Spring 4-26-2021

VOICES THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE SOUTH VALLEY: STORIES OF QUERENCIA LOST AND RECLAIMED

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BY

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

CHICANA AND CHICANO STUDIES

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

MAY 2021

DEDICATION

For my dad, I walk in your steps, with your values, and in your shadow, preserving language, culture, and traditions. I inherited your hands, vision, and a creative thirst to protect the authentic artifacts of our people. The sound of your wisdom resonating in my mind and soul through the memories guiding me through the dark. The red and green tastes from your kitchen, giving eternal life to the food you cooked, giving eternal love to the many mouths you fed. The hummingbirds constantly visit because of your sugary water recipes. I love you and have become you.

For my mother, who said I was a Chicana. You were right! My poor mother was the cleaning lady, the maid, "the housekeeper," and the *invisible helper*. For my mother, who ruined her legs scrubbing someone else's floors in the hope that someday her daughter could retell her stories in a place where people might listen. Where her stories became my stories, and her ridiculous motherly manner became my own. I inherited your passion for mariachi music and your ability to live life *sin vergüenza con broches y todo.* I love you and, in a strange shameless twist, have become you.

To Brooklynn, Ava, Maggie, and Richard, who were understanding during my research and accompanied me through this journey, willing and unwilling. You have inspired me to do more and do better right here and right now. I could not have fallen in love with the place of my upbringing without you creating a space of comfort and safety. Popsicle summers and raccoon-filled evenings have helped build the stories that will conjure our warmest memories when we look back and remember our *querencia. ¡Gracias!*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With all my heart, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Irene Vasquez, my advisor, and thesis chair, for continuing to encourage me through the years and the vast number of months writing and rewriting and then rewriting. Thank you for pushing me when I thought I could not finish this journey. I also thank my committee members, who each offered suggestions and guidance that proved to be invaluable. Thank you, Dr. Nancy Lopez, for your priceless recommendations and professional style pertaining to this study that inspired me. Thank you, Professor Miguel Gandert, for your encouragement; creativity and vision have been a keystone in my work. Thank you, Professor Levi Romero, *El Jefe*, who saw hope in me and agreed to mentor me and helped me despite my academic challenges. Your inspiration should be bottled, capped, and sold as it has been liquid gold to me in my voyage. I cannot say enough to show my gratitude to each of you because you went above and beyond.

I want to acknowledge Dr. Rafael Martinez; I always say that I still would not be here without the inspiration I found hiding inside me through your instruction. With gratitude to Dr. Tessa Cordova for the emotional support to continue daily and her reminders from the Nuevo Mexicana voice. To the inspiration I received from Dr. Patricia Perea, who believed in me. To all my university friends Angela, Chantel, Diahndra, and Howard, thank you for the positive support and healthy inspiration. To my childhood friends Roseanne, Roberta and Jacinda, thank you for the past, present, and future and the immeasurable support that I still desire. The lifetime friends who forced me to "suck it up" like Debbie and Stephanie, I love that you have never quit me.

Voices through the Streets of the South Valley: Stories of Querencia Lost and Reclaimed

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Abstract

The South Valley is a rural community within the urban boundaries of the City of Albuquerque, New Mexico. It is predominantly populated by minorities from diverse ethnicities and linked to the City of Albuquerque through limited access thoroughfares. The South Valley, composed of inhabitants who have lived in the area for generations, also includes returnees or those who are new to the valley. On any given day, within these neighborhoods, economic and social problems manifest themselves on the streets and threaten to deteriorate the seams of the community. Nevertheless, given the prevalent socio-economic challenges, South Valley residents appear to demonstrate the tenacity and creativity to adapt to challenges and develop a sense of empowerment concerning social disintegration. The creative use of space has simultaneously defined and defended the South Valley from those who wish to label it as a ghetto. This Master's thesis explores narrative representations of abandoned storefronts and homes, discarded furniture, *descanso*s (roadside memorials), and homeless residents to offer a cultural analysis of South Valley poetics and narrative that transcends the language of loss and decline.

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Preface

The summers of my youth overflowed with strong bonds of kinship and friendship; those bonds were forged on walks from my friend's homes to mine on dirt roads, from elementary school to middle school, and north to south. These childhood experiences grew seemingly overnight on the streets of my neighborhood and stretched through the South Valley's waterways. Some called them acequias; we called them ditches, and ditch life was all we had, a natural playground, yet as far as we knew, it was the center of our universe. My eight-year-old self remembers low hanging cottonwoods, stemmed reeds, and bridge perches that linked us to the earth. The ditch bank was half a mile to and from their world to mine; it balanced everything and everyone. We slid down the cement culverts in summer (Figure 1), into cold water, making our socks, cutoff jeans, and canvas shoes soggy. The smell of honeysuckle blossoms, sour crab apples, and hot tortillas wafted through the air. We were young, awkward, lively, and cute, not fazed by anything, finding safety in each other and our place. We survived hidden make-out sessions with dirty boys on days when school let out early while darting dogs attacks from behind broken chain link fences. Skinny arms swung from branch to branch, and bank to bank. Our green-eyed girl sliced her foot on a jagged beer bottle that lingered on the bottom. Her blood droplets tainted the murky water; my first glimpse of a flesh cut wound memorialized in my mind. I remember after school scraps and hoop earrings lying in the dust under a curious mob of seventh graders, fantasies from ice cream trucks chimed along the trail. Shared blow pops and hot chip wishes from the U-Pump-It gas station. Testing the water depths with virgin inhales of smoke behind the Mushroom store: the lyrics to "Candy Girl" and Guns N' Roses t-shirts. Abandoned car tires, floating beer cans, crawdads, and suckerfish bubbles in the deepest parts.

Figure 1

South Valley ditch from the author's childhood

Young girls' voices converted to women's whispers and dreams. Seemingly innocent daughters baptized on muddy banks by ill-planned practical jokes; the plan left the youngest of us rolling down the bank scared and hurt. Mothers shouted our names to return home, their voices passed along by neighborhood denizens just before dark. Those moments belonged to us, some of us who are now grandmas, some of us with six-figure salaries, one of us buried too soon. Before we knew fear before dirty water made you sick before masks and hand sanitizers were necessary. Dried chickenpox and training bras, picnics of peanut butter and potted meat, we felt untouchable. Northern water came down cold and clear, like clockwork every spring. From meager schools that led one of us to an east coast college in style, the rest found jobs in Albuquerque across the Guadalupe bridge. We always had that stretch of the ditch that guided us back in all seasons. Our way was molded in the strides back home; some would continue leftward. I went onto the right, alone. It was a measurement of seasons, and it was a time of growth, from there, to here back home, a mi querencia.

I am from a home with parents who wanted a better life for me and my siblings; I continue to nurture those same ideas as I raise my daughters. The South Valley has been their haven despite its negative reputation. Unfavorable character traits are embedded into some close-knit community residents for generations, much like in other areas. Historical and contemporary media portrayals of crime ridden illegal gang activity, and poverty-stricken housing along with inadequate schools frames the South Valley's residents as disreputable. Despite the South Valley's negative reputation, my daughters attend church in the area; they eat in the area; their extended family and friends reside within minutes of our home. I teach my children the value, possibilities, and history I have found in the South Valley. I was encouraged by my parents to return to my roots and stimulate that same idea with my daughters. The return to a true heart space. The concept of querencia is a place where one feels safe, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn; a place where one feels at home. I will apply this definition to draw distinctiveness on home, place and identity. As Estevan Arelleno (2007) explains "Querencia is gives us a sense of place, that which anchors us to the land, that which makes us a unique people, for it implies a deeply rooted knowledge of place, and for that reason we respect our place, for it is our home and we don't want to violate our home in any way" (p. 50). The South Valley was built on the labor of Native Americans and later Spanish-speaking minorities who at one time retained their maternal languages; however, the community as my daughters know it today is not bilingual. The loss of language among many in the community started before my generation; it continues to be more prevalent now.

My parents did not encourage us to speak Spanish in the home. Thus, I never learned Spanish. Code-switching is a common practice among bilingual parents to provide cultural

information to their children. They find it very difficult and inconvenient to transmit this information to their offspring. Often, children, especially in the company of their Anglo-American playmates, find it embarrassing for their parents to address them in Spanish (Cobos, 1983). In my experience, code-switching presents itself between bits and pieces of my two languages. I find myself utilizing this same technique of code switching with my children. I feel this approach has directly killed a part of who I am because of the gaps in my Spanish, which I fear that I will never recover. My motivation to work in this community came from a personal desire, as a Nuevo Mexicana and daughter of the South Valley coming from a strong Catholic working-class family, I felt invested in the area. I found myself raising three daughters in the same area I vowed never to return to. I picked up a blue-collar job in the city and joined the working-class labor that was carved out for me. I came back to the university as a middle-aged woman and became a first-generation college graduate who has embraced the education, I swore was unnecessary. In doing so I began taking classes in Chicana/o studies that ultimately changed my simple life as I knew it. I took classes with professors who inspired and motivated me to look at myself, and in doing so I realized that I was not done with my goals and owed my daughters more. I now know that if I would have had this quality education in my youth, my life would have looked completely different, potentially more successful, and less challenged by academic standards.

I am unable to have a fluent conversation in Spanish, and much of that includes improper pronunciation. Many Hispanic people in the Southwest lost their Spanish language abilities due to fear of retaliation after not adopting English, and some chose not to teach the language to their children because of compulsory schooling or other civic practices. However, we should not fault parents for accommodating societal norms that promote

success in an English-speaking world. Like most people from the area, my parents have a typical story of being punished for their bilingualism within the educational system. Another form of language devaluation requires ignoring Spanish speakers even when they have a good command of the white-middle-class version of English. In various social settings, Spanish speakers are frequently ignored by whites as not worth listening to, as if their Spanish mother tongue renders their messages meaningless and underserving of white attention (Feagin & Cobas, 2014). English monolingualism constitutes the fabric of the United States, as well as that of our parents, grandparents, and community. Unfortunately, our Spanish maternal language and code-switching have been used as a way to instill a sense of *vergüenza* or shame and is why many choose not to maintain the language or traditions. As Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) writes, "English and English in dialects are under constant pressure to speak and write in standard English. Linguistic code-switching, which goes against language laws and norms, is not approved" (p. xxii). We notice small cracks in the structure and appreciate just how much work and ideological fortification it takes to maintain Spanish and English categories as separate and exclusive (Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

Although this thesis examines culture, traditions, language, and spatial loss in the South Valley, it also seeks to uncover and analyze how cultural meanings, including language and representation practices, draw a roadmap through symbolic or coded meanings. Pieces of broken languages and objects can help rebuild a fractured and historically overlooked neighborhood. In the United States, Spanish has become a language that provokes distaste and even spite by those who find it foreign. In Margaret Montoya's Law and language(s): Image, integration, and innovation (1994) article she states Spanish use is the practice of an "outlaw language" and is perceived as taboo; but language can also bring

meaning as we reclaim our stories (p. 153). Over many decades, language and cultural loss among residents in the South Valley has stemmed from discrimination and socio-economic issues. Language and cultural loss have complex ramifications; they may signal community loss, yet residents continue to show their resilience in claiming a voice and expressing a sense of home in a language and in material practices that are not owned by the dominant society. In this thesis, I attempt to reveal what happens when the sense of home is lost and how expressions of home are intertwined with language and representation. What happens as our belief in querencia diminishes? My research reveals that any exploration of the significance of home and place must entail an examination of those characterized as not possessing a home. Therefore, I exam notions of home and place among all residents, including people referred to as homeless because their identities are wrapped up in notions of home, attaching that notion to querencia.

Chapter One: Introduction

Methodology

On entering and visiting the community today, it is easy to see how the South Valley has changed in the last 25 years. Pieces of the past include abandoned, dilapidated adobe structures alongside thriving *chicharronerías, paleterías, taquerías, tortillerías,* and *carnicerías.* More than half of South Valley residents speak a language other than English (presumably Spanish) at home, and it is also home to a greater number of immigrants than Albuquerque or the United States as a whole (South Valley Data Atlas, 2016). The visual scenes have changed the home I remember from my formative years, a world that embodied a familiar narrative that has now been altered. I have witnessed these changes in the community in which I was born and raised; this insider perspective (what anthropologists call an "emic view") allows me to have this insight, which a new member of the community may not. I have a historical vision of what once was and what could be again. I have memories of my childhood and my experiences as an adult, and they are very different. Although communication within the South Valley appears to operate in the same manner that it always has, Spanish has become optional and fleeting and, in some cases, this has proved frustrating to me and others. Although many in the South Valley may understand the language to a point, the ability to respond can be troubling. For many like me, who often revert to code-switching to communicate, we also adjust our language to be heard.

This study will reveal how a small minority community's struggle exposes tensions with identity, place, and belonging, and resiliency and strength are used to reconcile life and wellbeing. I will also draw attention to the values and the cultural production that are hidden behind the stereotypes in the community. I utilize cultural asset mapping as a theoretical

framework to guide me through the concepts I use to understand cultural transformation. My fieldwork uses tenets of critical race theory to center the voices of racially stigmatized communities. It excavates the community cultural wealth and accompanying linguistics, familial, navigational, social, resistant capital and challenges, described by Yosso (2005) and Pérez Huber (2009). I am including elements of how they justify the importance of lived experiences in research. Pérez Huber explains that her approach:

> combines the essential elements of testimonio and critical race interviews to (1) validate and honor the knowledge and lived experiences of oppressed groups by becoming a part of the research process: (2) challenge dominant ideologies that shape traditional epistemology and methodology: (3) operate within a collective memory that transcends a single experience to that of multiple communities: and (4) move toward racial justice by offering a space within the academy for the stories of people of color to be heard. This method was designed to capture the complexities of the lived experiences of people of color whose realities are mediated by multiple forms of oppression. (2009, p. 713)

Language diminishes, changes, and continues through symbols; its expression is interactive and affected by modern trends and technology. Being dispossessed of language and tradition creates significant wounds and cultural injuries. Addressing problems and showing how they relay messages and speak to the community is powerful because language grows and changes.

Within my theoretical framework, I rely on the notion of *querencia,* a place where one feels safe, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn, where one feels at home (Arellano, 2007). *Querencia* comes from the Spanish word *querer* to express desire or

want but it can also convey love. I have spent most of my life in the South Valley and consider it to be my *querencia*. The community I know is a traditionally wealthy world that also encompasses the negative aspects the media emphasizes: failing schools, poverty, and violence. The community's strength in customs and traditions is vital to preserving community cohesion; many residents appreciate its natural resources and neighborhood connections. The area has a small-town feel, and it is easy to run into friends from high school in the old neighborhood as you drive through it or stand in line at the grocery store. The personality of the South Valley is vital to the feelings I expand on in this thesis as I write about home, *vergüenza*, and cultural capital.

