

Corrido-ing State Violence

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“This land’s all mine...I need every last inch of it...”

—*Texas Rangers in Action*, no. 8 (p. 28)

Content warning: This article contains discussions of physical and symbolic racial violence targeting colonized peoples and its depiction in various media.

Corridos and Community Listening as Cultural-Rhetoric Practices

Since the 15th century, a colonial and imperial design, axiologically premised upon logics of domination, management, and control of land, resources, and people, has functioned in the U.S. This colonial and imperial design, in my opinion, is best captured by Américo Paredes’ work in *George Washington Gómez*. The following passages reflect these logics:

- A few English-speaking adventurers moved in... Then came the railroad early in the 20th century, and with it arrived the first real-estate men and the land-and-title companies, and a Chamber of Commerce, of course, which renamed the little town “Jonesville-on-the-Grande. (p. 36)
- Mexicans labored with axe and spade to clear away the brush... To make room for truck farming and citrus groves. And the settlers poured in... while Mexicans were pushed out

of cattle raising into hard manual labor. (p. 36)

- So what if the Mexican had been killed by a Gringo? The Gringo would have got off with a year. One divided into twenty: A Mexican then is worth one-twentieth the value of a horse. (p. 178)

Together, these passages reveal a historical depiction of the appropriation of land, exploitation of labor, extraction of resources, racial distribution of work, and a subject/object binary. Settlers came to Texas and the region today known as the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) in the early 1800s. But they never left. Settler colonialism then must be thought of as a series of projects carried out, as Paredes depicts, that ensures that even if the temporality of the political order of colonization has passed, Texas and its people will re-write itself as colonial.

In Texas, there is a settler public memory that did and continues to desire to forget and remember in colonial ways. Jacques Derrida once captured this desire

(and the kind of literacy and rhetorical work needed to be carried out) in *Specters of Marx* when he spoke of Western conjuration practices: “let us make sure that in the future it [the specter] does not come back...in the future, said the powers of old Europe...it must not incarnate itself, either publicly or in secret” (p. 48). This kind of desire to forget is inextricably linked to literacy and rhetorical work, from classroom education to storytelling to ceremonial celebrations. Settler public memory resounds in characters such as K. Hank Harvey, as portrayed by Paredes, who as an invited keynote guest at a high school graduation, tells a population that is predominately Mexican:

May they [the graduating students] never forget the names of Sam Houston, James Bowie, and Davey Crockett. May they remember the Alamo where they go...When our forefathers rose on their hindlegs and demanded independence...when they arose with a mighty shout and forever erased Mexican cruelty and tyranny from this fair land. (p. 274)

Settler public memory desires to forget how the cruelty and tyranny of settlers both attempted to erase the “Other” from history (physically and historiographically) and emplace structures of management and control of land, resources, and people through a series of violent projects. Rather, settler public memory functions

through and with literacy and rhetorical work, as depicted in the scene above, to ensure a kind of ecological impact on humans of Texas. An impact, I argue, that ensures Texas will re-write itself as colonial (as in the colonial will traffic in the normative) as it forgets and remembers in colonial ways and confirms a haunting.

Specters haunt Texas. Before becoming an academic and encountering influential figures such as Américo Paredes, Rolando Hinojosa, José Limón, and the Saldívar family, who also illuminated this reality, I had knowledge of this haunting from my community. I was born and raised in the LRGV where there is a different kind of literacy and rhetorical work at play. Work that reflects a kind of community expression of responsibility and justice that seeks, without certainty, to create a space for and to give back speech to specters that haunt Texas. An example of such work are corridos, which carry a collective memory of tragedy and hope. Corridos, or Mexican folk ballads, have one corridista (singer), who is channeling society through a first or third-person perspective as they bear witness hypothetically to a tragedy, reinforcing both shared community perspective and collective memory (Limón, 1992).¹ Typically, the corridista identifies a place, recognizes the wronged and the wrongdoers, articulates a metanarrative of a triste verdad, and announces an urgency to communicate both in the form of

¹ See José Limón (1992), also, for an insightful conversation on the theme of masculinity, which might very much be the limitation of corridos.

refusing to forget and an expression of remembering so as to bear witness to an inheritance. The corridista's propositional intent, without certainty, is to implicate others to bear witness to this inheritance, to interpret it, and to orient the self to it. The affective value of the corrido is its circulation and flow, which keeps its secret even as it is expressed as a form of public memory. In the márgenes of the LRGV, there are communities educated through this kind of literacy and rhetorical work that undermines official Texas history. An education, I argue, that begins by cultivating community listening towards a memory of tragedy and hope.

