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Decolonizing Imaginaries: Rethinking “the People” in the Young Lords’ Church Offensive

Darrel Enck-Wanzer

This essay is an attempt to come to terms with the Young Lords’ popular liberation rhetoric in the church offensive. Building from Michael Calvin McGee’s observation that “the people’ are more process than phenomenon,” I explore the ways in which the Young Lords’ craft “the people’s repertory of convictions” from diverse rhetorical resources in their verbal, visual, and embodied discourse surrounding the church offensive. In highlighting such a performative repertoire for “the people,” I extend research related to ideographs by articulating a link between ideographs and what Charles Taylor and others call the “social imaginary,” which is “not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society.” In making this connection between ideographs and social imaginaries, I read the Young Lords’ rhetoric of “the people” as a radical, decolonial challenge to the modern social imaginary. Specifically, I argue that the Young Lords’ rearticulation of “the people” as a pluriversal collective, demanding material and epistemological liberation, delinks and denaturalizes hegemonic constructions of a liberal/Western “people” that “totalize A reality” in the modern social imaginary.

Keywords: Young Lords Organization; Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans; Ideographs; Social Imaginaries; Coloniality

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God is not dead. / God is bread. / The bread is rising! / Bread means revolution. / Organize for a new world. / Make the church a people's church. / Wash off your brother's blood. / The streets belong to the people. / And the church belongs to the streets. / In the midst of occupied territory, / The liberated zone is here.

—New York Young Lords, "Celebration for a People's Church," 1969¹

In the late 1960s, a group of young Puerto Ricans in New York City, angered and fed up with what they perceived to be a non-supportive approach to community health, education, and political needs of the Puerto Rican community, took matters into their own hands. The group, calling themselves the Young Lords, was a multiethnic, though primarily Nuyorican, liberation organization that formed in East Harlem (a.k.a., El Barrio) in July 1969. The Young Lords' activism was enacted in conjunction with symbolic resources that articulated revolution as essential to "the people" and vice versa.² This revolutionary tradition was first set in motion over a hundred years earlier with *El Grito de Lares* (The Cry of Lares) in Puerto Rico. Influenced by Latin American revolutionaries, US American revolutionaries, the Black Panthers, and others, "the Young Lords centered their work on a combination of community-based empowerment and national liberation."³ The Young Lords advanced a "revolutionary nationalist" agenda, which sought to address the material and political needs of the community through a rhetoric featuring "community control" and "self-determination." In so doing, the Young Lords struggled to discern the most appropriate tactical maneuvers for negotiating systemic constraints and overcoming the stacked deck out of which their hand had been dealt.

After initiating the process of articulating a space for revolutionary activism in El Barrio through their garbage offensive—a protest organized around increased trash pickups, which realized a short-lived victory⁴—the Lords turned their attention to expanding activities in the community and concretizing what they envisioned in their 13 Point Program and Platform by terms such as "community control," "self-determination," and "liberation." Faced with a long history of outsiders controlling nearly all aspects of their daily lives, the Young Lords instituted practical programs to challenge the exercise of power by the state and outsider-run institutions—an exercise of power that had profound effects both on their material and mental conditions. In so doing, they featured and redefined "the people" as a key ideograph structuring their experiences, their social imaginary, and ultimately their decolonial radical democratic politics.

In what follows, I examine one key early instance of popular rhetoric by the Young Lords: the church offensive. Late in 1969, about three months following the start of their garbage offensive and their official formation as an organization in New York, the Young Lords began implementing their community control program after examining how local institutions were serving the people of El Barrio. In addition to testing community members for lead poisoning and tuberculosis with the assistance of medical student volunteers, they addressed hunger by serving breakfasts to poor children.⁵ They also looked at how churches, one of the most dominant institutions in the community, were serving (or failing to serve) the people in the community of which they were supposed to be a part. When a prominent church, the First Spanish

Methodist Church on 111th Street and Lexington Avenue, failed to respond to the community needs, the Lords overtook the church, occupied it, claimed it in the name of community control, renamed it “The People’s Church,” and declared a “liberated zone” “in the midst of occupied territory.”⁶