I approached my research from an ethnographic lens, utilizing a random sample of oral histories and one-on-one interviews, that was approved through the University of New Mexico Office of the Institutional Review Board (OIRB). The qualitative data I collected offers an overview of the community's often unheard or underrepresented voices that carry value and meaning. I believe that the interviews I conducted give character to the community, and rather than showing loss or diminution, they reveal agency and resiliency. The community thrives in the face of negative characterizations and depictions and rejects ghetto or barrio stereotypes that are associated with violence. Using a random sample of interviews allowed me to use various people's experiences in making generalizations about the area and eliminating targeted answers. An image collection proved valuable to the research, bringing together the living environment's visual data as it complements the orality and visuality embodied by South Valley residents.

Oral testimonies are a critical aspect of my methodology. In particular, my use of the nonacademic theory of *el oro del barrio* or the gold or treasure of the area influenced the

conversations I had with South Valley residents. This notion is built on personal experiences and emerges through the stories people tell (Montiel, Atencio & Mares, 1942). People share their reflections through family and community as a sign of solidarity. Dialogue shapes *el oro del barrio* and develops from pearls of collective wisdom that convey values such as wholeness, wellbeing, and contentment, or *una vida buena, sana y alegre*. One resident named Pablo[1] told me, "I wish I could have talked to my grandpa. I bet he had a lot of history to talk about; my family was prominent. They would run ten thousand sheep on the mesa, but taxes came in and tore them up. I can't say for sure, but I think it took their land." The values in people's stories would become lost over the generations if it were not for these oral histories.

In order to capture the value of daily knowledge practices, I conducted interviews with randomly chosen individuals I encountered on the streets of the South Valley. The locations of these conversations included sidewalks, local businesses, medians, roads, bus stops, or other public areas where I located my target population. The criteria for inclusion were anybody found throughout the South Valley, without limits. The people I spoke with for my project came from various genders, races, ethnicities, education levels, and class positions. Subjects volunteered for the interviews and were not compensated because of strict policies set by OIRB. Only minimal gifts cards are allowed and because my research was not funded, other incentives were not allowed. Participants gave verbal consent to participate in exchange for my promise to protect their confidentiality. Children were not included because they are considered a vulnerable population and are unable to provide consent. The random approach I used allowed for various answers, stories, and viewpoints to enter the research

[1] Pablo and all other names attributed to participants are pseudonyms.

dialogue. I used a semi-structured interview format accompanied by a series of questions that I maintained through each interview. Some of those questions centered on language, home, community, and education. All questions were approved through OIRB at the beginning of the research process. The questions provided a structure from which to begin a conversation. Many participants led the dialogue, but other paths emerged at times, depending on the participant. Specific topics were still centered and focused on concerns that led to *pláticas* known as a Spanish term that means talk or conversation. These will lead us into what Atencio (2009) refers to as *la resolana* which is:

> "traditionally, a place where the sun strikes and reflects off a wall, creating a place of warmth, light, and tranquility, we're villagers in northern New Mexico and in many places around the Spanish speaking world gather and talk. It is an informal center for communicating." (p. xi)

The location could be a street corner, on top of an ant pile, or under a cottonwood tree, it was never scripted it became fluid. The questions were a starting point and not a limiting one. Some of the interviews were challenging because of time constraints and the often-unpredictable topics that emerged in the course of discussion. Since I was searching for the community's voice, this interview method allowed me to capture unfiltered narratives and expand on their stories and concerns.

Uncovering meaning systems should be prioritized by research in our social reality above trying to calculate, define or quantify and analyze quantitative data. Collecting meaning was the technique I chose to use to gather data for the research. A narrative analysis of transcripts revealed patterns and concepts, which connected each person I interviewed.

The interview participants (see Table 1) were forthcoming about the issues they saw in the area. Many had some of the same hopes, memories, and outlooks for the community. I conducted a narrative analysis with a target of answering fundamental questions that revealed a belief that no one cared about the area. I assigned pseudonyms to the participants to respect their anonymity and confidentiality but strove to preserve the integrity of their responses. Although many were not concerned about me photographing them for the project and gave verbal authorization during the interviews, throughout the thesis I have protected all participants' identities by avoiding facial images. All participants were advised of their rights to withdraw from the interview and the research project at any time. Consent to participate in research on how voices on the streets of Albuquerque tell their stories of place and identity was provided for all participants at the beginning of every interview.

The U.S. Born is from a nonimmigrant background, the first generation represents the first to arrive in the U.S. as an immigrant, and second generation is the child of a first-generation status person. Participants represented a cross-section of the South Valley community (see Table 1). These voices provide rich context to a void of academic knowledge of the historic South Valley community. As a researcher drawing on narrative storytelling, the rural landscapes revealed meaning for the many residents who inhabit this space. I became attuned to how community members spoke to me and amongst themselves.

Table 1

Demographics of interviewed participants

Participant	Photo	Pseudonym	Home	Education	Gender	Status	Race	Language	Age
1		Sueño	Homeless	Drop Out	Male	Second Generation	Mexicano	Bilingual	25 years
2		Rusty	Homeless	Drop Out	Male	U.S. Born	Chicano	Bilingual	53 years
3		Marie	Homeless	Drop Out	Female	U.S. Born	White	English	36 years
4		Florence	Homeless	Drop Out	Female	U.S. Born	Native American	English	49 years
5		Betty	Homeless	High School Grad	Female	U.S. Born	Native American	English	28 years
6		Catalina	Home Owner	Elementary Only	Female	First Generation	Mexican American	Spanish	80 years
7		Frank	Home Owner	High School Grad	Male	U.S. Born	Chicano American	English	50's
8		Theresa	Renter	Some Community	Female	U.S. Born	Chicana Indian	English	40's
9		Julio	Renter	Elementary Only	Male	First Generation	Mexican	Spanish	80 years
10		Manuel	Home Owner	College Grad	Male	U.S. Born	Mexicano	Bilingual	60's
11		Pablo	Home Owner	High School Grad	Male	U.S. Born	Spanish	Bilingual	60's

Table 1 reflects the variant identities that make up the people of the South Valley and reminded me that the standard response manipulated by census data to umbrella the community under the "Hispanic" category was not adopted by those on the streets. The participants respectfully changed or formed a unique identity to give honor to each part of their identity. Individuals whose voices are silenced in marginalized communities seem to hide their tribulations through walls they put up to protect themselves or their families. While the dominant society disregards their strength, grit and agency, residents also conceal

their voices to outsiders. This problem tends to impact the community for generations and communicates that many citizens in the area are not crucial to a community because they are situated in a location where their voices are rarely evident. Some of the coping mechanisms people have turned to in the face of loss have led to problems like addiction and the deterioration of the community. Many believe the South Valley is dying and is at risk of gentrification because dominant narratives seek to represent it as a place where loss and decline limit modernization and growth. The narrative of loss and decay in turn presents the area as lacking value and worth. To date, South Valley residents' cultural resiliency and agency have not been widely studied. I found gaps in the literature that do not address the same questions as my research, and most of the extant research fails to consider lived experiences or personal narratives as valid sources.

I applied a cultural asset mapping framework to map the loss of *querencia* and how important it is to understand the enclave cultural dimensions. This mapping technique allowed me to acknowledge and communicate loss and empowerment. I identified items found during my fieldwork that were variously symbolic to individuals in my study. The neighborhood as I know it has been forgotten, and places of conversation (resolanas) are disappearing, a reminder that we do not dispense with the home and people we come from as we grow. Not only are people being displaced from the South Valley, but their spaces and sources of communication are also fading. Many of these voices attempt to regain their rightful place amongst what is being physically lost.

Focusing on Yosso's notions of aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, and spiritual capital, I identify resiliency as a major factor for explaining the values and actions of several South Valley residents. Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hope and dreams despite

barriers. Linguistic capital includes skills learned through language. Familial capital consists of forms of knowledge nurtured through *familia* and the social networks of people and community resources. People are empowered through their journeys and choose to code their language to communicate their struggles, hopes and dreams. Hispanics/Latinos in the United States tend to be group-oriented and collectivistic (Rinderle & Montoya, 2008), which I find in this study to have relevance to the South Valley community and their established forms or survival and organization. I utilize a visual mapping system to show how images and objects carve out space and agency for those in the neighborhood. Our voices can signify change and uncover hidden gems within the South Valley's confines to sustain ourselves in a changing landscape.

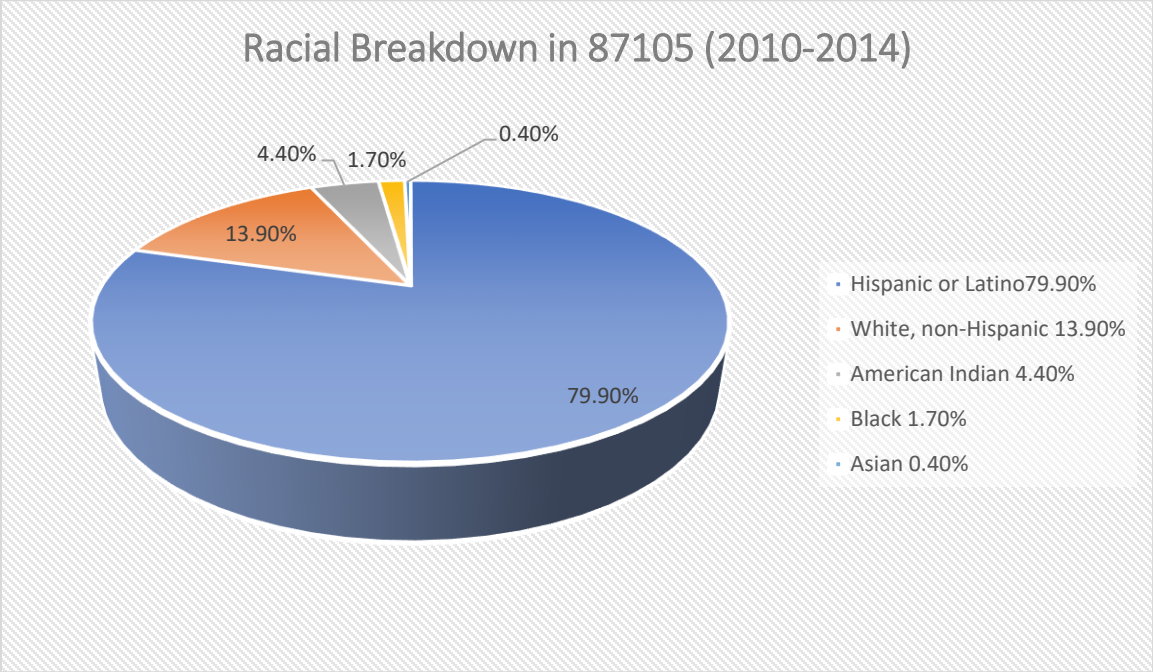
The South Valley's boundaries are roughly Interstate 25 on the east, Central Avenue on north, beyond Coors Boulevard on the west, and Isleta Pueblo on the south. The South Valley is an enclave separated from city life, quality education, and well-paid jobs. Many residents commute outside the area to seek financial stability. To understand a group of people and how they communicate, we must look at how their lived experiences and how their daily actions affect how they persevere.

According to South Valley data analysis statistics, South Valley residents are predominantly racial minorities, with, 39% of children living in poverty, and 45% live in households that receive either disability insurance through the supplemental security income (SSI) program, cash public assistance income, or food stamp/SNAP benefits (South Valley Data Atlas, 2016). Some of the most attractive aspects of the area include its agricultural character and the potential for land ownership. Figure 2 depicts the racial demographics within the zip code 87105. This data is valuable to show how minorities are represented in

the South Valley and how identity and place intertwine to give meaning to people and their ways of life.

Figure 2

Racial breakdown in the South Valley



Note. Taken from South Valley Data Atlas, Data Source is American Community Survey (ACS)

For many people, home indicates a place of comfort and security where memories and experiences mark social relations, where neighbors become family. On any given day in this community, physical symbols indicate a sense of self, community, and space. Many times, individuals in a shared living space hold similar attitudes towards their neighbors and families. Even when people find themselves unsheltered (homeless), they can find home and community in physical locations, such as the South Valley. I sought to include all of these voices in this study because they all speak to the importance of a shared connection to the roots of the community.

Chapter Two: Mapping the Cultural Landscape

Abandoned Querencias

Look up querencia in the dictionary. You will find that Ernest Hemingway defined it as a place the bull naturally wants to go to in the ring, a preferred locality. It is a place that develops during the fight where the bull makes his home. In this place, where he feels that he has his back against the wall, the bull is marvelously more dangerous and almost impossible to kill.

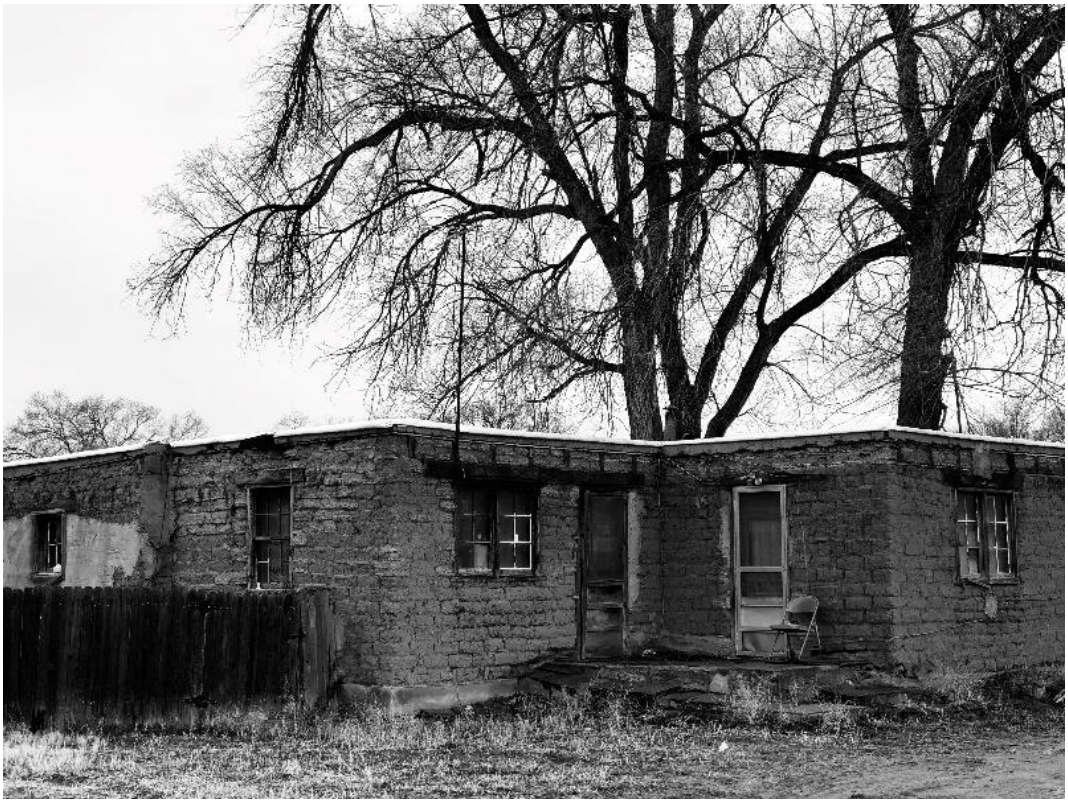
In *Death in the Afternoon,* Ernest Hemingway wrote about the art of bullfighting, explaining's the bullfighter's confidence, stance, arrogance, and grace. During the fight, the bull finds a natural position, or home within the ring where he feels safe. The bull is dependent on the bullfighter's arrogance and the technical errors he may commit during the fight to become dominant in the battle. When the bull is in his querencia, he is altogether on the defensive; his horn stroke is a counterattack, rather than an attack or lead, to defend against the bullfighter's attack since he sees it coming (Hemingway, 1932).

