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Enacting Invitational Rhetorics: Leveraging Networks of Care in the US Asylum Process

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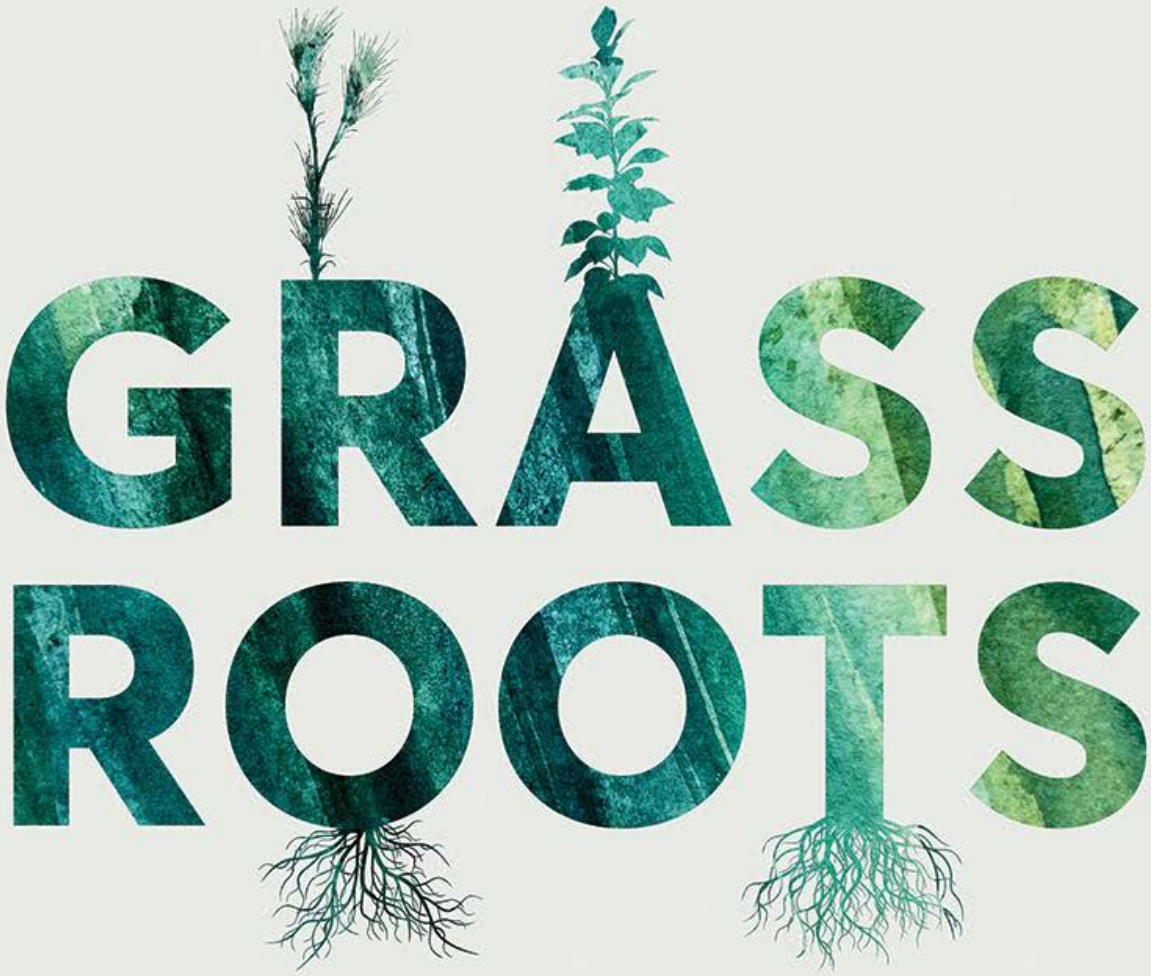

ACTIVISMS

Public Rhetorics in Localized Contexts

Edited by Lisa L. Phillips,
Sarah Warren-Riley, and Julie Collins Bates

INTERSECTIONAL RHETORICS
Karma R. Chávez, Series Editor

GRASSROOTS ACTIVISMS

PUBLIC RHETORICS IN LOCALIZED CONTEXTS

Edited by Lisa L. Phillips,
Sarah Warren-Riley,
and Julie Collins Bates

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Enacting Invitational Rhetorics