This essay is an attempt to come to terms with the Young Lords’ popular liberation rhetoric spawned during the church offensive. Building from Michael Calvin McGee’s observation that “‘the people’ are more *process* than *phenomenon*”⁷ and the extension of McGee’s research into subaltern contexts by scholars like Maurice Charland and Fernando Delgado,⁸ I explore the ways in which the Young Lords craft “*the people’s* repertory of convictions”⁹ from diverse rhetorical resources in their verbal, visual, and embodied discourse surrounding the church offensive.¹⁰ In highlighting such a performative repertoire for “the people,” I extend research related to ideographs by articulating a link between ideographs and what Charles Taylor and others call the “social imaginary,” which is “not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society.”¹¹ Like ideographs, which according to McGee, “exist in real discourse, functioning clearly and evidently as agents of political consciousness” in “the real lives of the people whose motives they articulate,”¹² the concept of social imaginaries addresses “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings” and “is carried in images, stories, and legends.”¹³ Given that many rhetoricians’ seem to have a lack of interest in ideology (suggested by scholars like Kevin Deluca, Joshua Gunn, and Shaun Treat),¹⁴ connecting ideographs with social imaginaries and their attendant concern with stranger relationality can rehabilitate and extend the usefulness of the ideograph, in addition to adding rhetorical specificity to scholarship on social imaginaries.

In making this connection between ideographs and social imaginaries, I read the Young Lords’ rhetoric of “the people” as a radical, decolonial challenge to the modern social imaginary.¹⁵ Coloniality, in this formulation, “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.”¹⁶ Relatedly, a decolonial challenge engages in a form of what Walter D. Mignolo calls “delinking,” which deploys a “geo- and body politics of knowledge that . . . denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity (body politics), located in a specific part of the planet (geo-politics).”¹⁷ In this essay, I argue that the Young Lords’ rearticulation of “the people” as a pluriversal collective, demanding material and epistemological liberation, delinks and denaturalizes hegemonic constructions of a liberal/Western “people” that “totalize A reality”¹⁸ in the modern social imaginary.

This essay develops over three sections. The first section assembles, in more detail, the theoretical perspective introduced above by connecting relevant scholarship on ideographs and social imaginaries in a manner that demonstrates synergy between the seemingly disparate concepts. Additionally, the first section links modern social imaginaries to coloniality and demonstrates how ideographic shifts can function to decolonize the imaginary. In the second section, I begin my critical engagement of the Young Lords’ popular rhetoric in the church offensive, paying particular attention to

how their rearticulation of “the people” enacts a decolonial alternative to their status quo. Finally, I finish the essay with an extended conclusion that explores some implications that decolonizing imaginaries might have for how we conceptualize ideographic research delinked from modernist, neo-liberal projects.

Ideographs, (Modern) Social Imaginaries, and Decoloniality

McGee was one of the first to most clearly posit a link between rhetoric and ideology, which manifests itself, he argues, in the uses of the “ideograph.”¹⁹ McGee suggests that for one to understand clearly the operation of ideology in practice, one must look at the different ideographs operative within a particular rhetorical culture. “To participate in a rhetorical culture,” Celeste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites add, “one thus must pay allegiance to its ideographs, employing them in ways that audiences can judge to be reasonable.”²⁰ Ideographs do the work of ideology. They are higher-order symbols, similar to God terms, which are single word/phrase encapsulations of a particular ideology. Ideographs, such as “equality,” do the work that cannot be done by rational arguments, in part, because the whole range of the meaning of an ideograph (like “equality” or “the people”) cannot be known or wholly expressed.²¹

Given their partial indeterminacy, Condit suggests, ideographs “serve as powerful, normative warrants for public behavior” that have “evolved from their historical, discursive interactions with one another and from their standing as ‘the moral of the story’ in public political narratives.”²² Additionally, ideographs are so ingrained within a culture that their (general) meaning cannot be legitimately questioned or opposed. Ideographs operate not necessarily in theoretical discourse, but are in real political dialogue, like mass media, popular culture, political debates, and even images.²³ A range of scholars have built upon the conceptual foundation offered by McGee to account for the ways in which ideographs do socio-political and cultural work, even when the words (“people,” “equality,” etc.) are not often or ever uttered. Under this revised and modernized framework, ideographs can be understood as the constellation of various discursive forms constituting the verbal, visual, and embodied vocabulary of a public culture. Such a public vocabulary is significant because it materializes normative commitments and equips publics with the discursive and rhetorical resources for stranger relationality.²⁴