Hispano communities in New Mexico have also contributed to a cultural notion of querencia. Arellano (2007) has applied a sociological and cultural lens to the notion of querencia as a sacred haven or refuge. One can build strength of character through querencia, or home. Although people physically leave their querencia, they never fully leave their beloved place because one can return to it to feel nurtured. In the South Valley, some of the people interviewed for this study have a sense of querencia that they struggle with as economic inequities mark the landscape physically through absence and loss. Homes become abandoned or neglected as families move on or are forced to leave. Homes once filled with

so much life, stand quiet and empty of those who cared for or loved them. Those family structures, many of which turn into symbols for the community, show how a strong foundation is necessary for maintaining culture within any community and can draw positive values to a *querencia*. My childhood home, where I still remember standing on my mom's countertops slamming the cabinets shut as a child, has been changed by modern upgrades, but the comfort of the home I remember still exists in the bones and memories of the structure. A home can simultaneously reveal a history of growth and loss, in the structure and its occupants. Many current South Valley residents need to commute for potential advancements in jobs in Albuquerque, and those who cannot or will not commute are therefore often separated from high paying opportunities.

Figure 3

Authentic Adobe home with a flat roof



The building of adobe homes was an integral part of community building for Hispano populations in New Mexico (e.g., Figure 3). The pueblo style homes were dependent on the soil and grass, for their building material. The homes had minimal square footage and the gathering spaces were around a kitchen table or couch. Adobe, or sun-dried mud, was the basis for the construction of the home and churches (e.g., Figure 4). *Torreons,* an additional form of natural clay bricks, were cut from the banks of the river to construct the walls. Bunting and Conron (1966) describe the process of adobe and intricate details of the architecture in *New Mexico Architecture.*

> *Adobe*, a word of Arab origin, means "earth from which unburnt bricks are made." Technically speaking it is a balanced mixture of clay and sand enough sand to keep the dried clay from cracking an enough clay to keep the dried mixture strength. With this Adobe, which new Mexicans have used so well for centuries, is highly transient. When water runs over it or moisture dampens it at ground level, it softens and sloughs off. Unless plaster and repaired, adobe walls erode away. In any uncared-for adobe structure, erosion at the ground line undermine the wall on the outside until it topples outward (p. 15).

Modernization led to developer built contemporary wooden framed tract homes. Often, we see these cookie-cutter housing areas overtake precious agricultural fertile soil that changes the prospects for the land. Adobe homes require continued restoration and constant care. The upkeep that would come from handmade and hand-applied mud to the walls can be a tiresome chore, yet this method has become a tradition still used to maintain historical structures. Many homes are built with the customary New Mexican adobe, sap cured pine beams called *vigas* used to brace the ceilings in a horizontal manner and herringbone *latias*

or small tree branches, but when they begin to fall into disrepair they are torn down. This homecoming of adobe structures back to mother earth is inevitable unless the community's cultural identity is resuscitated and embraced by a new generation that is attached to adobe revival. Adobe making is comprised through a constellation of ideas and values connected to language, material resources, and *querencias* that connect one generation to the next. To be human is to communicate and language is the soul of a culture (Lamadrid, 1994).

Figure 4

Adobero

The sociological study of decay and decline has yielded notions of value and worth, particularly in relation to working class communities of color (Skogan, 1990). Others have drawn connections between dilapidated housing structures to crime and criminal activity and lower-class communities. One theory that has shaped public policy in regard to policing and law enforcement is the "broken window" theory (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). Allegedly, a link

is drawn between lack of care for basic residential structures and propensity for crime. In these areas, people care less about signs of decay and discarded objects such as couches, litter, and boarded up homes. Assumptions are made that the community is undesirable because people who live there do not take care of their homes or rental properties. Researchers of the "broken window" theory suggest that community deterioration is related to economic and cultural disenfranchisement. I interrogate the "broken window" theory in regard to notions of care and worth. Occupant's absence cannot diminish these homes built on querencia's love and hope.

Margaret Montoya, the first Latina to be accepted to Harvard Law School and now a faculty member of the UNM Law School, states that some people move away from their ethnic communities and want nothing to do with those they left behind, becoming estranged from both their ancestral roots and the dominant culture (1994a). To conform and assimilate, we leave these places of home to struggle in an unknown world where we also have trouble fitting in; our voices go unheard or silenced by the majoritarian story. Abandoned and boarded-up homes in the South Valley suggest that the former occupants, whether through deaths or other forms of absence have left behind their identities and communities. The dissipation of cultural and language practices as a result of family pressures and societal norms becomes normalized in a society where they are forgotten. The reality is that cultural practices can dissipate due to the promise of a better life outside what some might negatively call a "barrio." Montoya (1994b) writes:

> Language is a talent, allowing us to generate an idea and give it birth through words. Language is a gift that levels the playing field, allowing us to compete and, sometimes, to win. For me, language has been a door opener and an escape hatch.

> Language is my lens to refract the world, my link to others, my ladder out of isolation. Language is a source of considerable power. Most Latinas, Latinos, and others who speak a language other than English, however, have been denied that power. Language has been a primary and enduring force of subordination in our communities. (p. 147)

According to South Valley data analysis (2016), 55.1% of residents speak a language other than English at home. This juxtaposes with 30% of Albuquerque residents and 21% of United States residents who speak a non-English language at home (p. 2). Older residents are more likely to speak Spanish at home than their younger neighbors. This suggests a potential loss of the Spanish language for families that have been in New Mexico for hundreds of years. This study also includes a greater number of South Valley residents who are not completely comfortable speaking Spanish than Albuquerque and the United States. This shows a need for bilingual education and loss of language that needs to be interconnected to resources like including education in dual language immersion programs.

Higher-paying jobs or paths to upward social mobility are inaccessible unless one commutes out of the South Valley. South Valley employment are often unskilled labor, and generally require little training. Returnees to the area may be returning to raise their children or to care for elderly parents still living in the community. Or maybe they are returning to their roots to defend what is essential in the final stages of any fight, namely, to claim and honor their ancestral communities.

For some Hispanas and Hispanos, the building of the adobe structures (e.g., Figure 6) inform cultural and language practices. Much of who we are and where we come from is in those bricks of adobe, the heat from the fireplaces, watered by ditches running through all the

gathering spaces (resolanas) like veins in our body. There is value built in their home and maintenance of traditions and culture. According to Atencio (2009): *la resolana* is a way to uncover subjugated knowledge and to use every day lived experiences as a source of knowledge. It is a concept that brings light and hope through dialogue and reflection in an uncertain, complex, and rapidly changing new age. (p. xi)

Our pasts are in our childhood homes' floorplans, and in an atmosphere that might make us feel trapped but also strengthens our hearts and souls. Therefore, the power of connection to the South Valley leads some to seek the authenticity for which their hearts hunger. From the anthropologist's emic (insider) perspective, the consideration of place focuses on a given individual or group's emotional, symbolic, and cultural attachment to a home site or environment (Gonzales, 2007). Home is where the heart is, and we know this because there are elements we tend to miss about home when we are gone for a period of time. It is that feeling of comfort in our place, our querencia where we seek refuge in times of hopelessness or confusion. These homes are attached to pieces of memory, to experiences that place our language's recognizable sounds and feelings in a specific location.

These *querencias* communicate our family's voices in an abandoned language, a deceased mother tongue, for those who no longer have access or conversational knowledge of the language. We are often the underrepresented voices left out of the conversation. Some native South Valley residents have returned as adults to raise their children and have the same experiences but still face some of the same problems due to a lack of resources or outreach from government programs that can benefit the community. Overtime many occupants have left the South Valley for the promise and connectivity of city living, including better jobs, quality education, organizational vitality, and economic growth. People

build new memories as their childhood homes fall apart and die, unheard, unloved, back to the dirt, where our ancestor's sounds disappear. As Anzaldúa (1987) writes, "Yet, in leaving home, I did not lose touch with my origins because lo Mexicano is in my system. I am a turtle; wherever I go, I carry "home" on my back (p. 21).

Having both worlds is obtainable, and many who live in one area and commute to another for work or school do not see it to be a burden. Still, it does offer a solution to return home where growth occurs, and the love of place is found. Our sense of place can impact who we are and what we can achieve. We can analyze how our location can affect a person's trajectories and how location can be transformative, for example, if one comes from a decent home or goes to a respectable school. Everybody wants a sense of family, a sense of belonging, where they can feel safe to which they can return. Our households have their own unique voices; they speak to us; they deliver a message of security and offer shelter in a language we can understand. They become an extension of who we are, our faith; they reflect each of our family's perspectives and truly house our intentions. Abandoned structures become part of a bigger problem that shows neglect or a lack of care (see Figure 5). The comfort of a home is lost when it is deserted or when people run away from it like Dorothy did in the classic book by Frank Baum *The Wizard of Oz*.

Figure 5

Boarded-up adobe home in 2019, and its demolition in 2020

As a daughter of the South Valley, I was adamant about leaving, following dreams to move away just as Dorothy did in *The Wizard of Oz*, and as soon as I became a full-fledged adult, I left home. I reflect on the first home I purchased, a new construction home, and I was the sole deed owner. It was not fancy, but I was proud and felt accomplished at the time. Yet, in retrospect, it brought no sense of home. Every day, I returned "home" to what was actually just four walls. I have no memories of family gatherings, children's voices, or intense romance in that house. I slept there as a single woman for many years. I felt disconnected from it, and when I sold the home, I never yearned to go back. It did not house any valuable memories, it was not a forever home, it was merely a place to rest and recover. It housed trinkets and a heart that longed for community engagement and a fostering space. My current home in the South Valley has become what I call my "heart space" with all the ideas I felt missing in the first home I owned. It is a place I associate with family cooked

meals and masa stuck on my fingers, the aroma of *posole* in winter and chile that makes you cough, connecting to something tangible like the dirt and fresh-cut alfalfa fields. My emotional connection and recognition of the twice transplanted *yerba buena* (mint) roots, from my parents' home growing strong in a new heart space. The difference between the two is that a house is just a place to cover your head, and what becomes a home is a place that fills your heart with those enduring roots.

Figure 6

Adobero forming exterior walls

The importance of home became emphasized during this research project as COVID-19 remanded society to their homes. Home was brought to the forefront, as did the importance of having a home during months of isolation and illness. The presence of homeless people, who are already more or less invisible in the world, became magnified as they became the only humans still regularly occupying the streets. During a global pandemic

and a government-mandated quarantine, the homeless had few options for safe shelter. COVID-19 further exposed the problems of homelessness, particularly the lack of a home to retreat to as protection from disease.

Street Side Sofás

I found physical objects in the community that guided my research to acknowledge and pay due respect to the environment. These objects stood as a measure of the community's sense of home and courtesy to land. I became mindful of the discarded couches that plagued my communities' streets and open spaces in 2017 when two couches emerged underneath a famous Route 66 street sign along Isleta Blvd. (see Figure 7) I kept track of the time frame during which the discarded couch sat on the side of the road, destroying the area's visual beauty, and I kept hoping that someone would care enough to dispose of these *sofás* properly. Weeks and weeks passed, and the *sofás* seem to go unnoticed and began to blend in. Now I feel burdened and summoned by all the discarded couches I encounter along my journeys in the South Valley. These couches have become symbolic and caused me to consider what lies beyond the *sofás* and how they tell a story of the community and its people. The couches represent the decay that the community tries to separate themselves from.

Figure 7

Route 66 sofá (2017)

Street-side *sofás* communicate a story of people's existence in the South Valley community and how their past remains written in those cushions left unloved on the streets. New generations may be utilizing the contents of their home to be born into the modern world. Furthermore, as our ancestral language and history are no longer needed or desired, is roadside junk a sign that the new generation of South Valley residents just does not care? These discarded pieces of furniture are filled not only with dirt and grime but are also markers of the stories of past occupants of the community. When we see these eyesores, it suggests that we as a community have adapted so well to the demands and expectations of the dominant language that we give up how we communicate. These couches are both visual

representation and a sign that the community has forgotten its identity and values. They are monstrous forms of litter and often block needed access points (e.g., Figure 8). Their presence can indicate larger social problems that, when overlooked, can lead to physical signs of disorder, or indicate what happens when home is lost. We must not ignore or neglect the stories of these discarded couches that were once in people's homes, just as we should not ignore the stories of homeless people displaced onto the streets who sometimes inhabit discarded sofás.

Figure 8

Couch left on Isleta Boulevard (2019)

We search for fragments of who we were to retrace our language. Our place continues to shift as we strive for unrealistic expectations. Many South Valley residents are deficient in Spanish. This reveals why at times the younger generation does not speak the

language. The everlasting love of community is why many come back to retrieve those feelings of what once was. As new occupants are settling in the community, they decide what is important to them and build their idea of home, bringing pieces of landscape, food, and tradition from their communities. Do these abandoned couches relay a message of change? Is it that we have lost our cultural and material practices to progressive change, or is it simply that no one cares, and the litter and roadside debris is just an indicator of social disorder? Residents do not simply perceive litter and react to it, rather they use this mundane object of physical disorder to construct ideas about the people they accuse of littering as the subjects of disorder. Litter and roadside junk are thus read as a signal of physical and social disorder (Murphy et al., 2012). This construction of people can devalue marginalized people and communities.

Ethnographic accounts document how longtime residents of various communities interpret physical and social order to signal that their neighborhood is undergoing racial and class changes (Murphy et al., 2012). Trash and litter within a community can say something about people and their sense of decency, respect, and pride. They become a representation of who Hispanos are and what they value. Litter pollutes space because it is "out of place" (Douglas, 1966). It speaks to how people can be "be out of place" and criminalizes residents in the area. When people assume that individuals do not take care of their neighborhood, they lose social and cultural value in society.

Physical disorder is categorized as abandoned buildings, graffiti, and overgrown lots, as well as litter (Murphy et al., 2012). Scholars find that responses to physical order are mainly contingent on the efficacy of neighborhood-based organizations (Murphy et al., 2012). As a final reason, the community's investment falls on the shoulders of the residents.

