

INTERCHAPTER DIALOGUE

FOR CHAPTER 2

About: Interchapter Dialogues (ICDs) are conversations among the co-authors about each individual author's chapter, in which we further explore various ideas, themes, and contexts that inform their work. They serve multiple purposes that we hope will be useful to our readers. First, as we argued in our introduction (Chapter 1), cross-cultural communication and collaboration among scholars is an essential practice of antiracist research. Next, the ICDs provide our readers with additional ways to access our research. Both the audio and textual formats complement and enrich our single-author chapters. These recorded dialogues, as well as their edited transcripts, integrate our perspectives and demonstrate that our work is grounded in real, lived experience. Overall, the ICDs experiment with enacting the intellectual potential of collaborative, multimodal writing processes and building connections among co-authors.

Alexandria (Alex): First, I want to delve into your work on disciplinary history and how race and racism appear in the field. You've provided us with this really nuanced chapter to give us a sense of how rhetoric, composition, literacy, and communication studies has simultaneously claimed that it is committed to anti-racism and social justice, but when we look at how people are actually studying race or talking about race, there seems to be a different story being presented. I'm interested in knowing a little more about what you're working on right now, Iris, and how you see it being relevant to your activism in equitable online communication and CCCC leadership.

Iris: Well, let's see, there are a lot of different pieces to the puzzle. The work that I contributed to this book very much builds on the previous work that I've done with critical historiography and how critical historiography is a method of reclamation. As a method of reclamation, it's about recovering history for marginalized populations, which is a manifestation of racial reconciliation, which James discusses throughout his chapter. That's where my work began. I also considered other types of decolonial methodologies which I explore in "La Cultura Nos Cura: Reclaiming Decolonial Epistemologies through Medicinal History and Quilting as Method," a chapter I wrote with Sonia Arellano for *Rhetorics Elsewhere and Otherwise: Contested Modernities, Decolonial Visions*. Thinking about alternative ways to look at some of the most common research methods in the field really informed that particular chapter since we were considering

how critical historiography branches into decolonial theory and how traditional methods manifest in the field with little attention to how race plays into that type of method, let alone racial reconciliation.

Alex: Iris, would you please define decolonial, for any readers who might need a little clarity? What's decolonialism, and how is it connected to antiracism?

Iris: This work started back with the Civil Rights movement, which is characterized by nationalist rhetoric that goes beyond a colonial affiliation with the US for people of color. You had the Third World Liberation Front claiming a nationalist identity for colonized peoples. You had Chicana nationalist rhetoric, you had Black nationalist rhetoric associated with the likes of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, and, last but not least, you had third-wave feminism, and all of the aforementioned inform and are informed by a broader consciousness linked to the decolonized identity and a reclamation of identities lost through colonialism. These ideas have not ever disappeared, but have been developing with more clear theoretical concepts informed by historical concepts such as “the colonial matrix of power” and “epistemic disobedience,” and it's been resurfacing again with these concepts since the mid-90s with the work of Dussell, Mignolo, Quijano, and Walsh. More specifically, the way that we have come to understand it, through the work of Walter D. Mignolo and Anibal Quijano, is that there is a difference between decolonizing and decolonialism or decoloniality. For example, one of the major issues of narratives about Mexican history is that we think about the decolonialization of that place as when Europeans led the conquest of the Mexican people. We think about the Mexican people being liberated from their colonial presence.

Decoloniality is a little bit different. Decoloniality relates to the study of epistemology and the study of discourse. Decoloniality deals with the question of power and epistemology and the superiority that is attributed to the episteme associated with the body of knowledge that is embedded within Western modernity. When asking the question—what does it mean to be a colonized population?—we must think about the structural aspects of knowledge and its systems, namely, the interdependent production and circulation of knowledge and language.

Chris: Iris, when rereading your chapter, I found myself drawn in by your assessment of how intersectionality theory has been appropriated and diluted. Would you say more about how this connects with your overall analysis of critical historiography in composition?

Iris: Far too many studies misuse the term intersectionality, because their methodology does not fully engage critical race studies. This concern is one of my biggest motivations for doing this type of work. We can't take the term “critical” for granted because assuming its neutrality privileges colonial, racist habits

of mind. We need to closely examine methods that claim to be critical and critique them when they fail to be reflective about how they exclude marginalized populations.