Together, Grandma and I listened to corridos. One in particular continues to serve as inspiration for the work I do. In one corrido, "Pistoleros Famosos," the corridista announces a place, "Por las márgenes del Rio [as in the Rio Grande River]," which situates the subject, the "pistoleros," and proclaims the urgency to communicate, "Murieron por que eran hombres...no por que fueran bandidos" (Garza and Arredondo, n.d.). In the exchange between rhetor and audience, the audience is implicated by the corridista, called to listen to stories of tragedy and hope and pushed to listen in ways that create presence from absence and sound from silence. Corridos are an expression of a cultural rhetorics practice of speaking back—back to a white truth or white narrative that doubles down on settler colonial rhetoric and the narratives that justify the violence they inflicted on the Mexican and Mexican American communities in South Texas in the name

of modernity. When the corridista states in "Pistoleros Famosos," "Murieron por que eran hombres...no por que fueran bandidos," they are calling and pushing la gente de las márgenes to hold settlers answerable to their past actions. The past, however, still is present and still makes a sound in the present because of the literacy and rhetorical work that takes place throughout the communities of Texas—settler public memory and public memory of the márgenes.

For Grandma, it was important for me to listen. It was a kind of listening that ensured every act of seeing, being, and doing in itself was with my community in mind. She was preparing me for a life of tragedy and hope—the burden of our historical bodies and material conditions. Corridos were but one exercise in listening to what was at stake when submitting to the literal translation of *así son las cosas*. Perhaps for no other reason the commencement of the corrido "Jefe de Jefes" was significant to Grandma: "A mi me gustan los corridos por que son los hechos reales de nuestro pueblo...Si a mi también me gustan por que en ellos se canta la pura verdad" (Bello, 1997). For Grandma, it was important for me to recognize and acknowledge que no hay una sola verdad. Rather, similar to the above lyric, there was always a verdad from gente like us that challenged a singular truth. Grandma exercised my listening to ensure I knew this:

Grandma: "Ay, esta canción me encanta."

Me: "¿Por qué?"

Grandma: "Pos, está pesada."
 Me: "¿Pesada?"
 Grandma: "¡Sí, pesada! ¿Entiendes?
 Ábre tus oídos, ¿me estás
 escuchando?"
 Me: "Estoy escuchando"
 Grandma: "Te digo esto para que sepas
 y aprendas."
 Me: "Yo se, Grandma."
 Grandma: "La gente se cantan los
 corridos con padre, ¿que no? Es
 una triste verdad."

The translation of "pesada" is "heavy." But the word itself is expounded in the sentiments it conjures. Her charge for me to open my ears suggests that listening goes beyond the mere act of listening. The "pesada" component of this exchange is something that resides within the gente de las márgenes who inherit stories of tragedy and hope. Grandma was preparing me for community listening, a kind of listening that not only recognizes what is being said literally but also metanarratively. In the tense usage of "Murieron por que eran hombres...no por que fueran bandidos," they [the "pistoleros"] are humans then and now. Cultural rhetorics practices such as corridos and community listening enact a kind of literacy and rhetorical work meant to ensure that the dominant white power does not circulate and flow smoothly as it assumes it does.

Texas will always re-write itself as colonial. Corridos announce this consequence to the community in which they circulate and flow. Corridos, like archives, are structurally spectral. They

are sung to announce that hegemony is synonymous with the human condition and to confirm a haunting. Perhaps for no other reason is it common to hear a variation on these words pronounced throughout corridos: "diles que nunca olviden and ay que prender la lección." Jose Limón (1992) speaks to the spectrality of corridos when he writes that corridos "return the dead to the living and to the politics of the present" (p. 73). Because the telos of Western epistemology is a topos of intelligibility, rationality, and totality, there is an effort to mark and display the "Other" as "dead." The "dead" stand juxtaposed *to* and *with* the present (de Certeau, 1988; Cushman, 2013).

The corridista, however, in naming a place, time, subjects, and/or atrocities, ensures that an exorcism of the past is impossible. This resistance reflects, perhaps, the limits of Western epistemology; it cannot avoid the "surreptitious return of what it effaces" (p. 96). Corridos, like specters that haunt, are a kind of "slow hemorrhage of knowledge" (de Certeau, p. 96-97). Similar to how Adam Banks (2011) discusses the role of the griot as someone who is a "canon maker," a "time bender," a "keeper of history," and an "intellectual" of the local community (p. 3, 23), the role of the corridista is to enact a politics of memory, inheritance, and generations that take shape en las márgenes para los que saben (the wronged) y los que nunca aprendieron (the wrongdoers). In doing so, the politics of the present are

interrupted by what remains present—the “Other.” Creating presence from absence and sound from silence is a kind of being with specters, in the present.