Some may see it as an easy fix to discard the litter in the proper receptacle, and others may disagree and state the resources to accomplish that is not as simple as it seems.

The "broken window" theory comes from the field of criminology and claims that a failing communities are the result of disrepair, disorder, informal social control, and crime (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). Research has found that conditions like abandoned houses, litter, graffiti, and physical deterioration in the community are connected, and that one flaw leads to another, such as increased crime. These problems cause residents to withdraw or leave, eroding neighborhood control, which then fosters crime along with other undesirable bad elements. One broken window is often followed by another and so on until all windows are broken all of which leads to more crime and less optimism (Wilson & Kelling, 1982).

Figure 9

Discarded furniture along the path to the author's grammar school

These discarded couches (e.g., Figure 9) may come from homes that once belonged to a parent or grandparent and have now been inherited by a new generation. The changes to a community may be subtle, such as trash on the streets, or impressive, such as the construction of new strip malls or franchises, that overlay historical spaces. The idea of "out with the old and in with the new" often signifies a change in furniture, as well as in the people, beliefs, language, and customs of a community. These can all constitute painful reminders of how the querencia we cherish is slowly falling into disrepair (Herrera, 2020). Can the loss of home be felt in the landscape, and does such a change reduce the potential for revival in a community's cultural need?

We may argue that the sofa is not an indicator that no one cares, but in contradictory terms, the couches signal motivation to create new space in a home. Then the retired couch is displaced on the street as a quick method and release of responsibility to embrace the families' hope. Maybe side street sofás are the evidence of subtracting from the negativity from within to create new spaces of *resolana*. The resolana of gathering places and social locations that we hunger for to reflect positivity in the heart space of a conversation. And the notion that no one cares is mistaken by an immediate gratification or exaggerated love of their heart space and the pride in a place.

Descansos

Crime prevention through environmental design emerged in the 1960's and was a working method to create safe communities and address how to build a framework for self-policing. Methods that should have been applied to a community such as the South Valley were never implemented and left safety measures unaddressed. Such as entry and exit points

into the area, lighting and architectural road designs. Isleta Boulevard, which makes up part of historic Route 66, runs north and south through the South Valley and is populated with roadside memorials (see Figure 10) of those who have lost their lives in traffic accidents, tragedies and traumas that also speak of a dead or dying identity and language. Although people die every day, we particularly feel the loss for our family, friends, and neighbors, making death a rather personal and collective affair. The external world largely disregards what happens to those in minority communities, but when a community, is unable to communicate or share in the dead's ideas, the voices of those individuals are lost.

Figure 10

Descanso located on Route 66

Descanso is a Spanish word that means a resting place. In this context, the term denotes roadside memorials to those who have died. As Anaya (1995) explains, "we take a cross and place it where the accident occurred, there where the loved one met the shadow of

death, and when we drive by, we will remember the one we loved." The *descansos* along the corridor of Isleta Blvd in the South Valley stand, as reminders of the underdeveloped stories that left many silent and a larger society mourning them. People who could not communicate their needs due to untimely death are unheard because of an abrupt ending. Environmental hazards are often responsible for their deaths only leaving symbols behind and the narrative of underrepresented voices. Although many see *descansos'* as a sign of universal human destiny, in the South Valley they represent how we as a community feel the absence of those who have passed on, whose memories live on in the *descansos*.

Many high-crime areas are replete with dangerous roadways due to poor environmental design and lack of crime prevention. These problem areas have not been addressed by government leaders and their false promises. I would like to draw attention to the intersection of Coors Blvd. and Pajarito Road, where, at the time of writing this manuscript, three *descansos* currently stand as the representations of lives gone too soon. The road design has not changed despite the countless lives that have ended in tragedy in fatalities.

Descansos are not only reminders of journeys that were never completed; they are also works of art and perhaps one of the few authentic noncommercial folk arts of New Mexico Hispanos (Arellano, 1995). These *descansos* stand as tributes to the lost souls and voices of loved ones, and they also serve as a critical symbolic key to one's faith. When a person from the community dies tragically, they become immortalized by the messages and stories loved ones leave at the *descansos.* These crosses on the side of the road are markers of the nonverbal identifiers that say. "We grieve for those who die and remember them. As long as their time on earth is not erased from our memories, they continue to exist for us" (Anaya,

1995). We should not have to perish within our community boundaries to be heard, how can we assure that our stories and safety are addressed adequately so we can fulfill our dreams? Denise Chavez (1995) writes:

> In the old days, a cross meant an untimely death at someone's hands, the death of the traveler. Death meant an adventure, a setting out into new land, with dreams. You could see the crosses so many of them, for miles…
>
> Today death is still violent, but it means carelessness and emptiness, drugs, and alcohol. And now it is we who are responsible for our own deaths. To have been killed by the side of the road is forever to wander the road. (p. 176)

Although many *descansos* are markers of genuinely unavoidable accidents, the memorials are also put up for tragedies like mass shootings and murdered victims. In 2009 a human bone was found on Albuquerque's West Mesa, alerting police to the remains of eleven bodies. The bodies were linked to women who were reported as missing over the period of many years. The deaths of eleven women and one fetus on the Westside is relevant to the South Valley community's consciousness. These women, whose lives and voices were silenced between 2001-2009, were the victims of an unknown serial killer. They disappeared from the streets and were frequently labeled as sex workers and addicts. They became victims of a society that failed to prevent their weak voices from being suppressed. The women's past behavior has been used to diminish the importance of their loss and has made them not only expendable but criminalized, thus functioning as an excuse for their death. The stereotypes formed around sex workers focus on unvirtuous images that are said to eventually contribute to their brutal demise. Julie Nieto, one of the victims, was a twenty-three-year-old mother from the South Valley who turned to prostitution. She never had an

opportunity to express how she identified and what mattered in her life. We pay homage to those women who were murdered and then buried in sandy shallow graves on the Westside Mesa, offering respect and acknowledgment to those lost voices. These murder victims have been memorialized by publicly funded *descansos* (see Figure 11) in the same area their lives were taken. Their unsolved fates constitute a silence that is an area for further research.

Figure 11

Westside murders memorialized by the City of Albuquerque

> I was raised hearing about people who were deceased long before I was born. En mi Embudo todo cambia pero nada muere- everything changes, but nothing dies.
>
> (Levi Romero, 2020, p. 4)

Memorialization functions as a way to symbolize the cycle of life and death in which the community pays homage to those lost through an untimely or tragic death. We look to *descansos* to help us remember people. Sometimes they can function as political or social justice statements for community problems, spiritual beliefs, or religious practice. Making art to memorialize the dead is a natural outgrowth of communal art production to preserve local memory (Cordova, 2012). The act of remembrance is important, and *descansos* can foster respect and help those who have lost loved ones to cope with grief and trauma. The *descansos*, artists, community, and music form a web of celebration in memory of those who have died but are kept alive in spirit (Cordova, 2012). The artistic form of representation embodies the cultural wealth that the community has as it memorializes the life of the dead person. In small communities, a person's sense of belonging is heightened by their connection to place, people, and their family history, which often goes back for generations, even centuries. As Gabriel García Márquez (1967) wrote, "A person does not belong to a place until there is someone dead under the ground" (p.13). The *descansos* serve as visual testaments to those connections not just to the people but the earth.

Addiction is not a topic I dive deeply into in this research, but it is difficult not to address an issue that impacts many of the individual's testimonials that I collected for this study. I acknowledge that alcohol and drug abuse can negatively affect any community. Issues of addiction are killing people in the South Valley at an early age, and they thwart their potential to achieve sustainable lives. Drug abuse in this research will be addressed through the participant's voices in their own experiences so that the topic is not glossed over or forgotten. Healing is an imperative factor for the community's health and its members and can be symbolized in a *descansos* presence.

While sociologists and other researchers point to dilapidated structures and litter as signs of decay, I argue that there are multiple meanings signified through these objects that simultaneously speak to resiliency and loss in the South Valley. The adobes denote tradition and, in many situations, signifies stories of history. During its demolition the home in Figure 5 reveals that the home was built from *torreons* that were retrieved from the banks of the Rio Grande in the 1800's. The unidentified owner stated it sat too long and was unable to be restored, and subsequently if was torn down in 2020 and no longer exists. This home was replaced with a farmhouse style wooden construction frame home, and although its decaying appearance was removed, its historical possibilities were also removed.

Figure 12

Car Wash Santo

Over fifty sofás I documented abandoned on the roadways, side streets, open spaces, and parking lots did not just litter the environment; they also expressed that the debris has become acceptable to residents as a sign of growth toward transformation within the home. A couch is an intimate and central part of a home and becomes recognizable as a gathering space. I found that only 6% of abandoned couches in the South Valley were occupied by a person upon my contact. Although couches in a home can be seen as a simple piece of furniture on which to rest and indulge in communication in the center of the home, it does not necessarily reflect a gathering place when it is illegally dumped in a public space. The sofá pattern documented in the research gravitated toward Isleta Blvd., which is generally used as the main street, maybe in a deliberate intent to be seen or utilized by the those in the area as a place that needs more spaces of comfort. An example would be a center plaza or open space parks.

The *descansos* in my South Valley community are symbols that are often covered with stuffed animals, fake flowers, candles, and crosses filled with prayers to commemorate the season or offer remembrance of the dead (e.g., Figure 12). The descansos should not be viewed as "ghetto", tacky, or just in bad taste, they are filled with emotions from the people. The *descansos* are markers of our loved ones gone too soon, they induce memories that help with the healing of the deceased. *Descansos* are acts of love. They symbolize life and the belief that we will not forget tragedy and loss. They are not litter or part of community decay; they are resurrected in hope and acknowledgement. These physical symbols debunk ghetto themes as they attempt to reclaim a space in time by merely existing.

Chapter Three: Cultural Wealth: Resistant Capital

Mapping the Voices

> What could seem more solid than the earth and the land we live on, the neighborhoods, the houses we inhabit, our bodies even? And yet our relationship to these does not always give us a sense of being arraigados, rooted, that is, of belonging, being at home. The ideas of knowing your place and having a place are tied together and suggest that the personal sense of being at home, whether in society or in your body, whether it is a female, a queer, and immigrant, or a negatively racialized minority body, or a combination of these, is shaped by our sense of belonging socially (Pérez, 2007, p.146).

The lived experiences of people of color are vital to communication, including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, *testimonios*, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Olivas, 1990). Telling your own story has become a means to reveal trauma and manage loss. Research has shown that words can be cathartic for a person's health and lived experiences can become tools for healing. Arguably the best way to give voice to disenfranchised individuals and populations is to center narratives about traditional techniques. Telling our own stories can, like focus groups, provide valuable context for designing programs to meet community-identified needs and build trust between individuals, communities, and the services intended to support them (Gültekin et al., 2014). Written and spoken words are shared and can create a healing space and form connections needed in the community. Honoring stories demonstrates respect for the person and their independent

struggles and can help establish a place where people feel validated, and their efforts affirmed and protected.

Through this research process, it became apparent that it was more personal than academic, that my role as a researcher became necessary to restore the faith and find hope living inside the community. If only optimism came for a small group or only for me, I would feel accomplished knowing the value I discovered hidden in the South Valley. The people I interviewed were a captivating element of my study; their roles within the community have created a level of optimism that has been absent in traditional media accounts of the South Valley. As Montiel et. al (1942) write, "We assume that uncovering this gold from our community is not an individual, but a communal action requiring awareness. The vehicle for this awareness is *la resolana*"

The concept of la *resolana* refers to a gathering place where dialogue about weighty subjects is encouraged, where knowledge can flourish (Montiel et al. 1942). I utilize this concept to gain an understanding of personal knowledge. Montiel's theory is that wisdom is not the monopoly of the educationally credentialed elite: life itself, if systematically and keenly observed, can give all of us the basis for making sound judgments about the world and give meaning to existence. *La resolana* is that which enlightens us through dialogue. To uncover "subjugated knowledge, we use daily experiences as a source of knowledge" (Montiel et al. 1942, p. xi). This can enhance the appreciation to our efforts to value lived experiences and oral histories. In appreciating and utilizing these concepts we must also acknowledge how technology has interfered with the communication of elders or those that convey the verbal knowledge transmitted through a *plática*, or conversation.

I organically reached out to random people I saw in the South Valley to share a dialogue about identity and place. I asked them if they would be willing to share stories or consider a *plática* to gather real lived experiences. My hope was to uncover a morsel of who they are, to shed light on the people who play a part in community formation. The dialogue is missing from the people who stand in the margins and are unrecognized by any valid source. Whether participants had a life of struggle or success, whether they were a student, a mother, or a vendor, the process was inclusive. The interviews lead into semi-structured qualitative interviews, with questions that I felt would jump-start their stories, and with a narrative analysis to follow later. The collection method was an incomplete representation of the residents, and so I also included images of the people who had deep ties to the community. As people engage in communication, they spin a cultural discourse that locates them in a particular set of ways (Carbaugh, 2007).

To understand the people of the South Valley, we must realize that this community is overwhelmed by many obstacles, and these obstacles have led many to consider it a ghetto, including high rates of poverty, poor education, and unemployment. These factors can directly add a level of difficulty to any person's fight for a high-quality life. Those living within places like the South Valley face daily challenges surrounding a lack of available resources. It is crucial to address homelessness in this study, as it is prevalent in the already impoverished community. According to a 2019 study published on the personal finance website marketwatch.com, most Americans are one crisis away from homelessness.

Homelessness in the South Valley

The concept of "home" is often rooted in a physical structure however, this study examines notions of home among a diverse set of study participants. Some individuals are

"homeless," meaning they are not residing in their home of origin or family home. Instead, they find home in abandoned structures or public places in the South Valley. The interviews I conducted with homeless people in the South Valley revealed much about their connections and close relationships. "We all need each other," Participant 2 states, who I call Rusty a fifty-three-year-old Chicano high-school dropout (see Figure 13) who is now homeless stated; "He's [referring to another participant] panhandling right here in the median, and I will tell him if he is going to leave, I will plan to get there." He points to signify the ideal location for panhandling, being the place that is prized by several people. Rusty was concerned about his girlfriend Marie and spoke about how he tried to collect change to feed her because she was hungry.

Participant 3 a thirty-six-year-old homeless white woman (also a high school dropout), who I refer to as Marie, was panhandling across the street at a grocery store. Marie eventually made her way toward me and agreed to sit and talk. Marie revealed that when things get hard then they just get harder, she is hoping to get a place each month after being homeless for two years and relying on the generosity of family members.

