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Teaching a Decolonial Counterstory: 1551 Valladolid Debate and Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*

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Abstract | This article theorizes how educators can draw from Aja Martinez's research on counterstory to teach decolonial theory. It provides a case study of this approach explaining how a particular scene from Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, acts as a 'decolonial counterstory.' The scene details how indigenous revolutionaries in Chiapas, Mexico, convict a Cuban Marxist intellectual named Bartolomeo for crimes against history. The criminal's name is an allusion to Bartolomé de Las Casas, the 16th-century Bishop of Chiapas, the protector of the Indians, and former encomiendista in Cuba. As a counterstory, this scene reimagines colonial accounts of the 1551 Valladolid Debate: one of the earliest debates among colonists on indigenous peoples' human rights and the event where Las Casas famously defends indigenous peoples' humanity. In this way, Silko reframes the Valladolid debate as a trial overseen by indigenous peoples, conducted on indigenous land, and bringing the crimes against history to bear on the present. Teaching this counterstory allows educators to illustrate four foundational decolonial concepts—"delinking," "bio-politics," "geo-politics," and "sedimented history"—in accessible ways for early career college students.

Keywords | Counterstory, Pluriversality, Coloniality, Decolonial Theory, Valladolid Debate, Pedagogy, Delinking, Bio-Politics, Geo-Politics, Sedimented History, Leslie Marmon Silko, Walter Mignolo, Aja Martinez, Bartolomé de las Casas, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda

Conversations among decolonial scholars often overlook the challenges and inherent contradictions of teaching, articulating, and illustrating decolonial concepts to early career college students. Even for disciplines like rhetoric and composition, which have worked to elevate and legitimize the scholarship of teaching and learning, there have been few publications about the actual practice of teaching decolonial concepts. A sample of these publications include syllabi,[1] ethnographic studies of Latinx students' experiences learning decolonial theory,[2] and course descriptions of first year writing classes that implement translingual practices as a form of decolonization.[3]

In addition to these publications, there have been meaningful discussions about decolonial theory's pedagogical implications within the scholarship on how to decolonize research methods and knowledge production in rhetoric and composition.[4] For example, Damián Baca's final chapter in *Mestiz@ Scripts* outlines a model for decolonizing disciplinary histories and curricula of rhetoric and composition. Iris Ruiz's final two chapters in *Reclaiming Composition for Chicano/as and Other Ethnic Minorities* detail the ways first-year writing (FYW) instructors can implement the principles of critical historiography to construct a curriculum that contests 'official histories' (181).[5]

The conceptual and curricular revisions that Baca, Ruiz, and other decolonial scholars offer are meant to create tectonic shifts in traditional approaches to composition pedagogy, and importantly, they do not recommend simply reading decolonial thinkers "at the end of the semester, if there is time" (Baca 3). Implementing decolonial theory in a class is not just about revising a syllabus or assigning the seminal work of decolonial theorists as readings. In fact, for many early career college students in the US, an initial exposure to seminal decolonial texts can be alienating given the new theoretical vocabulary and the challenges posed by unexamined colonial epistemologies. Accordingly, teachers must not only think through the decolonial concepts and texts that

[1]See, Mukavetz, Andrea Riley. "Decolonial Theory and Methodology." *Composition Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2018, pp. 124–193.
[2]See, De los Ríos, Cati V. "Writing Oneself Into the Curriculum: Photovoice Journaling in a Secondary Ethnic Studies Course." *Written Communication*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2020, pp. 487–511.
[3]Medina, Cruz. "Decolonial Potential in a Multilingual FYC." *Composition Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2019, pp. 73–219.
[4]See Ruiz, Iris D, and Raúl Sánchez. *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016; Cushman, Ellen, et al. "Decolonizing Projects: Creating Pluriversal Possibilities in Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–22; García and Baca, *Rhetorics Elsewhere*; Baca, *Mestiz@ Scripts*; Ruiz, *Reclaiming Composition*.
[5]Ruiz's chapters on applying critical historiography to the FYW outline two full syllabi: one that examines the historiographical case study on the Spanish Conquest and the roots of Manifest Destiny; the other looks at historical accounts of Guatemala in the US (164–165). These courses look first at general discussions of historiography by interrogating who has access to the production of history. Then the class applies those discussions to specific historical case studies.

guide their teaching but also the instructional approaches with which they introduce those concepts and texts to students.

An important model that decolonial scholars can draw from to develop accessible and effective instructional approaches is Aja Martinez's approach to counterstory. Martinez defines counterstory as both a methodology and a method. As a methodology, counterstory is rooted in the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and works to destabilize oppressive narratives by recognizing that the "experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism" (Martinez 3). As a method, counterstory includes a range of techniques aimed at empowering marginalized peoples "through the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures" of marginalized narratives (3). The range of these methods includes allegory, fantasy, narrative dialogues, "family history, biography, autoethnography, cuentos, testimonios" (3). Martinez offers examples of these counterstory methods from the legal scholars that founded CRT: Derrick Bell's allegories in *And We Are Not Saved* and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Richard Delgado's narrative dialogues in *The Rodrigo Chronicles*, and Patricia J. Williams's autobiographical writings in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*.