Leveraging Networks of Care in the US Asylum Process

MONICA REYES, RANDALL MONTY,
JORGE M. CAMARILLO, AND CINDY BERNAL

A person is eligible to apply for asylum in the United States if they are able to effectively persuade the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—in written, narrative form—about the circumstances surrounding their escape from persecution in their home country. The process includes filling out an application (USCIS form I-589) in English, wherein asylum-seekers are asked to answer a series of detailed questions about their persecution in their home country. In some cases, individuals must appear before an immigration judge to recount the information in their asylum application. An appeal may take months, or even years, to get resolved, and even then, given the complexity of the process and the lack of professional and legal assistance accessible for immigrants, many appeals are rejected.[1] In 2019 only 31 percent of asylum cases handled by immigration courts were approved (Transactional Records, 2020), while a mere 16 percent of approved asylum cases were successful without help from a lawyer to navigate the process.

Asylum appeals narratives are vital, as they open opportunities for work, education, and a pathway to resettlement in the United States; however, these narratives are also dependent on a problematic ideology that centers on

1. For example, Migrant Protection Protocols, otherwise known as "Remain in Mexico," is a policy passed during the Trump administration that mandates that asylum-seekers must return to their country of origin, or to the last country they were physically in before entering the United States, while their claim is processed. This policy has resulted in thousands of people living on international bridges or in tent cities within Mexican border towns, where they can be victims of violence and have extreme difficulty accessing legal help.

hegemonic, dominant rhetorical traditions of whiteness and neoliberalism. This ideology is illustrated in the expectation that applicants tell a story that "predominantly conforms to the conventions of model narrative forms" (Vogl, 2013, p. 63). In other words, if an asylum-seeker struggles to articulate their experiences in accordance with the legalese and rhetorical expectations of the US asylum context, there is a high probability their claim will not be compelling enough to be approved.

The standardization of genre and form as a requisite for participation in the asylum process demands asylum-seekers retell and relive trauma, an expectation "that undermines narrative capacity" of the experiences themselves (Butler, 2004) and renders the asylum-seekers as those, "who are not persons or are not considered to be the kinds of beings with whom one can or must enter into an ethical relation" (Butler, 2012, p. 140). Through Butler's argument, we can view the United States' approach to the asylum process not only as an effort to control who is allowed into the country but as a process of determining who is human and who is deserving of protection. In doing so, the asylum process is designed to ignore the precarity inherent in sharing a planet with other humans. Further complicating the conditions of this grassroots initiative, although "retelling the trauma narrative is a way of claiming ownership of their experiences," Hesford and Shuman (2018) note that "for others, describing what they endured is retraumatizing" (p. 53). Taking these ideas together, by requiring every asylum-seeker to compose a written narrative to justify their claims, the US asylum appeals process flattens trauma and individual identity in service of a political and economic hegemony that renders all claims as comparable and in competition with each other (Lyon, 2018).

There are compelling arguments for why professionals associated with rhetoric and composition should leverage their expertise to support their communities in material ways (Cushman, 1996, 1999). For us, the border regions connecting Mexico and the United States bring the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers—including their difficulties navigating US immigration policy—to the forefront both liminally and materially. This context invokes Butler's (2012) concept of the precarity of cohabitation, the realization that our ethical obligations to one another emerge out of this "'up againstness'—the result of populations living in conditions of unwilled adjacency, the result of forced emigration or the redrawing of the boundaries of a nation-state" (p. 134). This "geographical proximity" reveals the precarity of human relationships and interconnectedness and calls to our attention the factors that contribute to the "glocal" conditions, including those we are culpable for, that cause other humans to migrate. This runs contrary to usual lines of thinking employed by nation-states, that interpersonal responsibility extends "only in the contexts of established communities that are gathered within borders" when humans "are

unified by the same language, and/or constitute a people or a nation" (Butler, 2012, p. 137). The existence of refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as the global sociopolitical, economic, and environmental factors that cause people to become refugees and seek asylum, reifies our obligations as cohabitants of our world, to an extent well beyond regionality, linguistic affinity, and nationality.