The corridos I listened to with my Grandma often depicted the Texas Rangers as “Rinches cobardes.” This depiction was contrary to how I learned about them in the classroom. From corridos, I learned how the “Rinches” played a central role in the de/re-territorialization of Texas (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1972). Therefore, when the words “diles que nunca olviden” are articulated, it is a call and a push to remember how the loss of life and land and the projects of dehumanizing Mexican and Mexican Americans in Texas were caused by settlers and Rangers. The lesson of the corridos, once more, is the message that they/we [“pistoleros”] are humans, then and now, and not “bad hombres” simply because “we” refused logics of domination, management, and control. In this way, corridos run counter to the practices of Western cultural rhetorics of claiming some “event” as the last (see Rushdy, 2012), forgetting and remembering in settler ways, and moving on. Instead, as I have asserted above, corridos are structurally spectral. They call and push la gente de las márgenes to create space and give back speech to specters, even if only ever channeled through our bodies in the present.

All this brings me to the following question: how do we bear witness to an inheritance and debt, especially when the call to responsibility and justice at times seems so ungraspable? I am reminded of

my conversations with Grandma in the context of listening to corridos together. I understood the words in the corridos. But the readability of their meaning was not a given—these words kept their secrets even as the corridista revealed their formation in an utterance.

Much has been discussed with regard to the music that emerges from la gente de las márgenes (see Paredes, 1958/1976; Peña, 1985; Herrera-Sobek, 1993; Sánchez, 2006; Noe, 2009; Aparicio, 2013; Ríos, 2017). Little has been done to put this genre into practice within Writing and Rhetorical Studies (WRS). From once personifying that “palomita” in corridos that is tasked with picking up the “urgent message” and passing it along to others, to now embodying the spirit of corridistas, I attempt here a corrido-ing approach that calls and pushes the audience to listen. Abre tus oídos as I submit here a praxis of corrido-ing and community listening in this, the first of a trilogy of projects on national, state, and local violence.

This project is about the atrocities in Texas which resulted as a consequence of the encroachment of settlers and the formation of the Texas Rangers. Specifically, it focuses on how the *Texas Rangers in Action* comic book series engages in a kind of literacy and rhetorical work justifying settler colonial logics of domination, management, and control in the name of modernity (salvation, progress, and development). Its literacy and rhetorical work contribute to a public memory that ensures Texas will rewrite itself as colonial. But an intervention can be made into the supposed smooth flow

and circulation of hegemony. In the spirit of corridos, I first name a place, time, subjects, and/or triste verdades and tragedias, and second, I call and push the audience towards acknowledging an inheritance and debt. So I ask you, the reader, to pick up the message, however ungraspable it may seem, to get “caught up” by a sense of responsibility, and to pass it along to others so as to indict them also in the project of social justice. I submit this work pa’ los que saben y pa’ los que nunca aprendieron with the hope that we can create a new ecological impact that is more humane.

El Siglo XIX: Settler Colonial Logics, Narratives, and Rhetorics

The Mexican American War (1846-1848) resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, which gave the U.S. the present U.S. states of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. This result was set into motion decades before, though. Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1821. Mexico considered the Northeastern province of Texas its territory (e.g. Northern Mexico—the Province of Coahuila y Tejas). But before the Texas Revolution (1835-1836), the founding of the Republic of Texas (1836-1845), and the annexation offer to Texas (1845), Mexico invited Anglo settlers (e.g., Green Dewitt and Moses Austin) with the intention of having these settlers act as a buffer between the Republic of Mexico and the Comanches (see Hämäläinen, 2008). Underwriting Texas

Independence and the emergence of the Republic of Texas is a mythology that is part of public memory— that settlers “earned” Texas because they alone “possessed the masculine and martial vigor to wrestle that land away from the Comanches and savagery” (Hämäläinen, p. 201).

In the 1830s, settlers said the frontier needed protecting, first, from “The Indian” (see Berkhofer, 2011). Stephen F. Austin, son of Moses Austin, came up with the idea to form a “common defense” known today as the Rangers. As Austin proclaimed, “I therefore by these presents give public notice that I will employ ten men in addition to those employed by the Government to act as rangers for the common defense” (qtd. in Ivey, 2010, p. 253). Then, in 1835, the frontier needed protecting from “The Mexican.” Amidst escalating tensions between Anglo settlers in Texas and Mexico, Austin expressed his intentions to settle Texas in a letter to his cousin, Mrs. Holley:

The situation of Texas is daily becoming more and more interesting. . . . It is very evident that Texas should be effectually, and fully, Americanized—that is—settled by a population that will harmonize with their neighbors on the East, in language, political principles, common origin, sympathy, and even interests. Texas must be a slave country.

All that is now wanting is a great immigration of good and efficient families this fall and winter. . . . They

can get lands.... The government of Mexico cannot complain—it has invited immigration.... A large immigration will prepare us, give us strength, resources, everything.