Importantly, Martinez points to these examples to establish that the methodology of counterstory cannot be separated from the methods of counterstory. While many authors and scholars have used allegories, fantasies, narrative dialogues, and/or autoethnography, the specific framework for counterstory as a methodology emerged from the lived experiences of those scholars of color who founded CRT. This intellectual tradition is important to acknowledge and cite as decolonial theorists apply and adapt counterstory methods to their classrooms. Accordingly, using counterstory methods to illustrate decolonial concepts without citing the intellectual tradition that Martinez details can obscure the theoretical distinctions between decolonial theory and CRT.[6]

Decolonial theory, as it has been circulated in rhetoric and composition, is difficult to characterize. However, Walter Mignolo's work has consistently shaped the language and conceptual framework scholars of rhetoric and composition use to challenge settler-colonial histories, research methods, and teaching practices. For example, *Rhetoric Review*'s 2019 symposium, "Decolonizing Projects: Creating Pluriversal Possibilities in Rhetoric" outlined the ways seven scholars used Mignolo's concepts of "delinking" and "pluriversality" in their scholarship and teaching. Additionally, Romeo García and Damián Baca's introduction to their award-winning edited collection, *Rhetorics Elsewhere and Otherwise*, highlights Mignolo's theorization of pluriversality and the decolonial option. Therefore, Mignolo's work is

[6]In the field of rhetoric and composition, CRT storying and counterstory methods have given rise to a field called cultural rhetorics. The citation politics between decolonial scholars and cultural rhetoricians was recently magnified in a 2021 special issue of *College English*, where prominent decolonial scholars, Ellen Cushman, Damián Baca, and Romeo García, criticized cultural rhetorics because "to publish therein, one must cite those of the appropriate lineage, precisely in order to create its own hierarchy of knowing with reference to its own self-authored intellectual lineage" (13). My point here is that despite these citation politics, "story as a knowledge-making method can contribute to pluriversal understandings and decolonial thinking" in our classrooms, and there is room enough in our works cited for both cultural rhetoricians and decolonial scholars (Cushman et al. 13).

evoked here as a meaningful starting point for teaching decolonial theory to early-career college students.

Mignolo's work aims to reveal how totalizing histories and epistemologies of the Western world are incomplete because they do not account for colonized peoples. One of the major hindrances to revealing the incompleteness of Western Modernity's totalizing history and epistemology is combating what he calls "the rhetoric of modernity" or "the myth of modernity" which promises progress and democracy (higher standards of living, technological advancements, more equitable societies, etc.) ("Delinking" 454). The rhetoric of modernity promises progress, modernization, higher standards of living, technological advancement, and modern systems of government and education. The different versions of progress take on an ethos of salvation, but these promises of salvation obscure the logic of coloniality. The logic of coloniality states that progress and modernization only come when colonizers establish nations and develop global markets. This reasoning is rooted in the epistemological genealogy of Athens and Rome and the geographic boundaries of nation-states and world powers but presents itself as universally applicable to all people, cultures, and geographies.

To combat the universalization of the logic of coloniality, Mignolo's arguments begin by exposing how the totalizing claims of Western thinkers are rooted in those thinkers' local socio-historical contexts. For example, Mignolo discusses the origins of international law in *Darker Side of Modernity* and points out the inherent contradiction of a universal application of law that was born from a specific socio-political context. He exposes this contradiction by simply asking, "Who can trust international law based on the local thinking of Europeans?" (263). He argues that the work of enacting a more intellectually honest international law "cannot be a project from one local history" (273). Instead, Mignolo situates the local history of Western thinkers and their claims to universality within an expansive constellation of local histories—"a world within which many worlds would coexist" (273).

After exposing how the arguments of Western thinkers are born from their localized contexts, Mignolo elevates overlooked decolonial thinkers who, rooted in their local histories and experiences, speak directly against the universal claims of Western European thinkers. For example, Mignolo's study of Guamán Poma de Ayala's *New Chronicles*[7] and Ottabha Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on Slavery*[8] demonstrates how individual decolonial thinkers have used colonial language and logic to subvert universalized Western ideas. Guamán Poma's *New Chronicles* is a bilingual document that utilizes Mayan and Spanish logics to persuade King Phillip of Spain to reprimand his men for their abuses of Mayans. Cugoano's treatise details a blaring critique of enlightenment thinkers' practice of slavery using enlightenment thinkers' own logic. These rhetors were able to wield the colonizer's language and logic because they had to view themselves through the eyes of the colonizer and colonized, but they spoke back to the colonizer in his own language and framework to show that the terms and concepts of the western world are not universal and would never be universal. Both Guamán Poma and Cugoano's experiences expose the atrocities that come with the logic of coloniality

[7]Guamán Poma de Ayala, et al. *El Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno*. 1a ed., Siglo Veintiuno, 1980.
[8]Cugoano, Ottobah. *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species: Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great Britain*. 1787.

and illustrate the violence of totalizing narratives that silence multiple ways of thinking and being. Importantly, Mignolo points out that "the genealogy of decolonial thinking is planetary and is not limited to individuals" but includes social movements ("Epistemic Disobedience" 53). According to Mignolo, the main end of this planetary genealogy of decolonial thinking is to enact a world system that accounts for the diverse range of local histories and the various ways of thinking and being. Mignolo calls this world system the pluriverse.