This need for stranger relationality, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar suggests, is a particularly modern one: “modernity in its multiple forms seems to rely on a special form of social imaginary that is based on relations among strangers.”²⁵ Western modernity, he continues, has imagined “the public sphere as a meta-topical place for deliberation and discussion among strangers on issues of mutual concern.”²⁶ By invoking the modern social imaginary Gaonkar taps into a rich and developing literature, with roots in (post-) Marxist critics Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, which is engaged most actively by public culture critics like Charles Taylor.²⁷ The concept of social imaginary draws attention to the imbrication of social

practices and civic habits (like voting and political marches), political doctrines (democracy, liberalism, socialism, etc.), and circulating symbols (metaphors, narratives, myths, images, etc.) to highlight what Gaonkar summarizes as “ways of understanding the social,” which “become social entities themselves, mediating collective life.”²⁸ “To put it differently,” I have summarized elsewhere, “‘social imaginary’ is one way to talk about the complex hegemonic structuration of ‘the social’ in manners that inform and are informed by political discourse and habitus.”²⁹

When Taylor discusses social imaginaries, he attempts to name that, which in our social world, escapes simple definition. Social imaginaries are “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.”³⁰ Social imaginaries inform and are informed by factual and normative commitments about “how things usually go” and “how they ought to go.” Such norms, by extension, inform understanding of and the ability to identify “ideal cases” that make sense in the context of the background understanding that undergirds the social.³¹ The social imaginary, then, drives us to understand, appreciate, and demand a wide set of practices and beliefs that are constitutive of who we are in some meaningful way.

Unlike Castoriadis, who seems focused almost exclusively on the symbolic dimensions of the imaginary, Taylor is concerned with the articulations of symbols, ideologies, and embodied practices. According to Gaonkar, the social imaginary “occupies a fluid middle ground between embodied practices and explicit doctrines. The relation between the three is dynamic. The line of influence is not causative but circular.”³² More to the point, according to Taylor, there is a crucial, recursive relationship between social practices and the understanding produced by imaginaries:

If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that the practice largely carries the understanding. At any given time, we can speak of the “repertory” of collective actions at the disposal of a given sector of society. These are the common actions that they know how to undertake, all the way from the general election, involving the whole society, to knowing how to strike up a polite but uninvolved conversation with a casual group in the reception hall.³³

Seeming to echo McGee’s aforementioned “repertory of convictions” evident in rhetorical constructions of “the people,” the notion of social imaginaries offers a potential alternative justification for studying ideographs.

McGee’s ideographs project was, first and foremost, an attempt to articulate a “link between rhetoric and ideology” (the subtitle of his original essay). The critical thrust of the concept of ideographs, however, comes from their value in explaining the practical rhetorical functionality of social control. McGee extended his attentiveness to social control with arguments on materialist rhetoric,³⁴ something for which poststructuralists and materialists like Ronald Walter Greene and Dana Cloud have taken him to task.³⁵ In linking ideographs to social imaginaries, our attention is refocused to the constitutive potential of ideographs—to the ways in which they normalize social relations, construct the background of a society, and enunciate a set

of practices that, in turn, inform how ideographs are understood and do their socio-political work. Furthermore, bringing ideographs to the social imaginary table adds a well-theorized rhetorical concept to Taylor's, sometimes vague, attention to "symbols" and practices. Ideographs, then, can be understood as (a) the verbal, visual, and embodied symbolic repertoire that (b) is defined by, and in turn defines, the social imaginary, which (c) facilitates ideologically, historically, and doctrinally constrained modes of stranger relationality.

Since the exigency of stranger relationality is a product/productive of modern Western social imaginaries, the Young Lords' rhetorical intervention as a decolonial liberation movement is particularly significant. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues succinctly, "Modernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses."³⁶ While scholars like Maldonado-Torres, Mignolo, and Latin@ studies pioneer Juan Flores readily acknowledge the virtual disappearance of formal or political colonialism, all are attentive to what Aníbal Quijano calls "a colonization of the imagination of the dominated."³⁷ For Quijano and others attentive to coloniality, critical scrutiny is directed largely to the "colonization of the imaginary," which is productive of oppressive and repressive epistemologies and master narratives.