It is well known that my object has always been to fill up Texas with a North American population.... The cause of philanthropy and liberty, also, will be promoted by Americanizing Texas.... The more the American population of Texas is increased the more readily will the Mexican Government give it up. (qtd. in Barker, 1910, p. 271-271)

When Austin writes, “nothing shall daunt my courage or abate my exertions to complete the main object of my labors—to Americanize Texas” (p. 273), it is important to pay attention to the characteristic he ascribes to himself—courage. It is also significant to note the phrase, “object of my labors,” because the public memory surrounding Austin and settlers is typically projected in positive ways in Texas. However, the idea of effectually and fully Americanizing Texas, a Texas “settled by a population” that shares “common origins” and “political principles,” suggests there are other objects that could result from Austin’s labor. These other objects are evident when Austin refers to “The Mexican” as “strange people” who “must be studied to be managed” (p. 273).² One object of his

labor, thus, is the management and control of a people, while another is the management and control of land. Settlers didn’t just come to Texas—they stayed.

The Rangers would assist in Austin’s objects of labor with a series of projects, including the official formation of the Texas Rangers. In 1835, on the verge of the Texas Revolution, in San Felipe, outside the present-day Texas capitol of Austin, delegates from around Texas, including Austin, formed a “Permanent Council” and established a “Consultation” (Barker, 1910, p. 274). Here, Daniel Parker, a member of the “Permanent Council,” petitioned a resolution for the creation of a corps of Rangers. It was resolved, “On motion of Mr. Parker of Nacogdoches,” that a corps of Rangers be formed with the “business” of ranging and guarding “the frontiers” (qtd. in Ivey, 2010, p. 254). Herein emerge, at least partially, settler colonial rhetorics and narratives. With regard to “The Indian,” Mirabeu Lamar, second president of the Republic of Texas, argued that “[t]he white man and the red man cannot dwell in harmony together. Nature forbids it” (qtd. in Webb, 1989, p. 31). And with regard to “The Mexican,” settlers found that “during a century of residence in Texas,” Mexicans had “failed to improve their status and environment” (de León, 2010, p. 12). Settlers and the Rangers would be charged with bringing civilization and progress to the land of Texas. Together, these rhetorics and

² The significance of “The Mexican” is not only an indicator of colonization, but of a presencing of colonial logics, logics that connect “The Mexican”

to “histories, rhetorics and images” that accumulate negative affective value (see Wingard, 2013, p. 9).

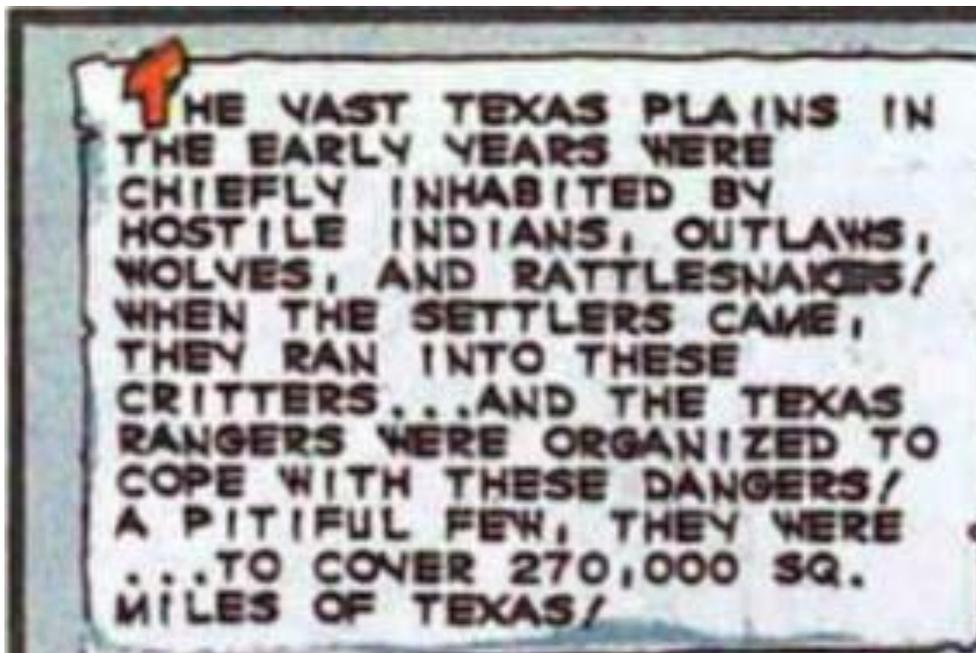


Figure 1: *Texas Rangers in Action*, no. 56, p. 19

narratives would inaugurate a hierarchical structure that benefits settlers to the present day.