In this chapter, the authors—a collective of shelter staff and volunteers—discuss the development of a grassroots initiative, Retórica del Refugio (RDR), whose name translates as "Shelter Rhetorics." This initiative was collaboratively designed by writing faculty at a large, public, Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), along with staff and clients at an emergency shelter for displaced people in the Rio Grande Valley border region of Texas, La Posada Providencia (LPP). Through the initiative, volunteers, including faculty, staff, and students from UTRGV, provide support and feedback for shelter staff on professional documents, conduct professional writing workshops for clients seeking to enter the US workforce, and at the core of RDR, provide writing consultation services for shelter clients as they compose their asylum application narratives. To do this work, it is essential that staff develop trust with each client, and one important factor for developing clients' trust is effective communication.

Informed by tenets of "invitational rhetoric" (Foss & Griffin, 1995) as well as critical new materialist theory (Clark, 2018; Coole & Frost, 2010), RDR enacts the disciplinary expertise of rhetoric and composition to leverage and diffuse asymmetrical networks of institutional, political, and individual power to benefit asylum-seekers and the shelters as a whole, including helping to ensure that individuals maintain agency and dignity throughout the writing and appeals processes (Kreuter, 2018). In this way, the authors understand that these networks of power, when enacted through an invitational rhetoric, must be reimagined as networks of care.

In what follows, we—a team of coauthors consisting of public volunteers, professional academics, and shelter staff—begin by outlining the networks for care that were assembled to create RDR. Next, we detail the initiative's writing consultation services and a pedagogy of writing consulting for working with asylum applicants. We also point to systemic fissures of the initiative that help us conclude with special considerations (and our recommendations) for replicating such an initiative.

SHELTER PROFILE

LPP is a 15-minute drive from the international border connecting Mexico and the United States. The shelter has helped over 10,000 asylum-seekers from

nearly 90 different countries around the world since 1989. In fact, during the late 2010s, there was an increase in families crossing to the United States from Africa. Often these families began their journey by flying or sailing to Brazil, then traveling (usually by foot) through Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico before finally reaching the United States. Many of these clients are asylum-seekers fleeing extreme poverty or persecution based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and political and religious beliefs.

The staff and volunteers of LPP are diverse and represent a variety of educational, political, and cultural backgrounds.[2] Staff work with clients to maintain a steady atmosphere of support. For example, many current clients assume chores such as cooking, laundry, and yard work, and three former clients are now employed at LPP. Volunteers are also involved in planning and carrying out LPP's mission.

Jorge, as LPP client coordinator, understands how the passion of the volunteers—many of whom are connected to UTRGV—makes the shelter's mission achievable. The shelter's mission statement explicates its religious motivation as follows:

> La Posada Providencia (LPP), founded and sponsored by the Sisters of Divine Providence, is a ministry for people in crisis from around the world, who are seeking legal refuge in the United States. The shelter staff provides a safe and welcoming home, mentors to promote self-sufficiency and cultural integration, and imparts values that witness God's Providence in our world.

One of the main differences between LPP and other organizations working in this area is that LPP is a long-term shelter that offers intensive case management to assist clients through the entire asylum-seeking process. Even though they can begin to feel a sense of peace upon arrival, asylum-seekers continue to experience traumatic stress and the effects of acculturated stress exposure. One of the many services LPP offers to clients is on-demand and on-call counseling as well as on-site medical services.

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2. Volunteers come from nearby schools, churches, and other organizations, and the shelter also accepts charitable donations and facilitates philanthropic partnerships with local businesses. Therefore, because of this initially recognized exigence, volunteers for the initiative we outline here primarily, although not exclusively, joined the initiative through their connections to UTRGV. Most volunteers are faculty in UTRGV's writing and language department, while other volunteers include faculty from health sciences and political science departments, staff in the human resources department, undergraduate students in the biomedical sciences program, and independent counselors from the local community.

FIGURE 18.1. The interior of "Casa Carolina." Photo by Yazmin. Used with permission (IRB approval #18-024, Old Dominion University).

INITIATIVE DESCRIPTION

RDR offers writing support to clients who desire to talk and write about their experiences in service of their personal and professional goals. Pedagogical outcomes for the initiative include developing a protocol for tutoring asylum-seeking clients, designing reusable materials and resources for tutors, and analyzing asylum appeals as rhetorical genres. To these ends, RDR implements three main writing-focused activities: individual writing consultations, translation services, and professional writing workshops. Additionally, RDR coordinators have developed mental health support protocols for volunteers and counseling support for clients.