Figure 13

Homeless and Hungry

Participant 4 who I refer to as Florence, a homeless Native American mother, talks about her 29-year-old daughter, who I will refer to as Betty. The pair have become homeless after tragic deaths of family members. Florence states “I’m all she has. It’s me and her, that’s all we have, she has been scared to death.” The fear and reality Florence and Betty face demonstrate that the elements of homelessness can be surreal. Yet comfort in each other has fused them. She continues “We both get anxiety when we are separated for too long; considering everything we been through, we don’t do well apart anymore.” Florence and Betty had a deep bond with another participant, and they were often watching out for one another. As Lee et al. (2010) explain, “Homeless peers represent an attractive, accessible alternative to relationships with the domiciled.” (p. 508)

My first attempt to collect an oral history from a homeless person was a man who was panhandling on the street. Those on the streets are often unheard, yet they are part of the

community voice that continues to be lost, even if they constitute a part of it that society has not wanted to acknowledge. “Unhoused men constitute social disorder and should signal that ‘no one cares’ in the same way a broken window might” (Duneier, 1999). One day I observed a young male at the intersection of Rio Bravo and Isleta he agreed to sit down with me at Bob’s Burgers in the South Valley for a conversation. This twenty-five-year-old male (Participant 1) was panhandling in the median of intersection. This man collecting change in the median was surprisingly willing and eager to tell his story. Participant 1, who I refer to as Sueño, was born and raised near the Five Points neighborhood, just a few miles north of the interview location. He is estranged from his family and has an active restraining order denying him access to the family home. However, he still feels connected to this home.

Even as Sueño admitted that he felt estranged from his family and home, he did make it a point to share that he developed a sense of kinship in the South Valley. Sueño’s daily mission was to obtain money from a generous community. He believes he has a “fan base” of regulars. Sueño created this term “fan base” to identify regular donors. He bragged that a woman once bought him a pair of shoes, lifting his leg to show me his black high-top Levi’s brand sneakers. Donors are often older couples that tell him that he reminds them of their nephew or their son, or that they feel bad for him, or that they care about him. He said, “it feels good to hear these things.”

Those homeless who choose to stay in semi-rural places like the South Valley become hidden and reside in arroyos (drainage ditches), cars, abandoned homes, the wooded bosques that runs along both banks of the Rio Grande, or on businesses properties. These places also make them vulnerable to law enforcement intervention. Therefore, some homeless individuals travel light and are ready to move, which makes it difficult to maintain

family relations. Sueño stated he has everything he owns in three bags, one of which he stated was at "camp," which is an empty lot. He says he landed on this path through his own bad choices. He fathered two children at 16 and 17 years of age and being a teen parent was difficult and unexpected. He has a 6-year-old son and an 8-year-old daughter. As he told me about his children, he began to cry, explaining that his homeless lifestyle does not allow him to be a part of their lives. It was then that Sueño told me, "it's sad actually."

Sueño expressed that it is false that the more "homeless" you look, the more likely you are to receive donations; rather, you must present yourself as clean. He states it is harder to get cleaned up because he is only able to use cold water, and colder weather only makes it more difficult. Cold and sick, he feels he is doomed to recover on streets where people barely know he exists. Which aligns with theories that appearance consists of more than well-groomed hair and a clean face (Montoya, 1994a). Those measures of judgment from morning to night, and how we present ourselves, versus how the world sees us, can be exhausting to maintain. Appearances can be deceiving and rising from the underdog mentality just to survive another day is not always what it appears. Judgment will also be addressed later in this study to show how oppressions create *vergüenza* or shame and how such judgment becomes a burden. For many of the homeless population, there are mitigating factors that place them in positions where defeat sets in, and the causes and effects of this are not always immediately visible to the public.

Sueño knows his father is disappointed with his choices, and because of that, the two have a damaged relationship. "He is a big reason why I can't go home." His sense of home is lost. His confidence was compromised, and the street life seemed to take his spirit and sense of home. Sueño described his dad as "a hardcore Mexican." I did not have to ask him

what that meant as he later clarified that his dad was “old school” and “meaner than crap.” He stated his 64-year-old dad worked hard all his life and became a successful business owner. Nevertheless, life has not been as fruitful for him as the homeless struggle has derailed opportunities in his life.

Figure 14

Rusty

Rusty has lived in the South Valley most of his life, he lived with his mom in his youth. “Right now, I am on my own. It’s too hard, you can’t afford to even rent, and then on top of that, the bills make it even harder.” He tried to go to St. Martin’s Hospitality Center to see if they could help him get Section 8 or public housing but could not get any help. St. Martin’s is a program for homeless people in need of recovery treatment. He has been on a

public housing list for years, but feels he often gets passed over because of his lifestyle on the streets; he does not elaborate on that lifestyle. He believes that help is just for people in wheelchairs. Rusty expresses his frustration with the housing system as he states "what the fuck, it's four years, that's not right. I said, 'you guys been getting people ahead of me, and I was already here.' No apartment, no nothing, just because I'm out here on the streets, or I don't know what it is."

Figure 14 depicts a veteran *cholo* known on the street as Rusty (Participant 2) with Old English lettering on the back of a hoodie. An absence of the use of language can equate to an absence of identity. "God bless you" hand gestures or waves; these are subtle messages in the language, pretending not to see them or refusing to make eye contact will not subtract that sense of belonging. These are straightforward messages that speak the truth of the struggle and how conversation matters and is sacred. Identity can be reinforced by language, so communicating with others affects individual identity, shared and symbolic traits or characteristics (Rinderle & Montoya, 2008).

Something else is needed: knowledge of what kinds of codes, channels, and expressions to use in what kinds of situations and with what kinds of people (Hymes, 1964). Florence and Betty have been homeless for two-and-a-half years. Florence exclaimed that one of the cardboard signs she wanted to make was one that says: *Do not judge me, you don't know my story. You don't know what we have been through to get here.* She elaborates: "some people are more compassionate, we do not ask for anything, we are not going to lie, some will lie about stupid stuff, but why lie?" The handwritten cardboard signs used by many of the homeless persons are interpreted, by readers, donors, and the community and can humanize a stranger's situation. The centrality and protection of a home can be felt within the

confines of a community. Does this community's security encourage some to stay beyond having a roof over their head?

Rusty told me about the conditions in which he and Marie were living: "Right now, we are living in a tent, back there in the ditch. It's not right, but they keep pushing me back. I went to prison, and I stayed out here, we're out here just panhandling. That is what I got to do now before it starts raining." The complexity of obtaining city housing has proven to be more difficult for those who have been incarcerated. Rusty expressed that he believes available resources are designed to challenge those in need as a test. Rusty states "but they have homeless. They keep giving me a number, a number, a number, a number. I will get a place. It is hard out here, especially now that it is cold."

Rusty was anxious about getting an available location on the median he had planned to occupy after our conversation; as we spoke, he kept advancing toward the popular median. When I asked if people were in a giving mood that day, Rusty said that in a certain way they are: "I stood out here for 3 hours and only got 50 cents," he laughed. But at a nearby Walgreens, he made five dollars in twenty minutes. "I am going to give it to my girlfriend so she can eat something," he said. I saw him bend down to pick up a penny, a constant and tireless effort on which he relies. Clutching a handful of pennies in his left hand, his nonverbal communication to take a position on the median appeared in his anxiousness to stand up and walk away. "I got to get back out there," he explained. He was straight-forward with me, and although he kept wanting to leave, he never did. I wondered if he wanted me to convince him to stay, but I knew he was on a mission to collect. I did not want to prevent that. This leave-taking technique is a reminder of how many times we attempt to leave. This Columbian style is known as *Salsipuede* a ritual of attempting to leave the *plática* (Fitch,

1991). This Salsipuedes translates to “leave if you can” and refers to making an exit. This technique reminded me that not only could they leave the conversation but the community all together, for a more prosperous life, so why weren’t they leaving?

Some of the participants I interviewed unexpectedly fell into homelessness. Florence and Betty from the South Valley had suffered many family tragedies that propelled them into a trajectory of drug abuse that inevitably put them on the streets. They have been homeless for two-and-a-half years; in that time, Florence lost vision in her left eye, and was run over by a truck. Our encounter began in front of an abandoned store front, but I felt that if we sat in a business, we could have a more intimate and honest conversation. As we sat inside the Church’s Chicken just two days before Thanksgiving, three women of color sharing food and conversation, I reflected on food sharing practices that often involve dialogue. This reminded me of the Spanish tradition of *sobremesa* (dinner table conversation) that involves time relaxing and chatting after a meal. This act of *sobremesa*, taking in place in a resolana, enacted the relationship between food and conversation and the sharing of stories. Culture and conversation can intertwine with shared hopes. As I shared lunch with these women. I felt like I was amongst friends or family. The line was blurred between researcher and subject. We were three women of color chasing an idea, a hope not just to be seen but also to be seen positively without stereotypes or other burdens. This moment was a profound reality that I could be homeless someday, or it could be my sister, or my daughter. Moreover, although I have escaped it to this point, my situation could shift at any moment. Would the world look upon me and still be able to humanize with my situation? Would I be remembered as a steward, or would I be a beggar and an embarrassment?

The community has not put stock in the Spanish language by creating programs to maintain or promote its preservation. For some, like Florence, who had lost her native language, the only hope is to not lose ourselves in the world. Can we encourage bilingual communal dialogue and sharing as a bridge that can counteract so many technological addictions that disempower person to person communication? In a world moving so fast it is easy to be consumed by electronics and media that we are unable to exist in the presence and conservation of each other. How can we reestablish broken relationships when they are replaced with the advances of the tech world? As we move into the future, how do we maintain solidarity with the living voices still residing in the past, how do we intersect, especially when language is the barrier?

Florence states, "they discriminate against me because I'm single, because I'm homeless, because I'm a female, because I'm Native…, pick one! Which is it? That's what I want to tell them." The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, is the combination of a person's gender, sex, race, class, or physical appearance converging to create a complex web of advantage and disadvantage for a person: "Race and sex, moreover, becomes significant only when they operate to explicitly *disadvantage* the victims: because the *privileging* of whiteness or maleness is implicit it is generally not perceived at all" (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality refers to the condition of living in many different worlds with overlapping identities and experiences of self. Women of color never fit neatly in any world; they are oppressed in many different tiers of their life. Some homeless voluntarily embrace their status, finding virtue rather than shame in their otherness (Lee et al., 2010). Homelessness does not discriminate against any race but rather impacts everyone.

Nevertheless, prejudice against the homeless is often expressed by people who think they are superior to the poor. According to Collins and Bilge (2016):

> People use intersectionality as an analytic tool in many different ways to address a range of issues and social problems. They find intersectionality's core insight to be useful; namely, that major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time, for example race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually of entities, but build on each other and work together. (p. 2)

Florence lives in a triple jeopardy world where she cannot separate or compartmentalize her identity. She faces and resists oppression daily at the macro and micro level for those who intersect at so many confluences. Florence says people always think they have the answers or the cure, but they do not actually have helpful suggestions. "We have a routine every day with odd jobs for people," she says. This routine also includes visiting various methadone clinics to "go dose." Florence stated that people are wrong to assume the saving grace for a homeless person is to get a job: "It's not just about a job, I don't have a place to sleep, I don't have a place to clean up, I don't have identification, it's everything, it's a vicious cycle." People do not understand that basics such as showering or physical maintenance is not the priority anymore; recovering from a homelessness predicament involves so much more; the central component of functioning is missing and without the home nothing more is possible.

Florence talks about applying for disability and how that might be the change that she needs: "We just got to get to the good point, moving forward with goals." For some homeless people, the waiting list for housing programs can be a lucky break, but for many the situation can be discouraging and frustrating. Resources are limited at the city and county level.

Florence says she is “looking for an angel” to help her and Betty. She believes that this kind of benefactor may change her fortune. Florence hopes to be the person on the other side, who can one day help someone else in need. Some kind of help, like housing or disability assistance, might make a world of difference, but how to obtain such help is not always clear-cut. Limited resources are available but understanding how to obtain them and how the system works is difficult. “We are taking the right steps,” she says. “We’re starting by just getting clean. It’s a big part of it, and it’s part of the process of rebuilding.” My research revealed that unsheltered people often help and support each other in the South Valley when they are denied claims to home.

Figure 15

A homeless mother asks for help

Unsheltered peoples have learned how to navigate the streets and develop networks to ease their troubles the navigational capital that Yosso (2005) refers to as "skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with communities of color in mind" (p. 80). They also recognize people's access to space and place. People know who has first rights to a spot. It is respectful not to "step on anyone's toes." Newcomers also give up spaces to someone who has been on the streets longer. This street code and system of seniority constitute the agreements upholding networks. Florence states that in this part of town, you do not have to worry about someone beating you up (see Figure 15). Furthermore, for her and her daughter, they have created a rapport with business owners: "Luckily, everyone likes us, and we pretty much know where everyone stays. People would come to check on us, make sure we are all right. We have that feeling of a family, I guess. People are protecting you; people watch out for you." A sense or regard for others who share similar types of struggle allow for these types of relationships or attachments.

Notions of home impact all residents of the South Valley, including individuals who are homeless or unsheltered. Yet, in this study of the South Valley all voices are essential; they have appropriated public spaces and occupy them as they would a home. Homeless people are displaced from their homes, but not always from their home environments. Some, like those I have interviewed, remain attached to the community. These street family systems are invisible to many; yet in order to survive the homeless create understandings and tools of survival. The value and influence of relationships prove to be essential in the South Valley community. Sometimes, the people who motivate us are not the wealthiest people who have something tangible to offer us; sometimes, people with the least have more compassion

because of their own struggles and challenges. In my study, I observed people with multidimensional wounds survive and help others in the community who have been denied basic resources.

Although characterized as a low-income area in Bernalillo County, the South Valley has many resources, including people who give back to their community and less fortunate individuals. Participant 8, who I refer to as Theresa, a Chicana Native woman in her forties, told me she volunteers with a homeless program at God's House. She states, "I am a volunteer. I feel good about it. If I did not volunteer there, I would go back to the church. If they put you with kids or adults, there will always be an area there for you, no matter what. I do not hang out in mansions with rich people. I go help with homeless people that need it, where it is needed." The desire to offer help to less fortunate people is a source of connection to people. This care exists among homeless people, those who have the least economic resources. Despite their situation, the care they have developed for one another revealed that love was present among those who had nothing materially to give one another. They found love despite their circumstances and maintained hope for change.

Searching for Querencia

Much like Dorothy's message in *The Wizard of Oz* that "there is no place like home," many people seek the comfort of home. Often it becomes a tireless journey to find those same genuine feelings that cultivated us in childhood. None of us would have believed that our voyages of adulthood would lead us back to the roots we tried to escape as adolescents. However, as we are thrust in the world of maturity, we appreciate that there is indeed no place like our home.