The work of enacting a pluriverse as an academic and within the university is an incommensurable contradiction. As Gina Ann Garcia has discussed, institutions of higher education in the US use measures of success that are rooted in white normative standards. Namely, they prioritize national rankings, graduation rates, and retention rates over addressing "the history of oppression and subjugation" their institutions perpetuate (7). Indeed, these white normative standards for success promote an "institutional habitus" that encourages a competitive individualist ethos (byrd 1). For decolonial scholars navigating the demands of promotion and tenure, this academic culture sends a clear message: "Reach conventional levels of productivity or get out" (Plaut 35). In this way, notions of pluriversality are subsumed into a marketplace of ideas where decolonial theory is positioned as a brand or product to be marketed and circulated at conferences and in classrooms. This context forces decolonial scholars to continually work through the contradictions that come with creating a pluriverse in a reward system dictated by competitive individualism. The imperative to publish reifies measures of success that encourage individual competitiveness, thereby devaluing possible partnerships with decolonial thinkers outside of the university.[9] Decolonization is, first and foremost, a political project that began from the colonial wound and grew into political societies vying for liberation from Western modernity ("Delinking" 492). The academy as a whole, and Anglo academics in particular (like myself), have a limited role within that larger project of decolonization. We still work in settler-colonial institutions that reproduce coloniality, yet we still have a responsibility to be intellectually honest about these limitations and the realities of our settler-colonial history. Gloria Anzaldúa articulates this dynamic in respect to Chicano oppression and white allyship:

> We need to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us,

[9]BIPOC faculty in the US are generally more interested in engaged forms of scholarship that center around diversity and community work, but they have to navigate an institutional reward system that privileges publishing and does not recognize engaged forms of scholarship (Baez). This leaves BIPOC faculty working by themselves to create the institutional reforms they hope to see actualized in their contexts, and it results in their senior colleagues actively encouraging them to focus on research rather than work on the community-engaged work they value. In their interview study with 16 BIPOC faculty at an R-1 public-serving institution, Quinteros and Covarrubias found that many BIPOC faculty saw the main focus of their work as "fostering equity and removing barriers for minoritized groups, including colleagues, staff, and students" (12). This focus on equity extended BIPOC faculty's understanding of their work beyond concerns around publishing, teaching, and service. Instead, they prioritized "ground level […] community-based goals" to humanize and center community needs and voices (15).

> you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty. You'd rather forget your brutish acts. (qtd. in "Delinking" 490)

For Anzaldúa, Anglo scholars are not "helping" the decolonial cause; they are "following the lead" of decolonial thinkers both within and outside of the university ("Delinking" 492). This "bottom-up" approach might break the norms of knowledge production for academics rooted in Western modernity. Scholars like to think that their research creates new knowledge that trickles down to the general population, but decolonization, "has to work from bottom up" ("Delinking" 492). Instead, this "bottom-up" approach considers how the ideas of decolonial thinkers trickle up to the academy and challenge the epistemological foundations that constitute it. In this way, we can look to those scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa who come to the university speaking from their experience of colonization in order to center the voices of the communities and histories that shaped them.

Latinx scholars in rhetoric and composition have recently debated how best to decolonize totalizing narratives of our discipline and center the histories and communities that shaped them: provide alternatives to "traditional" histories or expose "traditional" histories as incomplete because they do not account for the rhetorical traditions of minoritized communities. The first option treats decolonial scholarship as disparate from an already coherent disciplinary history. The second option uncovers the limitations of our disciplinary history and seeks to ameliorate those shortcomings. Jose Cortez and Romeo García advocate for affirming the incompleteness of the history of rhetoric and composition and acknowledging that Latin American and indigenous rhetorics have always been a part of that history but never acknowledged. They argue that positioning "decolonial" rhetorical history as separate from "traditional" rhetorical history is to affirm the disciplinary hierarchy that privileges Western, Eurocentric, and logocentric understandings of literacy. For Cortez and García, defining decolonial thinking in opposition to Western thinking legitimates Western thinkers' claims to universality. Instead of playing into this binary, Cortez and García point out the ways Latinx rhetorical practices have always existed and continue to thrive independent of their relation to Western thinking. This reality "bears witness to the structural incompletion of the history of rhetoric" (104). Therefore, decolonial historical methodologies invite rhetorical scholars to interrogate the ways our current understanding of the rhetorical tradition is lacking rather than viewing decolonial research as an alternative to an already coherent tradition.