Writing consultations consist of faculty and student volunteers meeting with individual clients, typically at a round table (figure 18.1), to help them write their story about why they are seeking asylum in the United States. During these consultations, consultants help clients to generate and develop ideas, understand how content and structure are related, implement revision strategies for independent learning, and raise their confidence in writing and sharing stories. Obviously, the consultations function similarly to writing

center tutoring sessions, although we are less strict with following disciplinary or local programmatic expectations, such as "the tutor doesn't write on the paper." This gives volunteers some leeway with helping clients to record their ideas, including transcribing while the client tells their story. Consultants are careful not to write or suggest anything on the client's behalf, because clients need to be able to articulate and support their narratives.

Although writing consultations are the galvanizing task of the RDR initiative and the focus of this chapter, varying client and shelter needs invoke different opportunities for collaboration and support. These include tasks like individual counseling services for vulnerable clients, technical writing feedback for documents written by shelter staff, translation services for shelter documents and client narratives, and professional writing workshops for clients who require support in finding work.

Assembling Networks of Care

By its nature as a shelter, LPP is developing "networks of care," which requires fostering the resources, personnel, and networks necessary to care for the needs of asylum-seekers. We understand "network" broadly as fluctuating connections made between a variety of human and nonhuman things in a rhetorical context; however, we also understand that networks often leverage power asymmetrically, impacting institutions, policies, and individuals (Clark, 2018). As such, we focus on the following primary networks of power that the authors worked to assemble and leverage for RDR in order to promote care for asylum-seekers: shelter rhetorics, expertise about the narrative demands of the asylum process, and writing tutoring.

Shelter Rhetorics

RDR builds on a larger study Monica had previously conducted that invited shelter clients, staff, and volunteers to share multimodal perspectives (through interviews, drawings, and photos) to understand the kinds of rhetorical support LPP provides clients to tell stories on their own terms. Monica learned that LPP provides opportunities for displaced communities to employ what she terms *shelter rhetorics,* distinct shared rhetorical practices of daily life—like silence and routine—that both safeguard vulnerabilities and enact agency for individuals within precarious spaces. By practicing shelter rhetorics, the shelter encourages clients to tell their unique stories in ways that help them to

move forward as well as critique reductive dominant discourses about what it means to be an "asylum-seeker."

Shelter rhetorics at LPP rely on "invitational rhetoric" (Foss & Griffin, 1995), an alternative rhetoric that centralizes collaborative understanding instead of persuasion in order to "create an environment that facilitates understanding, accords value and respect to others' perspectives, and contributes to the development of relationships of equality" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, 17). Moreover, we see invitational rhetoric as closely tied with "rhetorical listening," articulated by Kristina Ratcliffe (1999) as a strategy of rhetorical invention, like reading, writing, and speaking, that leads to attuning oneself to "discursive intersections of gender and race/ethnicity (including whiteness) so as to help us to facilitate cross-cultural dialogues" of understanding (p. 196). Additionally, Ratcliffe's key ideas about the underlying rhetorical value of silence and listening coincide with work done within displacement contexts from the social sciences that ideologize silence as a strategy for displaced people to tell stories on their own terms and at their own pace (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010; McFadyen, 2018; Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustinos, & Somasundaram, 2015).

Clients, staff, and volunteers saw cultural-rhetorical practices as ways to understand one another more deeply; this is a contrast to traditional models of rhetoric that focus on persuasion. Through shelter rhetorics, LPP strives to "create an environment that facilitates understanding, accords value and respect to others' perspectives, and contributes to the development of relationships of equality" (Foss & Griffin, 17).

One way that LPP illustrates invitational rhetoric is that there is no expectation for clients to share their story of persecution with anyone at the shelter unless they want to, because clients are not obligated to begin their official asylum application during their stay. Ayana, a participant in Monica's study, described from her own experience how this type of respect for silence is necessary for asylum-seekers. Although she didn't speak about her own past to other clients, Ayana did listen to others' stories at LPP, and this fostered a feminist materialist space of speaking, listening, and silence. Ayana captured a photo of the outdoor circular table, "la mesa redonda" (figure 18.2), to depict the space where she slowly built community with other women every day:

> In the evenings, after dinner, we have free time, some girls would gather there, and sometimes, I would join them. Little by little, I would join them, and all of them would start telling their story, what they used to do in their country or why they came here and things like that. I would listen. I wouldn't share my stuff, but I would listen. I liked to listen. It distracted me, listen-

FIGURE 18.2. Exterior photo of *la mesa redonda*. Photo by Ayana. Used with permission (IRB approval #18-024, Old Dominion University).