Chris: One of the things that I also noticed in your analysis, Iris, is the way you critique euphemisms that are used in place of a real discussion of race and racism—that there’s overuse of undefined broad terms that allude to race like *social justice*, *power*, *diversity*, and *inclusion* (and increasingly *antiracism*), which masks the field’s own history of racist oppression (and beyond). How do we train ourselves to notice this happening, and what kind of work addresses the origin and spread of these euphemisms?

Iris: Fortunately, some studies directly address this issue (Clary-Lemon, Prendergast, etc.). The data is pretty transparent in terms of how many publications are actually engaging with race or racism proper. In my chapter, I call for more research that specifically studies the *CCC* journal and how racism gets talked about. Composition gets racialized through exactly what you said: euphemisms of social justice and inclusion. This is part of what decolonialism is critiquing: the discipline is structured to value and reify a White, hetero-patriarchal discourse since its beginning in 1949. Therefore, when it comes to studying race, we have a hard time with it.

James: I remember a point in graduate school when I started to recognize the field was mostly White men. I picked up what I thought would be transformative text—George Kennedy’s *Comparative Rhetoric*. When I read through it, I recognized that it was a great cultural work. However, it also seemed to be reinforcing Greco-Roman tradition. I imagine that George Kennedy was trying to do good by employing comparative rhetoric as a methodology, but its lack of discussion about race and colonialism affects what we think of as Greco-Roman tradition and its so-called exceptionalism. What other work addresses this issue?

Iris: There are definitely people who are trying to devote themselves to social justice pedagogy and social justice methods—for example, studies about actor-network theory. But when I read actor-network theory, I don’t see any people of color, I don’t see them writing, I don’t see them mentioned. I see that kind of work as critical in the sense that it is trying to disrupt disciplinary identity, but when I do not see the mention of marginalized people or any racial issues with technology or information systems, such theories definitely don’t exemplify antiracist thought. As James mentioned, this absence reifies existing structures of power, what it means to be credible, and what it means to be legitimate. It has a lot of the characteristics of decolonial theory but is not acknowledging those connections.

Alex: I think another problem involving participation is that there’s still a tendency in scholarship to present knowledge from an assumed point of view.

For example, a few years ago, I was at a UNCF-Mellon Teaching Institute in Austin, Texas at Hutson-Tillotson University (an HBCU). Asao Inoue was one of our workshop leaders. Before I continue, I want to acknowledge that he and I are great colleagues and I deeply respect his scholarship. He's done some impactful work on antiracism, putting it into a public sphere of dialogue in the field. But, after reading his work, I asked him, "Who do you imagine that you're talking to?"

When I asked him the question, I was thinking about how he was in an HBCU space and asking *us* whether *we* understand whiteness. "Well, yeah—we do!" So, I decided to flip the script in that workshop and ask him, "If you could write your book in a way that addressed not just the (potentially resistant) White people you imagine reading, but all of us, what would your book look like?" He acknowledged that he had not thought about audience in that way. So I looked at your chapter as helping me grapple with this issue of how we talk about participation and audience in ways that help us start to recraft a more inclusive narrative about who is making contributions to this discipline, and what they look like, and how they can affect knowledge making in the future.

James: I'm glad you brought that story up, Alex. It's great for thinking about how we consider audience. When I'm writing anything, whiteness is always in my mind. In graduate school, I learned that when you're thinking about audience, you're thinking about an academic White audience. I don't mean that as a defense; it just seems like a fact. Whiteness dominates our field in so many different capacities. But you can make the argument that there is an audience out there that we can absolutely speak to. Also, I think it's interesting that you brought up Asao because I've heard great things—and some criticism—about his keynote at CCCC, but audience was very much a part of what he was thinking about at that moment, right?

Alex: Oh yeah. We've had a few conversations since that event. I think that's why he kept in touch with me. He realized that "the issue of audience is a problem, even in my antiracist work." He alluded to our discussion at Hutson-Tillotson in the second footnote in his recent (2019) article, "Classroom Writing Assessment as an Antiracist Practice: Confronting White Supremacy in the Judgments of Language."

James: It does make me think that all the times that I'm talking about race, I think about it in terms of whiteness. And I would love to flip that script and say, "What if I imagine my audience mostly as people of color?" What could come out of that awareness?