In addition to the stories, I gathered in the interviews I conducted, I also found concepts associated with my interviewees' language that led me to identify codes that reveal their beliefs about home. For example, Sueño misses comfort food, like eggs with green chile in the morning; he says, "It is rough not to have that." The experience of a sense like taste or smell can remind us of home. Food can be a representation of culture and a vehicle for communication, especially when we are separated from the ties that established those senses. Food is a symbol and creates comfort and meaning with regard to our perceived concept of home. An expression shared among Hispanos is *con el corazón abierto, la cultura cura*. (Anaya, 2020). The food and flavors of our culture become important guideposts for the remembrance of home, holidays, and people. Pablo recalls a memory from his childhood when he and his family would plant and harvest chile, which they would tie into *ristras*, but as a food product: "We would sit in the evening and make piles and string the chili with twine. They used to be beautiful and long, but they were sold for food. Ninety-nine percent sold now are for decoration. It is so crazy how things change" (see Figure 16). For some of the participants, food can bring hope and comfort because they convey flavors of home on our tables and in our gardens. Food like this, which we associate with home, can be an extension of self and community.

Figure 16

Woman tying a ristra on Pablo's farm

Despite the fact that they are homeless, my participants expressed that the South Valley is their home, in the sense of where they come from or the place that they occupy. Betty told me that "People have this idea about the South Valley; many portray it as dangerous and violent." Florence interjects and says, "That is not how it is at all I don't know how people are scared to come over here." The two participants clearly object to the master narrative that the South Valley is a "ghetto." The systemic social binaries of "them" and "us" create the "other" in the discussion, an everyday discourse of betweenness. It is a language for those that feel separated or displaced in some way. Florence could not imagine living anywhere else but the South Valley. She feels a connection to the people there, explaining

"We have encountered people out here in the South Valley that are very generous, and as soon as they see us, they are giving us something."

I found that not all homeless situations are the same, and homelessness in semi-rural areas cannot be evaluated by urban standards for what constitutes homelessness. Evaluating the situation of homeless people in the South Valley is challenging as each situation looks different from environment to environment. As with any issue, the perception of a problem must be acknowledged before the actual problem can be solved. Not only are the experiences of the rural and semi-rural poor different from those of the urban poor, but they are also less visible in research and scholarship than the urban poor (Tickamayer et al., 2017). Across different social groups, there is little to no agreement on how homelessness should be defined (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1992), especially when considering temporary shelter situations. Nonetheless, rural and semi-rural homelessness appear unique. After all, homelessness is less visible outside of cities because non-urban homeless people often rely on family or other networks to escape the elements (Institute of Medicine, 1988).

Some of the participants identified the South Valley as an area where they found support. Florence and Betty revealed that they have built connections with businesses on Isleta that have helped them, such as gas stations and barbershops. Yet it seems that society in general still does not understand their experiences. Betty told me "it has humbled her," pointing to her Florence, who replied, "It definitely humbled me, I have been humbled." I attempted to place that humility into perspective. Florence became unmasked, and her vulnerability exposed, she has been subjected to the worst conditions in her journey.

Feelings of attachment to home are crucial to understanding why the homeless people I interviewed in this study chose to panhandle in a community that has been stricken by

poverty and unemployment. Moreover, this connection to home is part of how they rationalize the idea that their efforts in this area can be rewarding. Their daily quests for a sense of home and attachment to the earth are found in the community helping them. Some of the words relating to home taken from transcripts included home, camp, tents, section 8 housing, mom's house, dad's house, rentals, and abandoned house. A person's view of home evolves over a lifetime and can change depending on factors like work opportunities, divorce, or death. But that unique connection and sense of belongingness can stay with people. The rewards and attitudes of home is constructed within us, and we carry it with dignity as a possession.

Chapter Four: Decolonization

Vergüenza

> One could say that if a child behaves in an outgoing or free-spirited way, it can be cute and all right. You can jokingly and almost approvingly say of a child, *es sin vergüenza*. Beyond that age it is no longer cute to behave without self-control and responsibility. Parents and grownups are expected to admonish children so that they will learn vergüenza (Valdez, 1979, p. 102).

The internalized shame that Valdez (1979) describes comes from parents trying to teach their children what is proper and what is forbidden. The homeless participants of my study revealed that while they found a sense of belonging in the South Valley unlike any other area, they still held feelings of shame about being homeless. This deep attachment to home is a central characteristic of my study. Those who live on the streets experience feelings of embarrassment about their lack of a permanent home, but they also have pride in their survival skills and convey appreciation for the people in the community who assist them. According to Freud, guilt is an emotion learned from potty training, and this emotion can be difficult to unlearn. Freud holds that guilt is a species of anxiety and shame is a result of anxiety- hence anxiety will be considered first, then guilt, and finally shame (Hazard, 1969). Shame can paralyze us as we attempt to hide behind minimal confidence and to search for a place to let down our guard. For those I interviewed the loss of home resulted in the loss of a deep connection that helped them navigate the world.

In New Mexico, the key native constructs in this system of meaning are *respeto* (respect) and *vergüenza* (shame) (Rodriguez, 1987). Internal feelings of loss of confidence

and dishonor can remove one from the dialogue or the conversations with family members and devalues a person's voice. In 9th grade, Sueño suffered a traumatic brain injury that had lasting injuries. It was impossible for him to complete his education, and he subsequently dropped out in 11th grade. He sees teachers from school sometimes, and it is the "worst feeling." He states, "I hope they didn't predict that I was going to be on the streets. [Like,] 'I knew it,' right? Regardless, it's like they will judge." *Vergüenza* brings dishonor that we are not doing what we should be doing, and the judgment comes from all our disappointments. When his family and other people found out he was on the streets, he was shunned and cut out, and this reaction contributes to the *vergüenza* he carries with him. People will also say that vergüenza creates broken people and how we are raised says everything about us (see Figure 17). Many use a term like the following, *"el árbol que crece torcido, nunca su rama endereza* (if the tree grows crooked you can't expect the branches to grow straight) (Valdez, 1979).

Feelings of powerlessness in the face of discrimination and an unnavigable social services system plague the stories collected through this research. Many of the participants have little to no control and suffer stigma in their shared social predicament. Sueño states "It's sad to think I have pretty much given up like really it's hard, and it's lonely out here; actually, there is a lot of us out here." V*ergüenza* is present among homeless residents of the South Valley. On the afternoon I interviewed Sueño, a man divulged his disgrace and struggle to a stranger. For all the choices he made, good or bad, his connection to the South Valley proved that commonalities between me and him were greater than our differences. Sueño says "People think we are these savage beasts out here. We get treated like that, honestly." He claims he gets used to it, which speaks to his resiliency. "When our *caras* do

not live up to the 'image' that the people or community wants us to wear and when we rebel against the engraving of our bodies, we experience ostracism, alienation, isolation and shame" (Anzaldúa, 1990).

Women face particular challenges as homeless residents in the South Valley. Mothers must stay resilient for their children, and pride, at times, interferes with seeking help, which usually means their needs become private. Relying on the community, on handouts, and on family can dimmish how parents feel about themselves. Being a bad parent is shameful in almost any culture; this idea of a bad parent has lowered parents' self-esteem and diminished their pride (Gültekin et al., 2014). Many women experiencing homelessness reported shame and embarrassment when asked about their current homeless situation (Gültekin et al., 2014). Florence did not want her face to be in any pictures because she has a family. She knows many people and does not want people to know where she is because she feels they would "definitely judge" her. As she explains, "I think for me, it's such a fall from grace from where I was and the things I did to now." Being a homeless recovering addict, has caused her life to morph unrecognizably. It has been a vast transformation. Everyone I interviewed has some similar tragic event, weather sexual abuse, encounters with death, or some other trauma that caused their lives to change. Women with children must find ways to cope with environmental and social challenges. So, Florence asks, what is the one thing that will change it back? She has tried to figure it out, saying "I don't want pity, maybe just some understanding. I do not want people to judge me and ask, 'How she did not ask us for help?' It is nobody's business." She hides from her family, explaining "I do not want anyone to know where I am. Everything we have been through and to lose everything we had… it can happen to anyone."

Figure 17

Sueño, writing his sign for help

Rusty explained they keep warm with candles in the tent. "We put them in the tent, with blankets all around," he laughs. "We live in a big old field, yeah, where nobody can see you. It's kind of hard out here, especially now that winter came." The field represents a place where the heart and unfortunate circumstance will not be witnessed by a public who may cast judgement. I first saw Florence and Betty reading in front of an abandoned building. The act to me seemed to happen as if they were invisible, it was as if they were reading in the privacy of their own living room. Florence and Betty found a distraction by reading "In order to escape the threat of shame or fear, one takes on a compulsive, repetitious activity as though too busy oneself, to distract oneself, to keep awareness at bay" (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Psychosocial theories explain the importance of feelings such as shame and guilt in the lifespan of a human being. Lewis (1995) explains the difference between a person's self-conscious emotion. Primary emotions include joy, sadness, anger, disgust, interest, and fear, and they appear early in human development while requiring cognitive activity and not relying on self-consciousness. The secondary emotions, such as shame, guilt, and pride, all involve self-consciousness. It is not possible to feel shame without comparing one's actions to one's standards or beliefs. A child's fear of punishment for transgressions by the withdrawal of parental love or some other penalty is the initial source of guilt. Thus, as Freud writes in his essay *Civilization and its Discontents*, once a transgression has occurred, the individual and "his conscience is lenient and lets the ego do all kinds of things; when some calamity befalls, he holds an inquisition within, discovers his sin, heightens the standards of his conscience, imposes abstinences on himself and punishes himself with penances" (p. 31). Our conscience tells us that we should self-inflict punishment for our flaws, and that we should prepare to be judged. These images guide people to represent themselves in a positive light "They would see us as different, would judge us, would find us lacking. Lessons about combing, washing, and doing homework frequently relayed a deeper message be prepared because you will be judged by your skin color, your names, your accents. They will see you as ugly, lazy, dumb, and dirty" (Montoya, 1994a).

Ethnographic investigations across various settings describe attempts by homeless adults and youth to hide or to cover (i.e., make one's stigmas less obvious) (Lee et al., 2010). Some might see shame as a useless emotion. Still, it can impact education. We should move to decolonize *vergüenza*, releasing the feelings of inadequacy responsible for oppressive beliefs learned in the classroom as ignorant or illiterate or unable to be taught. The sadness

that comes with disappointment has been incorporated in the community as we attempt to represent ourselves authentically and bring pride to our families, ourselves, and our community. The irony is that educational deficiencies and their accompanying *vergüenza* can develop through educational microaggressions and should not be placed on the individual. Shame is not black and white; there is a grey area in which many must balance, the overwhelming shame that impacts us in a world not designed for us.

Rusty stated that his tent was in a place that no one could see him. The shame he feels has been ingrained in our culture as part of a coded language to put those who do not abide by social standards. The act of hiding behind masks that Margaret Montoya (1994a) writes about are those continual feelings of inadequacy which were evident in narratives of the participants. Next to blushing, hiding is often mentioned as a behavior indexing shame. This response-collapse of the body, including hunching the head and squeezing the shoulders together, has been used to measure shame systemically (Benedict, 1946). Some words used for *vergüenza* amongst the participants were shunned, judged, hide, disappointment, fall from grace, and not wanting people to know where they are.

Participant 9, who I refer to as Julio, a eighty year old street vendor tells me "*Siempre que quieras podemos hablar en cualquier momento después de las 5, pero encuentra una persona cercana que conoce bien el español y te puede explicar*." He is from Torreon, Mexico, and tells me he wants to sit down and talk to me, but he explains I need to find someone who speaks better Spanish, as my broken language will not work for him. On this street, I again feel that inferiority of language, the difficulty hearing the voices in my community. My constant loss of language and a fractured Spanglish has been a source of shame. Coming from the Chicana and Chicano studies department, the level of expectation to

respond in Spanish feels compounded, not to mention the lack of academic language that keeps me silent. Unable to fit in either an English or a Spanish world reminds me that I am not immune from v*ergüenza.* I conducted my fieldwork on my own and was unable to have those profiecient conversations in Spanish, and this proved to be a limitation for me periodically.

Participant 10, who I refer to as Manuel, a sixty-year-old Mexicano and college graduate states, "*La vergüenza no mata el hambre*" shame does not kill hunger, as he encourages me to eat a prickly pear cactus fruit he intends to sell at the growers market. I somewhat laugh and with apprehension taste the fruit. This draws me back to Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless, Me Ultima* as it addresses the shame of food as the character Antonio is embarrassed to eat his burrito in front of his class peers and seeks refuge amongst others like him that share in the cuisine I knew as a child when dinner consisted of whatever was rolled in a tortilla. As a child I craved white bread sandwiches, Whataburger, and McDonald's, something different. To me, the exotic food served outside of my home reminded me of what I was missing in my kitchen.

Florence states that most people are three paychecks away from a situation of homelessness. I interviewed her in November 2019, just before COVID-19 hit the United States and closed the statement's margin. The current pandemic has affected employment, the economy, and homeownership, making her statement a reality for many, although the actual effects have yet to be seen. We can see how "Vergüenza is a strength. It defines the people who can be entrusted to organize the village to fight, to keep track of its money, without fear people will forget the rest of the village and go on to promote their own careers (Valdez, 1979). This quest has become a healing journey to live *sin vergüenza* or without

inflicted shame. That is, if we speak from a position of strength against critism, we can exterminate doubt that is cast upon us.

Healing Our Educational Wounds

We can map how a lack of resources has challenged a community and created obstacles for those locked into the area's investment. Whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is derided as irrelevant becomes vital in this conversation. Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical insight is about how a hierarchical society reproduces itself, and it has often been interpreted to help explain why people of color's academic and social results significantly lower whites' outcomes. This study states that people of color lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. Furthermore, as a result, school systems are lacking; those that are disadvantaged lack the necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities, and cultural capital (Valenzuela, 1999).

Figure 18

Mother and daughter participants

Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that challenges the cultural capital theory and favors instead alternative community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). The educational system oppresses and fails to consider people's lived experiences as valid forms of knowledge. Schools devalue histories, and social systems have failed them. Critical race research emphasizes the inequitable educational differences in schools and how race dramatically impacts one's success. It explores and challenges racist practices that have historically put people of color in last place. Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital can be acquired in two ways: from one's family or through formal schooling (Bourdieu, 1986). This research is vital, as not everyone is born into wealth, and we must extend educational opportunities so that we can have a level playing field.

Historically, education has been an area that has not reached marginalized communities, and the South Valley has not escaped this social injustice. Many, if not all, of the schools in the South Valley district score a failing grade amongst their counterparts in other Albuquerque areas, and higher education access is decreasing among the residents. As we accept that we are products of our environment, we must consider the school system's role in accepting a failing school design and continuing to be anchored to such fruitless educational systems. Yosso describes a network of people and community resources as the best method to find the way through social institutions. The extreme disparities in different locations also suggest that the school systems have held the Mexican American population in a subordinate position (Grebler, 1970).