Settler colonialism is neither philanthropic nor a liberty-for-all project, as Austin would have us believe in his letter to his cousin. Yet, Western historical discourse, and the *Texas Rangers in Action* series (1956-1970) in particular, argue otherwise. White settlers “came” to Texas.³ This arrival was an event in historical time. It happened. But white settlers also came to “stay.” They reflect a continuous structural happening (see Wolfe, 2006). To provide clarification on this structural happening, I deploy “history” as a category of my analysis to read the *Texas Rangers in Action* comic books (issues 1 through 63). Jan

Blommaert and April Huang (2009) argue that to invoke history as a category of analysis, there must be a toolkit of concepts that “points towards connections between the past and the present in terms of social activities” (p. 3-4). I have identified these social activities as the institution of law, order, justice, and the articulation of rhetorics and narratives of modernity.

Frontier Immortals: Esos Que Quitan y Matan

The *Texas Rangers in Action* comic book series often grounds itself in historical discourse. It is common to read: “From the archives of the Texas Rangers.” And from the archives, the reader encounters a

³ Little information is available as to how large of a production was and how wide of a circulation this comic had.

racist history: “The Texas Rangers were organized before the battle of the Alamo!” for the purposes of protecting this land and defending settlers from “The Injun” and “The Mexican” (no. 5, p. 3). From the archive of the Rangers, we also find depictions of Texas and the Rangers. There are two types of moves articulated. On the one hand, Texas and the Texas border were a “blazing frontier of outlaw guns, Apache arrows, and swaggering bad men!” (no. 5, p. 11). As the image above reads, Texas was “chiefly inhabited by hostile Indians, outlaws, wolves, and rattlesnakes!” As the passage continues, “When the settlers came, they ran into these critters... and the Texas Rangers were organized to cope with these dangers!” (no. 56, p. 19), the first move becomes evident. “The Injun” of Texas, a stereotype for people from tribes such as the Nazan, Pinta, Harices, Comecrudos, and Tejones, is stripped of his history and presented as part of the wild (e.g., critters). This reduction reveals a paradigm of rational knowledge at work where either “The Injun” or the “bloodthirsty Mexican bandits” (no. 60, p. 24) are presented as external to “reason” and objectified as nature (see Quijano, 2007).

The other move consists of presenting a people as pre-civilized, and thus, an empty landscape where the inhabiting bodies of the Other “vanish” or “evaporate.” Texas, in this context, is “a new land—rough and raw—untamed” (no. 11, p. 13; no. 33). This “squalid” land, therefore, is “up for grabs” (no. 60, p. 15), needing to be civilized because no

law, order, justice, or honest men exist in it (no. 46; 54). With both moves, space is created to articulate a rhetoric and narratives of salvation, progress, and development (see Mignolo, 2007). Such discourse ensures that settler specters continue presencing in the present—as a legacy. That is to say, as the discourse of settlers announces the commencement of civilization at the turn of the 19th century, as marked by the arrival of the settlers, and pronounces a commandment that dictates this is so because settlers are men of vision and integrity, it is emplacing structures that ensure the image of the settler is both creator and finalizer of progress and development on a Western stage of time.

There is something to be said about the importance of land and the transferring of lands to these settlers. We could turn to the novel, *Squatter and the Don*, a fictional depiction of California’s history with settlers, which provides one example of the many tactics Anglo settlers took. In one scene, the question is posed, “But the law does not open to settlers private property, private lands?” The response by one of the characters is, “Yes it does, because land is not considered private property until the title to it is confirmed and patented” (p. 123). Despite the decree of Spanish and Mexican land grants, there was still the “surveying” of land, challenges to land ownership, and litigation that took years in the courts to settle. To return to an earlier quote, Américo Paredes’s novel, *George Washington Gómez*, provides some context here with regard to Texas: “A few



Figure 2: *Texas Rangers in Action*, no. 48, p. 33

English-speaking adventurers moved in... Then came the railroad early in the 20th century, and with it arrived the first real-estate men and the land-and-title companies” (p. 36). Again, despite the decree of Spanish and Mexican land grants, companies emerged to question the authenticity of said titles. Legal proceedings often meant money, and for money landowners mortgaged their land. Settlers simply had to outlast the landowners in court, which many did.⁴

History is central to the comic book because it allows for a discourse of commencement and commandment. “The history of the Texas Rangers,” the comic book announces, “is crammed full” of true accounts (no. 12, p. 28). The Rangers are depicted as honest, dedicated, and

courageous men (no. 24). The Rangers could make Texas “fit for progress” (no. 37, p. 19). If “progress was to continue,” the comic book reads, “a semblance of law and order had to be maintained” (no. 35, p. 10). The mission or social activities of the Rangers thus consisted of instituting law, order, and justice. “The Injun” or “The Mexican,” as the comic book refers to both populations, needed to be “repelled” (no. 5, p. 18), using a logic of elimination. In the “coming war for freedom” (no. 11, p. 38), as the comic book refers to it, the Rangers were then responsible for going from one “lawless” or “squalid little settlement” (no. 46, p. 9) to another to clean it up (no. 13, p. 7) and/or “cure” it (no. 35, p. 4). This action was their “impossible task” of “bringing