> ing to it, each one's story, and it was always like that. We'd start—maybe, we didn't always talk about [the past] but also about our future and all that, so that was something really beautiful that we would do in the evenings, after dinner, there, at the table. (Ayana)

Ayana's initial hesitance to tell her story of persecution and suffering combined with her willingness to listen to others' stories demonstrates how LPP offers a reprieve to the accelerated, persuasion-driven demand for credibility narratives within the US asylum system that centers on criminalizing people who seek asylum.

First, the rhetorical intents of sharing a story of persecution are different at *la mesa redonda* than during a credible fear interview.[3] The former is based on "rhetorical listening" (Ratcliffe, 1999) and "invitational rhetoric" (Foss & Griffin, 1995), while the latter is based on classical rhetorical perspectives of persuasion. Ayana and the women she joined at the table are thus fulfilling

3. A credible fear interview is the first screening for a person seeking asylum at a port of entry, in which they justify their need for asylum in the United States. The screening is completed by an asylum officer with US Customs and Immigration.

their need for "adequate space to tell their stories at their own pace and in a manner most conducive to them" (Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustinos, & Somasundaram, 2015, p. 70). This self-paced rhetorical exchange, this listening, is especially seen in Ayana's description of how she became part of the group "little by little." In this way, *la mesa redonda* is a critical part of the network of care at LPP for those seeking asylum, especially women, in that it offers a habitual meeting space for those who voluntarily desire to listen and speak among other displaced women, without the same bureaucratic high stakes of an asylum hearing.

Second, the community and storytelling that takes place here is in stark contrast to the storytelling that demarcates lines of difference between mainstream or bureaucratic audiences in the Global North and those who seek asylum. Instead, the outdoor round table allows Ayana to experience stories as empowering for refugee and immigrant women because they are "told among . . . friends" and "told in a language or talk style that is comfortable to them," and this provides Ayana and the other women "space to voice themselves" (Hua, 2000, p. 113). As a rhetor, Ayana has slowly been able to gauge the rhetorical possibilities at this table and make meaning at her own pace and in collaboration with women who may have faced similar circumstances. *La mesa redonda* is a space for Ayana and the other women to practice what Cheryl Glenn (2002) refers to as the "feminist rhetorical art" of silence that works to "resist" powerful bureaucracies that use the words of marginalized people to reduce and categorize them (p. 262).

Expertise about the Narrative Demands of the US Asylum Process

To add to the shelter rhetorics in place at LPP, RDR required expertise about the asylum process and the many struggles clients have when sharing their stories to make claims for their asylum case. While Cindy, an intern at LPP, was never a client, she has been through the immigration process personally. As a teenager, Cindy had to face immigration officials in the United States, with fear and uncertainty about her future; however, she attributes her own success in this problematic process to her faith and to her pro bono attorneys, who were willing to give her their time and resources to carefully guide her through her immigration process. Cindy was already a critical part of LPP's network of care, as one of her main roles during her internship as a UTRGV social work graduate student was assisting clients in drafting narratives that they could use on their asylum application.

A primary challenge clients face is the fear and anxiety about what information to include as part of their narratives. Immigrants and refugees are often skeptical of those offering help, due to the corruption existing in their home countries. People in authority positions, such as law enforcement officers, are known to be involved with gangs and criminal acts. Law enforcement officers and even government officials at all levels are often involved in extortions and other violent crimes to receive financial and political gains. Sometimes Cindy could sense the clients' inhibitions about sharing their stories with her.