The participants I interviewed fell out or were pushed out of educational opportunities and currently lack access to high school and higher education. Florence dropped out of high

school at the age of 14 due to becoming pregnant, but she later continued at the local community college and has always been an avid reader. As she explained to me: “We have always been big readers since the kids were small. We would talk about book passages. I would show them it is okay to read. People don’t read anymore.” (see Figure 18) Florence then adds that she had a profitable supervisory position in a high-profile business in downtown Albuquerque. She lists her successes to convince me how much her life has changed. Florence feels like she must “dumb herself down” to talk to people on the streets to get her needs met.

The education gap amongst Mexican Americans is present in the South Valley. The quality of education forces occupants to leave the area, searching for excellence in private schools starting in primary and secondary schools. Census data does not consider differences in the quality of education (Grebler, et al.,1970). This systemic issue surrounding quality education reflects a community’s struggle for equality. The community has adapted to the lack of resources often by choosing schools outside the South Valley district. I am somewhat of an exception as I have approximately 20 years of formal education under my belt. Nonetheless, I still find my mediocre education has negatively impacted my graduate school success. I am an academically minded individual, even though I never had a source of social capital to help me navigate higher education. In addition, I have often felt left out of many conversations because of my inability to communicate in Spanish.

I developed shame and a sense of not holding value in either, the English or the Spanish world. Microaggressions have weakened my confidence and forced me to address how uninformed I have been in any language. My ability has constantly been in question in both languages, but never as much as was vocalized in graduate school. I became aware of

my position of in-between and otherness, as I felt extremely deprived of the educational essentials. And this demonstrates that students should "Always be conscious of your location in systems of racialized, gendered, and class power, privilege, and disadvantage and to consider how to strategically engage in advancing a more perfect union for all" (López, 2017). My awareness became more attuned to the lessons that should have originated earlier in my education, but only by those microaggressions felt through the process of this thesis.

In a world where we are consumed by credentials and academic achievement, we often overlook life experiences as a source of knowledge. Foucault (1980) states:

> "it is a fact that we have repeatedly encountered, at least a superficial level, in the course of most recent times, an entire thematic to the effect that it is not theory but life that matters, not knowledge but reality, not books but money etc.; but it also seems to me that over and above and arising out of this thematic, there's something else to which we are witness, and which we might describe as an insurrection of subjugated knowledges." (p.81)

He defines subjugated knowledge as a whole set of knowledge that had been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledge, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientific (Foucault, 1980). Highlighting the idea of subjugated knowledge to push away from higher education and reassigning value to disqualified knowledge. For example, lowriders are part of Chicano culture and represent a particular form of this identity. Participant 7, who I refer to as Frank, a Chicano in his fifties, was found detailing a 1964 Chevy Impala (see Figure 19). He stated he was raised in the culture and had strong faith that if you were invested in restoring a

classic car, you would not get caught up in drugs or alcohol. The following excerpt of the transcribed interview reveals Frank's commitment to classic car restoration:

> I got my first vehicle at the age of 16; it was a 1949 pickup; there was a place called Tito's wrecking yard. Well, I bought it from him for two hundred bucks, and it took me six months to put it together. I have been with Bedrock car club; I have been the president of Bedrock for over 12 years, and our goal is not necessarily the car, but we push education. That is what we have always pushed ever since before I got in. We have an ex-president who is a lawyer, we got one that is a detective, and we have one who does all the sign painting for the base. We have a guy who works for Nikon, all the software stuff for computers, so we always pushed the education over drugs.

Figure 19

Frank's 1964 Chevy Impala

Positive stories are woven into the community. Despite their humble upbringings, many South Valley residents have succeeded. Many go to college, and many understand the use of syntax and diction have been provided the fundamental skills and tools to succeed. I know that some of my peers went off and obtained Ivy League educations and are making six-figure salaries; they are comfortable. Others have their own stories of how they struggled after their South Valley educations let them down. However, the reality is that many young people in the South Valley today cannot envision that same fortune. Some return to the neighborhood to take over their parents' homes and end up living below the poverty line, content just to return to the community. Latino students are likely to go to a nearby college, even if their grades qualify them for better universities that are sometimes thousands of miles away (Sosa, 1998). I reflect on my own education and how feelings of *vergüenza* impacted me, fostering the belief that my inadequacies would not be detected if I remained closer to home where I felt safe. I returned to a community that holds my heart, my querencia, with all my baggage and shortcomings.

Many people like Participants 7,10, and 11 consume themselves with skills for rebuilding of their lives and work with their hands in blue-collar jobs for a lifetime. They want to give back to the community in whichever way they can. And like many in doing so "Every Sunday churches are filled with worshippers who constantly hear that working with their hands is the greatest virtue, that they are poor but honest, that they should remain content with their lifelong poverty. Stop! Why are you doing this? Why do you want to make us believe we are destined to live in poverty?" (Sosa, 1998). For many the dream is filled with efforts that uplift the community. The community stake holders that established love for the community are not looking for an escape; rather, they add to efforts to maintain the community. Whether it is

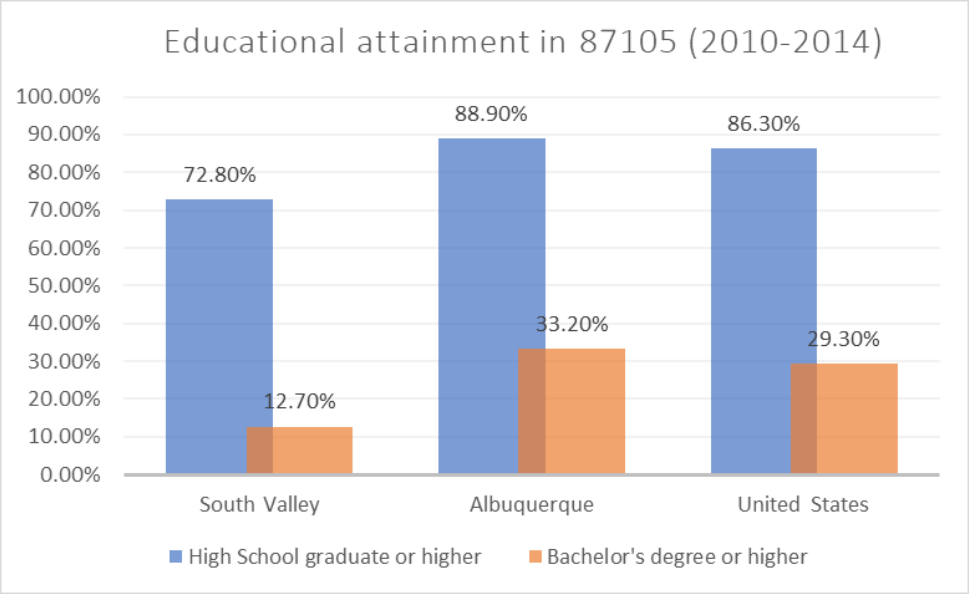
Kansas or Emerald city or even the semi-rural community of the South Valley the experiences can be life changing but they can also be reminders about a home's genuine value.

The Wizard of Oz is more than a children's film and more than a fantasy. It is a story whose driving force is the inadequacy of adults, in which "the weakness of grown-ups forces children to take control of their own destinies" (Rushdie, 1992, p. 10). Children learn to create their own opportunities, knowledge, and street smarts, and can then build their own yellow brick road to success in the future. Manuel claims, "You can read a thousand books, you can watch a thousand videos, but unless you get your hands into it, you will not learn how to build." This concept fits into Yosso's (2005) beliefs of familial capital and how traditional knowledge is passed on, often the important life lessons are passed on rather than accumulated in a classroom. Homeless people in the South Valley sometimes return to toxic homes because of their strong desire for a reconnection to their querencias. Their fragility has quarantined them within the only community where they have ever felt a sense of home.

The shame of not having a quality education has followed me throughout my academic career. I might attempt to explain why it has taken me so long to complete my university education, or why I feel challenges to speak or write accurately in either language. I believe I was being prepared from a young age to use my hands and creativity above my academic performance. Decolonizing pedagogy and actively resisting the narratives and changing beliefs so that resources can be accumulated in education should be prioritized in neglected communities. If one is not born into a family in which knowledge is already deemed valuable, one could then access the knowledge of the middle and upper class and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling (Yosso, 2005).

Table 2

Educational attainment levels in the South Valley



Note. Taken from South Valley Data Atlas, Data Source is American Community Survey (ACS)

We must recognize that Chicana/o communities have their knowledge systems, which must be the basis on which we enter our relationships with these communities, while also shaping our methods (Pizzaro, 2019). Some have succeeded in academia. According to census data (2015-2019) 14% of South Valley residents have a college degree. We know that education can be a catalyst for getting out of poverty. Nevertheless, we should not measure success in degrees or credentials; rather, we should see success in more modest advances, particularly in the area of community growth. Growth is in people's hearts, the place from which they can push back, and how we build each other back up when we fall. The majoritarian story tells us that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools. The dominant society informs us that limited or Spanish-accented English and Spanish surnames equal bad schools and low academic performance (Solórzano &

Yosso, 2002). I truly believe if I had a better education in my lifetime, my success would look much different today. I accept responsibility for the areas I have lacked as an adult. Still, I also see how all of this has been due to the commonalities I have with my participants in the environment we all share. Although the Albuquerque Public School (APS) system funds schools in the South Valley, schools in the area have historically received failing grades according to the APS website, with a 39% dropout rate and a 50% homeless rate reported in 2018. Isolation in the community impacts students for generations, just as Telles and Ortiz reveal in their findings on segregated neighborhoods.

By highlighting the cultural, social, and historical heritage of the Southwest, special courses should enhance the classroom experience and thereby motivate students to develop their writing and critical thinking skills (Gonzales, 2007). For some, a lack of quality education leads to disconnection from institutions, and they end up relying solely on subjugated knowledges. Others are pushed to continue their education against all odds and often little support. Research on subjugated or situated knowledge confirms that there is capital in lived experience, which allows this knowledge to be used as a growth tool. For example, Manuel discusses his knowledge gained from lived experiences "In these adobes we made, we add blessed palms in the mud from Palm Sunday, and when we build the home it serves as a blessing, with the earth, it is a labor of love." In Gültekin et al.'s (2014) analysis, some mothers generally saw education as the path to a better future for the entire family because it enhanced one's ability for gainful employment. As a Chicana mother, I am constantly encouraging the power of education in my home. Although Anzaldúa's statement has resonated within me, it has also haunted me. I contemplate on my educational experiences through her following reflection as if it were my own:

> A Chicana graduate student talked to me about not knowing how to argue against the professors who were trying to shove their methods and theories down her throat. "I don't have the language, the vocabulary," she said sobbing.
>
> Like many *mujeres* of color in graduate school, she felt oppressed and violated by the rhetoric of dominant ideology, rhetoric disguised as good "scholarship" by teachers who are unaware of its race, class, and gender "blank spots." It is rhetoric that presents its conjectures as universal truths while concealing its patriarchal privilege and posture. It is a rhetoric riddled with ideologies of racism that hush our voices so that we cannot articulate our victimization. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxiii)

The educational system upholds dominant narratives that can crush many students, and it is essential to write in opposition to those narratives. The schools in the South Valley have contributed forms of educational segregation that have often prevented these schools from improving. Education is of lower quality for the children of immigrants because immigrant parents tend to have lower educational levels and incomes and are especially likely to live in segregated neighborhoods (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). The following transcript of part of my interview with Participant 3, who I refer to as Marie (see Figure 20) provides some insight into this tendency:

Researcher: Did you grow up here in the South Valley too?

Marie: Yeah.

Researcher: Did you go to Rio Grande?

Marie: I went to West Mesa. I went in 94.

Researcher: Did you finish?

Marie: No.

Researcher: So, you would have finished in 94?

Marie: I would have graduated in… I don't even know what year I would have graduated in. I am 36, so it would have been around that time so, but I only went to I went to 9th grade and went to 3 months of 10th grade, and that was it.

Researcher: What happened?

Marie: I got pregnant.

Researcher: So, you have, how old is your…?

Marie: She is 19, she just had a baby, as a matter of fact, she is graduating so she is doing good and her baby's dad and the family are very involved, so that is a good thing. So, they are happy and their doing good. As long as she graduates, that's the most important thing you know, yeah.

Figure 20

Marie's necklace

Education has become the main gatekeeper to success, and for this reason, only a few people leave the South Valley. We must know that "It is within the context of racism that 'monovocal' stories about the low educational achievement and attainment of students of color are told. Unacknowledged white privilege helps maintain racism's stories" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Systems want to keep people in positions of subservience. This narrative is a familiar story for generations of young women who become teen moms and lose their educations to unplanned pregnancies. This story impacted three of the participants in my study. Teen mothers lack mentors and advocates. Non-profit organizations and schools may be able to fill this need if given adequate funds. Some single mothers experience v*ergüenza* that drives them from school and other networks of support in the South Valley.

Healing Addiction

Addiction plays a role in marginalizing homeless people. Florence states that most homeless are addicts who spend all their money on their addictions. During an interview with Participant 11, who I call Pablo, a sixty-year-old Spanish farmer, explains how gambling also deteriorates our value systems and changes people and creates the same physical disorder in communities as many squanders their livelihood on denied addictions. Pablo states, "New Mexico is 50th in poverty, so why are they building casinos? I wish they would shut down; I hate them; what are we doing?" Although my research does not focus on the impact of casinos, this thesis presented uncut concerns voiced in the interviews. Pablo was correct that New Mexico has been ranked 50th in poverty with 19.5% of people living below the poverty line (taken from Center for American Progress, 2019).

When you are addicted to drugs, the urgency to make money creates panic and sickness, and Florence was glad to not have that feeling anymore. She states, "The withdrawal from heroin is awful; to be that sick, I wouldn't wish that on anyone." Getting off drugs sometimes brings individuals closer to families. Florence states, "Trying to stay clean with everyone who knows us, and everyone is supportive" has been a key to their sobriety. The holidays, special occasions, and anniversaries make the struggle harder because they bring up all those emotions that drugs help to forget. As Florence deals with her demons, she feels she would like to help other addicts to kick their addictions. She states she would like to create an opportunity for someone else struggling with sobriety. Her motherly instinct has not diminished as she has attempted to convince Sueño to seek help. She says that Sueño has told her, "I'm going to die out here," expressing that sometimes she feels like he wants to die. She spoke of her own recovery from drug abuse and how she and her daughter Betty attend

counseling and receive help from methadone clinics, which has allowed them to remain clean since July 2019. They are still homeless but not using. Drug abuse is an area for further study and an element that researchers must not ignore due to its power to truncate both confidence and education. Still chronic illness and pain affect drug use among homeless populations. Sueño said that after he was in a traffic accident, he developed migraines, and in trying to control the pain, he would smoke the medication he was given and was outed as misusing the pills. Rusty states, "I'm on the methadone. I don't do heroin or anything like that, I'm on the methadone." Questions of how the homeless can cope abound, and how unrealistic expectations are the main reasons why they became lost in the first place.

