processing of his bill; at least for now.” 9 March 2013.
4. As the Dallas Morning News reported on May 22, 2010, the Texas State Board of Education proposed an initial plan when it revised the history curriculum and textbook choices. One plan was to follow the suggestion of a history “expert” who recommended Texas rewrite history books to include less César Chávez. It has to be assumed that the backlash against this revisionist curriculum change halted their intended wish, which I suppose is more “American” history that did not highlight Chávez’s contributions to U.S. society.
6. Turner Classic Movies has offered the public a clip which includes the fight scene referenced by Tino Villanueva in several poems. <http://www.tcm.com/mediaroom/video/240954/Giant-Movie-Clip-Sarge-s-Place.html>
7. Their pedagogical choices are better explained in their own voices in Precious Knowledge from Dos Vatos films.
8. The full list of the expansive removals can be found at Cal State Northridge’s website. <http://library.csun.edu/Guides/arizonabannedbooks>
10. Emmy Pérez, a poet and Mexican American Studies Faculty member at UTPA sent me this clip. CBS News, 29 Nov. 1968. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUzQBvgn-k
11. In removing the program, they also demonized the teachers who teach these very real themes and characterization. In fact, Jeff Biggers of the Huffington Post website makes the following report on the comments by a top Arizona Administrator: “As a state administrative judge deliberates on the fate of Tucson Unified School District’s Ethnic Studies/Mexican American Studies Program (MAS), Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal compared the nationally acclaimed program to the Hitler Nazi Jugend paramilitary organization at a Pima County Republican luncheon last week, making the open comparison between the teaching of these texts and the teaching of Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler. This comparison is offensive and filled with hyperbole. Similar fear speech is made by board member Michael Hicks who suggested students will want ‘bloodshed’ after class is over.” He made this comment on the April 2, 2012 episode of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-april-2-2012/tucson-s-mexican-american-studies-ban>. Another of Huppenthal’s claims that made its way into the Arizona dismantling of the MAS program and its literature is that they “promote overthrowing the U.S. government” (Herreras).
Works Cited


Juntos Podemos: Devising Theater as Community-Based Pedagogy

Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

In this Workshop Reflection, Roxanne Schroeder-Arce reflects upon a devising workshop that she and two UTPA professors facilitated with 15 students from UTPA and UT Austin during the conference. During the workshop, the students and faculty devised a performance called Juntos Podemos. Schroeder-Arce chronicles the background and goals of workshop, the devising process and how the workshop reflected the themes of the conference. Then, she paints a picture of the final performance. Finally, she includes her own reflections as well as those of the student participants from both UTPA and UT Austin.

At the NACCS Tejas 2013 Conference, Chican@ Studies ¡Ahora!, I facilitated an interactive devising workshop with two colleagues from the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA): Eric Wiley, Department of Communication, and Edna Ochoa, Department of Modern Languages and Literature. Aiming to engage theatre as a tool to explore issues of Latino identity on college campuses, the workshop was titled Juntos Podemos: Devising Theater as Community-Based Pedagogy. The Spanish part of the workshop title translates to “Together We Can” and the idea was that bringing a diverse group of students and faculty from two distinct universities together to devise a piece of theatre would encourage reflection and action around Latino Theatre and representation on both campuses. In 2011, 38.1% of the population of Texas identified as Hispanic or Latino in origin. However, the theatre produced in educational institutions throughout the state, including secondary and post-secondary school theatre programs and regional theatres representing Latino stories and characters is staggeringly disproportionate to the number of Latinos living here. Through this workshop, my colleagues and I hoped to foster dialogue and relationships among the students and ourselves with a larger goal of building a collective voice dedicated to ensuring more Latino stories on Texas university stages.

A total of 15 undergraduate and graduate students from UTPA and the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) participated over the three-day workshop. Of the 15, eleven identified as Latino, three as White, and one as Black American. The UTPA group included ten
students studying theatre or Latino/a Literature and the UT Austin group was comprised of five theatre students. In a total of six hours, we collectively devised a piece of theatre entitled *Juntos Podemos*, loosely based on the conference theme: community based pedagogies, scholarship, and activism.

**Background: Why We Chose this Project**

In the summer of 2011, I met a few UTPA faculty members at two separate conferences. I felt an immediate shared passion and desire to develop professional relationships with them with a goal of increasing the representation of Latina/o stories in Texas theatre. I already have some ties to the Rio Grande Valley, where I supervise student teachers and conduct research about culturally responsive theatre education. My interest in the Valley led me to respond to a request for proposals offered by Marci McMahon for a session about performance in the Valley, to be presented at the American Theatre in Higher Education Conference. McMahon and I presented with others committed to Latina/o theater about some of the exciting theatre being cultivated in the Valley and I learned about Eric Wiley at UTPA. Then, I saw a performance of *Crawling with Monsters*, created and directed by Wiley at the American Alliance for Theatre and Education conference in Chicago. The play is a multimedia performance ethnography piece based on interviews exploring issues of violence in Reynosa, México. Wiley shared with me that he had begun a Latino Theatre Initiative at UTPA, a goal I have for UT Austin. Wiley, McMahon and I met, along with Brant Pope, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin, and we began to make plans for action. McMahon invited Edna Ochoa on board and we began to brainstorm our first collaboration to be implemented at the NACCS conference.

We decided that given our ultimate objective of nurturing more Latino theatre in the state of Texas and our experience in Latino theatre and theatre-making, devising a piece of
theatre together with students from both institutions would be an excellent starting point. We also agreed that the piece we would develop would reflect the theme of the NACCS conference and we could begin our work there. Fliers were made and students from both institutions were asked to email the facilitators to express their interest. Wiley, Ochoa, and I communicated via email to make a plan for the six-hour devising process.

**The Workshop: Our Process**

The three facilitators were in agreement that the first hour of the workshop needed to focus on community building and creating a shared vocabulary. When I refer to vocabulary, I do not necessarily mean oral language, rather I mean ways of communicating: with our bodies, through music, through feeling one another’s presence. We consciously fostered a space where neither Spanish nor English was privileged over the other. We briefly offered that participants were encouraged to speak in whichever language they felt most comfortable, that we must all lean in to try to understand both the words and perspectives of everyone and that we should collectively agree to ask when we needed help understanding.

Each of the facilitators led activities to build ensemble. The entire time, we were consciously creating the piece of theatre we would present, though we did not know what parts the ensemble would want to share. The entire time, we also kept the conference theme at the forefront, and the ideas of activism became central to the work we were devising. The work was organic yet at the same time carefully structured and guided. I led several name exercises and activities that helped us to make connections with others in the room, naming where we are from, things we like, our families and other lived experience. Ochoa offered a prompt for the group which started with breathing. We all breathed together and then individually wrote about some of our experiences given our own identity. Then, in groups we shared the work. The breathing proved to enable us to find stories deep in our bodies to recall, scribe and then
share. Wiley led an activity where participants chase butterflies. While an individual acting exercise, the act of collectively chasing butterflies helped to build community and ultimately served as a metaphor for border crossing. The ensemble congealed quickly and we found ourselves readily sharing, in English and in Spanish, some of our deepest thoughts and feelings about ourselves and our unique individual – and in some cases collective – identities.

In the third and final workshop meeting, we devised a little more individual work and then began relating the written pieces to one another. In some segments of the theatre performance we were creating, we decided that one participant would say one line of his or her writing, followed by another. Movement was added, by those who wanted to layer in frozen or moving physical images representing or inspired by what the spoken words were saying. Then, music organically came into the performance. Though we were conscious of the expectation of a performance to an audience, we remained process centered and continued to explore through the entire workshop. During the process of the devising, we explored the conference theme in many ways and on many levels. The three facilitators modeled community based pedagogies as we listened to the individual participants from two institutions as we all came together to explore shared questions and ideas. We listened to what the collective community wanted to say and then offered methods of sharing the ideas, to amplify and in some cases clarify the voices in the room, though always seeking to honor the participants and what they wanted to share.

The “Performance” or “Sharing”: Our Product
The sharing took place in the Studio theatre at UTPA. We worked under simple lights, in the clothes we wore that day, and with only a few props and a guitar. We hoped for our performance to be a sharing of the themes we had explored together, aiming to inspire thought and dialogue among the audience members, to include the audience in the thought and dialogue
we had over our six hours together. The workshop leaders performed with the rest of the
group. This was another way that we modeled community based pedagogy; the community was
all of us and we all presented ourselves together.

Eighteen bodies enter the space from either side of the proscenium stage, searching for
unseen butterflies. The bodies land in a frozen image and collectively orate the word,
“identidad.” The bodies disperse as they continue their search for butterflies. Then, seven
bodies lay on the floor. Each body rises and shares a line in response to, Quien soy Yo? One
performer states, “Yo soy una joven decendiente de sangre azteca y Española.” Another offers,
“Sometimes I hear people talk about me and I wonder if that is who I am or who I was.” As
those performers move out of the performance area, five others get into a frozen image, or
tableau, of how each individual feels about their own identity, and one performer begins a
monologue, “Yo soy una mujer que se siente identificada con los Mexicanos, con sus
necesidades, sus problemas, y sus luchas.” As the performer continues, another stands above her
and moves into four distinct individual tableaux, one of her idea of ethnic pride, of need, of
problems, and finally of the fight. Two pairs on either side move and enact these ideas more
fluidly, at moments supporting and at other moments resisting one another. There is a give and
take between the speaker and the pairs, reflecting the speaker’s and their own struggles with
similar experiences.

Next, the group sings a song in Spanish collectively as three monologues are woven
together and spoken, one line from each speaker, as a sort of braid of voices. One monologue
about a young Mexican American boy being shamed by a candy store employee for not
speaking Spanish is spoken in tandem with another monologue about being too brown for the
black people and too black for the brown people in the performer’s community, and yet another
monologue, in Spanish, of a mother living on the border who works so hard she barely has time
to see her children. The performance runs about 25 minutes and ends with another full group tableau of strength and unity, a symbol of the group’s activism in presenting this piece as a community to the community.

Tiffany Ana López, Professor of Theatre from the University of California, Riverside, joined us after the sharing, and facilitated dialogue about our process and final product. Brant Pope, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin, and Marci McMahon also joined the panel to respond as well. The audience seemed to appreciate the applied work, and the performers spoke of the impact of devising this piece together. We publicly shared plans for continued collaboration. We hope for more dialogue and collective theatre making, leading to action around US Latino/a identity and representation. Collectively exploring and sharing through an applied theatre practice led to affirmation of collective feelings about a lack of Latino/a representation on stage as well as a shared acknowledgement about the importance of every individual’s and the group’s collective stories being told and heard. Hearing the shared concerns of students and faculty members from both UTPA and UT Austin – and in turn UC Riverside – greatly affirmed the need for more dialogue about representation of language, identity and culture on university stages.

**Reflections and Conclusion**

Through our own reflections and through reading those of the participants, we concluded that we made significant steps toward reaching our goals. While the greater goal of increasing representation of Latino/a bodies and stories on university stages in Texas will take more time and action, we were able to take smaller steps and reach some of our goals which move us toward our greater goal. One smaller step we took was calling attention to the missed opportunities of including Latino/a voices on stage. Another was our progress toward building groups on several campuses to work toward the larger goal. Finally, we began to cultivate a
collective to support one another in this activism. The students have indeed become a support
network of sorts. They have become friends on Facebook and have been in contact over email.
One UT Austin student reflected on her blog shortly after the workshop:

I feel so empowered. Years and generations of oppression try to bring you down
and to fill you with doubt. This is why we write. To tell. To document. My line
in the performance was ‘I am the piece of the puzzle that didn’t fit. La Negra que
tiene tumbao.’ This is who I am. I assert my presence. That was what I was
expecting to do . . . Assert. It didn’t end up being like that. I learned so much
about standing in solidarity. It’s not about asserting your own identity in the
space but more so about finding common ground. There is always common
ground.

We indeed found a common ground and collectively felt the power in our alliance. This
solidarity appeared to be felt by all involved. A UTPA student similarly reflected:

En mi experiencia personal, el taller multidisciplinario de teatro, fue una
experiencia muy grata. Por principio, nos reunimos personas, tanto de distinta
edad, como de distinto género. Pero lo más divertido, fue el hecho de que había
participantes que hablaban español o inglés solamente. Trabajamos
intensivamente, durante horas, para poder tener un producto final. Partimos de
ejercicios de improvisación en los que el lenguaje y el contenido eran básicos.
Algunos utilizaban ambos lenguajes, otros no tenían lenguaje alguno. Creo que
para mí la experiencia fue muy grata, pues nos encontramos siendo un grupo de
gente que ama el teatro y que eso fue lo que nos unió, muy lejos de la habilidad o
el idioma. Al final descubrimos que la pasión debe ser lo más importante.
TRANSLATION: In my personal experience, the multidisciplinary theater workshop was a very pleasant experience. First, we met persons both of different ages, and of different disciplines. But the most interesting thing was the fact that there were participants who only spoke Spanish or English (but we worked bilingually). We worked intensively, for hours, to be able to have a final product. We departed from exercises of improvisation in which the language and the content were basic. Some of them were using both languages, others did not have any language. I believe that for me the experience was very pleasant, since we are a group of a person who love the theater and that is what joined us, much more so than our skills or language. In the end we discovered that our passion is the most important thing.

The deep connections developed over the time we worked together were critical. However, sharing the performance with others at the conference proved to offer a deeper connection as we supported one another in sharing our stories and as we participated collectively in a display of activism. A UT Austin participant wrote about the importance of such a performance:

At the conference, we, along with UT Pan Am students created a Theatre piece that combined music, movement and elements of our lives into an impactful performance. It reminded me of why I came to the Theatre Department in 2009. I didn’t just want to entertain folk. I wanted to make a difference.

Ultimately, we learned a lot from the work, and made some strong connections in the process leading to more collective goals for the future. We confirmed how eager the students from both universities were to talk about their identities and share their stories. We also learned how rich the stories of these youthful participants are. We have set our next meeting for March 2014, when we hope UTPA students will come to UT Austin to continue and deepen the dialogue.
We walked away with a strong feeling of unity and agency and the sentiment that, yes, it is true: juntos podemos!
Pedagogical Conocimientos: Self and Other in Interaction

Josephine Méndez-Negrete

This essay illustrates the process of conocimiento in the context of instruction and at a roundtable/workshop at the 2013 National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Regional Conference at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), McAllen, and includes a discussion on classroom experiences with the guide. This pedagogical activity and discussion examines and illustrates the process of doing conocimiento as a teaching/learning approach for coming to knowledge about the Self in relationship with others, through a conocimiento guide designed for the activity. Conocimiento is a process that unfolds in the context of unearthing knowledge in relationship to the daily life we engage with others as we come to Self-knowledge. A discussion of the guide, framed inside the voices of those who have participated in this social learning activity, along with a reflection of the implementation of conocimiento at the conference are discussed.