Alex: Or how inclusive, or representative, is that "academic" audience—of professionals in our field? As Iris demonstrates throughout her chapter, a racial politics of citation inhibits us from actually seeing the knowledge production of

the few BIPOC that have advanced degrees in the field, teach composition, or administrate writing programs. Scholarship is just one form of making knowledge, but it is the highest currency for tenure and promotion despite how racially exclusive the publishing processes are. When the people involved in the review and editing process are predominantly White and trained to see race and racism as ancillary to critique, rather than integral to it, they risk unconsciously reifying their tendency to cite and publish mostly White male authors.

Publishing without support, or access to learning about the process, is very traumatic for graduate students and early career scholars who mistakenly believe that publishing is an equal playing field and that they will solely be judged by the “quality” of their work. Worse, many of our publications are not open access (OA), which affects the likelihood of a person’s work being cited. These are some issues that need to be more comprehensively addressed in the field’s professional organizations (e.g., CCCC), their resolutions, conference agendas, publication outlets, funding, governance structures, graduate training curricula and resources, etc. One way that our book attempts to intervene is by drawing readers’ attention to the importance of multicultural, interracial collaboration. How do we talk to colleagues, like us, while modeling how we might address some kind of racially diverse, integrated audience?

Iris: It’s an interesting dilemma because Asao’s address tells the audience, “If I’m making you feel uncomfortable right now, this is how people of color feel all the time. If I’m making you feel excluded, this is how we feel all the time.” That rhetorical strategy certainly captured the attention of most of the White members there, reminding them that the organization is predominantly White in a mostly White profession. So, when I consider Asao presenting to a whole different audience of mostly people of color at HBCU symposia, it raises the question, “How would the terms of engagement have been altered if he had that audience in mind?” Other than saying whiteness is a thing, whiteness exists, our field is very racist and so therefore, we need to bring in these concepts. Yet if he was thinking, how am I going to connect with *this* audience, a completely different audience of color that was predominantly African American, how would he have better connected with that audience?

Alex: Iris, I’d like to turn our discussion’s focus to your critical analyses of the field’s origins. One of the things I really appreciated about your chapter is that you clearly demonstrate that disciplinary history needs to be understood within the context of political leadership and association during the 1970s. There’s so much different, interdependent, work going on at that exact moment in time. I’m talking about Watergate, the conclusion of Civil Rights, the growth of the Black Panther Party, etc. There was a claim to blackness at that time in the face of racist state-sponsored violence, which was occurring alongside the desegrega-

tion of higher education. There were so many things going on at that time that are called for Black cultural preservation and recognition. Few scholars deeply engage with the historical continuity of anti-Blackness. Research about race often fails to increase the value of Black culture and racial literacies. Instead, arguments about race seem to be in a vacuum of predominantly White scholarship. HBCUs, for instance, remain eerily absent from the field's historiographies.

This unfortunate omission inhibits researchers from producing accurate, interesting scholarship. For example, I would argue that we continue to honor our "students' right to their own language" at HBCUs. Here, there can be a lot of respect for home language, Black English, home discourse, or however you want to refer to a student's "own language." But there's also a cultural understanding of eloquence. We always have to switch these codes because you always have to be aware of how your race puts its intelligence on display. It's like the intersectionality question. What happens when something that's highly racialized and highly rooted in cultural preservation and knowledge making ends up being applied to these radically different contexts of social justice work? What do we gain? What do we lose? Iris, I'm very interested in your opinion about that.

Iris: I've written about that quite a bit. I did a lot of research on "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (SRTOL)—who wrote it, the historical moment in which it was produced, etc. I think Scott Wible has done work with SRTOL that is worth engaging. And that's one of the issues I'd like to touch upon briefly, this issue of camaraderie and the issue of multiple generations within the field.

I might not touch exactly upon your particular question, but our book fills in a rhetorical blind spot. One of the things that has been difficult about this work is delving into complex histories without sounding offensive, and/or without being limited by the parameters of scholarly critique. When you're trying to follow the path of an antiracist agenda, you call for these types of engagement, and that's one of the things that I think came across in the chapter. And it's really no different with SRTOL. Here's what we promised we were going to do as a profession. Here's what we decided would be legitimate. I'm sure it was a struggle for the NCTE/CCCC Black Caucus. I'm sure it was a struggle for Geneva Smitherman. I'm sure they had various heated exchanges. All this drama happens around the time the Committee against Racism and Bias in NCTE was formed, several years before that particular statement, and all of this comes out of histories of struggle. It does come directly out of the Civil Rights movement, which is such a complex history with many nuanced but interconnected trajectories to explore. We have to be able to look back on ourselves and be critical of ourselves. What did we promise we were going to do? How did we fail?