⁴ It is important to recognize and acknowledge that these land grants are also colonial claims, ones that ultimately displaced tribes who lived there.

law and order to a wild, young, land” (no. 60, p. 24). But no one attempting to stop them, it is written, was ever a “match for the highly-skilled Texas Rangers!” (no. 45, p. 33). Whether the Rangers were guarding the Gulf coast (no. 12) or defending the border against Juan Cortina and his bandit army (no. 21), they were successful in and for making Texas safe and lawful (no. 24, p. 27). As they battled for the land “yard by yard” (no. 60, p. 15), the Rangers emerged as “Valiant heroes of the Wild West” (no. 19, p. 1). Texas, it can be read, is a “shining monument to their greatness” (no. 56, p. 21).

¿Que es la Verdad?

The comic book recognizes that the Apaches and Comanches had “ruled Texas” before the “white men came” (no. 56, p. 31). But, as the image in Figure 2 claims, “The Indian” sought to “halt the Westward march of civilization!” (no. 48, p. 33). The settlers had a word for “The Injun,” according to the comic book, *siwash*: “An Indian...not being up to the white man’s standard” (no. 7, p. 32). It is a matter of historical fact that there was resistance to the encroachment of settlers. But defiant? Defiant implies that the “Westward march of civilization” already existed. Defiant they were, because they were against a type of “modernity” that justified the expropriation of land, the loss of life, and Western historical discourse and how “truth” reflects a particular type of morality and taste. The comic book received a “Seal of Approval,” for instance, which means that its “truth” narratives had

been “carefully reviewed” and “met the high standards of morality and good taste” of the Comic Code Authority. But what are the “high standards of morality,” and who determines “good taste”? Are we to think of taste in the ways Hugh Blair did, as “proper” or “correct” taste (see Golden and Corbett, 1990)? If so, we must approach the *Texas Rangers in Action* comic book series as an attempt to induce effect and affect at the level of taste and morality by presenting history. We must then hold the comic book accountable or responsible for justifying state-violence through its literacy and rhetorical work, for creating an ecological impact that is a matter of human rights.

Morality and taste circulate in the title of the comic book—*Texas Rangers in Action*. The relationship between Rangers and action is meant to cement into written form and public memory the idea that the Rangers were always in action. This stance is supported both by the comic books’ covers and their focus on the instituting of law, order, and justice. In and across the issues, depictions of Rangers are as follows: Rangers riding their horses with a six-gun shooter (no. 5); Rangers fighting border jumpers (no. 7); Rangers saving a white woman (no. 8); Rangers as “harmless” beings saving towns (no. 16); and Rangers as “Heroic Men of Action” (no. 48). This is underwritten further by the statement, “From the archives of the Texas Rangers.” “From the archives” lends itself to a particular kind of authority, an authority that seeks to invoke history and memory in particular ways. How fitting it is, I would say, to find the following

passage—“Fiction doesn’t follow life. Just the other way around. You dream up something in fiction and then watch it happen in real life” (no. 25, p. 25). This passage contextualizes the onslaught of Westernization in relation to a land and people and yet is cloaked by settler colonial rhetorics and narratives of salvation, progress, and development.

Morality and taste are also depicted in the representation of groups. “The Mexican” and brown bodies are always predominantly presented with a sombrero and sash, described as having a “quick temper” (no. 7, p. 3), shown as semi-literate—“will” vs. “weel” (no. 9, p. 14) and “these man” vs. “these men” (no. 31, p. 28)—and when confronted by the Rangers, are typically depicted as scared and confused. These are not the standards of the Western subject, who are cast as men of vision and integrity, endowed with the authority to direct the course of civilization and be in control of said direction for all eternity.

In no. 29, when Juan Cortina’s group encounters the Rangers, they are presented as frightened, with the words “Eet ees the Gringos” uttered (p. 12). In no. 55, we see “The Mexican” simply as ashamed rather than concerned with the atrocities caused by the Anglo-settlers or Rangers. “The Mexican” is a caricature: a funny man (no. 48), a “muy malo” and “bad hombre” (no. 62), a supernatural (no. 55), and collectively a group who wants to halt the West’s march towards civilization. On the other hand, the Rangers are presented as *cool* and *courageous* with a “burning desire to fight