Without a sense of identity, there can be no struggle.
—Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

In our round table/workshop—“Politics of Ethnic Identity: Pedagogical Conocimientos in the Classroom,” at the 2013 NACCS Tejas FOCO regional conference, Jesus Jaime-Diaz—doctoral student and advisee—and I facilitated a session on conocimiento as pedagogical praxis. Our experience with the process became the frame of reference for our work. It is not our intent to engage a theoretical discussion, although concepts such as funds of knowledge that speak to ways of knowing, as is the case with the work of Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti in Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in the Households, Communities, and Classrooms, may inform our work. These scholars conceptualize people as competent and knowledgeable because of their life experiences in a variety of settings, and conocimiento similarly conceptualizes human beings as able, capable, creative, and as carriers of knowledge. Because we begin with the premise of co-creations, conocimiento presupposes that the creation of knowledge must necessarily take place in a critical environment, following Paulo Freire tradition positing that teachers/learners are co-creators of knowledge. Moreover, this approach to learning contests institutional practices whereby students are treated as empty vessels.
awaiting the banking of facts from those who possess expert knowledge, as Freire argued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Knowledge about the social world departs from the general to the specific, depending on our point of departure. For example, examining the development of children and their cognition, Jean Piaget argued that a child’s development determines her or his cognition based on assumptions that begin with the individual. Lev Vygotsky, on the other hand, places knowledge formation in the sociocultural context of environment that later becomes internalized in the individual—this is the notion of *educare* upon which much of the philosophy of conocimiento rests—we know ourselves through others in a multiplicity of settings. With his social constructivist notions of the world, Vygotsky more closely fits the ways in which raza conceptualize knowledge.

The aforementioned theorists, with the exception of Freire, whose notions of knowledge emerged in the context of the favelas in Brazil, examine middle class experiences, while Freire’ emphasizes oppression rather than domination. Edén Torres, in *Chicana Without Apology*, takes on this contradiction as a potential way to blame the victim for their own oppression. In her text, one can conclude that unpacking power from the dominant perspective more readily opens up the possibilities for change through nuanced analysis of knowledge inside the dialectic of oppression/domination. Some of the above theories could frame the work of conocimiento. However, a genealogy of the theories informing the process would be a longer project to undertake.

In this essay, we engage a pedagogical discussion to examine and illustrate the process of doing conocimiento as teaching/learning strategies for coming to knowledge about the Self and others in a social learning environment. This process unfolds in the context of social interaction while actively coming to self-knowledge through reflexivity. The implementation of
conocimiento in the classroom and at the National Association for Chicanas and Chicanos Studies, Tejas FOCO facilitates discussion of this learning experience.

**Why Use Conocimiento?**

When critical pedagogues rely on conocimiento to join in the creation of knowledge, we necessarily begin with the understanding that conocimiento implicates its dialectical quality of desconocimiento or not knowing, also known as “el no.” Through this teaching/learning approach, we become aware and move into consciousness in relationship to the material, social, cultural, and spiritual forces that frame our own coming to self-knowledge. This is particularly the case in relationship to notions of power. We are better able to make visible power inequalities when we tease out and unpack the ways in which conocimiento and desconocimiento inform cultural and ethnic identity and our sense of belongingness.

The process we employ in conocimiento is complimentary to Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s philosophy “that guides your feet along the path, gives you el ánimo to dedicate yourself to transforming perceptions of reality and thus the conditions of life” (540). This praxis is one that initially began under the tutelage of Chilean scholars who immigrated to California’s South Bay Area after the coup in Chile. It was then that Chicanas/os and other progressive educators/activists took to the philosophy of Paulo Freire and devised variant approaches for engaging communities who desired to explore their own liberation. Chart pack papers or butcher paper pieces served as mediums by which citizens made visible their effort to document struggles in the barrios, as we organized our communities to fight for our rights.

Still, conocimiento was not just about struggle. Historically, those who worked in the development of this process include Roberto Vargas and Samuel Martinez—Berkeley students and activists (they published *Razalogia: Community Learning for a New Society* in 1982, Weird Books, and Roberto Vargas’s *Provida Leadership: Raza Student’s Guide to Social Transformation*, 228)
published in 1985 by Razagente Associates, San Francisco, California). Others included Francisco Hernandez, Amalia Gonzalez del Valle, Kathy De Leon, Raymond Segura, Josie Torralba Romero. Soon our practice began to appear at college campuses, community meetings such as Trabajadores de la Raza, and in our work with families and youth in our respective employment sites and community involvements. In San José, California, in collaboration with Margarita Luna Robles, Jorge Gonzalez, Maria Oropeza, Rosemary Cadena, and others, I devised a poétala conocimiento to encourage the creation and validation of barrio poets who wanted to share their work, and used it to continue developing their creative expression with conocimiento as the medium.

Our aim was to organize and document the struggles with which the groups contended, be they family or community issues, or struggles inside educational institutions as first generation students. The emphasis was not on knowing how to write or spell our ideas—it was on learning how to name and take on, in whatever way possible, the inequalities we experienced, often resorting to drawing and performing our experiences, as we moved beyond describing what it was we wanted to get across. Estos foros soon became sites of knowledge that mutually benefited listeners, speakers, and witnesses alike, as we created community and gathered the collective knowledge we gained as we practiced the reciprocity of knowing. With the belief that we all carry knowledge, have the capacity to know, and have variant ways to express it, we asserted that no one single individual can possess all knowledge—we all carry knowledge.

Anzaldúa (This Bridge We Call Home) provides a theoretical foundation for this practice, when she claims que “Llevas la presencia de éste conocimiento contigo. You experience nature as ensouled, as sacred. Éste saber, this knowledge, urges you to cast una ofrenda of images and words across the page como granos de maíz, like kernels of corn” (539). As she conceptualizes,
she clearly articulates the pain of coming to grips with our miseducation or our participation in substandard schooling that teaches to stereotypic notions about raza’s intellectual capacity and abilities, based on tracking or normative knowledge from a Western perspective.

It is inside this hegemonic socialization that we re-experience nuances of institutional oppression and domination, as we navigate the everyday of our lives. That is, depending on our positionality in the context of power, some display notions of superiority and dominance over immigrants, working class, and—worse yet—undocumented students. Privilege by gender, class, and sexuality also play out in the dialectic of oppression/domination. In that context, conocimiento facilitates the unearthing of all the various social positions and locations that frame our identity—without our identities, we are no one.

With few exceptions, engaging conocimiento as pedagogical praxis results in the re-stimulation of the trauma or entitlement that shapes who we are as persons. Anzaldúa suggests that, “[b]y redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they may be empowered” (540). It is in this sharing that we gain a deeper and more insightful understanding of our selves and others. Thus, within the teaching/learning experiences we negotiate, we encounter negative expectations and stereotypes—those presuppositions and worldviews associated with knowledge that makes our group invisible or distorts our reality. Still, with conocimiento, as teachers/learners we encourage each other to open all our senses so that we may guide the process. As Anzaldúa writes: “Attention is multilevel and includes your surroundings, bodily sensations and responses, intuitive takes, emotional reactions to other people and theirs to you, and most important, the images your imagination creates—images connecting all tiers of information and their data” (542).
Conocimiento processes or guides are not for entertainment purposes or empirical tools for collecting data (although with the appropriate approvals and design they could be)—the guides are living instruments that retrieve knowledge that has long been lost or hidden from sight. To become invested learners, we cannot hide in fear of the unknown, rather as critical educators we must, as Anzaldúa posits, confront our traumas and “work through your fear; playing safe could bury you” (544). It is only then that choice becomes an option in the process of conocimiento, as each participant begins to uncover and make visible those fears, secrets, or shames that have kept our family histories and institutional injuries hidden or silent. Conocimiento, thus, inspires a self and other confrontation as we unpack the contradictions of “living in despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness” (45). According to Anzaldúa, this is the only way that we can find order and meaning to the reality that we have experienced so that we can take our story to the world unblocked “from our own power” so that we can then “activate the inner resources” that motivate us to create social justice and social change. Finally, with this approach, we shift realities by developing “an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances” (545).

Throughout the process of conocimiento, and when we voice our experiences, teachers/learners begin to gain an understanding of the ways in which the United States imaginary defuses our power through structural systems that fragment our daily lives as persons marked with second-class status. Through conocimiento we can examine racialized ethnicity, socioeconomic, gender, and sexual inequalities and begin to peel off the embedded layers of colonization imposed on the self and our group, thus providing us an understanding of ethnicity in all its nuances, including the ways in which we disidentify with our roots.
José Esteban Muñoz, in *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, argues that disidentification serves as a concept to analyze the performative qualities of sexual identity. It unfolds “the survival strategies of the minority practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of the subjects who do not conform to the phantasms of citizenship” (74). I argue that, as is the case with queers, Mexican-descent individuals have had to devise variant strategies to negotiate ethnic identity as they interact with misinformation about who they are as persons of color in the context of a white supremacist society that derides them as second-class citizens and devalues them as ethnic members of a group.

Exposed to our racialization and derision we have confronted, through interactions and discussion of our historical legacies we gain insight into our ethnic identity and liberation. It is when we self-interrogate inside multiple identities that we gain agency as social actors, shedding desconocimientos or distorted realities about who we are as citizens of this nation—Americans in name only—and thus learn to contest stereotypes and inequalities that maintain us as internally colonized as devalued people. Still, for some of us, it is better to be second-class Americans, rather than have to negotiate a derided Mexican identity that marks us as non-American. We refuse “to confront the traits and habits distorting how we see reality and inhibiting the full use of our facultades” (Anzaldúa 5+1). As teachers/learners who have lived inside colonizing lived experiences, it is more comfortable to deal with what we know, rather than challenge the practices that define us as second-class or unequal citizens, just as it is safer to teach what we know.

Making visible and unearthing our histories through conocimiento gives us alternative explanations of our Self and our group. By sharing and voicing who we are, we come to self-knowledge as conocimiento brings us to awareness about our reality and into the threshold of
consciousness—a complex state of knowing that facilitates a critical examination of daily life. According to Anzaldúa, “living in nepantla, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems,” (541) motivates us to question the ambivalence and uncertainty of being. It is in that in-between space that we become “aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional obsolete” (541). As teachers/learners we experience hegemonic cultural power when we use “[distorted notions of what it means to be Mexican] to single out and negate those who are ‘different’ because of color, language, notions of reality, or other diversity . . .” (541). If we are to change our communities, and ourselves, this approach to teaching shows the possibilities en conocemos.

**Conocimiento Experiences in the Classroom**

We modified our conocimiento guide to assess the ways in which we understand, examine, and engage ethnic identity, and how we begin to identify ourselves, for our workshop at UT-Pan Am. Each individual would have to examine a multiplicity of sociocultural, psychological, emotional, and spiritual sites we necessarily relate to in our daily lives, to reflect on the ways in which we become conscious and active participants in the creation of knowledge. The guide provides a frame of reference for extracting family histories from both maternal and paternal lines, beginning with various sites for the formation of identity, such as relationship to Self and place in the make up of the family.

To partake in social learning and share knowledge about conocimiento, we handed out each guide, reminding the participants that the process is one that facilitates our coming to knowledge about Self in interaction with community. We encouraged our students or workshop participants to refrain from thinking in binary response of right or wrong, pointing out that our aim is to use conocimiento as a tool that unearths the knowledge we carry, including what we have amassed from formal, informal, official or alternative sites.
We allotted fifteen minutes—with an additional ten if necessary—to complete the conocimiento. We asked the participants to suspend the notion of the conocimiento guide as a questionnaire or survey that taps into their knowledge, emphasizing that the activity is one created to pull together the knowledge we carry about our Self and others, including our relational interactions with family, community, and other institutional arrangements. Moreover, we pointed out that there are often gaps or lack of knowledge about family culture and social histories for any of us. Further, we instructed students or participants to not second-guess themselves, but to write the first concept, idea, or response that came to mind. In addition, we reassured them that we are not concerned with spelling or the ways in which they write their response, so long as the writing is legible.

After completing the process, participants were encouraged to review their answers as they waited for others to complete the process. Students/participants were then instructed to interrogate what they had learned about themselves or others, as they identified trends or patterns in the information, along with clarifying or adding any thoughts or feelings that came to mind by way of reflexión—brief discussion and analysis of what they have learned. At this time, they were also encouraged to engage silences or empty spaces in their narrative, as they were urged to write additional reflective narrative on the comments or free write sections. Finally, as a learning community, participants individually shared their conocimiento with the group or in smaller groups to later contribute what they learned with the larger community, where they share information and begin the process of community building where respect, reciprocity, and mutuality are common grounds that trumps invisibility and anonymity in the creation of knowledge.

With very few exceptions, this type of instruction is outside of the students’/participants’ experiences. Thus, as teachers/learners we must reassure each person to
share only that with which they are comfortable as facilitators deal with the emotional discharges that surface in the community building process.

**Illustrating Conocimiento:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SELF</th>
<th>FAMILY…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>I like to be called</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Depending on the course content, ontology and pedagogy merge to provide foundational questions to create a conocimiento guide. For example, in Latina/o Cultural Expressions, a Mexican American Studies (MAS) course I instruct, the categories that guide our conocimiento focus on three generations of both paternal and maternal lines, and include open-ended statements about: Religion, Work and Education Legacy, Ethnic Identity—Self and Ancestral, Personal/Social Identity, Gender, Place of Birth, Immigration, Family Income, among others.
RELIGION: For each relative listed below, identify each with their respective religion …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maternal (MG) Grandparents</th>
<th>Paternal (PG) Grandparents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>MG-mother</td>
<td>PG-mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>MG-father</td>
<td>PG-father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WORK LEGACY: Identify each job held the longest by each member of your family line …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maternal (MG) Grandparents</th>
<th>Paternal (PG) Grandparents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>MG-mother</td>
<td>PG-mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>MG-father</td>
<td>PG-father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EDUCATION LEGACY: Document the years of education for each member of the family …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maternal (MG) Grandparents</th>
<th>Paternal (PG) Grandparents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>MG-mother</td>
<td>PG-mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>MG-father</td>
<td>PG-father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The section outlined above facilitates an examination of status and class locations. The emphasis is on education and employment, as these concepts are often associated with class mobility, albeit the relationship also shows the influence of religion. In Mexican Americans in the Southwest, another course for our BA in MAS, the ways in which structural patterns or systemic designs shape the historical legacies for students emerge as they examine the formation of a dual wage system and a separate and unequal education.