Critics of coloniality use language remarkably similar to Taylor and Gaonkar's descriptions of the social imaginary. "In the beginning colonialism was a product of a systematic repression," Quijano writes. He continues, "The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual."³⁸ In short, the repression engaged precisely those things that make up the social imaginary. In replacing indigenous knowledge with Western models of thought and rationality, the modern social imaginaries were born. And while Gaonkar recognizes "multiple modernities" and multiple imaginaries, reference to the racist, classist repression supporting those modernities is absent, which underscores the ways they are, in Mignolo's words, "blind to the colonial difference."³⁹

The fundamental linkage between modernity and coloniality—a linkage that is manifest in the social imaginaries that structure society and recursively inform political identity and practices of citizenship—underwrites the vocabulary of ideographs available to would-be agents. This is particularly true of dominant, Western-liberal articulations of "the people," which, as McGee argues, "produc[e] ontic rhetorics, arguments that promot[e] particular criteria for being or becoming American." McGee continues that both "people" and "public" further "anticipate a homogenous polity and take little or no notice of legitimate ontic or epistemic difference among groups of Americans" even in an era that has supposedly "legitimized heterogeneity."⁴⁰ In challenging Western-liberal articulations of "the people" through a rhetoric of liberation, however, the Young Lords' discourse and activism contain "the de-linking seed" that provides "alternatives TO modernity"⁴¹ and the modern social imaginary.

In the next section of the essay, I direct my attention to the Young Lords' church offensive, which offers an exemplary case study as a site at which a fragmented, critical, decolonial imaginary gets articulated through an inventive ideographic rhetoric. In approaching the Young Lords rhetoric, I heed the call of critical rhetoricians such as Kent Ono and John Sloop, who offer an attitude for approaching vernacular/Other rhetorics on their own ground—a call that Fernando Delgado, Bernadette Marie Calafell, Michelle Holling, and others all echo in their own work, similar to what Lisa Flores calls Latin@ “rhetorics of difference.”⁴² Engaging the Young Lords' church offensive, I try to enact and locate “an other thinking” in their rhetoric—a de-linking double-critique functioning within both Anglo-American and Latin@ traditions, and simultaneously, “from neither of them”; a critique “located at the border of coloniality” that overcomes the “monotopic epistemology of modernity” and “releases knowledges that have become subalternized” by the coloniality in/of modern social imaginaries.⁴³

“The People’s Church” and Delinking Imaginaries

Just over a month after the Young Lords formed on July 26, 1969, the group expanded their community service and activism to include a host of social programs dealing with healthcare, food, clothing drives, and education, to name a few. Bolstering their demands for “community control,” “self-determination,” “liberation,” and even “socialist redistribution,” their “serve the people” programs, generated visibility and intense support for the Young Lords in El Barrio.⁴⁴ One example of that support came in the form of the community’s response to police harassment of the Young Lords. Speaking about an attempt by the police to intimidate and provoke the Young Lords by surrounding the office one day, Pablo “Yoruba” Guzman (their Minister of Information) recounted the community’s response: “The people came out into the street and were behind us. They asked what are they here for and we told them what they were here for. Our explanation made a connection with what happened to the Black Panther party a week before and the people said ‘Why? You haven’t hurt anybody.’”⁴⁵

Within that context of increasing community support, the desire to fulfill the objectives of their program and platform, and the broadening of their focus to address coloniality in Puerto Rico and New York, the Young Lords sought out local institutions they perceived to be advancing dominant interests and failing to serve their community. In doing so, the Young Lords approached the First Spanish Methodist Church (hereafter, FSMC) about using their facilities to run a free breakfast program for poor youth. Initially, the Young Lords appealed to the FSMC as part of a broader effort to connect with partners in their various outreach programs. Since churches were eminently visible institutions and carried (through their history as vehicles of colonial domination)⁴⁶ credibility among residents of El Barrio, the Young Lords worked to ensure that different churches were actually serving the community in which they operated.

As part of their research and outreach, the Young Lords discovered that most of the churches in El Barrio had some kind of pragmatic community service program that served residents in ways other than spiritual sustenance. The FSMC, however, was a special and unfortunate case. Located in the middle of El Barrio, the FSMC only opened its doors on Sundays for official church services. Failing to involve itself in the community's efforts to rise above deleterious conditions, the FSMC became an institution of particular interest to the Young Lords.⁴⁷ According to Yoruba, "The First Spanish Church was chosen because it was right smack dead in the center of the Barrio. It's a beautiful location right in the middle of the community. It was also chosen because it is the one church in the community that has consistently closed itself up to the community."⁴⁸ The FSMC, then, became the symbol of colonial intervention in El Barrio and locus of conflict for the burgeoning Young Lords.