An important example of a scholar who enacts Cortez and García's decolonial revision of totalizing histories is Damián Baca's work in *Mestiz@ Scripts*. Baca explicitly critiques the notion of a traditional history of rhetoric and composition by explicating the limitations of Bizzell and Herzberg's seminal anthology, *The Rhetorical Tradition*. Baca explains how the temporal and spatial categories that Bizzell and Herzberg use to categorize rhetors make it impossible to account for indigenous and Latinx work. For example, Baca replaces the western historical blocks (classical, medieval, renaissance, enlightenment, nineteenth century, modern, and postmodern) with Antonio Rios-Bustamante's conception of the Indigenista Period "which begins with Native American creation origins" and the Colonial Period "which is divided into three stages spanning from 1521 to 1810" (148–149). Baca also takes issues with seminal histories of rhetoric

and composition that focus on the British colonial universities that drew from the tradition of rhetoric born from Greek and Latin rhetorical ancestry.[10] Baca argues that these narratives of the discipline erase "local regions and localized moments in time across the globe that provide […] crucial knowledge about the materiality of writing and various cultural transformations under colonial situations" (121). This geographic and temporal reorientation of the discipline also invites scholars to move beyond notions of belonging based on nation-states and consider cultural and regional subjectivities.[11]

Baca's work demonstrates how local histories have the potential to pull apart settler colonial histories into hundreds of localized directions. The true enemy of decolonial thinking are the totalizing narratives that disallow any possibility of a pluriverse. Baca provides a framework that emphasizes the need for composition instructors at universities in the US-Mexico Borderlands to realize how their universities have and are coevolving with local indigenous and Latinx communities, but it is up to instructors at those universities to apply that framework to their particular contexts. This line of inquiry begins with the specific local histories of the communities that host our universities.

Given the limited role of university students and teachers in enacting a pluriverse, I begin my college composition courses by acknowledging the local effects of settler colonialism in our city of Tucson, Arizona situated in the US-Mexico borderlands. I partner with students in questioning how local iteration of settler colonialism in our region has shaped the goals and directives of our class. We honestly confront the incommensurable experience of teaching and learning academic English at a university built on the ancestral homelands of the Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui, funded with the profits from stolen land,[12] predicated on the eradication of the Apache,[13] and which "side-stepped a recognition" of its multilingual and multicultural border space (Leahy 61).

In the midst of that questioning and reshaping of the class, we follow Mignolo's model of exposing how the arguments of Western thinkers are born from their localized contexts and elevating overlooked decolonial thinkers that speak directly against the universal claims of Western European thinkers and center their local histories and ways of being. We do this by examining the ways colonists in the Americas responded to indigenous communities. One of the most famous and well-documented discussions

[10]See, Connors, Robert. *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*. U of Pittsburgh P, 1997.

[11]Baca recommends that teachers interrogate the "culturally divergent ideas about American citizenship" by comparing "other articulations of national identity such as Zapatista sovereignty, Quebecois separatism, and even neo-Nazi nationalism" (158). Baca also recommends teaching examples of how local and cultural identities are constituted. For example, Baca discusses how Gloria Anzaldúa constituted a new mestiza consciousness in *Borderlands: La Frontera*.

[12]The university benefited from 521 indigenous land parcels that totaled to 143,564 acres (Lee and Ahtone). The US government paid nothing to the eight tribal nations—Pima, Western Apaches, Tohono O'odham, Apaches, Maricopa, Walapai, Navaho, Cocopa—for this land, and the university's returns on this land are incalculable (Lee and Ahtone).

[13]In his inaugural address to the University of Arizona, Pima city councilman, CC Stephans congratulated the Anglo-Saxon civilization for "advancing" west and "successfully disputing" the "relentless" Apache (qtd. in Martin 29).

among colonists about indigenous communities in the Americas is the 1551 Valladolid debate between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda.

The Valladolid debate was colonists' earliest attempt to discuss the ethics of colonialism. The core issue of the debate was whether indigenous peoples are 'human' and whether they are entitled to 'human rights.' The Holy Roman Emperor Carlos V convened a "specially appointed panel of fourteen learned jurists" and tasked them with articulating the "proper method of colonial conquest" (Saldaña-Portillo 34). The Junta of Valladolid invited, listened to, and judged the arguments of Sepúlveda and Las Casas.

The context leading up to this debate was shrouded in controversy. Spanish colonists had established systems of enslaving indigenous peoples through the encomienda system. This system started as the Spanish government rewarded the efforts of initial Spanish colonists with indigenous land and indigenous slaves. In 1537, Pope Paul III published a condemnation of the enslavement of indigenous peoples that included a defense of indigenous humanity, and in 1542, Carlos V issued laws that abolished the encomienda system (Saldaña-Portillo 37). In response, encomenderos led rebellions against Spanish government officials and threatened Spain's standing in the Americas (37). Ganzalo Pizarro, for instance, led a rebellion against Spanish Viceroy Blacso Nunez Vela in Peru in 1544 after Vela tried to enact Carlos V's abolishment of the encomienda system (37). As a result, Carlos V repealed the laws banning the encomienda system in 1544, leading to encomenderos initiating "a campaign to make their encomiendas perpetual" and continuing their enslavement of indigenous peoples (38).