By probing the educational and employment patterns of the learning community, students/participants come to learn that their grandparents or parents did not have a choice for an education—rather their only option was to become employed in agriculture or
manufacturing—with very few exceptions of a great-grandfather, father, or few mothers obtaining a higher education. With the retrieval of their family history, however incomplete, students or participants soon link the knowledge they carry to those findings presented by David Montejano in Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986, and Vicki L. Ruiz in Out of the Shadows, and other texts about Mexican American experiences. Other foci relate to the examination of contemporary or continuing issues we confront in our daily lives, such as immigration and wages:

My take on immigration is …

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Family Income – To the best of my knowledge, our family income is:

____ Under $10,000

____ $11,000 - $20,000

____ $21,000 - $30,000

____ $31,000 - $40,000

____ $41,000 and above

____ I decline to disclose my family income

Those who participate in conocimiento learn to understand the ways in which socioeconomic class and other social constructions of identity obfuscate the power differentials complicit in the privilege and entitlement of wealth, race, and other social positions that mediate equality, justice, and fairness in our nation-state. Moreover, problematizing such
categories provides students insight into the conditions of their communities of upbringing. This peels the layers of internalized oppression or responsibility for the systemic inequalities they have experienced in their communities and in their education. Thus, knowing family income is but one way to analyze each student’s circumstances.

Most learn to understand variant knowledges they carry, as they conceive of their families as a source of creating meaning for being in the world. A discussion of social positions allows the students or participants to interrogate gender arrangements and other structural concerns. For example, reflections about language use, education, and the values and beliefs upheld by family members become central in our discussions, as facilitated by the conocimiento focus below. Awareness about identity increases.
Check the response that most closely reflects your family experiences with housing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rent</th>
<th>Buy</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All members of my mother’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most members of my mother’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some members of my mother’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No members of my mother’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All members of my father’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most members of my father’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some members of my father’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No members of my father’s family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Household / Family Forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I grew up with a stay-at-home mother …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I come from a single parent home …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents / other relatives were part of my family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I grew up with a step-mother …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was raised by a step-father …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was adopted into the family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family consists of two moms …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two dads make up my family …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender: (Check appropriate category.) Female _____  Male _____
Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My first language is …</th>
<th>I am fluent in …</th>
<th>I can read and write …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education (Fill in the first two cells, then circle the appropriate answer.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The high school I attended was …</th>
<th>Neighborhood I grew up is called …</th>
<th>I attended public school …</th>
<th>I went to private school …</th>
<th>Attended public and private schools …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My mother believes education is …

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

With education, my father believes I can …

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

For both sides of my family, education means …

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Generation in College … Mother’s side __________________ Father’s side … ____________
The Meaning of Ethnic Identity—Conocimiento Knowledge

Since 1999, when I first arrived at the university that employs me, I have used conocimiento. Premised on the beliefs that Hispanic or Mexican-descent students are knowledgeable about their ethnicity and how it frames their everyday experiences living in a community that has over 50 percent Mexican- or Hispanic-descent individuals, I learned that more often than not, this was not the case. Perceiving themselves as the majority population, most had not problematized the meaning of ethnicity inside the derisiveness of being Mexican in Texas (See Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986).

Currently, this trend seems to be changing. In the most recent courses I taught, with a total of 60 students or 69 percent of the cohort, students displayed deep knowledge of ethnicity and the ways in which this identity contributes to their sense of self, as they connected it with family and community.

Starting with both paternal and maternal grandparents, students identified their ancestral ethnicity over three generations. Among this most recent group, twelve individuals identified as mixed heritage, with two Whites qualifying their identity as mixed with Portuguese and Mexican. Eleven named themselves Mexican across all generations, nine as Hispanic, and four adding the qualifier African opted for Black as their ethnic identity. One student, a MAS major, offered:

"Ethnicity] has become a REAL part of how I identify myself in society. I've embraced it because I respect the struggle of my family members and I know that I can help make a difference in our culture through education and mentorship for our youth.

In his statement, and in most other responses, there is an association to the individual and community, when speaking about ethnicity. As one stated, "It helps to group a person to a
culture, identity and community. It matters because it shapes a person’s history.” For them, understanding ethnicity facilitated coming to cultural knowledge, and knowing their ethnic allows them to “know more about yourself and your culture,” as “ethnicity is a part of who we are and represents a meaningful past.” One nuanced the inequality experience, when adding: “Ethnicity shapes how you will be treated and perceived and judged for the rest of your life,” because “it is a part of your character and your identity.”

Suffice it to say, students’ notions of identity did not just focus on cultural expressions or understandings of culture, rather students recognized that, “[a] person’s identity is shaped by their struggles and privileges that come with their ethnicity.” Still, pointing out that even when they have the privilege of citizenship, “there is more to me as well and I want to know/learn.” The two exceptions in this summative analysis were a mixed heritage student and one majority student. The Anglo-Mexican saw the point of privilege, when he added: “I’m proud to be of Hispanic ethnicity because more scholarships are available and it looks good on resumes,” while the Anglo student became the one dissenting voice: “It matters but it should not define you as a person.” This is a typical response for students who have never had to problematize their ethnicity or the entitlement of white supremacy.

In addition to documenting ancestral ethnicity, students provide their own ethnic identification by selecting from the options provided. When self-identifying, outside of their family history, 24 students or 34 percent chose a single identifier. Sixty-six percent opted to choose multiple identity categories, with a minimum of two identities and a maximum of five reflecting the ethnicity of their ancestors. Of those who opted to identify as mixed heritage, 66 percent were female, who selected three to five ethnic categories. While males represented only 34 percent of the population, they most often chose two categories, with one opting for three
and another identifying five. Ethnicity, in the lived experiences of these students, thus surfaced as multiple, fluid, and contextual.

Still, ten percent of the student cohort expressed that “Ethnic Identity does not matter.” In their comments, each student emphasized her or his humanity, not to sabotage ethnicity—as is most often the case with Anglo students—but to underscore its importance, as each expressed their right to equal treatment, implying awareness about living inside a culture that does not give them the same treatment. Capturing the nuances of identity, MAS major offered:

How can I know the person I am, if I don’t know where I come from? The community where I live, my history allows me to understand my culture and why I speak the way I do, and practice the beliefs I have—from religion to mal de ojo—I am my ethnicity.

Once again, in this and most responses, an association with the individual and the community emerges. Some clarified: “It helps to group a person to a culture, identity and community. It matters because it shapes a person’s history.” There is recognition for the importance of history as taught in the family. “Ethnicity is a part of who we are and represents a meaningful past,” and it “shapes how you will be treated and perceived and judged for the rest of your life.”

Clearly, the students’ notion of identity did not just focus on cultural expressions to describe a surface understanding of culture, rather they recognized that, “[a] person’s identity is shaped by their struggles and privileges that come with their ethnicity,” with the caution that, “[i]t matters but it should not define you as a person.” This speaks to the ambivalence about being in an institution of higher education where they constantly negotiate their sense of belonging.

To cross-reference the talking and doing of ethnicity, students respond to open-ended statements. It is how they gained the option to examine the meaning of ethnicity in the context of sociocultural expectations, as outlined below.
Ethnic Identity:

The category or categories that reflect my ethnic identity is/are: (Check all that apply to you.)

- [ ] Hispanic, not of Mexican-descent
- [ ] Mexicana/o
- [ ] Chicana/o
- [ ] Mexican American
- [ ] Mexican
- [ ] Latina/o
- [ ] White, non-Hispanic
- [ ] Black or African American

Ethnic identity – (Check statement that best reflects your beliefs, elaborating on the space provided.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic identity matters because …</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity does not matter because …</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Latino stereotypes I know about include:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Mexican stereotypes: (Fill in a response in each of the boxes provided below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I’ve heard …</th>
<th>Others have used against me …</th>
<th>I use …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When others use stereotypes to refer to others, I feel …

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Other open-ended statements provide a writing space whereby students or participants have the opportunity to think through and reflect on the ways in which they have conceptualized themselves as ethnic beings. With the exception of Free Speech, which often becomes associated with notions of Americanization and equality, the prior two elicit information about the knowledge they gained through the conocimiento.

Other thoughts:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Teaching/Learning Interactions in a Roundtable/Workshop Approach

The conocimiento guide previously outlined facilitated our roundtable/workshop at the 2013 National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas FOCO at the University of Texas-Pan American. Approximately twenty-five members attended, including two who arrived late into the process but remained to witness our interactions. Included in the audience were undergraduates, graduates, and recently minted doctors, as well as three professors from Texas and California. Co-facilitator Jesus Jaime-Diaz assisted.

To start our conocimiento, we began with brief introductions—first name only and institutional affiliation—followed by a discussion about teaching/learning pedagogical strategies for coming to knowledge about the Self in the context of our learning interactions with each other, clarifying that regardless of rank and status each person would participate in the process. Moreover, we stated that it was our intent to impart and share our knowledge about conocimiento—Jesus as a mentee-in-training—by sharing our completed guides. Before they put pen to paper, however, I instructed the participants to refrain from thinking about
their responses as right or wrong, rather to see this as an archeological process where they were unearthing knowledge they carry, including what they have amassed from formal/informal and official sites of knowledge, as well as their lived experiences and cultural legacy.

They were given fifteen minutes to complete the guide and reminded that the conocimiento design was to explore knowledge about the Self in relationship to others, including family, community, and institutional everyday interactions. Cautioned to not second-guess or doubt themselves, all were encouraged to enter the first concept, idea, or response that came to mind.

Memories and Emotions in the Unearthing of Hidden Histories

With more than twenty years of experience of doing conocimiento, I have learned to come prepared to engage emotional work and to mediate the energy that often surfaces for those who do conocimiento, and to expect resistance from those who fear exposure and are not the sharing-type. As teachers/learners, we must be prepared to engage emotional discomfort when those who are participating experience internalized oppression or domination, depending on the trauma or entitlement inscribed in those who are participating.

Compassion and love are the paths that guide this teaching learning/experience, and we begin with the recognition that each person has had a life path that deviates from our own. Each one of us brings unique ways of understanding our relationship to each other, communities, the nation, and the globe. For these reasons, when those participating show their discomfort or uneasiness, facilitators must be ready to guide and place in context their experience, affirming their right to express the emotions that emerge as a result of speaking or making visible something they did not previously know or recognize.
After they completed and reviewed their responses—to identify the gaps, patterns, or trends that emerged in the workshop—participants spoke about the one thing they learned about themselves or their family. All had the opportunity to respond, with the understanding that they could pass, although I reserved the option to elicit their response, reminding them that we were creating a learning community and the best way to engage in social learning is by sharing the knowledge we bring into the process.

Emotions and new findings surfaced for every one present at the workshop. Each person learned something about the Self in relationships to others that might have not been previously obvious, including historical gaps and missing family connections that had been lost through migration and immigration of ancestors.

**Conclusion: Conociendo in Process**

In our 2013 NACCS Tejas FOCO session, roundtable/workshop participants learned the philosophical framework for conocimiento. They completed the guide, discussed the process, and engaged in the creation of knowledge in a collaborative learning environment whereby each participant did their part to illustrate and exemplify the meaning and context of their experiences. Those who participated expressed their gratitude for having learned how to use conocimiento and some verbalized the desire to continue using this approach in their teaching/learning experiences.

As the session closed, Jesus Jaime-Diaz and I made each other available to discuss the process with anyone who was interested. Several participants remained and asked insightful questions. Because we did not have an agreement for documenting the process, we are not able to speak to the specificities of our session. Each participant, including the facilitators, gained new insight and knowledge about the process.
I have argued that a discussion and illustration of conocimiento facilitates an examination of various structures of inequality and the ways in which these maintain or impose hierarchical power relations that keep people of color subordinated. It makes visible and problematizes sociocultural arrangements that keep people Mexican-descent subordinated. A historical analysis of prior generations and their educational and employment legacies and ethnic notions of their experiences served to create historical narratives in the making. Through this process, we created a space whereby students/participants critically examined their respective legacies by sharing a living history that provides cultural, social, and political frames of reference for understanding individual and collective experiences. A collective analysis allowed the participants to experience the ways in which oppressed racialized ethnic groups negotiate cultural hegemony in the United States.
Works Cited


Community-Based Projects and the Performing and Visual Arts: Promoting Cultural Dialogue

Elena de Costa

Interdisciplinary collaborations between classroom and community can create learning strategies in meaningful contexts. They provide students and community with engaging experiences placing them in participatory roles leading to consciousness-raising, dialogue, and activism. Active and experiential learning through the performing and visual arts can be one of the hallmarks for developmental shifts in thinking, involving students in their own learning processes in stimulating ways. Furthermore, learning in social contexts is critical to the development of a variety of skills, including problem-solving, creativity, and life-long learning. Through this practical approach to learning, students gain confidence in their own abilities, discover innovative ways to overcome obstacles and turn a class project into a life experience. This essay explores student learning outcomes from a theatre / photography project for a Spanish class guided by community-based participatory research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. The campus and community workshops engage participants in building partnerships and strengthening community ownership, while also disseminating cross-cultural information to a broad audience. Participatory performances and visuals serve to bring together multiple communities, invigorating partnerships and implementing creative collaborations with educational institutions.

Experiential learning through the arts allows communities to engage in dialogue in safe public spaces. In our annual project Latino Images, Voices and Visions: A Traveling Pictorial Exhibit and Workshop, photos of Latinos in the community are accompanied by inspiring bilingual quotes of the person(s) photographed, the verbal text complementing the visual image. Participants in this traveling community photo exhibit and dialogue write their initial impressions on flip charts as they look at the powerful photos and quotes, and later discuss their comments/impressions. A culminating bilingual theatre performance on the theme of immigration (Latino diasporas) with the photos as a backdrop follows, including an audience talk-back with the performers and director. Facilitation of discussions between Latinos and Anglos is focused on exploring racism and discrimination in the local community and on contributing to social awareness and viable change to address issues raised in both fora. It is an interdisciplinary collaborative project with the Theatre, Photography and Spanish programs at Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin (a city with the fastest growing Latino ethnic
community in Waukesha county). Our motto is Communicate, Collaborate, Celebrate — the key words in building understanding between cultures or any groups exhibiting diversity—racial, ethnic, religious, ideological. The entire project is a semester-long initiative held on campus and in several community venues. Memory is the Soul of a People and these photographs record fleeting moments in the daily lives of our neighbors.