Beginning their discussions with the FSMC in October 1969, negotiations did not progress in the Young Lords' favor for at least three reasons. First, the church congregation was evangelical and conservative. Espousing leftist beliefs, the Young Lords were patently resistant to organized religion, even if many of its members had religious backgrounds. The ideological tension between what the Young Lords advocated politically (decolonial liberation and socialist redistribution) and what the church espoused politically and spiritually appeared to be an insurmountable hurdle. Second, the pastor of the FSMC, Humerto Carrazara, was an anti-Castro Cuban exile; whereas the Young Lords were pro-Castro and, more prominently, pro-Che Guevarra, the images and words of whom they regularly circulated in the community. Third, the vast majority of the leadership and membership of the FSMC did not reside in the community and, therefore, did not see a pressing need to expend church resources (space, funds, etc.) to support programs for El Barrio. As a spokesperson for the FSMC church explained in summary, "The First Spanish Church is a conservative church, as are most of our Evangelical Spanish churches. The tactics of the Young Lords and their ideology have been offensive to the people of the local congregation."⁴⁹

Failing in their initial negotiations with the FSMC, the Young Lords made the decision to appeal directly to the membership of the congregation. On December 7, 1969, after having sat in on services and distributed flyers outside for the previous six Sundays, at least 14 members of the Young Lords attended the Sunday worship again. At the end of the sermon, a period for free testimonial opened up and Felipe Luciano (then chairperson of the Young Lords) attempted to address the 80-member congregation. The trouble began when Luciano arose and shouted "There is something wrong here. This is not a community." Upon rising and, according to *New York Times* reporter Michael Kaufman, "interrupting the service," Luciano and other Lords were confronted by police officers that had been standing by in anticipation.⁵⁰ In the clash that followed, five Young Lords and three police officers were injured (Luciano the worst with a broken arm), and 14 Young Lords were arrested. After the incident, about 150 people in the community took part in a march that ended at the FSMC. Reported Kaufman, "At the church, the marchers stopped for a short rally at which they berated the police as 'cowards' and repeated their demand."⁵¹

In the weeks that followed, the Lords continued trying, progressively with greater vigor, to negotiate with the FSMC leadership. Each Sunday, the Lords returned to the church services and requested from the parishioners an agreement to use the space for a free breakfast program, a daycare center, a makeshift medical clinic (for tuberculosis and lead poisoning testing), and a “liberation school,” which was designed to address the colonial imaginary of the Puerto Rican people.⁵² On December 21, for example, about 150 Young Lords and supporters attended Sunday worship. A brief discussion with the Lay board (the governing body of the FSMC), a representative of the church youth, and some Young Lords followed the service, after which Luciano delivered another plea for use of the space. By that time, however, most of the church members had departed.⁵³

The following Sunday brought a substantial change in the scene, according to Kaufman of the *New York Times*:

As the sound of the final organ chord died down, Juan Gonzalez, a spokesman for the group, rose and attempted to address the congregation. For the last 12 weeks, many of the 80 parishioners and 150 supporters of the Lords have come to regard such speeches as part of the service This time, however, most of the parishioners filed out of the church . . . as Mr. Gonzalez sought again to persuade them to accept the breakfast program. As they left, crosspieces were quickly nailed onto the church’s two doors, which were also chained from the inside.⁵⁴

Choosing to “take” the church rather than continue futile negotiations, the Young Lords announced a “liberated zone” “in the midst of occupied territory.”⁵⁵ Promptly renaming the First Spanish Methodist Church as “the People’s Church,” the Young Lords began almost immediately to serve the community. According to another *New York Times* report, “Puerto Rican militants provided free meals, medical care, and history classes for neighborhood youngsters yesterday in an East Harlem church that they seized on Sunday.”⁵⁶

Outside the church, Luciano later recalled, “The community reacted very favorably. Leaflets, rallies, and marches through the streets proved effective in terms of getting the people out.”⁵⁷ One mimeographed flyer read:

The struggle around the First Spanish Methodist Church that the Young Lords have been waging for the past two months has resulted in the transformation of that church into the new People’s Church. The Young Lords Organization, members of the community of “El Barrio” and their supporters liberated the church for the use of it by the people The Young Lords program calls for the immediate opening of the church to the people. The children of our community will have a free breakfast program and a Liberation School. No longer will they go to school hungry. No longer will the oppressor keep from them their true culture and the history of repression in America.⁵⁸

In all, the Lords made the People’s Church a sanctuary warranted in the name of “the people”—a place for learning, livelihood, and liberation triumphing over an unresponsive and oppressive institution with strong ties to the modern Western project of coloniality.⁵⁹