When Carlos V repealed his ban on the encomienda system, Bartolomé de Las Casas was the bishop of Chiapas. By that time Las Casas had spent most of his adult life advocating for the abolishment of the encomienda system. Las Casas first arrived in the Americas to colonize Cuba in 1512. He was one of those initial Spanish colonists who was rewarded with an encomienda (Abbott 62). However, in 1514, he renounced the encomienda system and began preaching against the atrocities and violence against indigenous peoples. His arguments for the humanity of indigenous people and his condemnation of using violent conversion methods earned him the moniker "official protector of the Indians" (62). In 1547, Carlos V reinstated the encomienda system and Las Casas sailed to Spain to make his case for abolishing the system of slavery.

Las Casas's adversary in the Valladolid debate was Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. Sepúlveda was known for his defense of the concept of "just war" which allowed Christians to destroy external and internal threats to the church. The basis for his argument came from Aristotle's theory of natural slavery. As a famous translator of Aristotle, Sepúlveda detailed the ways indigenous peoples as "intellectually inferior" beings and arbiters of "inhumane and barbarous customs" embodied Aristotle's definition of "natural slaves" (Saldaña-Portillo 42–43). From this perspective, enslaving indigenous peoples "was a remediation, a virtue imposed on them to rectify their wayward status and their inferior reason" (43). Las Casas responded to Sepúlveda's arguments by nuancing Aristotle's conception of natural slavery. In his argument to the Junta of Valladolid, Las Casas interrogated Sepúlveda's claim that indigenous peoples fit Aristotle's characterization of "natural slaves" due to their inferior intelligence.

Las Casas explains that Sepúlveda incorrectly categorized indigenous peoples as natural slaves. Natural slaves were "sottish, stupid, and strangers to reason" (qtd. in Saldaña-Portillo 45). If indigenous peoples lack reason so severely, they would also lack friendship and community (45). Las Casas details how his experience with indigenous communities contradicted Sepúlveda's characterizations, and he goes on to argue that God would not ordain some humans to be inferior beings and others to be masters. For Las Casas, all humans were ordained with the divine nature of human reason (47). Therefore, indigenous peoples had the right to govern themselves and to utilize their resources and labor as they saw fit. Las Casas's arguments in this debate laid the foundation for his theory of universal humanity. There is no record of the Junta of Valladolid's decision on the debate, and the Spanish government did not change its ambivalent policies on the encomienda system until 1573 when encomiendas were officially banned. The more significant consequence of the debate is the legacy of Las Casas's theory of universal humanity.

In our class reflections on the Valladolid debate, we interrogate and problematize Las Casas's theory of universal humanity. These conversations lead us to wonder about the perspectives and voices that were missing from colonial accounts of the Valladolid debate. Aja Martinez's definitions and examples of counterstories give our class ways to think about and reimagine accounts of this historical argument. Once we have looked at examples and have established a shared definition of counterstories, we read an excerpt from Leslie Marmon Silko's book, *Almanac of the Dead,* through the lens of counterstory.

Almanac of the Dead is an expansive novel that details an intricate hemispheric indigenous revolution which spans all of the Americas. However, we only read a short seven-page excerpt from the novel where an indigenous revolutionary named Angelita tries a Cuban communist named Bartolomeo for betraying the pan-tribal revolutionary society, Army of Justice and Redistribution, and committing crimes against history. The arrogant and well-educated revolutionary left his "freedom school" in Mexico City expecting to begin a serious study of Marxism with the "treacherous tribalists" in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas (Silko 514). As a Cuban ambassador for Marxism, a salvific Western European ideology, the criminal's name is a clear allusion to Bartolomé de Las Casas. Bartolomeo can be conceptualized as a composite character representing the cultural and political ideologies of Western modernity that advocate for indigenous rights from within the colonial epistemological framework.

The indigenous revolutionary that tries Bartolomeo, Angelita, is interested in Marx because "Marx stole his ideas from us, the Native Americans" (311). Marc Priewe's analysis of Angelita's affinity for Marxism reveals that "Angelita understands that Marxism and tribalism are linked by their mutual insistence on storytelling—relating past events as a form of meaning-endowment for the present—which becomes a cross-cultural source for revolution" (227). However, Angelita critiques Marxism's spiritual limitations. She explains that Marx and Engels would never understand anything about "spiritual beings" (Silko 749). For Angelita, Marx had taken indigenous ideals, exported them from their local context into the global arena, adapted them to new locales, reconfigured them to erase indigenous spirituality, and "then returned via the global reach

of European ideas" (Priewe 226). In the end, Angelita rejects Marxism saying "to hell with all Marxists who oppose the return of tribal land!" (Silko 519).