As is the tradition for the annual bilingual performance, the theatrical piece this year (April 2013) was an adaptation from original works. The performance itself was student directed and student performed with collaboration between theatre students and Spanish students. This year’s performance blended the short stories of Francisco Jiménez of California, the dramatic Chicano one-acts of the renowned Luis Valdez of the Teatro Campesino, and the poetry of the Chilean Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda from his Canto General verses in praise of the laborer everywhere. The mural piece on the theme created by Taller Yonke artists from Nogales, Mexico and art students served as the backdrop for the performance. Followed by an audience talk-back with theatre, Spanish, and art faculty facilitators as well as the two muralist artists-in-residence and the student director and performers, this performance engaged dialogue on a number of issues: How are migrants’ narratives collectively reconstructed over time in the national memory of the host and origin countries? How are migrants represented in our mindset? How does literature and art (murals) portray immigration and emigration? How are racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and discrimination communicated in our culture? The collage adaptation of works (narrative, theatre, and poetry and background music) that was prepared in a bilingual creation, put all the joys, sorrows, history and culture of La Raza’s struggles on stage to be examined, to be remade, to pass on to others and to demonstrate to the audience that there are no easy answers to the questions posed. Bilingual programs were provided to attendees.
The Civically-Engaged Student in Community-Based Participatory and Action Research

Civic initiatives are ongoing in democratic societies, but only some of them promote campus conversations about higher education. What are the contexts in which civic values and civic practices operate on a college campus? How do the values of diversity, autonomy, and the common good affect any civic mission of higher education? What are the relevant connections among rights, laws, and freely-met responsibilities in an educational context? Are there global civic values that affect policies worldwide? Are there distinct civic values on which America’s ‘dream of democracy’ is based? And, finally, what does a civically-engaged student look like?

In response to this last question, a civically-engaged student actively participates in the public life of his community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good. There is an institutional imperative to provide a comprehensive climate wherein students develop skills to live, learn and work in a pluralistic society in which they are active participants. Civic engagement is a philosophy, pedagogy, and model for community involvement and development that is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards with civics as a signature component in the Spanish program of Carroll University. And the examples of the aforementioned Community-Based Participatory Research Projects (CBPR) and subsequent Participatory Action Research (PAR) are designed to open a dialogue and serve as a tool for cross-cultural communication in a diverse community. Indeed, CBPR provides a framework to empower our Hispanic community by partnerships with our faculty, students, and the numerous non-profit organizations in which we complete service learning components of our coursework. The CBPR model views community participation, in all levels of the design, as essential to the research process and the end-products—a photographic exhibit and a theatre production. The community’s immediate and on-going involvement in the preparatory phase is based on the belief that the community
members 1) are qualified to investigate their own experiences; 2) provide detailed descriptions of social context; 3) establish congruity between the topic and reality; and 4) are entitled to hold the status of researcher.

What are the criteria that shape a civically-engaged student? A civically-engaged student participates in meaningful and personally relevant campus and community activities. Such experiences incorporate multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one’s relationship to society. Furthermore, civic engagement in our ethnically diverse society promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all civically-engaged participants. Community partnerships to foster civic engagement are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs while providing students with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating experiences with guidance from community and faculty facilitators. A simple definition of civics is “the study of the privileges and obligations of its citizens.” But civic issues are not discipline specific; centering on civics assists the student in seeing issues from multiple academic perspectives. As Higgenbottom argues in the Opinion Papers,

We all have an important stake in the quality of each other’s civic education. While on the one hand, different educational paths lead us to different jobs, salaries, working conditions, and lifestyles, our common humanity, culture and democratic commitments draw us together. That which each of us has in common—democratic citizenship—is a public office replete with rights and privileges, but also mutual obligations (7).

Additionally, centering on civics through a critical issues lens allows the academic institution to build community through the ability to participate in a campus/community-wide common conversation. Cultural experiences provide students with the opportunity to deepen their
understanding of the problems and forces shaping today's changing world through local experiential / immersion experiences. Five key words summarize the intent of such cultural experiences:

Communication: To communicate in the target language in a culturally appropriate manner.

Cultures: To gain knowledge and understanding of the target culture.

Connections: To connect with other disciplines and acquire information.

Comparisons: To develop insight into the nature of language and culture.

Communities: To participate in bilingual communities in local settings as well as abroad.

A civically-responsible citizen must be able to understand a topic from many perspectives, recognize the audience addressed, and effectively communicate thoughts. A civically-minded person needs to make a number of connections related to topic, audience, and method of communication. Students also need to make connections among the many varied disciplines of their academic program in order to progress in their lifelong travels of education and the development of lifelong skills. One of the best ways that students learn to connect disparate materials, ideas, and information is through participation in interdisciplinary experiences. By using the knowledge generated in their participatory experiences (service learning, volunteerism, internships, and participant-observations), community and students working together are able to identify changes needed to bring marginalized communities together with mainstream communities in effective dialogic exchange.
Hispanic Images, Voices, Visions: Traveling Photo Exhibits and Workshops using CBPR

What does civic responsibility mean? As defined by Linda Sax, civic responsibility means “active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good.” Indeed, interdisciplinary collaborations between classroom and community create learning strategies in meaningful contexts. They provide learners with engaging experiences which place them in participatory roles leading to consciousness-raising, dialogue, and activism. Active and experiential learning through the visual arts can be one of the hallmarks for developmental shifts in thinking, involving students in their own learning processes in stimulating ways. Active and interactive learning in social contexts are critical to the development of a variety of skills, including problem-solving, creativity, and life-long learning. Deeper learning can be stimulated by getting past the minimalist notion of subject coverage if students are challenged to think critically and creatively within a performative setting with the students themselves engaging audiences in talk-backs which explore social problems and how they might be resolved.

Developmentalists encourage a social context for learning as well as group learning settings whenever possible. In student workshops presented in venues throughout the community, the interdependence of student workshop teams provides a rich milieu for creative ideas, support and feedback. Civic engagement in our ethnically diverse society promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all civically-engaged participants. It provides a comprehensive climate where students will develop skills to live, learn and work in a pluralistic society in which they are active participants. The visual and performing arts in bilingual contexts bring communities together to recognize real-life stereotypes and prejudices in a framework that is developmental, individual, transitional, and transformative. Performance-based teaching is an interactive approach to cultural awareness. Students and community alike
participate in the exploration of cross-cultural conflicts through visual and verbal engagement. It empowers them to identify prejudices, discuss how they might be resolved, and then engage in community action projects to alleviate them. Collaborations, open communication, and the celebration of difference are the key concepts in building understanding between cultures or any groups exhibiting diversity—racial, ethnic, religious, ideological.

A substantial portion of our cultural heritage from the 20th century is recorded in enormous collections of spoken-word materials. Indeed, a great deal of what we know of past communities’ and peoples’ daily activities (i.e. in immigrant enclaves, rural farming towns, and military encampments) cannot be gleaned from books, digests, or newspapers. Rather, it can only be revealed to us through stories, interviews, and spoken dialogue, or what is known as oral history. Oral history is one of the ways in which people share memories, and how people hear and respond to them is partly shaped by the contexts of their telling and listening. The Hispanic Voices and Images project focuses on a variety of perspectives designed to educate the campus community (students, faculty, and staff) as well as the larger Waukesha community beyond the confines of Carroll University. The goal is to educate non-Hispanics about the fastest growing subculture in our community as well as to celebrate Hispanic cultural heritage and its many enriching contributions to our community. At a time when the topic of Hispanic immigration is one of heated debate in our country, it is imperative that diverse communities come together in productive, open dialogue. In a period when Carroll University is actively seeking a more culturally diverse student body, it is prudent to open our mind as well as the doors of our institution.

Mindful of contemporary concerns, open fora address, but are not limited to, the following issues: archiving memory, healing memories, memory and community, memory and trauma, memory and pleasurable recollections (photographic portraits, performance, theatre,
music), heritage issues and belief systems, diasporas and cross-cultural dialogue (stories in translation). The Hispanic Voices and Images project is designed to be a gathering of voices, past and present, to initiate a dialogue among all community constituents, a vox populi and interrogating discourse, where young people can make a difference in their community rather than just be spectators living on the margins of our city. Students need to take a more active role in their community—after all, they will be residing here for four or more years of their life. The project provides our students with the opportunity to work across disciplines with other students and community members, and gives them a more positive image as community participants and activists and life-long learners who know how to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways. In addition to fostering communication among students and the larger Waukesha community (both Anglo and Hispanic), The Hispanic Voices and Images project focuses on the following research components: oral histories and the process of interviewing; the effect of telling one’s story to the listener; the examination of oral history in a wide range of environments (i.e., museums, heritage agencies, academic institutions, law courts, radio and television, performing arts, community projects); and the taking of retratos or photographic black-and-white portraits with personal bilingual quotes—all formats expressing a relationship to the past through a particular cultural medium.

This presentation of interactive methodologies to instruct students focuses on performance-based projects used at Carroll University: Hispanic Voices, Images, and Visions: A Traveling Pictorial Exhibit and Workshops (Remember the Past, Imagine the Future), each focusing on student engagement on cultural and sociopolitical issues within a Hispanic context. Performance-based teaching is an interactive approach to cultural awareness. Students and community alike participate in the exploration of cross-cultural conflicts through visual and verbal engagement. It empowers them to identify prejudices, discuss how they might be
resolved, and then engage in community action projects to alleviate them. Interactive discussion of engaging methodologies for exploring racism and discrimination follows. The photographs in this exhibit celebrate the presence of Hispanics in our community—their traditions, their values, their humanity. Since Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic population in Waukesha county, in addition to the many contributions of their language and culture, are their expressions of friendship, community, and an ardent desire to be welcomed and included as equals among us. These photographs were a joint venture between Professor Elena De Costa’s Advanced Spanish Conversation and Composition class and Professor Phil Krejcarek’s Photography class, both of Carroll University. They have been and continue to be shared in exhibit in numerous venues in Waukesha, accompanied by student presentations on Hispanic culture.

**Remembering the Past—Imagining the Future: Artistic Expression and the Liberal Arts**

The Performing and Visual Arts are a fundamental means of human expression and communication. Contemporary culture is suffused with visual imagery; we are surrounded by non-verbal cues and visual messages, and visual modes of communication are omnipresent. Thus to be able to speak a visual language and understand the process by which such communication succeeds are useful skills. In the context of a liberal arts education, the study of art introduces students to a non-verbal but rigorous, form of thinking and expression. These photographic images of Hispanics in our community and on the Carroll University campus are complemented by inspiring quotes from their subjects—the verbal complementing the visual! Such projects are in keeping with Carroll University’s globalized curriculum and focus on the study of culture, contemporary issues, and dialogic communication beyond the classroom in real-life situations and community applications. They are also relevant to pedagogical innovations inasmuch as the content and methodology of this project present a creative
approach to learning—collaborative, experiential, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, enriching both in content and approach.

**Project Objectives and Anticipated Outcomes and Methods to Attain Outcomes**

Our goal was to powerfully portray the inequality and injustice, the discrimination, and struggle of Mexican-Americans specifically and immigrants in general in the American milieux through the context of a series of photographs or dramatized vignettes on the topic. Project outcomes include raising consciousness of immigrant problems, beginning a dialogue both in the attendees’ talk-backs and beyond. Outcomes include cultural knowledge (values and belief systems), cultural awareness (attitudes, openness, flexibility), and cultural sensitivity (cultural differences and similarities without value judgments.)

**Value of Projects to Faculty, Students, Community, Programs**

The project directly relates to our cross-cultural seminars and experiences from Carroll University’s General Education program, their faculty and students; relative to the fastest growing ethnic population in Waukesha County and its immigrant community from varied Spanish-speaking countries, many of Mexican origin; topic of contemporary concern—the role of Hispanics and immigrants in general in our society; theme of the worker-immigrant. The theatre project, in particular, was a result of our trip to Borderlinks in Tucson and Nogales in January 2012 and the contacts made there.

**Timeline for the Theatre-Mural Project, Anticipated Dissemination of Results**

We scheduled a series of 10-day workshops and lectures of two artists (Taller Yonke) in collaboration with faculty and student interpreters to assist with communication (April 14–24, 2013). The unique interdisciplinary and experiential nature of this collaboration was presented at various round-tables on campus and in the community. Taller Yonke is the name of the artist collective begun by Guadalupe Serrano and Luis Diego Taddei of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico.
Their work focuses on human rights, particularly around the unique issues of life in a border town. In dealing with the problems of a transitory population in their hometown, they work to create a sense of belonging and pride within their city through public works. Their work also addresses political concerns of regulation and humane treatment of individuals caught between two countries and ideologies. Guadalupe Serrano is a founding member of the Taller de Arte Público Yonke (Junk Public Art Workshop). The purpose of their workshop is to reclaim public spaces that have been contaminated by commercial and political propaganda, and to integrate public art into those spaces to add human and cultural value to the city of Nogales. Taller Yonke has placed sculptures and murals on the border fence among many other locations. The artists have been invited to create works with local artists in many Spanish-speaking communities from the Basque region of Spain, to Colombia as well as creating collaborative works in the United States.

The mural medium was selected for this project since it is an artwork in which the architectural and/or environmental elements of the space are integral to the work. Murals may be painted directly onto walls, or on large canvases attached to walls. In the case of this project, we created a mural on canvas that was a backdrop for our bilingual theatre production on the theme of immigration. This project provided the Carroll and Waukesha communities an opportunity to discuss issues of immigration through public lectures as well as smaller conversations in the community, in the classrooms and through the theatre experience on April 24, 2013. The artists from Taller Yonke worked with painting students from concept to execution of the mural. This professional interaction with the muralists gave students a unique opportunity to work with international public artists as well as to learn how to develop public projects on important community issues. Since several Cross-Cultural domestic and
international Experiences (CCEs) are being developed on this topic, this on-campus experience also generated interest in these off-campus programs.

**Collaborations**

Theatre, Spanish, Art and Photography programs; community collaborations with La Casa de Esperanza, United Community Center and Latino Arts Gallery of Milwaukee; the Waukesha community—these all were integrated into our project. This endeavor presented a unique opportunity for faculty, students, artists, and community to collaborate in a single interdisciplinary cooperative endeavor to explore the development of cultural identity among Latino immigrants in the community. Diversity Awareness and Training play a significant role in businesses and organizations of all sorts in our globalized society. This performance was designed to promote cross-cultural awareness and dialogue. Given our campus-wide initiative toward multiculturalism and cross-cultural understanding through experiences (both domestic and international) in our new General Education curriculum, the performing arts provide an ideal venue to bring diverse communities (students and faculty, Hispanics and Anglos) together in a setting of entertainment and education.

**Participatory Action Research Community Projects: Service Learning and Civic Education for Engagement**

The visual and performing arts have the special power to give form to our imaginations. In communities where there is no art, it is hard to imagine a better world. Those voices are stifled and we are weaker as a society. What are the unique roles and responsibilities of an artist in community settings? How do artists shape work to meet the parameters of a community institution without compromising personal aesthetic values? As we continue to explore and interact with residents and institutions in different neighborhoods and learn about the lives and personal experiences of those who live there, they often become engaged not only as artists but also as citizens. Community artistic endeavors work best when all involved take the time to
build relationships with individuals and institutions in the neighborhoods where they are working. This means that the commitment goes beyond the life of the project and the scope is larger than the art itself. It also requires thoughtful listening to community partners as they speak about their vision. Access leads to stewardship. The scholarship of engagement redefines our research and teaching missions to include research that addresses real-world problems and pedagogy that creates involved and committed citizens. Teaching materials from the Teaching Tolerance program of the Southern Poverty Law Center, The Advocates for Human Rights and Rethinking Schools publications are adopted or adapted to specific courses in the curriculum for ideas generation and implementation. All activities involve our university students in interdisciplinary service learning projects in Hispanic community contexts. In such contexts, students practice what they are learning in their disciplines in community settings where their work benefits others. In our case, we work closely with the Visual and Performing Arts Department (VPA), which includes photography, theatre, and art to inform and enrich our local Anglo and Latino community.