Additionally, Cindy noted that many clients tended to summarize their stories because of how traumatic their experiences had been. At first, many clients refused to elaborate on details; not only because they were fearful of who the information would be shared with, but also because they had a difficult time recalling events and struggled with sharing their experiences in chronological order. It was common for them to not always remember dates, names, and details when describing traumatizing events that pushed them to migrate. If they were trying to write about an event, they would leave out details of who the perpetrator was, when the event happened, and the reason why they were being persecuted. While these challenges may have various explanations, one of the factors applicants struggled with was that by sharing their stories, they were reliving their experiences.

Also, and especially if a client had never before shared about their persecution, it was common for them to experience the trauma of those events again simply by telling their story. As an intern, it was important for Cindy to be mindful of this reality and learn how to assist them in narrating their stories in a way that made them feel safe. Even just writing these narratives, clients at LPP often experienced exhaustion and fatigue, either because they experienced storytelling as arduous and anxiety-producing or because writing their stories was a form of therapy in their process of healing.

Cindy helped us understand how asylum narratives function rhetorically as archives of evidence, which Rice (2020) defined as inclusive of "literal documents and records, cultural memories archived through multiple retellings, family stories, preserved media files, personal archives of experience, and so forth" (loc. 408). Further, narratives are an essential part of the appeals process, because they function as "tools for the construction of public memory" (loc. 444) and reflect "ordinary and extraordinary experiences in public life that leave lasting, palpable residues, which then become our sources—our resources—for public discourse" (loc. 430). However, asylum-seekers in the United States often encounter difficulty composing these necessary forms of evidence because of institutional expectations that narratives be written

in the genre and vernacular English that the adjudicating parties recognize and prefer.

Complicating this evidentiary process are limitations and biases of those evaluating claims and documents, conditions Popescu (2019) identifies as owing to state actors that "have multiple and often conflicted responsibilities and limited understanding or knowledge of the context of forced migration" (p. 109). These conditions leave those seeking asylum at physical border crossings, notably the Mexico–US border, at the mercy and discretion of US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers (Musalo, 2019). What counts as evidence and archives varies greatly across contexts, audiences, and purposes, and what counts as evidence in US asylum courts—physical evidence, medical reports, and expert testimony—can be extremely difficult for asylum-seekers to produce. This difficulty is due to a number of factors: asylees typically leave previous locations under duress, physical items like papers and photographs may not travel well, the country of origin might not supply requested evidence, the receiving country's expectations might not be known before arriving, and some preferred documents can be expensive to procure.

This is why Reyes (2020) reframed these narratives as "accounts of asylum": because they "provide access within the globalized migration conversation, but also serve as a proof of authenticity for the displaced individual themselves." Before being presented to a judge, narratives are finalized with the help of an immigration lawyer, typically working pro bono, to ensure legal compliance. In the complex legal ecosystem that is the US asylum application process, narratives are essential forms of documentation that can become determining factors for whether an individual's claim is approved.

Writing Tutoring

With shelter rhetorics and expertise about the narrative demands of the asylum process in place, RDR required an assemblage involving willing and knowledgeable writing tutors to carry out the work. Early in the spring 2019 semester, Monica approached her departmental colleague Monty (then the associate director of the UTRGV Writing Center) to see if he could help expand the writing support offered at LPP. The network of care was growing. Importantly, contemporary writing center scholarship provided numerous touchstones of relevance for supporting LPP's mission: multilingual writing tutoring (Lape, 2013; Severino & Prim, 2016), using feminist (McNamee & Miley, 2017) and anti-racist (Faison, 2018) theory to support tutors and writers from vulnerable populations (Denny, 2010; Alvarez, Salazar, Brito, &

Aguilar, 2017), collaborative approaches to tutoring (Scharold, 2017), aligning tutor education with social justice missions (Godbee, Ozias, & Kar Tang, 2015) including specifically at Catholic institutions (Zimmerelli, 2015), and implementing effective tutoring in nonacademic and online spaces (Miller-Cochran, 2015).

A grassroots approach to community partnerships informed by rhetorical listening requires academics to diffuse the kinds of power they may be used to maintaining. Given the constant variability of LPP's needs, it was in the best interest of the clients and the shelter for the volunteers to follow and respond to their lead rather than preemptively developing initiatives or services. This dynamic played out in an unexpected but beneficial way with RDR as a kind of writing center initiated by an articulated praxis but flexible enough to modify according to individual needs.