Although the focus of this study has not been on drug use, I find it essential to acknowledge how it ties into issues of trauma, death, and education. Furthermore, to give my participants a platform to talk about their actual challenges with addiction allowed Sueño to bring up substance abuse in general without being overwhelmed or silenced by the *vergüenza* of addiction. This is not to denigrate other addictions listed in this manuscript, such as gambling and technological compulsion, but drug addiction is undeniably an aggravating factor of homelessness. Lee et al. (2010) explain how being homeless affects a person's opportunities and coping strategies. The lack of opportunities that comes along with homelessness signals an individual's weak anchor to home. Resources and other assistance from the private sector may exist, and some governmental aid exists in combatting the community concerns, although they are insufficient. When the needs of South Valley residents are not attended to, they may become generational wounds.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

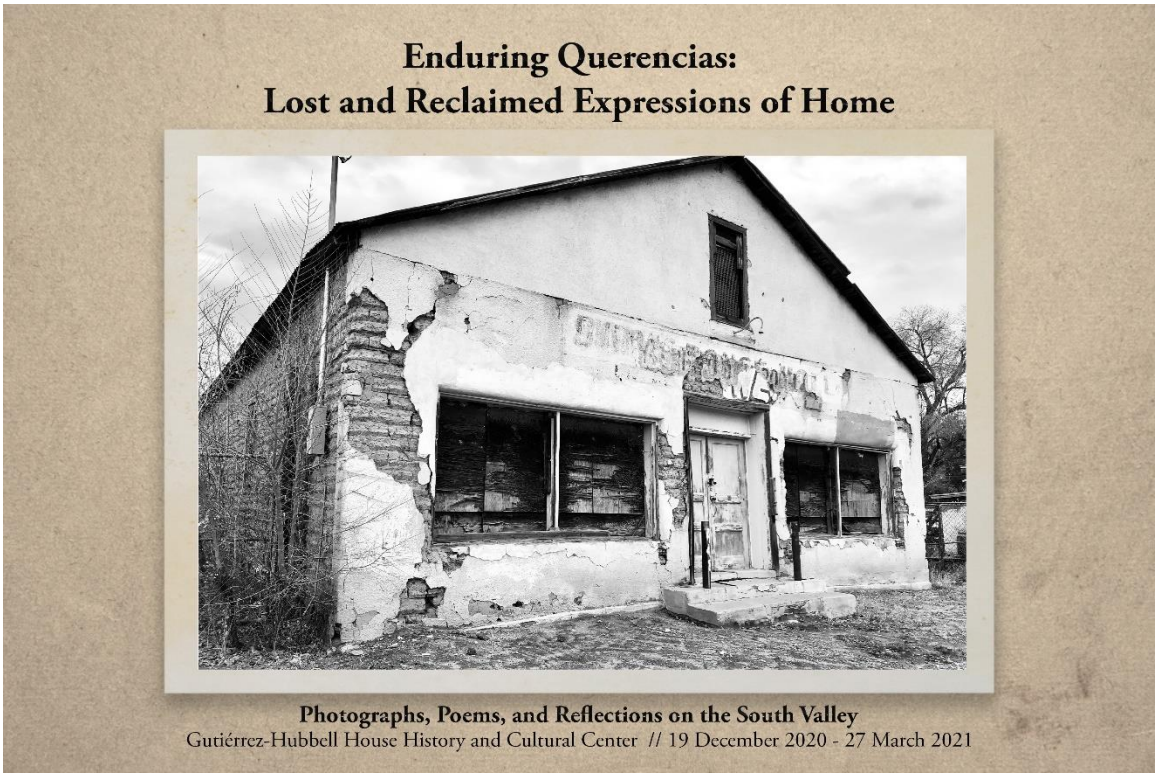
I wish I could say that my research culminated in a grand finale but, the experiences documented through the qualitative storytelling are dynamic and ongoing in the lives of the residents of the South Valley. My research is only one aspect of their desire to leave a vocal legacy. I was fortunate to be able to present my research to the South Valley community in an exhibition titled *Enduring Querencias: Lost and Reclaimed Expressions of Home* (see Figure 21). This collection of photographs, poems, and reflections on the South Valley was held in the historic Gutierrez-Hubbell House from December 2020 to May 2021. The exhibit was planned during the pandemic and maintained all social distancing protocols. The pandemic of 2020 did not kill my vision or silence my participants' voice. The stories, poetic verses, and reflections illuminated the area and rekindled a place in the people's hearts that refuses to be lost. In fact, preliminary numbers revealed that the museum programs had totaled 650 streamed views from three different countries and calculated 775 people in attendance, despite pandemic closures the exhibit proved to be of cultural interest to many people.

The exhibit consisted of 23 vinyl panels and shed light on my photo poetic journey of mapping my querencia along with other stories of South Valley residents. Therefore, I placed my own memories of home among others who are overlooked people who make up the South Valley's cultural landscape. The exhibits, workshops, and discussions that grew out of my research centered on the following themes: love of home; reclaiming querencia; acknowledging the landscape's wealth, cultural traditions; shared knowledge practices, and the power of oral histories and storytelling. Events focused not just on South Valley elders

but also on the youth: two social groups needed to carry on the values, methods, and practices of our community. Beyond the academics, citations, and qualitative findings, this exhibit allowed me to give back to the South Valley. In the vein of the philosophy and approach to Chicana and Chicano Studies, I believe that academics should always give more than they take. The exhibit and thesis stand as their own visual markers of the pride and traditions hidden or invisible in the master narrative of the South Valley. The counter stories revealed the people who are stitched to the place and whose enduring influence on the community calls us to challenge stereotypical "ghetto" storylines.

Figure 21

Enduring Querencias postcard announcement



Although this community's metaphoric language tells us that one's man's trash is another's treasure, we see a new generation emerging with similar intentions. The South

Valley remains the site of 75% of the Albuquerque's landfills, and access into the community is limited and continues to be neglected and underfunded. Despite bad road conditions, poverty, and lack of public arts, it is home to many. We know the problem: it is all around us. Too many have become separated from the *querencia* of family and our ancestor's voices. And when "El duende loco, the maddening creative spirit that takes hold of us when we sing, dance, recite poetry, were filled with love for querencia, (Anaya, 2020). El duende loco (crazy spirit) or our spirit has lost its way in a modern technological culture that separates us from querencia. The neighborhood with the sounds and voices of a community is abandoned by people, for opportunities in the city across the Rio Grande. It is a cry from people wanting better lives for their children, at the cost of losing identity, language, and tradition. The souls of people whose native tongue was forced out of them and into the soil and then absorbed by the spirits, buried, and lost can and should be resurrected. We each have motivation ingrained inside us by the stories we tell and are told, they our hearts but are sometimes lost or faded by a world that has not embraced them. We know that "Each culture and language offer a unique set of solutions to the age-old challenges of human existence: birth and health, love and death, struggle, and peace. Each word, poem, and narrative can be understood and appreciated as a cultural artifact which both contains and transcends its purpose and spirit." (Lamadrid, 1994).

Montoya (1994a) illustrates how we present an acceptable face, hiding what we feel, masking our inner selves, and how this becomes a defense tactic against racism taught to us through our families and society at large. We find that it is safer to disguise ourselves and be divisive about what our community needs. A community with little to no progression has lost their identity and voice because of assimilation. We have failed to communicate our needs

due to a lack of understanding or a lack of respect across generational and cultural differences. The people who have settled in these neighborhoods and their desire to continue those traditional and symbolic relationships resides in the heart of those who continue to nurture ancestral ideas and knowledges, creating counter stories rather than apologies.

The homeless people I spoke with live for the hope and promise of returning to a *querencia,* even if it is only imagined. Their remembrance of community in youth helps them to shed their masks and be vulnerable in a neighborhood that recognizes them, a place where they can reveal themselves without hiding behind the symbols that most people insist are crucial to success. Many participants were unfiltered in their expressions about their place in life and had very little to hide, yet all the burdens of *vergüenza* continued to weigh on many of them. We continue feeling vergüenza despite realizing we currently control nothing. I felt an honest connection to the people I interviewed a connection that many of us seem to forget as we pass judgment on a world that we ourselves have only narrowly escaped. I wonder how close I have been to the same fate. Those internalized feelings of inadequacy have changed me. We recognize our community's ways have shaped our own experiences and understandings of knowledge and that the struggles of our families and the strength that they found in the community and shared resources and knowledge were the lifeblood of these communities (Pizzaro, 2019). At times we put on our masks to hide who we are, which also prevents us from seeing who is on the other side of those masks.

This study's qualitative data represents the relationships between querencia, *vergüenza,* death, and addictions within the South Valley community. Figure 22 organizes the collected data by all eleven participants. The information reveals patterns and interests or concerns of the residents. Physical markers like couches, abandoned structures, *descansos,*

and murals remind people of the spiritual capital intertwined in their community. The concepts of querencia and family, as well as the visible codes are connected to the tendency of these local homeless people to mask their situations. The education levels, addictions, and traumas are important markers that have impacted the participants and should not be viewed as alibis, but rather as a sign of insufficient social support structures.

Figure 22

Interview Keywords

Notes. Keywords taken within the interview

Furthermore, although many have narrowly escaped this life, I believe one missed paycheck can change that outcome. So, as we look down from our ivory tower of credentials to prove that we did not fall victim in spite of our past, we cannot ignore the multitudes of obstacles that communities like the South Valley face on an everyday level of living.

Carbaugh (2007) states that cultural analysis benefits from knowing what communication practices are saying about where people are, how they are related to those places, and how they are inhabited. The location and the environment have been necessary to these street people who occupy the South Valley, as a place to conceal themselves and find refuge. The community is part of their identity. It is their home, and it is part of a more extensive network through which community members attempt to have a voice.

Of course, not everyone who grows up with trauma, poor education, or struggle has the same outcome. Some live and have successful lives that do not negatively impact them. Participant 6, who I call Catalina, a woman born in Durango, Mexico, describes her life as an immigrant who has pursued a fruitful American dream. Catalina owns and operates her store, and has several homes and many children, all with no more than a few years of education. What is the turning point for some, and how can we explain how some pull themselves up without allowing the world to consume them? Some say if you work hard enough, you can achieve anything, and that obstacles present themselves to test or deter us. In *The Wizard of Oz,* Dorothy encountered distractions along her path but found helping hands. She sees problems and reflects on her own life and how she grows in appreciation for home. We hope to remove some barriers that interfere with our chances of success in life, so that our goals seem feasible. Catalina and my friend mentioned in the epigraph to this thesis are examples that provide us with hope that a successful story can be further down the road for some of my participants (e.g., Figure 23).

My participants' battles were measured through the *vergüenza* they felt, struggles with drug addiction, loss of home, and lack of formal education. Although my research was initially supposed to uncover how a community has lost its language, data collection directed

me toward an examination of the networks in the South Valley and their importance to the community's people. I feel powerful, nurtured, and safe in the South Valley. It is no longer a source of shame for me as I vow to create awareness of the community's challenges by exposing them and potentially offering hope or change. As my research came to an end, I realized that in emphasizing factor like language and culture, we might miss something the area was expressing that was much more valuable: the importance of home and community. The conversation surrounding the notions of *vergüenza*, *querencia*, *sobremesa*, *la resolana*, and *descansos* are reminders that we do not just hang onto language itself but the themes and rituals that make us distinctive people. In addition to the enduring relationships, we are reminded that the people give us a sense of querencia in the stories that we share and tell. *The Wizard of Oz* shows that imagination can become a reality, that there is no place like home, or that the only home is the one we make for ourselves (Rushdie, 1992).

Figure 23

Florence and Betty

These visible struggles are immediate clues to a community whose bonds lie in language and culture, and it lies in what we have left behind as pollution; it is, in the shame and the pride and in knowing the possibilities. Anzaldúa (1987) elaborates on how we exist between two worlds the English and the Spanish. “the *Pena.* Shame. The repeated attacks on our native tongue dimmish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives” (Anzaldúa). The struggles they induce can motivate us to succeed and return to some sense of home where we feel powerful, where we can speak freely with our language and with our stories. We are products of our environment, and so we succeed and fail with the tools we have been provided over a lifetime. It is essential that we tell our own stories, as they bring meaning to our lives and our communities. I had bits and pieces of the language and more than I thought revealed itself in this thesis, fractured and regional but it lived and grew. Maybe it was the fellowship, maybe it was the research, maybe it was the nurturing influences, I like to think it was the positive inspiration from my community.

The home that calls out to us, our memories of those unforgettable times define who we are wherever we go. Concluding with the voices and those who have overcome disparities to reclaim a basic sense of place, in a community familiar to them and their memories. That comforting maternal language can provide an inherited sense of reassurance. We recognize that the loss of our culture, language, and sense of querencia causes us to place a high value on the concept of home. The strangers I interviewed became friends closer than family. I could not have written this manuscript without the help of technology, but it is also certain that their voices became imperative and essential to document in the research. Perhaps as Arellano’s (2007) theory resonates in us. Perhaps we realize that querencia becomes housed in our bodies, our children and our parents telling us to *portate bien* (behave), the food, and

the love messages left in memories. The voices of many of the people I honor, and respect emerged in the manuscript's lines; they gave me a sense of family even if the passages were left many years prior. Maybe I am just a vehicle for transmitting this information to my children. This journey I began years ago has brought clarity to that responsibility of preservation of community and culture. Without memories or messages left behind after our death, our home, beliefs, and traditions are lost. Our stories act as hieroglyphics left on the wall hoping that we are not forgotten.

The place we find belonging is not a zip code or an area code**,** and maybe querencia is not necessarily a physical location. It does not have to be a permanent address; it is not the coordinates of my parents' adobe house. However, there are aspects within the home that remind me of moments that bring me safety and peace. Querencia has become rooted in my soul, allowing me to reflect on it and feel strong. It has been retracing and reclaiming the connection to the people and their powerful counter stories, combined with cultural aspects like language, food, and community that I rejected as a young adult. It is about taking pride in your roots and where you come from, building strong identities to create resiliency in people. My mom's voice and her love for mariachis or my dad's hands that map his humble life those memories and reflections bring me safety and balance. In time, it is what I have grown to miss, especially when we cannot be together. The storytelling and lived experiences become treasured moments. The interviews and conversations developed into valuable time in dialogue that you do not want to overlook, which turned out to be a big deal or worth the research.

The memory of who we are and where we come from can be found on the faded building facades, in crumbling adobe structures, and the acequia ditch banks where we

played as children. These memories are conveyed through the stories people tell. The *descansos* along the roadsides remind us of lives loved and lost and that life is precious and fragile. This sense of belonging seemingly still exists; it brought me back to my roots, my place's attachment, that safe feeling. Like Dorothy, I had the power to go home all along. I returned home cultural driven with subjugated knowledge consumed in my brain, a heart that brought me to my *querencia* so that I could understand the true love the community needs, and of course, the courage to function *sin vergüenza*,

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