Alex: I really like your questions because they further illustrate antiracism as a methodology. They highlight that antiracism as a process that requires con-

stant reflection and continuous reflexive assessment. Your chapter will be very useful to graduate student education, fo' sho. We must consider how people are being trained to understand history, in general, and especially of the actual history of the discipline and the field because it will influence the future of research design. In my personal experience, the whole issue of desegregation of higher education is not part of a wide mainstream conversation about the formation of this field. But, in fact, it is integral to it because most “remedial programs” were located and administered by writing centers and writing programs. The learning mandates of these writing spaces vilified Black students, characterizing them as intellectually deficient and in need of White cultural assimilation. Schools poured millions of dollars into the idea that, “Let’s just teach them the right way to talk and that’ll rectify the issue of civil unrest.” Arguably, the entire modern history of composition studies relied on “basic writing” and the emergence of those kinds of racist programs. I think that’s the place upon which we should understand the emergence of SRTOL and those kinds of documents. But I don’t know that when people are being trained in the discipline, or learning about disciplinary history, that they’re really getting that kind of knowledge.

However, I should mention that my knowledge of this history comes from being situated in one of the most prestigious HBCUs (and women’s colleges) in the country, where our field’s very own Jacqueline Jones Royster started Spelman’s Comprehensive Writing Program (CWP) in notable Black Feminist scholar Beverly Guy-Sheftall’s office, where they were also architecting the Spelman’s Women’s Research and Resource Center. It had never occurred to me that the history of a writing program might actually lie in the development of other curricular initiatives like Black or Women’s Studies until Dr. Royster provided her account during a keynote at a writing-intensive (WI) faculty development workshop that I organized at Spelman in summer 2017. More information about such historical collaborations is discussed throughout their article “The Promise and Challenge of Black Women’s Studies: A Report from the Spelman Conference, May 25-26, 1990.” I plan to continue to work with Dr. Royster to unveil these kinds of hidden narratives of the field to push them towards the center.

Iris: Yes, Alex. As a matter of fact, when we think about civil unrest—even within the histories of Mexican Americans within the United States—rhetorical blindspots regarding the Latinx populations residing within the United States still very much exist. Many Latin Americans living in the United States are largely invisible to the public eye due to their absence in Latin American history lessons. These absences are detrimental to the understanding of these Latin American peoples. The conditions of their absence tell a story of violence, in which colonizers erase a people’s history and, in turn, erase a people out of existence.

This is dehumanizing education that negates the humanity of real people. These individuals deserve to be a part of the U.S. imaginary. They are contributors to our joint existence on a common land. They should be able to see themselves within the histories of the land they now live upon.

With these thoughts in mind, I'd like to end by saying that Historical Curanderisma can enact a healing methodology; it is a type of medicinal history, which gestures toward healing through critical engagement with competing epistemologies, "polyverses," or "loci of enunciations," which can work toward the recovery of lost knowledges. One of the reasons why we have these misunderstandings of migrants who are coming over from Guatemala and Central America, for example, can be attributed to what we learn and do not learn. We do not learn a critical history of Latin America in high school, for example, and we do not learn the colonial history of the United States in high school. There's a lot of knowledge that we're missing out on, and this knowledge that we're missing out on is very detrimental to how we understand the Latinx population inside and outside of the United States. Children are being separated from their families, being put in detention centers, and how much of these cruel circumstances are based on this idea that they are inferior, or that they are "those people over there"—such misconceptions are not necessarily tied to our history. It's really important to be able to bring up this idea as somebody already operating on the margins of the discipline, as a Latinx scholar, and as somebody already excluded from dominant historiographic representations in common public school history textbooks, with the exception being Ethnic Studies courses. Not reading somebody's experience is the same thing as burning their books. What happens when you basically X out a people's experience is that you also X them out of existence. This is a type of segregation that leads to trauma, but it's also indicative of who we think we are seeing in our classrooms and who is really there. I believe that Carmen Kynard argued that "If there is a physical absence of Conscience Rebels in classrooms, then we got some neo-racial-Jim-Crow admissions standards in our institutions." Let's continue to challenge this *de jure* segregation by using the appropriate research methods to do so.

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