Commonly in both composition and writing center studies, students, faculty, and (especially) other academic programs within the institution view writing and writing tutoring according to deficit models. That is, writing is something that is to be done "correctly," and the writing classroom or center is where students go to get their writing fixed, once and for all. While there was some deference to our professional status as writing teachers, interactions facilitated through RDR were marked by a noticeably different expectation on the part of our community collaborators and, as a result, our interactions enacted an idealized version of a collaborative, writer-centered consultation. There were fewer expectations about conventions (grammar, spelling, punctuation) and more of an immediate focus on developing ideas and conveying them with clarity, accuracy, and individual voice. This focus may have been due to the material consequences of the writing opportunity, and so the clients likely approached the consultations as part of the larger asylum-seeking process, resulting in more engaged consultations.

Empathetic and intentional listening is a key strategy of effective writing tutoring (Valentine, 2017) and is especially important when supporting students who are hesitant to write about complex and controversial topics (Draxler, 2017). Furthermore, discussing physical violence and other traumatic experiences of persecution can be consequential, both for the speaker and the listener. Internalizing this dynamic, the asylum-seeker might be hesitant to talk about their experiences because of personal trauma or out of concern for their listener. In addition, we acknowledge that clients who participate may experience discrepancies of power between themselves and the volunteers, because the questions we ask during individual consultations may mirror the credible fear interview that clients have endured. Similarly complicating the conditions of a consultation, asylum-seekers can be hesitant to report traumatic experiences because they may view their experiences as

mundane, shared by families and neighbors who may not have been able to escape the violence at home. If everyone you know has had the same experience, what makes yours—or you—special? This is particularly problematic because expected traumatic stories represent the preferred evidence in appeals narratives. In response to these concerns, RDR employs tenets of safety, value, and freedom from Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin's "invitational rhetoric" approach. Volunteers do this by assisting clients in composing authentic narratives that resist the rhetorics of dominance and persuasion inherent in USCIS asylum screenings and required storytellings and by providing peer counseling support for volunteers.

CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no tidy solutions; there is just continued work. While we acknowledge the systemic inequalities and racism in the US asylum process, we also understand that progressive change occurs slowly. In other words, we don't think advocating for systemic change and supporting people who are navigating the current system (like RDR does) are mutually exclusive. We do, however, offer guidance about the effects of storytelling for others who are inspired to take on work like that of RDR.

First, while RDR offers LPP clients opportunities to tell diverse stories on their own terms, it also supports clients who desire to tell their stories within the highly problematic, bureaucratic, and reductive rhetorical ecology that is the US asylum system. So the question must be asked: By helping clients write "compelling" public narratives of asylum for their applications (by hegemonic US asylum standards), is the initiative only perpetuating the binary-based, inflexible narrative standards of asylum experience that are already so difficult to navigate? A complicated answer emerges when we observe how LPP uses RDR to nurture clients, first, as human beings. RDR allows clients to tell stories, which fracture the "false sense of stasis" about identity, and encourages them to offer stories that highlight the "in-motion and in process qualities of the displacement where 'moving identities' are constantly in action" (K. Powell, 2015, p. 15). This is important, as Powell argues, for the act of being displaced impacts identity in profound ways, even in the opportunity for a displaced individual to "resist having a narrative identity imposed on them, and create subversive narrative identities as resistance to the subjectivities inscribed on them" (Powell, 2015, p. 13).

Second, the efforts the faculty and clients make toward collaborative storytelling is one way to resist reductive portrayals of the asylum experience. RDR is essentially advocating for more nuanced and meaningful representations of

people who are marginalized and oppressed (Hesford, 2010, p. 55). By asking questions about their home communities and the specific types of persecution and layers of oppression faced, faculty volunteers and clients work together to put aside simplistic representations of displaced people and delve into the intricate networks and "political structures and processes, global economic systems, or colonial histories that imbricate systematic . . . violence against [marginalized populations]" that are often neglected (Dingo, 2013, p. 532).

Third, initiatives like RDR work best in concert with the organic invitational rhetoric practices such as those already at work in spaces like LPP, like the ones used at *la mesa redonda* that Ayana describes earlier. One way this is achieved is by expanding RDR to also support other stories that clients desire to tell, aside from stories of persecution. These stories may include listening to clients in their own languages (translation) or helping clients express their hopes for the future (resume writing). For example, LPP recently developed a series of educational initiatives for clients to complete in order to demonstrate to governmental authorities and agencies that the clients were prepared to enter into and contribute to the US workforce. To support this endeavor, RDR developed and led a resume-writing workshop where clients created their very first English-language resumes. Within a week of participating in the workshop, one client submitted several job applications along with the resume they had created with RDR's help.