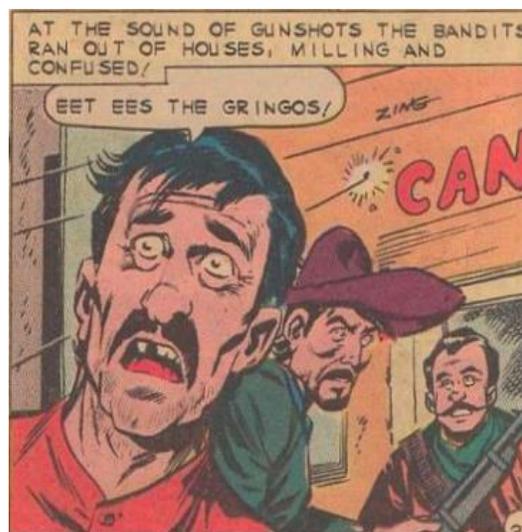


Figure 3: *Texas Rangers in Action*, no. 29, p. 12

for justice” (no 12, p. 17; also see no. 17). This portrayal is why the words “critters,” “siwash,” and “squalid” are so important. They depict notions of savagery and wilderness meant to stand as binary opposites to Western subjectivity, intelligibility, and reason. By the word “commencement,” readers are to understand when civilization begins, while “commandment” clearly means readers to see the law of settlers as representative of men of vision and integrity.

All truths, as presented in these comic books, though, must be subject to questioning, especially in the context of settlers and their exploration of a “New World” or “unknown West.” What is meant, for example, by the following statements—“opening the wilderness” (no. 7, p. 18); “Without the brave lawmen, the West could never have been built up” (no. 46, p. 17); or “I had been sent out by our great father to explore the Western country...were not women to be turned by words to go back...we were

men well armed and would sell our lives at a dear rate to his nation” (no. 29, p. 26)? When we come across statements like these and the following—“Today we think of a clear cut line that does separate our law enforcement men from the criminal element...but it wasn’t exactly that way in the days of the Old West” (no. 36, p. 18)—we must remind ourselves that not only is there not a clear cut line, but that the very term “law enforcement” is fraught with a Western morality and taste that seek to justify violence in the name of modernity. This is evident throughout the comic book series. For instance, when Texas Ranger Clint Shelby sends a telegram to his chief giving his resignation so as to be able to enter Mexico, we find a Captain who reports he never received any telegram (no. 5, p. 17). Or, in the case of Juan Cortina, we read the following from one Ranger Captain: “Of course I can’t order you to cross into Mexican territory to get him! But, if you should somehow, in the dark, cross the Rio Grande without knowing it...” (p. 12). Such a passage clearly signals settler morality.

In the Ranger comic book, the improvement and growth of the land represent solely the accomplishment of settlers and the Rangers. It is a matter of historical fact, however, that the Rangers “ruled” by their “six-guns.” So, when the comic book authors write, “Texas Rangers’ [six-guns] brought law and order” (no. 52, p. 39), we must

acknowledge that the de/re-territorialization of Texas land and the extraction of resources were done with the “six-gunner.” The kind of literacy and rhetorical work here proves that sometimes settler colonial logics don’t even need to be cloaked by a rhetoric and narrative of modernity.⁵ The rhetickery (see Booth, 2004) presented in the comic book series obviously has implications. And these implications are most evident in the public memory that circulates and flows in Texas, a state which celebrates Anglo and European settlers and Rangers, a settler collective public memory that accepts one *verdad* and claims it never knew otherwise. I was reminded of this one day as I visited the Texas Department of Public Safety website, where we see the Rangers described as playing an “effective, valiant, and honorable role throughout the early troubled years of Texas” (“Historical Development”).

Para los que Nunca Aprehendieron

La *verdad* is that the settlers and Rangers stole land and they also killed (see de León, 2010). The Rangers would be responsible in South Texas and the LRGV for intimidating and/or eliminating “The Indian” and “The Mexican” from their claims to the land. They did so in the name of law, order, and justice. Yet, en las márgenes, like the LRGV, one can find corridos that confirm specters haunting

⁵ I am reminded of an early 1900s *Laredo Times* article that states, “there is a serious surplus

population there that needs elimination” (qtd. in Johnson, 2003, p. 3).

Texas. There is a memory in such places that speaks to una triste verdad y tragedias that the people refuse to forget.

The “Corrido of Juan Cortina” partially accounts for both the land-grabbing and violence (Elizondo, n.d.). Cortina is known for witnessing a Brownsville city marshal arrest a Mexican American and pistol-whip the man. After a verbal argument, Cortina shot the marshal. Months later, he returned to Brownsville to release unfairly imprisoned Mexicans and Mexican Americans (Thompson, 2010). The corrido begins by stating, “1859 para ser preciso,” and with the corridista noting, “la tierra se han robado.” It continues by accounting for how the people, particularly Juan Cortina, knew what was going on: “leyes y tratados sirven solo a los Americanos.” The treaties and laws, particularly enforced by the “rinches,” provided the means to steal “el ganado” and “la frontera.” And so, there emerges a long resistance to Anglo colonization along the LRGV and South Texas. In “Pistoleros Famosos,” this is partially accounted for. “Por las márgenes del Rio” is where the corridista begins. He continues by listing those “pistoleros” who died resisting the Texas Rangers. The corridista defiantly names the cause of their deaths, “Los Rinches que son cobardes.” And for such reasons, the song continues by stating that “En los pueblitos del Norte... siempre ha corrido la sangre.” The words “Es cierto no son mentira” expound the final parts of the song: “Desde aquí se les recuerda... Cantándoles sus corridos... Murieron por que eran

hombres... no por que fueran bandidos.”