Lasting eleven days, the People's Church was home to all of the programs the Young Lords sought to implement. Furthermore, the church became a political, social, and artistic refuge for "the people" of El Barrio, and the residence of some 300 people. They hosted a children's theatrical event (which was, essentially, a play about the church offensive), numerous speeches, poetry readings (including the first reading of Pedro Pietri's famous poem, "Puerto Rican Obituary"), musical events, and more. Then, at 6:30 a.m. on January 7, 1970, 105 Young Lords and supporters submitted to arrest, bringing a peaceful end to the church offensive.⁶⁰ While undeniably short-lived, the holding of the People's Church set the practical and discursive terrain for a prolonged rearticulation of "the people" that lasted until the Young Lords' demise in 1972.⁶¹

There are probably obvious ways, given the above narrative, that "the people" was a key ideograph at play in the Young Lords' rhetoric. For example, their choice to rename a seized church "the People's Church" is just the first of many hints that "the people" were central to this action and the Young Lords' rhetoric generally. This should not be surprising given the long tradition of privileging "the people" in US political discourse. According to Daniel T. Rodgers, "Post-Revolutionary America belonged to the people; the terms entered the constitutional lexicon at independence. Through the carefully balanced machinery of their constitutions the people ruled."⁶² More importantly, Rodgers continues, "No political term with as powerful a history as the People disappears; their moment past, such words remain lodged in the patterns of speech, open (with luck) for new tasks and occasions."⁶³ Kenneth Burke knew this well when he addressed the American Writer's Congress and argued, unsuccessfully, that "the people" ought to be privileged over "the worker."⁶⁴ McGee also understood the power of "the people" in liberal democratic politics—both as product and structure of political myths, and as a homogenizing force in US rhetorical culture.⁶⁵ Just as these and many other scholars have recognized the power of "the people," the Young Lords, versed in the discourse of US and Latin American democratic traditions, seized on "the people" as a key ideograph in their public discourse. The church offensive is just one example of such a rhetoric in action—an example that was sustained through future reiterations of the memory of the church offensive, a later retaking of the FSMC, and continued articulations of "the people" in their activism in the subsequent years.⁶⁶

Through verbal discourse, leafleting, artistic performances, and modeling civic and political practices, the Young Lords crafted "the people" in various ways and in a manner that shaped a sustained public image of "the people" in action. The means by which the Young Lords did this was complex and not temporally bound in the immediate context of the church offensive; that is, the Lords spoke, wrote, performed, and imaged "the people" into existence in the immediate context of the church offensive and through further advocacy afterward. Much like Maurice Charland's "people québécois," the Young Lords' "people" were a "representational effect" of the narratives and other discourse that "create the illusion of merely revealing a unified and unproblematic subjectivity."⁶⁷ In the church offensive, the Young Lords crafted "the people" as: (1) subverted by the FSMC and dominating institutions; (2) collective

rather than individualist; (3) oppressed in everyday life and in their normal/normalized position; (4) oppositional and engaged in liberation, especially through education; and (5) powerful, even omnipotent, at the center of the Lords' liberation politics. By constructing the ideograph of "the people" in this way, the Young Lords advanced a decolonial challenge to the modern social imaginary dominant at the time.

To begin, "the people," in the Lords' articulation, had been let down, even robbed, by various institutions. Whether in politics, education, the church, or some other institution, the needs of "the people" had not been met. Regarding organized religion generally and the FSMC in particular, Yoruba argued,

The other issue that has been brought up is that *organized religion has got to respond to the needs of the people*. Now the Board of Directors and members of that church say that we imposed ourselves on them by speaking up and asking for space during their service. We say that *they have imposed themselves* on the community by putting their church in the middle of the community and *then not opening their doors to the people*. That's the true imposition that they fail to see.⁶⁸

In this way, "the people" were constructed as having their will subverted when their attempts to voice their pluriversal lived experiences were silenced. Furthermore, the church had excluded "the people," shut them out in their own community, thus warranting liberatory action on the Lords' part. In a related rhetorical move, "the people" were duped and held down by the church. According to Yoruba, "They teach only the parts of the bible that will mollify the people, keep them down, you know, turn the other cheek, be cool, be humble, slow up, wait."⁶⁹ In drawing attention to the ways in which the FSMC—understood both as a colonizing power in its own right and as a synecdoche for broader coloniality—occupied both the space of "the people" and their minds, the Young Lords initiated a decolonial rhetoric aimed at delinking "the people" from the modern colonial social imaginary.