Bartolomeo's condescending and paternal attitude toward Angelita and other indigenous revolutionaries reaffirmed Angelita's criticism of Marxism and other Western salvific ideologies. When Angelita put him on trial for crimes against history, Bartelomeo's defense was: "What right did they, ignorant Indians, have to put educated Cuban citizens on trial?" (526). Angelita answers: "You set foot in our sovereign jurisdiction" (526). In another defense, he says: "Jungle monkeys and savages have no history!" (525). Angelita answers with a list of forty-five indigenous uprisings and revolutions that span from Hateuy's first Native American revolt against European slave hunters in 1510 to the 1945 formation of the National Federation of Peasants in Bolivia (531). As she reads, "voices buzzed with enthusiasm […] as people began to recall stories of the old days," but they are still wary of executing Bartolomeo because of where his spirit or ghost might go after he is hanged. However, Angelita explains "this was war, the war to retake the Americas and to free all the people still enslaved. You did not fight a war for such a big change without the loss of blood" (532). In the end of the trial, Angelita pronounces:

> All this is only a short list. A beginning. But Comrade Bartolomeo here has no use for indigenous history. Comrade Bartolomeo denies the holocaust of Indigenous Americans! Seventy-two million people in 1500 reduced to ten million people by 1600! Comrade Bartolomeo is guilty! Guilty of crimes against history! (531)

As Bartolomeo is hanged for his crimes, an old woman yells from the crowd, "Next time don't lie about our history!" (532).

As students read, we discuss the significance of four main revisions that Silko makes to the Valladolid Debate: Silko turns the debate into a trial; she replaces the Spanish colonial intellectuals with indigenous revolutionaries, she situates the event on indigenous land (Chiapas), and she sets the event in the present rather than in the past.

The first revision of turning the Valladolid debate into a trial demonstrates the absurdity of two Spanish men using Aristotle's definitions of natural slavery to debate whether or not indigenous peoples are human. Mignolo points to the Valladolid debate to illustrate how colonial epistemologies set up "linguistic frames" that silence coexisting epistemologies (*Darker* 124). In other words, the colonial terms and rules of engagement in this debate represent how the universalization of Western epistemologies ignores and delegitimizes indigenous epistemologies. By reimagining the debate as a trial where indigenous revolutionaries judge Western accounts of indigenous history, Silko "delinks" from the colonial terms that frame the Valladolid debate and interrogates the colonial framework that the debate is based on. Importantly, this is not to say that Angelita or indigenous revolutionaries should be the judges of history. It is to say that they should be the judges of their own history and that Western epistemologies have knowingly ignored and silenced these histories.

Similarly, Silko's counterstory exposes how Western conceptions of human rights ignore indigenous conceptions of their own humanity. The very notion of rights or being a rights-bearing citizen is a Western construct that requires acknowledging Western

sovereignty. Las Casas's theory of universal humanity granted indigenous people the legal right to be free from violent action and seizure of land on the condition that they accept the colonial framework of human rights.[14] Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's analysis of the Valladolid debate outlines the harm that this imposed conception of rights caused indigenous peoples by explicating Francisco de Vitoria's idea of "ius gentium" or the 'law of nation' into international law[15] (47). Saldaña-Portillo concludes that while de Vitoria's notion of international law gave indigenous peoples rights and freedoms as sovereign nations, this system required indigenous peoples to recognize the sovereignty and legitimacy of Spain's colonies (51). Silko caricatured this attitude in the Cuban communist's paternal arrogance and expectations to be welcomed, respected, and admired.

In line with Saldaña-Portillo, Mignolo further exposes how de Vitoria's conception of 'law of nations' assumed a hierarchy between nations and therefore justified the dispossession of indigenous lands. Mignolo explains that while de Vitoria recognized Indians as human, he still assumed a "standard model of humanity" that was based on the European man (*Darker* 276–277). In other words, when European thinkers universalize European frameworks, they become the standard measure for humanity and therefore position themselves as the judges of humanity. Bartolomeo exemplifies this portrayal of Indians as lacking when he screams "ignorant indians" and "savages" (Silko 525–526). Both Mignolo and Saldaña -Portillo look past the linguistic frames of Western modernity and argue that indigenous peoples were included in the colonial system, "only to be disciplined" (*Darker* 279). That disciplining is best articulated in the way that the 'humanitas' (European standard for humanity) imposed epistemological hegemony over the 'anthropos' (the 'lacking' human) (*Darker* 84).

The second revision that Silko makes to the Valladolid Debate is replacing the two Spanish men that participated in the debate with a white Cuban Marxist and a female indigenous revolutionary. Instead of The Junta of Valladolid, a village of indigenous people acts as the jury for the trial. This revision centers the experiences and perspectives of indigenous peoples through their conversations about history. This revision points to a crucial starting point for decolonizing history that subverts the hierarchy of rationality imposed by colonial classifications. Mignolo discusses how colonial thinkers constituted themselves as the 'humanitas,' ones with the "epistemic privilege of hegemonic knowledge," and all people who inhabit exteriority as the 'anthropos' (*Darker* 83). In order for the humanitas to legitimize their settler colonial state, they reproduce their epistemology in "people, institutions, and disciplines where knowledge is managed and

[14]See, De las Casas, Bartolome. *In Defense of the Indians*. Translated and edited by Stafford Pool. Northern Illinois UP, 1992.