In her widely-discussed essay on “Teaching Thinking: Moral and Political Considerations,” Elizabeth Minnich asserts that, “thinking is exploratory, suggestive... holds us open and able to engage with others—thereby opening us to what is unique about individuals, contexts, and situations.” (20) And so civic learning and teaching provide a vehicle to integrate thought and action; combine diverse pedagogical approaches and educational practices; and engage students, faculty, and other partners on campus and in the community. It includes information and ideas on how students, faculty, and the local community can work together to address problems in society; how campus and community partners can collaborate in mutually beneficial ways; and how learning and teaching can contribute to higher education, civic engagement, and community change. As Malcom Gladwell points out in The Tipping Point,
broad change both within the scholarly institution and local community by a few people properly placed, promotes the idea of engagement. Within institutions of higher learning, civic engagement is adapted to disciplinary culture, in a context where society’s expectations and need for our energy is continuously growing.

Service-learning is now recognized as a highly effective pedagogical tool in a number of studies, including that of Dilafruz Williams on preparing undergraduates for responsible political engagement by participatory activities in community settings. Simply put, students learn better by doing—by putting the knowledge they are learning in the classroom to work in the real world. Moreover, service-learning can assist institutions of higher learning bridge the gap between their campuses and local communities. One way to achieve both of these goals is to design courses that use service-learning to teach about and work toward social justice (for examples of such courses, refer to the “Profiles of Service” as posted at www.involved.tcu.edu/sl_projects.asp).

Essentially, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) refer to research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it. Participatory Action Research is not just research which is hoped to be followed by action. It is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants. Nor is it simply an exotic variant of consultation. Instead, it aims to be active co-research, by and for those to be helped. Nor can it be used by one group of people to get another group of people to do what is thought best for them—whether that is to implement a central policy or an organizational or service change. Instead, it tries to be a genuinely democratic or non-coercive process whereby those to be
helped, determine the purposes and outcomes of their own inquiry. Mere volunteerism does not automatically lead to speaking out on public matters, no matter how related the activity is to students’ areas of concern. We need to help our students to take the lessons of their service a step further to become advocates and witnesses in direct contact with the problems of our community and the people whom these issues directly impact using the linguistic, cross-cultural, and sociopolitical skills that they are exposed to in the classroom. Indeed, a key component to participation in democracy is service. Thus, service-learning, when properly exercised, becomes both a mode of action and a method of inquiry. Service-learning necessarily engages us in the method of political inquiry. It necessarily engages us in the politics of democracy, and, by extension, life—the cornerstone of the Humanities and a liberal arts education.

Conclusions

The year 2012 witnessed an increase in Latino participation in the democratic process, leading political commentators to question the continued value of anti-immigrant rhetoric. There is a national consensus about the need to reform the immigration process. The Obama administration has recently instituted a deferred action program that offers better work and educational opportunities to immigrant children. Community organizations and faith communities are eager to address the injustices in education, health, housing, and local government, but lack experience or knowledge of best practices in outreach to minority and majority communities. Institutions of higher education need to prepare the professionals of the future to bridge the growing achievement divide between immigrants and local populations. By providing programming on these issues, colleges and universities can provide community leadership that allows institutions of higher education to showcase institutional commitments to inclusivity and service learning. The interdisciplinary initiatives formed in Community-
Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) described in this essay, together with ongoing service-learning programs to complement classroom instruction and meet community needs, place civic engagement front and center as learning tools. Some strategies and lessons that proved to be particularly effective for our CBPR/PAR projects include 1) developing an in-depth understanding of the community ethnic culture; 2) developing mutual respect and trust with community members and study participants; 3) appreciating and praising community partners' knowledge, expertise, and experiences; 4) developing a sense of ownership by incorporating their needs, ideas, suggestions, and opinions and empowering study participants to make decisions concerning the study approach and wording; 5) soliciting participant feedback and clarification of study results and involving them in disseminating the study findings to their community. The mandate for our institutions of learning in the 21st century is to engage through actions as well as classroom teaching by building bridges, breaking barriers, and bringing diverse communities together in dialogue.

Notes
1 As of the census of 2010, the racial makeup of the city was 88.1% White, 2.3% African American, 0.4% Native American, 3.5% Asian, 3.5% from other races, and 2.1% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 12.1% of the population.
2 Taller Yonke is the name of the artist collective begun by Guadalupe Serrano and Luis Diego Taddei of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. For more on Taller Yonke, refer to the following websites: http://borderwallinthecity.blogspot.com/2011/06/binational-effort-helps-rescue-border.html and http://www.nuevodia.com.mx/local/buscan-proyectar-arte-nogalense-en-espana/
3 I view CBPR and PAR as a methodology within a total experiential process (ensuring satisfactory productive cycle of life and labor in human communities). The aim is to achieve “power” (a finding of voice, people power) and not merely “growth” for the grassroots population. This total process simultaneously encompasses education, research, and action, whose ultimate goal is to improve the plight of marginalized groups and to advance them toward shared goals of social change by their own participatory initiatives. It has both short-term and long-term goals.
4 BorderLinks (www.borderlinks.org) is a bi-national non-profit organization that leads educational delegations in the exploration of border issues. It prides itself on providing a 360 degree view of border and immigration issues. BorderLinks' Mission and Vision statements are follows: Mission Statement: "BorderLinks is an international leader in experiential education that raises awareness and inspires action around global political economics. BorderLinks grew out of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980’s when faith communities, universities, and other organizations rallied to advocate on behalf of thousands of refugees fleeing persecution in Central America. Today, BorderLinks’ educational programs focus on issues of immigration, community formation, development, and social justice in the
borderlands between Mexico, the U.S and beyond. As a bi-national organization, BorderLinks brings people together to build bridges of solidarity across North and Latin American borders and promote intercultural understanding and respect.” Vision Statement: “BorderLinks envisions a world in which people, within and across social borders, respect and care for each other, value and celebrate differences, and build healthy and just communities where everyone has equal opportunity for a full and dignified life.”

Works Cited

Works Consulted
Towards Implementing Culturally Relevant Curriculum: How 17 Words Inspired Research

Dagoberto Eli Ramírez

Texas districts approved Texas Association of School Boards’ Update 93 in spring 2012. The policy update calls for use of culturally relevant materials in school districts’ implementation of their instructional programs. The policy uses seventeen words to describe resources necessary to deliver, support, enrich, and assist in implementing the district’s educational program: materials that “represent many ethnic, religious, and cultural groups and their contributions to the national heritage and world community.” Using a qualitative case study approach in a Texas district, this University of Texas-Pan American Educational Leadership Doctorate Degree research project investigates how and to what degree educational leadership shapes implementation of Update 93’s culturally relevant curriculum policy. Via semi-structured interviews with personnel — superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, principals, and teachers — the study is uncovering how educational leaders’ personal stories and values drive this seventeen-word policy implementation.

This study investigated how and to what degree educational leadership shapes the implementation of policy that dictates culturally relevant social studies curriculum in a Texas school district. Furthermore, the project investigated the following three aspects about the district in South Texas: 1) how having a mandated district-level policy implementing a culturally relevant social studies curriculum manifests itself at the school and classroom levels; 2) how the implementation of policy of cultural relevance in curriculum is shaped by school leadership; and, 3) how the policy of cultural relevance in curriculum translates into classroom practice.

In the winter and spring of 2012, school boards in Texas school districts approved the Texas Association of School Boards’ four-page Update 93, EFA(LOCAL)-A policy (Texas Association of School Boards). This policy, among other things, mandated the use of instructional resources and materials that present varying levels of difficulty, diversity of appeal, and a variety of points of view, with the stated purpose of delivering, supporting, enriching, and assisting the implementation of the school district’s educational program. Objective number four of five in the Update 93, EFA(LOCAL)-A policy specifically states that
the local school board shall rely on the school district professional staff to select and acquire instructional resources that “represent many ethnic, religious, and cultural groups and their contributions to the national heritage and world community” (Texas Association of School Boards). It is therefore clear Texas school boards in the winter and spring of 2012 intentionally approved policy that mandates culturally relevant instructional resources and instructional materials be used in classrooms in their school districts to study the “many ethnic, religious, and cultural groups and their contributions to the national heritage and world community.”

Because the study of “ethnic, religious, and cultural groups and their contributions to the national heritage and world community” most naturally occurs in social studies classrooms, it should be expected that the implementation of Update 93, EFA(LOCAL)-A policy should be occurring via a culturally relevant curriculum in social studies classrooms in Texas schools and districts. The purpose of the study is to explore how and to what degree educational leadership shapes the implementation of policy that dictates culturally relevant social studies curriculum in a Texas school.

The overarching research question was: how and to what degree does educational leadership shape the implementation of policy that dictates culturally relevant social studies curriculum in school districts in Texas? The research sub-questions were:

1. How does having a mandated district-level policy implementing a culturally relevant social studies curriculum manifest itself at the school and classroom levels?
2. How does school leadership shape the policy of cultural relevance in curriculum?
3. How does the policy of cultural relevance in curriculum translate into classroom practice?
This research study used qualitative methodology, with a case study approach (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*; Denzin and Lincoln; Erickson; Gay and Airasian). Creswell (Educational Research) stated that a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection; the term “bounded” referred to the fact that the case is separated out for research in time, place, or some physical barriers (Creswell, Educational Research). Data was collected from district and school leaders (whose responsibilities include implementing decisions about Social Studies curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices) and classroom teachers from one district in Texas. The data gathered from individual interviews at the multiple sites generated the basis for case description and case themes to emerge (Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry). A case study approach was appropriate in studying the research problem previously identified in the introduction because the research study had a clearly identifiable case with boundaries and aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry).

The research study was framed through the lens of a framework, which I developed using the combination of two previously developed and published theoretical models. The first model is the Guajardo, Guajardo, Oliver, Valadez, Keawe, Henderson, and Rocha “ecologies of knowing” model, which has three levels: the self, the organization, and the community. The second model is derived from the works of both Trueba and Mehan, in which the authors discuss the technical, the political, and the cultural leadership skills that are necessary in curriculum development and implementation as well as in organizational change and reform. This framework, the Knowing to Lead (KL) Model, was developed by intersecting the levels (self, organization, and community) of the former model with the skills (technical, political, and cultural) of the latter model. The KL Model was then used as an organizing and analysis tool with which to organize and subsequently analyze the data I gathered in this research study.
Figure 1 depicts the KL Model’s resulting nine paired-combinations when each of the three ecologies of knowing (self, organization, and community) is paired with each of the leadership skills (technical, political, and cultural). This study used the KL Model in investigating how educational leadership shapes decisions about implementing policy that dictates culturally relevant social studies curriculum in school districts in Texas.

Figure 1. The Knowing to Lead (KL) Model

The KL Model was used to organize and analyze the qualitative research data that the one-on-one qualitative interview transcripts yielded. The first components that the KL Model used were the Guajardo et al. “ecologies of knowing” model’s three levels of knowing: the self, the organization, and the community. Guajardo et al. explained that interactions occur at these three levels to organize conversations, identify entry points, and find spaces for interventions;
these ecologies of knowing start at the most intimate, inner part, the *self*, and then naturally flow out toward the immediate *organization* and subsequently the larger *community*, in a three-ringed concentric circle formation. At the *self* level of knowing, conversations and experiences are made personal and relevant at the most micro of levels, as this level is an opportunity for the individual to own their learning and their teaching through story telling (Guajardo et al.). Guajardo et al. detailed how, through story telling, every participant becomes owner of their learning and teaching by making this process personal, as it reframes the learning of the *self* and the collective and helps participants develop the necessary agency to act on their knowledge. At the *organization* level, this pace allows the learning to be couched within participants, families, schools, non-profit organizations and/or their neighborhoods (Guajardo et al.). The authors remind us that at the *organization* level the environment for learning is a critical element to explore and discuss, for it is within this social context that we develop our values, habits, and views of the world, further stating that the *self* within the *organization* is a critical unit for analysis (Guajardo et al.). At the third level, the *community* is critically important in mapping the learning. The *community*’s economy, educational systems, housing, other elements of its infrastructure, and investment in its future are critical to account for when making sense of the learning and reconstruction of our story (Guajardo et al.). Guajardo et al. stated that as participatory members of the *community*, we must learn the skills, build the awareness, and plan the actions to change the behaviors and narratives from an outdated political practice grounded and informed by a zero-sum concept, to a new politic informed by caring and sustaining the quality of life for every child and citizen in our communities. These three levels of knowing that encompass the Guajardo et al. “ecologies of knowing” model, the *self*, the *organization*, and the *community*, comprise one aspect of the Knowing to Lead (KL) Model.
The other intersecting component of the Knowing to Lead (KL) Model is comprised of the *technical*, the *political*, and the *cultural* leadership skills necessary in curriculum development and implementation, as well as in organizational change and reform that Trueba and Mehan discuss. Mehan explained *technical* leadership skills focus on supporting the development of new knowledge and skills and are used to add new resources, including such assets as equipment and curriculum. Leading with *political* skills involves working to build productive relationships and galvanizing important political constituencies (Mehan). Mehan further shared that *cultural* leadership skills help engage an educator’s values, belief systems, and norms, often about controversial topics (i.e., placement of teachers, the nature of intelligence and its distribution across race, ethnicity, class, and gender, as well as school sorting or testing practices). Trueba addresses the *technical*, the *political*, and the *cultural* leadership skills as well. The author begins by stating that traditionally the art and science of teaching (students in general but more specifically Hispanic/Latino students) has focused on using methodological and mechanistic tools – *technical* skills – completely dislodged and divorced from the sociocultural and historical circumstances of students’ families and community (Trueba). Trueba describes this *technical* skills approach to teaching as the positivistic tradition in education, which understands teaching as a precise scientific undertaking and that views teachers as *technicians* who implement predetermined and preselected skills and strategies. The author further adds that these *technical* solutions assume that schools and teaching are *politically* neutral, ascribing responsibility of any necessary changes to students and their families and therefore not the schools, teachers, and the educational system in general (Trueba). These erroneous assumptions, Trueba believes, freed teachers from critically analyzing exemplary and effective teaching approaches and pushed them towards the act of simply grabbing and latching onto *technical* solutions. Trueba asserts that educators and educational leaders needed to steer away
from incorrect apolitical assumptions of educational reality and venture steadfastly toward the
due critical assessment of the learning environments in their appropriate political contexts. The
author adds that the challenge was to inculcate in educators a sophisticated understanding of
the political nature of such environments (Trueba). Trueba then connects to the cultural skills in
educational leadership by explaining that educational institutions in many ways mirrored the
greater society in which those institutions existed, including our culture, values, and norms. He
challenges educators to consider addressing the larger society’s issues of asymmetrical power
relationships among the various social and cultural strata which if not intentionally addressed in
the classroom would replicate themselves there as well (Trueba). Trueba thus contended that
technical expertise and mastery of content and methodology were insufficient to ensure
reflective and effective instruction and that it is only with political clarity that educators could
then create, adapt, and reform teaching strategies and methodologies to actively engage
children in the learning process while at the same time respecting their cultural capital and
challenging them.