And a final consideration is the consequence of physical and emotional harm suffered by refugees and asylum-seekers before, during, and after the transition process, which has been substantially and continuously documented (Berthold & Libal, 2019). Likewise, and without downplaying the severity of those experiences, the work of writing tutoring can be traumatic for tutors themselves when writers are writing about topics that are volatile, violent, and potentially triggering. This phenomenon is related to what professional counselors and therapists refer to as "vicarious trauma," wherein "the traumatic imagery presented by clients . . . may cause a disruption in the therapist's view of self, others, and the world in general" (Bober & Regehr, 2006). Early in the initiative, we experimented with different ways for volunteers to reflect and decompress after meeting with clients, such as through one-on-one meetings with initiative coordinators and through writing for a shared blog space.

As the first volunteer under the auspices of RDR to assist a client with a writing consultation, Maggie (a professional academic whose areas of specialization include carceral studies and community literacy) constructed her reflection as a narrative of her experience and a preview for fellow volunteers. The initial session lasted three hours, which included the consultation with the client and meeting with the client coordinator. Although her reflection ended

on a positive note, looking forward to the next session, Maggie described the session as "a very intense few hours," noting that she, "was exhausted in every way" afterward. Maggie's feelings mirrored common sentiments across the volunteers' written and informal reflections: helping the clients write their asylum appeals narratives was difficult and stressful. Importantly, these challenges are not due to the clients' literacy skills, which vary widely from client to client, but rather because the personal experiences asylum-seekers are required to write about in their narratives are traumatic and violent.

As a result of vicarious trauma, it is common for counselors to feel pressure for their clients to make progress and achieve goals. This pressure can lead to feelings of burnout, a lack of self-esteem, professional isolation, compassion fatigue, substance abuse, apathy, and a need to save or rescue future clients (Glover-Graf, 2012; Lusk & Tarrazas, 2015). Without sufficient preparation and support, volunteer consultants and writing center tutors are also susceptible to these outcomes, especially given the material consequences of the asylum appeals process.

In response, volunteers with grassroots initiatives like this one can "take note of the consequences of working within a context filled with trauma and be prepared to be responsive to the needs of their staff" (Lusk & Tarrazas, 2015). For our initiative, training workshops to prepare volunteers for the content they will encounter and critical reflection opportunities allow for processes of resilience-building and consideration of programmatic assessment of our initiative. Critical reflection also validates the framings of invitational rhetoric and networks of care. Likewise, praxes recommended by recent and emergent writing center scholarship that support tutors' emotion and mental health (Giaimo, 2020), such as "giving consultants the space and time to process emotional issues they encounter in sessions" (Perry, 2016), practicing mindfulness meditation (S. Johnson, 2018), enacting trauma-informed practice and writing pedagogy (Krimm, 2020), and tutoring the whole person (Driscoll & Wells, 2020), can provide guidance for how to facilitate grassroots initiatives that ask individuals to enter into potentially traumatic writing tutoring contexts.

The asylum-seeking process is precarious, as policies are in flux, people are transient, and the diverse experiences and needs of asylum-seekers contradict the expected and preferred actions of international, neoliberal systems (Stenberg, 2015). For example, the Trump-era border policy Title 42, cynically activated to deny asylum-seekers from certain countries entry to the United States under the guise of preventing the spread of COVID-19, resulted in new concerns and working conditions for emergency shelters like LPP. As such, the embodied existence of asylum-seekers can be viewed as an act of resistance to

hegemonic institutions and systems. These positive deviations from the norm provide valuable insights into how individual experiences can prove useful as replicable models for intervention and response (Durá, 2015). We understand that what is happening at LPP is not indicative of what is or can happen at other emergency shelters or nonprofits that support displaced communities, which is why our focus on methods and approach are emphasized. It is unrealistic to expect systemic change overnight, but as we move toward systemic change, we can look for immediate ways to help people navigate the system, and we can celebrate small glories.