[15]De Vitoria outlines his fundamental arguments for "ius gentium" or law of nations in his three-part lecture "On the Indians Lately Discovered," delivered in 1532. His lectures outline three essential tenets of the law of nations: "1. The inhabitants of the Americas possessed natural legal rights as free and rational people" (R. Williams 97) 2. Pope Alexander VI's signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, which granted Spain "title to the Americas was 'baseless' and could not affect the inherent rights of the Indian inhabitants. 3. Transgressions of the universally binding norms of the Law of Nations by the Indians might serve to justify a Christian nation's conquest and colonial empire in the Americas" (R. Williams 97). Generally, Vitoria's Law of Nations justified the marginalization of indigenous cultures in the Americas based on "'modern,' desacralized, legal basis, but a basis nonetheless possessed of all the missionary, chauvinistic zeal that had attended Christianity's will to empire" (108).

controlled" (*Darker* 85). This epistemological hegemony imposes the exteriority of the anthropos on all threats to its order. Within such a framework, the Anthropos are made to be "as much the barbarian or the primitive as the communist, the terrorist, all those who can be placed in the axis of evil, and those who are friends of the Devil" (*Darker* 85).

Silko's counterstory shifts the telling of history from the perspective of the humanitas to the anthropos. This is not just a shift in perspective; it is also a shift in epistemological frameworks. The humanitas, by definition, believe that their thinking is the only valid form of knowledge and viewed written history as the only valid form of history (*Darker* 81). However, shifting away from the binary, Silko points to a central question that Mignolo asks about the humanitas and anthropos, "Who establishes criteria of classification and who classifies?" (*Darker* 83). The humanitas classify all anthropos as other. This leaves a diverse range of cultures and communities subsumed under the same category thereby flattening the differences between their epistemological frameworks embodied by a diverse range of anthropos, but shifting away from the binary of the humanitas and anthropos allows that pluriverse of epistemologies to classify their own histories and ways of being. As Mignolo explains, this shift moves us closer to "the democratization of epistemology" (81).

Importantly, each epistemological framework of the anthropos stems from what Mignolo calls "the colonial wound" ("Epistemic" 63). Mignolo develops this term based on Gloria Anzaldúa's reflections in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* where she writes: "The U.S. Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds"[16] ("Epistemic" footnote 9). The experience of colonial oppression, of viewing oneself first as a colonial subject and second as a person, is the foundation of "border thinking" ("Delinking" 493). Only those who have experienced the colonial wound and who have had to conceive of themselves as both human and colonized subjects can conceptualize decoloniality. Each anthropos will have their unique type of border thinking depending on their local and individual experiences with the colonial wound. In this way, border thinking is an epistemological framework, that allows for a pluriverse of perspectives and necessitates theorization and praxis on a local level.

Silko's counterstory embodies the inversion of the humanitas and the anthropos by centering the experiences and voices of indigenous peoples rather than the academic arguments of colonial thinkers. The Valladolid debate saw colonists asking themselves, "Is what we are doing right?" Silko's trial shows that the indigenous peoples should have the epistemological sovereignty to classify and judge their own histories. Elevating the experiences and perspectives of indigenous peoples forces colonists to confront the genocide and centuries of oppression they orchestrated. This analogy represents a key historical method for decolonial thinking and the theorization of pluriversal futures: the anthropos are the only ones that can enact the pluriverse. Western conceptions of history are the results of an epistemological hegemony that managed and controlled people and institutions associated with knowledge production to perpetuate totalizing historical narratives that efface the atrocities of settler colonialism.

[16] 'es una herida abierta' can be translated as 'is an open wound.'

The true enemy of decolonial thinking is any totalizing narrative that disallows the possibility of a pluriverse. Instead, the realities of the colonial wound as represented in the long list of indigenous uprisings and revolutions act as the conceptual framework for judging Western histories. When the "hidden" experiences of colonized peoples are brought to light, they shatter Western histories into hundreds of localized directions (*Darker* 80). Where the Western framework creates a binary between dominant and marginalized histories, the decolonial framework recognizes a pluriverse of co-evolutionary histories.

The third major difference between Silko's counterstory and the Valladolid debate is its relocation to Chiapas. This geographical shift demonstrates the decolonial concept of geopolitics, or "thinking where you are" (*Darker* 97). Instead of the Spanish city of Valladolid, Silko centers the trial in one of the largest and most politically storied regions of Mexico. The Cuban communist asks: "What right did they, ignorant Indians, have to put educated Cuban citizens on trial?" (526). Angelita's response highlights the importance of thinking where you are. She says: "You set foot in our sovereign jurisdiction" (Silko 526).

Mignolo calls this place-based thinking "geo-politics" ("Delinking" 485). Geo-politics functions in two ways: it refutes the totalizing claims of Western modernity by unveiling the ways that Western thinking was born out of a specific location, and it affirms a pluriversality of local epistemologies and histories. The first function of geopolitics is to delink from "zero point epistemology" or the idea that all history and knowledge center around Western modernity. Zero-point epistemology is "grounded neither in geo-historical location nor in bio-graphical configurations of bodies" (*Darker* 80). Instead, the zero-point framework of history effaces the local history that produces it, and functions under the pretense of "this is the way things are." For example, Mignolo discusses the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas that "created an imaginary line that divided the Atlantic from North to South and settled the dispute between Spain and Portugal for the possessions of the New World" (78). He also discusses the orientations of East versus West, "East and West are obviously not ontological places on a round planet. They are fictions invented by someone who placed himself in the middle, between East and West [...] Western Christians (located in the territories that will become Europe) located themselves in the West: not to the west of the East, but to the west of Jerusalem" ("Pluriversality" 91).