Such a rhetorical delinking from coloniality occurred visually as well as verbally. McGee once playfully asserted, "No one has ever seen an 'equality' strutting up the driveway."⁷⁰ While I will not challenge the specific example, we can *sight* ideographs.⁷¹ With regard to "the people," Lucaites makes a provocative argument about how the ideograph is figured in documentary photojournalism beginning in the 1930s. According to Lucaites, documentary photography ushered in a technology that disrupted the myth of a unified "people" and highlighted individuality in an apparently fragmented US American public. Starting in the 1930s, photography functioned to imbue "the American people" with a certain character that reduced the sense of collectivity into the individual, thus accenting the liberal dimension of liberal democracy.⁷²

Countering the hegemonic formulation of this specific liberal, individualist ideology, the Young Lords visualized "the people" in a manner that privileged collectivism. In a sense, rather than, as Lucaites says, "concretize 'the people' in its individual particularity,"⁷³ the Lords focused attention on the interconnectedness of a heterogeneous people. For example, in the Young Lords' film *El Pueblo Se Levanta* (which documented their church offensive and other early activism), viewers can find

numerous scenes where they cannot tell who any of the specific persons pictured are; rather viewers are shown “the people” as a collectivity taking over the church—not quite “the people” strutting up the driveway, but close. In the church offensive, then, “the people” asserted their liberation by taking “community control” of the FSMC. Such performances of collective peoplehood were captured on moving images, reported by mainstream news organizations, and filmed by activist still-photographers linked up to the Lords. Furthermore, such captured images of “the people” performed were circulated beyond the church offensive context. In its circulation, the image of “the people” in action links up with similar images of protest commonplace at the time. In this way, such imaging of “the people” was specific to the Young Lords decolonizing politics, and generalizable to (a) wider populist struggles and constructions of people-hood and (b) broader “Third World” decolonial politics.

In rearticulating “the people” through a collectivist and coalitional lens, the Young Lords normalized “the people” as a regular part of everyday life in El Barrio. Furthermore, the Lords constructed “the people” in opposition to a ruling class and hierarchies in the church that oppressed them in various ways. “The people,” in this manner, were “normal” despite, or in the process of, being oppressed. At one point, Yoruba demanded, “The hierarchy of the church has got to come down from up there in the sky and see what’s happening with the people.”⁷⁴ In this sense, “the people” were on the ground figuratively and literally. They were, on the one hand, real, historically situated people with practical problems that the church would not address; and on the other hand, they were the materialist counterparts to the church’s metaphysical idealism—the products of intersubjective social relations rooted in a history of coloniality.

Even something as simple as the Young Lords and supporters gathering in the FSMC for a musical performance became a key figuring of “the people” because of the representational force of this collectivity in the subdued space of the church. Importantly, the representative form of such figurations of “the people” keys us to a particular performance of peopleness and its heterogeneous content.⁷⁵ When we look at the images and read/hear the words that capture particular performances, “the people” lack any originality or uniqueness except in their collection en masse, which marks the representative form as remarkable and powerful. Their collective unification in a manner that asserted agency (however normal their acts may seem) marked a performative commitment to the *vita activa* and a resistance to docility and the colonized imaginary.⁷⁶ So while they are figured as normal, action and the exercise of a particular type of power are normalized as well. And this is what makes the Young Lords’ “people” particularly unique and resistive: rather than reducing collectivity onto the individual, the Young Lords reversed the equation by locating the people in a sense of collectivity or groupness that imagined a democratic and decolonial moment of liberation rooted in the necessity of cultural heterogeneity (the Lords were a multi-ethnic, multi-racial group, after all) and its attendant universalization of plurality (pluriversality, in Mignolo’s terms).⁷⁷

Within this decolonial moment challenging the modern social imaginary, “the people” were visually and verbally positioned oppositionally to institutions, in this case the church, but also to broader oppressive institutions. In addition to images, words, and activism showing “the people” taking over the institution that had excluded them, the Young Lords articulated and performed a “people” making alternative use of the church’s space for a concert, performances, meals, and a liberation school to free them from the restrictive confines of the church’s and society’s colonial imaginaries.⁷⁸ Such oppositional positioning and deterritorialization also placed “the people” within liberation by visually and performatively marking their movement from an excluded position into new spaces and realms, delineating a “liberated zone.”⁷⁹ They are witnessed in this context as enacting decolonial power and are constructed beyond this context as doing the same.