The Knowing to Lead (KL) Model is a cross-pollination result of the intersection of the
components, levels, and theoretical underpinnings of both the “ecologies of knowing” (Guajardo
et al.) and the leadership skills (Mehan; Trueba) previously discussed. In developing the
theoretical framework, I contend that the KL Model serves as a dual-dimension organizing and
analysis tool that can be used to organize and analyze my qualitative case study’s one-on-one
interview transcripts and experience. I further contend that the cross-pollination process
occurs by overlaying a specific and unique leadership skill (Mehan; Trueba) onto a specific and
unique “ecology of knowing” level (Guajardo et al.) which then helps create a specific and
unique “knowing to lead” framework component. When the three specific and unique leadership
skills (Mehan; Trueba) were intersected or combined with the three specific and unique
“ecology of knowing” levels (Guajardo et al.), the results were nine specific and unique dual-dimension “knowing to lead” framework components. For example, overlaying or intersecting Mehan’s and Trueba’s technical skill onto Guajardo et al.’s self level “ecology of knowing” produces the dual-dimension technical self Knowing to Lead (KL) Model organizing and analyzing “knowing to lead” component. Thus, overlaying or intersecting Mehan’s and Trueba’s three specific and unique leadership skills onto Guajardo et al.’s three specific and unique “ecology of knowing” levels produces the following nine specific and unique dual-dimension Knowing to Lead (KL) Model organizing and analyzing “knowing to lead” components: 1) technical self; 2) political self; 3) cultural self; 4) technical organization; 5) political organization; 6) cultural organization; 7) technical community; 8) political community; and 9) cultural community. Figure 2 lists each of the nine Knowing to Lead (KL) Model organizing and analyzing “knowing to lead” components along with a short, succinct definition of each component.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowing to Lead (KL) Component</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>technical self</td>
<td>leader uses technical skills within personal space; combines human aspect of the self with the mechanical aspect of the technical realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political self</td>
<td>leader uses positive agency within; leader operates affectively and cognitively in constructive and productive way; all is well within relationship-wise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural self</td>
<td>leader develops values, beliefs, and norms at the self level; sets leader’s moral trajectory; ethical compass within the leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical organization</td>
<td>leader uses technical skills at the organization level; technical leadership at organization level often contingent on shared, collective technical abilities and wills from other leaders and organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political organization</td>
<td>leader uses relationships to negotiate space to lead the organization; leader uses political to harness human and non-human resources with which to lead; uses and grows professional and personal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural organization</td>
<td>leader helps develop values, beliefs, and norms at the organization level; leader moves outside the moral and ethical self to influence the organization’s culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical community</td>
<td>leader uses technical skills at the community level to solve community problems and address community issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political community</td>
<td>leader uses relationships to help build community; leader harnesses human and non-human resources to negotiate political space at community level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural community</td>
<td>leader develops values, beliefs, and norms at the community level; leader moves beyond the moral and ethical self and organization level to influence the community’s culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.** Knowing to Lead (KL) Model components and definitions

The school district site and its corresponding middle school and high school level leadership participants and classroom teachers were selected from the area located along the borderlands adjacent to Mexico along the Rio Grande River in South Texas, in a regional area known as the Rio Grande Valley. The site was chosen based on the gender and years of experience of the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the two principals, and the four teachers who participated in the research.
The first selection criterion was the gender of the superintendent for the district; the district had a male superintendent. Once the participating district was selected based on the male gender of the superintendent, the next selection criterion was the gender of the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction; the district had a female assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. The next selection criteria were the gender and years of experience of the principals at the district. The district had one female high school principal with less than five years of experience and a male middle school principal with six years or more of experience. The last selection criteria for participants were the gender and years of experience of the participating teachers. The high school had one male teacher with less than five years of experience, and a female teacher with six years or more of experience. The district middle school had one male teacher with six years or more of experience, and a female teacher with less than five years of experience. These criteria (job descriptions, years of experience, and gender) were used so the study would have a spectrum of participants from different job descriptions, years of experience and gender combinations.

The purposeful sampling (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*) criteria for the selection of the participant school district was based on those who have responsibilities for making and implementing decisions about social studies curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. The most accessible (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*) cases from the eligible participants at all districts and campuses were the ones selected by the researcher to participate in the research study. Criteria set were used to select the participating district, and its corresponding superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, principals, and teachers.

Anonymity was created for the study’s participants by implementing a process where actual names of individuals, people, places, and other things associated with the research study
(including the sites and participants) would be replaced by pseudonyms. The following list provides the initial pseudonyms for the district, schools, and participants associated with the research study’s site and participant selection, which subsequently appears throughout the study:

La Frontera ISD was used as the name for the Rio Grande Valley independent school district where the research study was conducted; Dr. Alvaro Arnolfo was used as the name for the male superintendent of schools; Bianca Benitez was the name used for the female assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction; Tuco Benedicto High School was used as the name for the high school where the research study was conducted; Candi Cardenas was used as the name for the female high school principal; Diego Duarte was used as the name for the male high school teacher; Eliana Enriquez was used as the name for the female high school teacher; Los Veteranos Middle School was used as the name for the middle school where the research study was conducted; Fortunato Franco is the name that was used for the male middle school principal; Graciela Gonzalez was used as the name for the male middle school teacher; and, Herlinda Hernandez was used as the name for the female middle school teacher.

I made every effort to assure that no real names were used in the process of writing the dissertation. If any of the pseudonyms I used bear any resemblance to real names of actual people, living or dead, such an occurrence is purely coincidental. Additional pseudonyms and brief descriptions were provided as specific individuals, people, places, and other things associated with the research study emerged in the dissertation process.

The data collection process at La Frontera ISD consisted of one-on-one semi-structured qualitative interviews. Creswell (Educational Research) shared that in qualitative research, the researcher asks open-ended questions so that participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or by past research findings. Creswell
(Educational Research) clarified that the one-on-one interview is a data collection process in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time. He further added that one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably (Creswell, Educational Research). I found that Dr. Arnoldo the district superintendent, Ms. Bianca Benitez the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the principals Ms. Cardenas and Mr. Franco, and the classroom teachers Mr. Duarte, Ms. Enriquez, Mr. Gonzalez, and Ms. Hernandez were unhesitant, articulate, and comfortable interviewees in the one-on-one interview setting in which they each participated.

Interview protocols were established and employed for the one-on-one interviews. These instruments were used because their designs appropriately matched the purpose of the qualitative method of case study the researcher used. Interviews facilitate the researcher in reaching areas of reality otherwise inaccessible, such as people’s experiences and attitudes (Denzin and Lincoln). The interview also serves as a convenient method of overcoming space and time (Denzin and Lincoln). Additionally, past events and faraway experiences can be studied by interviewing participants who partook in them (Denzin and Lincoln). When conducting the one-on-one interviews with all participants, the researcher made annotated, detailed field notes using the five senses, paying attention to what was said, as well as how it was said. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with participants involved in the study. The instruments used in the one-on-one interviews included exploratory, investigative open-ended questions that helped elicit details about issues, assumptions, and beliefs associated with making and implementing decisions about culturally relevant social studies curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices at the district, campus, and classroom levels.
In order to create consistency in conducting the one-on-one interviews, I developed a set of interview protocols that were employed in conducting all the one-on-one interviews. Four separate interview protocols were established based on the job position the participant held: a first protocol was developed for the superintendent of schools; a second protocol was developed for the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction; a third protocol was developed for the principals; and, a fourth protocol was developed for the teachers. To establish the consistency between and among the four separate interview protocols for research study participants from the four separate and distinct job positions (superintendent, assistant superintendent, principals, and teachers), the researcher took care to ensure that the topics, themes, and foci that were explored via the interview protocols were common to all four protocols. Each of the following topics, themes, and foci were explored in all four separate protocols that were used to interview the superintendent, assistant superintendent, principal, and teacher participants: 1) participant personal and educational background; 2) participant understanding and perception of culturally relevant curriculum; 3) curriculum policy conversations participant has had with people above and below her/him in the district’s organizational chart; 4) conversations about culturally relevant curriculum participant has had with people above and below her/him in the district’s organizational chart and with students, parents, and community members; and, 5) participant understanding and perception of the research study’s specific culturally relevant curriculum policy focus, the seventeen words – implementing the district’s educational program by using resources that “represent many ethnic, religious, and cultural groups and their contributions to the national heritage and world community.”

While the researcher allowed each one-on-one interview to proceed in an organic fashion and with its own natural flow within the established interview protocol, the researcher used the framework and structure of the protocol itself as a set of parameters to guide the framing of the
interview process. This allowed for an important combination of consistent, common topics, themes, and foci to be explored and rich details to emerge.

At the time of the presentation of this session at the National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies (NACCS) Tejas 2013 Conference at the University of Texas–Pan American in late February 2013, I was concluding his data analysis in order to then begin the development of findings and recommendations. At the NACCS presentation, members of the audience asked me to identify some of the possible findings the data was surfacing. I unofficially shared some of the general concerns identified by the teachers who were interviewed, especially in reference to the official district-adopted and campus-implemented curriculum at La Frontera ISD. This generated a lively discussion at the NACCS session, and ultimately, this very topic – the official curriculum – did find its way into several key findings and recommendations when the dissertation was finalized and successfully defended on March 25, 2013. Appropriately, those findings and recommendations will be published subsequently.
Works Cited


Whose Latino/a Studies? Teaching Latinidad as a Güero on a Predominantly Anglo, Socially Conservative Campus

Justin D. García

Administrators at colleges and universities heavily promote “diversity” and “multiculturalism,” although these topics are not always as enthusiastically received by students. Mandatory general education courses in cultural diversity and/or ethnic studies have been implemented as part of the curriculum at many institutions nationwide, but contentious exchanges between students and various forms of resistance from white students are fairly common in such courses. Non-white students often have competing visions and agendas pertaining to identity politics, which also play out in the classroom. As the nation’s demographics shift towards a society with a rapidly increasing non-white population, these dynamics are likely to increase in scope on campuses across the country. Using Millersville University of Pennsylvania, a public state-owned university in the northeastern United States, as a case study, the author discusses some of the common challenges that arise when attempting to teach Latino Studies, Anthropology, and other social science and humanities courses, as well as discussing why cultural diversity is often divisive and emotional material. He also provides examples of effective classroom exercises when teaching latinidad.

“Diversity” and “multiculturalism” have gained such currency on colleges and universities in recent years that such terms have become quasi-buzzwords within higher education across the United States. However, this official administrative/institutional embrace of multiculturalism does not necessarily ensure that the faculty and campus administrators assigned to carry out the college’s or university’s diversity mission will be met with equal acceptance among the student body. Expressing a commitment to and respect for diversity is one thing; the actual implementation of diversity in a manner that conveys to students the administration’s professed admiration for said diversity is another matter altogether. The former is clear-cut and simple; the latter is considerably more ambiguous, arduous, and quite difficult to attain.

In this paper, I share my experiences of teaching courses in anthropology, cultural diversity, and Latino/a Studies as a second-generation, Mexican American male at a primarily white (Anglo) and working-class public state university located in a small rural Pennsylvania community. In addition to discussing my experiences teaching latinidad and cultural diversity at the university level, I provide some teaching activities and classroom strategies that I have
found to be quite effective in broaching these topics with a majority white classroom throughout my teaching career. I am the son of a formerly undocumented Mexican immigrant father from Zacatecas and a Pennsylvania German mother. I grew up in a bilingual home (as a result of two non-English speaking paternal uncles who lived with my family at different points in my childhood), although my Spanish comprehension skills are stronger than my speaking proficiency. I am the first member of my family, on either side, to attend college, let alone earn a Ph.D., which I obtained from Temple University in May 2011. My doctoral preparation is in urban anthropology, with a specific focus in the dynamics of community relations and racial/ethnic conflict. This academic training in ethnographic research methodology, with its emphasis on critical analysis of observations and attention to reflexivity, has imparted in me quasi-instinctual reflexes to observe, contemplate, and analyze the nature of student interactions with one another around campus and in the classroom.

Topics such as race, racism, immigration, and cultural diversity are among the most contentious social issues in American society, and when such topics inevitably arise during anthropology and ethnic studies courses, they often generate palpable atmospheres of varying moods that are conveyed through students’ verbal and non-verbal reactions – from awkward silence, to uneasiness and discomfort, to fear, and to anger or frustration. Individual students’ emotional reactions vary tremendously and are profoundly influenced by their own respective social locations, life experiences, and prior exposure (or lack thereof) to human difference and cultural diversity, as well as their respective knowledge of diversity, race/racism, and immigration. Importantly, students’ knowledge of these topics is not necessarily rooted in a factual or scholarly foundation, but instead may be more of a social knowledge than an academic knowledge. I use the term “social knowledge” to refer to ideas and (mis)information that people use to make sense of the world around them that are primarily rooted in hearsay, opinions or
beliefs, and/or popular media discourses, rather than academic or empirical research. Since all persons have had their own idiosyncratic sets of life experiences, which have been shaped and influenced by the confluence of multiple variables such as social class, sexuality, gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship or immigration status, and geographic locale, among others, each person has their own distinct “prism” or “filter” through which they have come to view the world and understand/interpret the society around them. Chicana anthropologist Patricia Zavella refers to this intersection of multiple variables in shaping one’s respective life experiences and social outlook as “social location” (188-193). Understandably, misunderstandings quickly arise and tensions escalate when persons who come from very different social/cultural backgrounds fail to recognize the significance that their own respective social locations have played in constructing their respective worldviews and subsequently naively assume that their perspective is the legitimate perspective, thereby ensuring acrimonious exchanges between different social actors. These dynamics pervade many emotionally-laden lectures and discussions about cultural diversity and human relations in the college classroom, complicating the instructor’s efforts to effectively teach such subject matter to students.

**Significance/Implications**

Given the nation’s rapidly shifting demographics, non-white students and students who are either immigrants or the children of immigrants are poised to account for much of the growth in higher education enrollment nationwide in the coming years. These shifting demographics will likely encourage campuses to publicly praise “diversity” and “multiculturalism” with greater emphasis than already is the case. Nevertheless, white students will remain the majority of the student body at most colleges and universities throughout the nation, with certain limited exceptions, as in the cases of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (educational institutions where Hispanic/Latino students
comprise at least 25 percent of student enrollment), and certain public institutions in urbanized locales (such as the various City University of New York branch campuses).