These colonial imaginings and orientations performed and codified zero-point epistemology. Mignolo equates this zero-point epistemology to the concept of "I think, therefore I am," as opposed to his geopolitics which equates to "I am where I think" (*Darker* 81). Mignolo often turns to Anibal Quijano's article "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality" which criticizes Descartes' famous axiom to expose the epistemological oppression of zero-point thinking. Quijano argues that Descartes' conception of the indifferent subject who can objectively observe other cultures made it impossible for Europeans to engage in epistemological cultural exchange. Instead, Europeans created a false notion of social totality which is incapable of recognizing knowledge systems outside of their own. Quijano's project, then, is to delink from this myth of individual objectivity so that cultural exchange becomes possible.

The move from zero-point epistemology to geo-politics allows historians to see the immense diversities of coexisting/parallel histories that are born from individual local contexts. Working with local contexts and histories is the second decolonial step after delinking from zero-point epistemology (*Darker* 275). Importantly, Mignolo notes that this work with local histories means that "[t]here cannot be a monotopic history of decolonial options" (89). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, colonialism is part of a grander narrative, but it is "part also of a very local, very specific experience" (24).

Silko's final revision to the Valladolid debate is situating colonial oppression in the present rather than in the distant past. Situating colonial events in the present illustrates the decolonial method of denouncing the fiction of progress and delinking from Western periodizations of history. In the way that Western linguistic frames constituted a hierarchy of being that set the Western man as its pinnacle, Western linguistic frames also set a hierarchy of time using "modernity" as its standard (*Darker* 160). Bartolomeo appeals to this hierarchy of time in his trial when he claims that "Jungle monkeys and savages have no history!" (Silko 525). In his discussion of colonial conceptions of time, Mignolo points out that the eighteenth-century philosophies of Hegel and Kant translated "barbarians" into "primitives" and located those "primitives […] in time rather than in space" (*Darker* 153). Mapping this temporal hierarchy onto world geography resulted in the planet suddenly "living in different temporalities, with Europe in the present and the rest in the past" (*Darker* 151). Anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls this colonial temporal hierarchy the "denial of coevalness" (*Darker* 152). This temporal hierarchy "served as the justification of the ideology of progress" (152).

The specific stages of that temporal hierarchy have undergone many transformations. Mignolo explains how Renaissance thinkers invented the Middle Ages "in order to locate themselves in the present of a history that they could trace back to Greece and the Roman Empire" ("Delinking" 470). Mignolo also points out that even though Western historical blocks shifted from Hegel's three stages of history—the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the discovery of the New World— to the three stages of modern history—the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, both taxonomies affirm the destiny of Western Europeans as "guardians of the world" and have inspired and justified missions of conquest—the Crusades, the Age of Exploration, the Age of Imperialism, the crusade against Communism ("Delinking 467"; *Darker* 159). However, it is important to emphasize that these taxonomies do not exist outside of the linguistic frames they come from. Mignolo says, "there is no modernity and tradition beyond the rhetoric of the same modernity that invented itself" (164).

Notice here that Mignolo delinks from the colonial conceptions of time by exposing the static and sedimented nature of colonial history. Indeed, Mignolo accepts and acts on the fact that the colonial conception of history is "a flat narrative of imperial dominium that pretends to capture the flow of reality, while histories, ancestralities, memories are local, marginal, insignificant, narratives" (*Darker* 175). The long list of indigenous revolutions that Bartolomeo's judge recites illustrates Mignolo's characterization of colonial history. Each revolution stacks on top of the other without periodized interruption. The list stands as a unified, sedimented monument to indigenous resilience in the face of colonial atrocities.

Silko's counterstory demonstrates how important it is for scholars to acknowledge how past histories of rhetoric and composition are guilty of crimes against history. They silence the lived experiences of the colonized and refuse to account for the atrocities of settler colonialism. As we move forward as a discipline, scholars should view implementing decolonial methods as a matter of intellectual integrity as much as a moral imperative. A key component of living up to this intellectual integrity is following the lead of past and present decolonial scholars who are speaking from their lived experiences, and shifting understandings of decolonization from the academic arena to the local communities that host our universities. As histories of rhetoric and composition continue to be taught and written, they should attend to a pluriverse of cultures and histories.

While delinking from linguistic frames of coloniality, rooting history in the bodily experience of the anthropos (bio-politics), thinking where you are by recovering the pluriversality of local histories (geo-politics), and understanding history as sedimented and cyclical do not represent the entirety of the work that decolonial thinkers in rhetoric and composition are doing, they offer an important starting point on decolonial theory for early career college students. More importantly, counterstory as a methodology and method offers an effective practice for students to access decolonial terms. Counterstories like Silko's can contribute significantly to furthering decolonial thinking and pluriversal understandings.

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