Corridos pesados.

Siempre ha corrido la sangre. La Matanza, for instance, describes the period of 1915 to 1919, a period in which words such as “vanish” and “evaporate” were used to account for the estimated 5,000 killings of “The Mexican” in South Texas (see Ivey, 2010; Villanueva, 2017). To name a few, there were Jesus Bazan, Antonio Longoria, Paulino Serda, and Florencia García. The Rangers indiscriminately harmed and/or killed “The Mexican” in the LRGV and South Texas. The corridos not only provide an opportunity to remember the past but also remind us that even in the present day the colonial continues to traffic in the normative. “Los Rinches de Tejas” is one such corrido. The scene is Starr County in the LRGV (1967). “Voy a cantarles, señores, de los pobres infortunios” are the first lines (n.p.). The poor and unfortunate farmworkers “[q]ue brutalmente golpearon esos rinches asesinos,” the corridista continues. Those assassins, “Esos rinches maldecidos,” were sent by “el gobernador” to “proteger los melones.” The corridista accounts what happened to Magdeleno Dimas, one of the victims, who states, “Yo no opusé Resistencia. The song continues, “Me golpearon sin conciencia” (n.p.). Near the conclusion, the corridista sings, “Esos rinches maldecidos... Los mandó el gobernador a a proteger los melones.” Past and present, the Rangers have “protected” the land and resources. In the state of Texas, a place where land is

capital and ranching is capitalism, a rhetoric of modernity must cloak colonial logics and imperial designs.

The wreckage of settler colonialism is a matter of fact. At the turn of the 19th century, “The Mexican” was displaced from the land, politically disenfranchised, and forced to be economically dependent on a settler-colonial capitalist order (Montejano; 1987; Rodriguez, 2007; Bedolla, 2009; Carrigan and Webb, 2003). Such wreckage emplaced structures and logics of domination, management, and control still felt today in and across all of Texas. The settler colonial rhetorics and narratives of “The Mexican” as the “ill” of society enabled Juan Crow segregation in Tejano society (e.g., “Mexican Colonies”) and schools (e.g., “Mexican Wards” and “Mexican Schools”). And yet, even when the courts ruled Latinos could not be segregated from white students on the technicality of being white (Martinez, 1997), arguments that language deficiencies needed to be remedied were made (Foley, 2014). As a result, “The Mexican” was taught inferiority both in material ways (school equipment, facilities) and through pedagogical approaches (Menchaca and Valencia, 1990; Menchaca, 1997; Spring, 1996; Córdova, 1998; San Miguel, 1998; Valencia, 2000; Guajardo and Guajardo, 2004; Blanton, 2007). In Texas, these projects of domination, management, and control were the work of settlers and the Rangers. These projects carry on in the present day in such a way that Texas will always be re-written as colonial.

Towards Developing a Language and Practice of Spectro-Politics

Settler public memory exhibits the desire to forget and remember in colonial ways. And yet, from las márgenes there is a memory of hope (El Primer Congreso Mexicanista of 1911, The Tejano Revolt of 1915, The Harlingen Convention of 1927, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the American G.I. Forum) that refuses to forget. What I have submitted here is an effort towards developing a language and a practice of spectro-politics that has implications for research and classroom education. When Derrida writes, “Everyone reads, acts, writes with his or her ghosts” (1994, p. 174), he is calling and pushing us towards acknowledging how we are all interwoven and entangled by a constellation of stories, genealogies, and hauntings. In this universe of constellations, we have the ability, as Derrida would say, to imagine, to think about, and to project the visibility of the invisible (p. 125). Community listening eradicates mere presence as a marker for listening. It focuses on learning how to be with specters, as a form of responsibility towards an inheritance and as an expression of social justice where it is not yet. When I write that it is important in my community to create presence from absence and sound from silence, it is a kind of seeing, being, and doing with the past, present, and future irreducible to exactness and norms.

The *Texas Rangers in Action* comic book

and corridos are similar in that they do literacy and rhetorical work. Both can be brought into the classroom as examples of the ways in which public memory works. As we consider their ecological impact on shaping and informing ways of seeing, being, and doing, what I ask is that we learn how to re-listen and re-search in the memory of tragedy and hope so that we can make history matter to ourselves and students. What is at stake is humanity and being complicit in allowing the colonial to traffic in the normative.

No te dejes!

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