Although professed commitments to diversity and multiculturalism are already a part of the missions statements and institutional programming of many colleges and universities, certain scholars (Goode 434–438; Goode and Schneider 65–71) have heavily criticized traditional approaches towards multiculturalism for attempting to focus on colorful and exotic displays of food, music, and dancing – the “safe” aspects of group difference – while conveniently overlooking issues of power, privilege, and inequality, which are the actual sources of conflict and division within society. A major limitation of this strategy is that by solely focusing on “safe” topics, students’ pre-existing racialized views of “the other” remain intact and unchallenged. Others (Newitz and Wray 168–170) also criticize traditional approaches towards multiculturalism and diversity for their tendency to depict socially-defined racial and ethnic groups in monolithic and essentialized fashion, thereby reifying ideas of fundamental and immutable cultural differences between groups while ignoring the internal social/cultural diversity within groups. Such is the case when a diversity workshop at a freshmen orientation (mis)educates students about the presumed existence of a singular “Latino culture” and proceeds to stereotype and essentialize Latin men as “excessively macho” and Latin women as “overly passive.”

In order to prepare American students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds for the nation’s new demographic and cultural realities, as well as preparing students to participate in the globalized workforce of the 21st century, I recommend a new approach towards diversity. Teachers, professors, and educational administrators must move away from simply attempting to celebrate diversity (through essentialized displays of group differences) towards teaching students to critically understand diversity (by emphasizing the complex and
multifaceted nature of cultural identity formation, internal diversity within groups, and the importance of social location in producing a wide continuum of socio-cultural experiences). Cultural diversity does not solely exist between groups; it also exists within groups. These are fundamental concepts that I strive to convey to students in all of my courses, and I offer two examples below of in-class activities designed to raise students’ awareness of such concepts (my examples focus specifically on latinidad, although they could easily be modified so as to be applied to deconstructing other racial or pan-ethnic categories as well). Before presenting my two sample in-class exercises, however, I discuss the various challenges of teaching cultural diversity and latinidad at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, while highlighting the various factors that spark student resistance, escalated emotions, and intra-Latino divisions on Millersville’s campus. Although each college/university is situated within its own unique socio-historical context which shapes the dynamics of its specific campus climate, the challenges that instructors confront in teaching cultural diversity at Millersville University are reflective of those at many other institutions throughout the United States.

**Millersville University: A Quick Overview**

Before discussing my specific experiences in teaching issues of latinidad and cultural diversity in detail, I would like to provide a general overview of my university. Anthropologists have increasingly emphasized that matters of race/ethnicity are fluid and dynamic phenomena that are contingent upon social context (Goode and Schneider 65-69; Hartigan, *Racial Situations* 11-19, Hartigan *Odd Tribes* 5-12; Vigil 123-140). Millersville University is one of fourteen state-funded, public universities that comprise the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). Millersville University is located in historic Lancaster County, which is nationally known for its large Amish communities and prominent Pennsylvania Dutch heritage. Millersville is about 75 miles west of Philadelphia, about an hour and a half’s drive away. The
university enrolls approximately 8,500 mostly undergraduate students, and its student body is overwhelmingly white. According to the university’s website, white students represent 80 percent of the total enrollment, while 9 percent of students are black or African American, 7 percent are Latino, and 2 percent are Asian/Pacific American. The university is primarily a commuter school, with the majority of its students living off campus. This is because a large segment of the student body comes directly from Lancaster County. Nevertheless, approximately a quarter of students live in the dormitories on campus. Millersville is also known as a “suitcase campus,” meaning that a significant portion of students living on campus go home on the weekends and do not return until Sunday evening or Monday morning.

A clearly evident and palpable racial divide marks Millersville, which I contend has geographic underpinnings stemming from the socio-cultural environments of students’ home communities. The vast majorities of white students are local and come from the small towns and rural areas in the periphery of Lancaster County, while the majority of black students come from inner-city North Philadelphia or West Philadelphia neighborhoods. Most of the Latino students come from either nearby Lancaster City or, to a lesser extent, from Philadelphia and urban neighborhoods in Reading, Harrisburg, and York (three small cities in neighboring counties that are each relatively equidistant from Millersville). Lancaster City is the only urbanized area within Lancaster County; it is a small city of 60,000 residents with a majority Latino population and a sizable black minority. As with most cities in the northeastern United States, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans comprise the majority of Lancaster City’s Latino community.

Geography fuels the student divide at Millersville because, despite the relative close proximity of these various locales in southeastern Pennsylvania, many of the students from Lancaster County and Philadelphia alike have had little to no exposure of life outside their
respective communities prior to their arrival on campus their freshmen year. With the
exception of Lancaster City, Lancaster County is extremely conservative, both politically and
socially, and has been identified as one of the most heavily Republican counties in the entire
nation. The area is also highly religious, and fundamentalist evangelical Christianity holds a
powerful sway over the local culture. Given these social and cultural dynamics of Lancaster
County, and the fact that many students who come from its rural and peripheral regions have
had little previous contact with non-white persons, racial misunderstandings, stereotypes, and
outright prejudices persist on campus. This is exacerbated by the fact that most black students
have not had prior exposure to white persons with viewpoints either as conservative or as
“racially unenlightened” (also known as “ignorant,” in the common parlance of students of color
at the university) prior to arriving on Millersville’s campus. Philadelphia is in many respects
Lancaster County’s social and political inverse; the City of Brotherly Love is one of the nation’s
most heavily Democratic-leaning cities, and Philadelphia has a long history of immigration and
ethnic/religious diversity dating to the colonial period (Takenaka and Osirim 1-4). Such
dynamics serve as the basis of Pennsylvania’s nationwide reputation as a socially and cultural
dichotomized state, reflected in the label “Pennsyltucky” (a portmanteau of “Pennsylvania” and
“Kentucky”) – which implies that the state is comprised of two modern, progressive
metropolises, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, at its opposite corners and a vast region of
presumed “backwardness,” conservatism, and intolerance in between. While this
“Pennsyltucky” image greatly simplifies the Keystone State’s internal socio-cultural
complexities, it does acknowledge the fact that, in the abstract, the Philadelphia region and
central Pennsylvania are quite socially distinct from one another.

This is the context in which I, an assistant professor of anthropology, am assigned to
teach courses in cultural diversity, race/ethnicity, immigration, and Latino studies. The
aforementioned campus dynamics are further compounded by the fact that I am a very fair-
complexioned or güero, second-generation Mexican American male who has an Anglo first
name, but a very ethnic surname. My own specific social location further compounds my
experiences as a professor at Millersville because although the majority of the white segment of
the student body has had little prior exposure to racial/ethnic diversity, the university’s
administration places a tremendous emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity. The
administration aims to cultivate a multicultural campus climate through a variety of means,
including annual “Cultural Events” series of talks and seminars that are dedicated to African
American and Latino issues (food and music festivals, public lectures by authors of color, open
mic nights, etc.), a required reading assignment for all incoming freshmen called “One Book,
One Campus” (usually consisting of a high-profile book written by an African American,
Latino/a, or other author of color), frequent public panels on diversity-related issues (racism,
sexism, homophobia, classism, etc.), a freshmen “Ethnic Studies” seminar for certain new black
and Latino students, and the administration’s continual expressions of support for its African
American and Latino student organizations (Black Student Union and Society on Latino
Affairs, respectively).

These strategies are not unique to Millersville University. Indeed, they are reflective of
most colleges and universities nationwide over the past twenty-five years or so as part of the
nation’s general shift towards a greater acceptance of pluralism and cultural diversity.
However, these very strategies are often perceived by many of Millersville’s white students as
discomforting, “divisive” or “reverse racism.” Such sentiments are revealed in graffiti scribbled
in bathroom stalls and walls, letters to the editor in the student newspaper, conflicts between
students in the residence halls, and at times, openly and explicitly during class discussions. As
an example, during a discussion in my “Gender, Race, and Class” course this past semester, a
white female student boldly asserted to her classmates that she represented the “real minority” on campus because the other students on the floor of her dorm were “almost all black, Hispanic, or international exchange students.” She then angrily expressed her disapproval of ethnic student organizations at the university because the mere existence of such clubs makes her “feel out of place.” As discussed previously, the majority of white students come from predominantly small-town and rural white communities. In such settings, issues of diversity generate little to no attention from local residents, public officials, or educational curricula, and for students from these settings to enter a campus environment where multiculturalism is so heavily promoted appears intimidating and serves as a bitter form of culture shock. The relatively small numbers of African American and Latino students commonly interpret such white alienation as racism, which further evokes defensiveness and anger among white students in a classic vicious cycle.

Numerous observers, such as progressive scholars Ronald Takaki and Howard Ehrlich and conservative pundit Thomas Sowell, have noted similar tensions arising from multiculturalism on college campuses across the country. In analyzing the undercurrents of ethnic divisions on campus, Enrlich points out that “For the most part, students arrive at college without significant intergroup or multicultural experiences. Their life experiences have been generally confined to segregated neighborhoods and predominantly segregated schools . . . the incoming students enter a world of some greater diversity than what they left. But it is an age-segregated world of essentially equally naïve actors” (285). Takaki, on the other hand, observes that efforts to incorporate multicultural perspectives into the traditional cannons of academia have often been met with bitter resistance among conservatives and erstwhile liberals, who find efforts to diversify curricula to be unnecessary, rooted in identity politics and “political correctness” rather than scholarship, or “divisive” or “anti-American” because they draw attention to oppression and inequality that mark the nation’s history past and present (305-313).
This backdrop made for a highly contentious course, titled Latino Immigration, which I taught during the Spring 2012 semester. Given the specific subject matter of this course, approximately 2/3 of the students enrolled in this class were of various Latino heritages. About 10 percent of students enrolled were African American, and one student was a Haitian immigrant. The remaining 25 percent or so of the class were white/Anglo. Fully aware that immigration policy is one of the most contentious issues in American society, and that conservative activists in Pennsylvania managed to inspire state hearings on whether an alleged “left-wing bias” existed in social science courses at Millersville and other PASSHE and state-related schools (Penn State University, Temple University, and the University of Pittsburgh) in 2006, I carefully structured the course from a historical perspective that examined the economic and political dynamics that foster international migrations from various Latin American societies. Several Latino students, mostly Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans, became enthralled in the subject matter and frequently participated in class discussion by relating the assigned readings to their own, or their relatives’, personal experiences. Topics such as the “English-as-the-Official Language” Movement, the DREAM Act, Arizona’s SB 1070, Arizona’s Ethnic Studies Ban, and the recent murder of a Mexican immigrant by four white teenagers in the working-class town of Shenandoah, PA, particularly resonated with students. However, one white male student, a self-described “patriotic, conservative American” (whom I shall call “Bryan”) regularly took exception with other students’ comments and adamantly expressed his opposition to the DREAM Act and his strong support for Official English and SB 1070 legislation. While Bryan, like all students, is entitled to his own personal and political viewpoints, and I did my best to run the course from as neutral a position as possible, Bryan’s conduct in class over the course of the semester bordered on disrespect as he, at times, attempted to debate black and Latino students over the validity of their experiences.
and often spoke in a condescending tone towards others. Evidently, Bryan assumed that his respective social location (as a white male and an American citizen) entitled him with a degree of authority and seniority over the non-white students in class.

Some of Bryan’s more egregious statements included his claim early in the semester that the very theme of the course itself, a class focusing on migration from Latin America, was – at its very heart – exclusionary and “racist” because it limited its focus to Latinos. Uttered defensively during a class lecture and discussion pertaining to Arizona’s ban on Ethnic Studies (HB 2281), Bryan’s comment evoked gasps and loud sighs of disgust from most of the others in the room. On another occasion, Bryan belittled a classmate – a Tejana in her mid-40s who grew up in San Antonio but who had relocated to Pennsylvania after meeting her husband – by bluntly asserting that she did not “know what racism is.” Bryan’s charge stemmed from his disapproval of a comment that the Tejana student raised during a discussion on Arizona’s SB 1070, whereby she expressed concern that her Mexican American relatives living in Arizona, all of whom had been born in the United States, would be subjected to unnecessary racial profiling if the law was implemented. For most of the semester, the classroom atmosphere remained tense and on edge, with several students who regularly participated in discussion towards the beginning of the semester eventually refraining from talking in class altogether. Most student visits to my office that semester consisted of black and Latino students venting about Bryan, but a few white students who were concerned that Bryan’s conduct would foster a general “anti-white” backlash among Latino students (or “guilt by racial association”) also visited me during office hours. One white female student emailed me that she felt “uncomfortable” about the “demographics” of the class.

Other Challenges
Teaching *latinidad* at Millersville poses other challenges, albeit considerably less hostile. Given my personal family history as the grandson of a *bracero* who worked in the fields of California during the 1950s and the son of a formerly undocumented migrant who crossed the Rio Grande in search of employment building cattle fences in Texas in the early 1970s, my primary teaching and research interests center on the social experiences of Chicanos/Mexicanos. In the northeastern United States, however, “Chicano Studies” and “Mexican American Studies” do not exist as they do in the southwest because the Mexican American population of New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, while growing, is still relatively small. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans account for the two largest Latino nationalities in this region of the country, in addition to smaller communities of Mexicans, Colombians, Cubans, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Panamanians, and Central Americans. The heterogeneity of Latinos in the northeast has consequently led to the establishment of more general, pan-ethnic “Latino Studies” courses and curricula in higher education. Finding the proper balance when designing “Latino Studies” courses can be challenging, because most of the existing scholarship, literature, and films pertaining to *latinidad* focus on Chicanos/Mexicanos in the southwest and, to a lesser degree, Puerto Ricans in the northeast and Cubans in southern Florida. Almost by default, then, “Latino Studies” courses and pan-ethnic social science anthologies on Latinos concentrate on the traditional trinity of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, who have comprised the largest and most socially and politically influential segments of the U.S. Latino population since the mid-20th century.

These factors inevitably raise proverbial explicit or implicit rhetorical questions of “Whose Latino Studies is this?” among students, a legitimate question that is further complicated by the fact that many “ Latinos” in the northeast prefer to self-identify by their respective ethno-national heritages, rather than self-identifying collectively and generically as
“Latinos.” As noted by Nicholas De Genova and Ana Ramos-Zayas (178-183, 204-206), it is primarily the second- and third-generation children and grandchildren of migrants, who were born and raised on the U.S. mainland and lack a strong degree of cultural identification with Puerto Ricaness, Mexicaness, Dominicanness, etc., who are most likely to primarily self-identify as “Latino” or “Latina.” Even so, the label “Latino” as a marker of self-identification is frequently invoked ethnocentrically, with persons using this pan-ethnic label, oftentimes unbeknownst to them, in reference to traditions, customs, issues, or identities that are specific to their own respective ethno-national heritage (such as referring to Día de los Muertos, Cinco de Mayo, or the Puerto Rican Day Parade as “Latino” events). The Pennsylvania Statewide Latino Coalition’s annual conference, for example, had for years generated some complaints among certain attendees that the conference harbors too much of a “Puerto Rican focus” at the expense of other Latino communities and ethnic inheritances within the state.

Of course, latinidad is multifaceted and plays out differently in different contexts and specific regions and locations across the United States. In the northeast, persons of Puerto Rican roots may self-identify as a Boricua or Nuyorican. Many Mexican Americans in Texas describe themselves as Tejanos to express state pride in being a Texan while also acknowledging their ethnic heritage. Likewise in California and other parts of the southwest, the term Chicano may be used by some of Mexican ancestry as a term of ethnic pride. Increased social interactions across ethnic lines have led to the emergence of new cultural identities, such as Blaxican (a person of African American and Mexican descent) in Los Angeles and MeriRican or PortoMex in Chicago. However, much of the discourse on latinidad continues to operate from one-dimensional, pan-ethnic essentialism of a presumed singular, monolithic Latino culture and identity that obscures the vast range of Latinos’ social and psychological experiences within specific locales and contexts across the nation.
Specifically, my teaching seeks to discourage students from engaging in simplistic, essentalized understandings of Latinos and other racial/ethnic groups by raising students’ awareness that race and ethnicity are socially constructed phenomena and that cultural identities are fluid, dynamic, complex, and multifaceted through emphasizing, above all else, that cultural diversity exists within socially-defined racial/ethnic groups, and not just between such groups (as is often portrayed in traditional or “vulgar” approaches towards multiculturalism). Utilizing a critical multiculturalism theoretical approach, my “Issues of Latino Identity” course, for example, emphasizes that third-generation Chicanos in Los Angeles, second-generation Nuyoricans in the Bronx, Cuban refugees in Miami, and Dominican immigrants in Boston all have distinct cultural identities and social locations, despite their general classification as “Latinos” by the larger American society. This deconstruction of *latinidad* is necessary, given the prevalence of identity politics among Latino/a students on campus as discussed earlier.

My Latino Studies courses likewise address and critically examine matters of intra-Latino conflict, including tensions and prejudices between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, or between Afro-Latinos and fair-complexioned Latinos that persist in Latino communities throughout the northeast. However, the most polarizing phenomenon of intra-Latino divisions at Millersville pertains to identity politics struggles between Puerto Rican students who are island natives (those who were born and raised in Puerto Rico) and students of Puerto Rican heritage who were born and raised on the U.S. mainland. As Puerto Ricans account for the largest segment of Latino students on campus, and there are significant numbers of both “islander” and “mainlander” Puerto Ricans, this makes for some highly emotional classroom discussions regarding constructs of cultural identity, ethnic authenticity, and language issues. Language as a central component of Latino identity is a
particularly heated topic that often breaks along generational lines, as first-generation students who grew up in Puerto Rico or other Latin American societies generally assert the viewpoint that an individual is “not really Latino” if they lack the ability to speak Spanish. This view is bitterly contested by most of the U.S.-born Latino students, particularly those who comprehend little or no Spanish.

Some ethnic studies scholars and multicultural/diversity coordinators whom I have known during my professional career have indicated to me that they would prefer that I avoid such sensitive topics in the classroom out of fear that by addressing them, white students might find “justification” for holding racist, prejudiced, or xenophobic beliefs of their own. Vaca (1-5, 185-193) notes that such concerns are not uncommon among progressives, who fear that analyzing intra-Latino conflict and animus between minority communities undermines the “rainbow coalition” discourse of race relations, which posits that various peoples of color and progressive whites must maintain a united social and political front against white racism. Nevertheless, the notion of a political “rainbow coalition” may itself be more wishful thinking among progressive academics and activists than reality, as individuals tend to base their political leanings and voting patterns in accordance with their own perceived economic, social, and personal interests.

It is no surprise, then, that African American and Latino students themselves raise issues of intra-Latino and intra-minority conflicts on their own in my classes, precisely because they have lived in communities where they are exposed to such tensions on a regular basis! These topics, therefore, are personal and important to them. Numerous students of color have praised or thanked me throughout the years for not attempting to stifle these topics when they arise during class discussions (as they claim other professors commonly do) and for operating my classes in an open-forum manner in which everyone is free to express their ideas, so long as
it is done in an intellectual and critical manner that is grounded within anthropological thinking.

I realize that some of these issues may not pertain to many colleges and universities in the southwest and midwest, where “Chicano” or “Mexican-American” Studies courses predominate and the vast majority of Latino students are of Mexican heritage. However, my conjecture is that the challenges discussed previously will only increase in the coming years at colleges and universities throughout the northeast and other regions as the diversification of the Latino population increases and as growing numbers of Latino students attend higher education, thus prompting colleges and universities to further promote multiculturalism in their curricula through the establishment of Latino Studies courses and degree programs.

**Recommended Classroom Exercises**

I now shift my focus to share some classroom activities and critical thinking exercises that have proven effective in encouraging both Latino and non-Latino students to “think outside the box” in my courses. I recommend anyone teaching Latino Studies courses, or any class with an ethnically diverse Latino student enrollment, to consider using these exercises in their own classrooms as a means of promoting critical thinking and fostering student participation during class discussion. These exercises are also useful in classes where the instructor is assigned to teach Latino history, identity, culture, or contemporary experiences to a classroom comprised primarily or entirely of non-Latino students.

*Exercise #1: Introduction to Latinidad*

This exercise is given to students at the beginning of the semester (if the focus of the entire course is on Latinos) or at the beginning of a particular unit that focuses on Latinos if part of a larger course, because its purpose is to make students aware of their pre-existing
knowledge, or lack thereof, regarding Latinos in the United States. The exercise consists of a worksheet with six (6) open-ended questions:

- **How would you define the word “Latino?”** Explain what you think this word means. What criteria makes a person “Latino” (such as looks? Physical appearance? Social or cultural characteristics?)? Explain in detail.

- **What are the sources of the knowledge that you have about Latinos?** Where do your ideas and information come from? – personal experiences (such as being Latino, living in a Latino neighborhood, attending a largely Latino school), occasional personal encounters, the media, word of mouth from family and friends, educational books and school/college courses, etc?

- **Name as many key Latino historical figures as you can** (either 20th century or earlier).

- **Name as many Latino figures in U.S. government and politics as you can.**

- **Name as many Latino figures in sports and music as you can.**

- **Identify as many Latino figures in TV/movies, entertainment, and comedy as you can.**

I distribute this worksheet to students during class and instruct them to complete the worksheet to the best of their ability in class, working on this assignment as individuals. Most importantly, I inform students that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to any of these questions and that the grade for this assignment will be based on effort and original thought. I instruct students to do no outside research while completing the worksheet, which is the primary reason why I have them fill out this worksheet during class by giving them fifteen to twenty minutes to work on this assignment. Afterwards I have students divide themselves into small groups of five or six to discuss and compare/contrast their responses with one another for approximately ten minutes. Following this small group discussion, I facilitate a collective
discussion with the entire class as we go over the responses that students have come up with for each of the questions on the worksheet.

The discussion yields some very interesting and revealing ideas. The first question, pertaining to the definition of Latino and what “makes” someone Latino generates a range of responses, which run the gamut from physical characteristics (many non-Latino students tend to assume that all Latinos are bronze-complexioned and have dark black hair) to cultural characteristics (the most common response is a reference to Spanish-speaking linguistic ability; sometimes students also invoke Catholic religious affiliation or essentialized, stereotyped traits such as machismo, loud/flamboyant personalities, or large families) to geographic heritage (ancestry from Latin America). As students share their responses, I keep a running tabulation by recording their ideas on the board while refraining from commenting on the responses. This almost always fosters more classroom discussion, as students begin to question or take exception with others’ ideas, as well as raising new questions of their own, such as “Are Brazilians and Spaniards Latino?” The second question (which asks where their knowledge of Latinos comes from) is the most revealing, because it requires students to engage in some critical self-reflection and to analyze their own respective social locations. This has led to several white students coming to the realization that their ideas about Latinos have been shaped by the media, news reports, and hearsay from family and friends and an understanding that this information may not necessarily be accurate. Without fail, students have very few responses for the third and fourth questions. The few names that a few students are able to muster for these questions include Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and perhaps a Spanish conquistador or two from the 16th century. This presents me with an opportunity to further question students on their thoughts as to why persons have no trouble providing answers to the first question, but struggle to such an extent with the third and fourth questions. The
answer, of course, is that Latinos have largely been excluded from mainstream accounts of U.S. history, despite the fact that Mexican Americans have officially been part of the United States since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in the middle of the 19th century, and Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917 following passage of the Jones Act. This general lack of awareness renders Latino studies courses all the more necessary at the collegiate level.

Speaking to these points, William Flores and Rina Benmayor (1-7) refer to traditional, hegemonic mainstream historical accounts of the United States as the “master narrative.” The hallmark of the “master narrative” is that it highlights American exceptionalism, focuses almost exclusively on the experiences and accomplishments of European/white Americans, and largely omits the experiences of non-white peoples from discourses of the nation’s history. Such a narrative of U.S. history consequently constructs whites as the “real Americans” whose experiences and achievements constitute the authentic “American experience” while marginalizing and trivializing those of blacks, Chicanos/Latinos, American Indians, Asians, and other minority groups deemed outside the boundaries of the imagined community of the American nation-state. Latino Studies (and other ethnic studies) courses thus represent extremely valuable teaching and learning occasions by presenting students with opportunities to expand their conceptualization of the United States beyond the traditional confines promoted under the “master narrative.”

**Exercise # 2: Pan-Latino Identity**

This exercise also consists of a worksheet with open-ended questions, although it probably works best in classes with a large enrollment of Latino students or at least around the midpoint of the semester or beyond in a course that focuses on Latino studies since the exercise requires at least a rudimentary knowledge of pan-ethnicity and a basic awareness of distinct Latino ethnic populations. This worksheet consists of four open-ended questions:
• How likely do you think a collective pan-Latino identity will develop?
• Do you think such a pan-Latino identity already exists? Why or why not?
• What factors do you think would help contribute to the development of a pan-Latino collective identity?
• What challenges do you think impede the development of a pan-Latino identity?

As with the worksheet discussed in the prior example, students are given this worksheet in class to complete as individuals for about ten to fifteen minutes. Afterwards, we discuss students’ responses as a collective class discussion. Because the nature of the questions in this exercise is much more in-depth and theoretical than those of the previous exercise, those who participate in this discussion tend to be either Latino students themselves or non-Latino students who take a keen interest in Latino identity and affairs due to the fact that I use this exercise primarily in upper-level Latino Studies courses – where the very subject matter tends to attract these types of students. One of the benefits of this activity is that it always yields an extremely fruitful conversation among students who have a vested personal interest in Latino Studies. Opinions and perspectives vary among students regarding the four aforementioned questions, with some more readily embracing of a collective, pan-Latino identity while others are much less enthusiastic at this prospect in favor of retaining their own specific ethnic/national heritage – although students who espouse this latter position still support the idea of coexistence and civility towards other Latino heritages.

From my experiences administering this exercise, the majority of white and African American students – who likely have a passion for Latino issues if they are taking an upper-level course where they would be given this activity – support the idea of a pan-Latino identity, often on the grounds that pan-ethnic identity increases “strength in numbers.” On the other
hand, Latino students have more muddled responses. Some adamantly assert ethnic or nationalistic pride in their respective heritage and only minimally identify as “Latino” because that is how the larger American society views them, while others question whether a pan-Latino unity is even possible, given the contentious identity politics among Latinos in terms of language, culture, immigration/citizenship status, social class, ethno-national background, and other variables. At the very least, this worksheet and the accompanying discussion conveys the often highly emotional and bitterly contested nature of identity politics movements, as well as the negotiation of ethnic and cultural identities.

Conclusion

The opportunity to inspire young students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to critically contemplate and discuss matters of race, ethnicity, immigration, and cultural diversity is one of the most personally-rewarding experiences of my teaching career. It is also one of the most socially significant and timely challenges that higher education administrators and instructors – particularly those in the social sciences and humanities, whose academic disciplines are heavily rooted in the study of historic and/or contemporary cross-cultural interactions between members of different social groups or analysis of different forms of cross-cultural human expression – currently face. Most colleges and universities openly declare support for multiculturalism and diversity; however the vast differences in social locations that many white and non-white students bring with them into the classroom creates the potential for antagonistic and belligerent exchanges between students, as well as resistance from students, when subject matter pertaining to cultural diversity is incorporated into the curriculum. If used properly, classroom discussions and in-class writing activities can be highly effective as teaching tools to broach potentially sensitive and contentious subject matter, of which Latino studies courses and other social science and humanities disciplines are enmeshed, even on
campuses where the majority of students have had relatively little prior exposure to, or experience with, peoples of color. The primary challenge for higher education today is to alter its paradigmatic approach towards diversity/multiculturalism from merely “celebrating differences” between socially-defined racial and ethnic groups towards teaching students to critically understand the multifaceted dynamics of cultural diversity, intergroup relations, and identity formation processes.
Works Cited


Contributors

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**José Ángel Guajardo** In his 2004 publication of *The New Americans*, author Enrique Trueba called José Ángel Guajardo "an organic intellectual," an apt descriptor for the goat herder with a 4th grade education from Dr. Coss, Nuevo Leon, who would become an important community based researcher in Elsa, Texas. Que en paz descanse el gran intelectual, José A. Guajardo, 1936-2013.

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Britt Haraway received a Ph.D. in literature with an emphasis in creative writing from the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi. His fiction has appeared in the South Dakota Review, Natural Bridge, 971, Product, New Madrid and is forthcoming in BorderSenses. His poetry has also appeared in BorderSenses. He teaches at the University of Texas Pan American.

Sonia Hernández is a Rio Grande Valley native who specializes in the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, gender and labor in Modern Mexico, and Chicana/o history. She earned her PhD in Latin American History from the University of Houston in 2006. Her most recent book, Working Women into the Borderlands (Texas A&M University Press, 2014) is the recipient of the Jim Parish Award for Documentation of Regional and Local History. After working in the History Department at the University of Texas-Pan American for nearly eight years she will be joining the History Department at Texas A&M University in the Fall of 2014.


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Joel Zapata was born and raised in the Texas Panhandle. Since then he has lived on the frontera and in Central Texas. He graduated with a BA in history and a minor in anthropology from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). His research focuses on telling the stories of immigration, settlement, and community of Mexicana/os on the frontera and Tejas. He is especially interested in the labor and education of Mexican origin women and children and is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at Southern Methodist University.