In a mimeographed issue of *Palante* that appeared after the church offensive, Yoruba featured the Young Lords’ rearticulation of “the people’s” struggle in the following way: “To fight this oppression, the YOUNG LORDS ORGANIZATION knows it is necessary to unite all The People against the Ruling Class. To do this, we must educate them to the lies we are faced with every day. Once people understand how they are being oppressed, then they can move against those who have their foot on our backs.”⁸⁰ This passage is important for two reasons. First, it established the opposition between “the people” and the “ruling class” (note the capitalization he uses), which delineates the broad scope of their revised “people” in opposition to a modern, universalized “people.” Second, it defined a crucial goal of the Young Lords as being the education of “the people” so that they could “move” (in literal and figurative ways) against their oppressors, empowered by new modes of thinking that functioned outside the modern colonial social imaginary.

In one photograph published in the *New York Times*, we are further clued into the Young Lords’ important goal of educating “the people.”⁸¹ The image’s composition was keyed to the familiar educational setting, but was also set aside as unique and revolutionary in this context because audience members (i.e., those viewing the image) knew it was occurring in a non-traditional setting with non-traditional goals (“liberation school”). Combined with the verbal messages about “the people” being denied a history and being repressed by the church, the act of teaching and learning, and the image of both, provided rhetorical and practical resources to rethink the social imaginary outside of coloniality. In this manner, “the people” were normal, oppressed, and preparing to move the social in significant ways.⁸²

In attempting such social movement in the context of continued oppression, “the people” were active and exercised a certain type of power. In a speech delivered at the FSMC, Luciano reasoned as follows:

Legally, the church is tax exempt. Any tax exempt institution is run by the people. The people should be allowed to use the space. They have no right to close the doors to any group of people, whether they be anti-poverty, revolutionary, or whatever the case may be, they have no right to close their doors.⁸³

This “tax exempt” justification for taking over the church was one that the Lords deployed often.⁸⁴ More importantly, and similar to the jaiberia sensibility I have discussed elsewhere in reference to the Young Lords’ garbage offensive, “the people” were authorized to act by the same system that oppressed them.⁸⁵ In a Burkean sense, the scene-agency relationship became complicated insofar as one of the institutional settings on which “the people” acted became the very agency through which action was made possible.⁸⁶ Put differently, the Young Lords again demonstrated their ability to think and act from the interstices or borders between modern/colonial worlds. They engaged in “an other thinking” that could “think from both traditions” at the same time⁸⁷ and precipitated a moment “in which the imaginary of the modern world system cracks.”⁸⁸ Such “other thinking” propelled a liberation rhetoric that was further doubled—one that affirmed a commitment to “the people” while rearticulating its meaning, history, and function.

Unsurprisingly then, “the people” were elevated in the Young Lords’ rhetoric to the highest possible position. Reacting to the tension between their own ideology and the ideology of the church, Luciano said, “It has to be understood that we may not advocate a worship in a God. Our god is our people. That is my god. That is my religion.”⁸⁹ Displacing what Mignolo calls the modern “theo- and ego-logical hegemony . . . , a (de-colonizing) geopolitics of knowledge and understanding” emerged in Luciano’s rhetoric.⁹⁰ More important than any other ideograph, “the people” took a central position as the nodal point of the Young Lords rhetoric—the point through which they challenged the dominant social imaginary and imagined anew.

As the initial point at which the Young Lords crafted a new vision of “the people,” the significance of the rhetoric of the church offensive extended beyond its spatio-temporal context. The Young Lords were a media savvy group and knew that the words they spoke and activities in which they engaged would become otherwise mediated images (film, television, and news photographs) that could circulate within a vernacular (counter)public sphere and to a broader public audience.⁹¹ Circulation, here, does not refer simply to the utterance of words and deployment of performances and images in their initial context. Rather, words, performances, and images of “the people” continued to circulate beyond the actual place and time of the People’s Church through flyers, newspapers (e.g., the *New York Times* and *Palante*), television (the church offensive received a lot of news coverage and garnered national attention with appearances by Jane Fonda and Sammy Davis Jr.), and film (*El Pueblo Se Levanta*).⁹² Such circulation continued past the immediate time of the event to cultivate a memory and imaginary of the “the people” that found material instantiation in the media just mentioned, in repeated oral performances of what happened at the People’s Church, and in the eventual second takeover of the FSMC after Julio Roldan (a Young Lord) turned up dead in his Riker’s Island prison cell from an apparent suicide. Thus, the liberation politics and rearticulation of “the people” advanced by the Lords was re-performed and may even continue to be so today.⁹³

Turning attention to the circulation of ideographs brings us back to McGee's demand that we examine these terms in ordinary, everyday, political discourse. Cara Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang would agree when they write, "Circulation enables us to avoid untenable distinctions between images and texts, focusing not on individual types of discourse, but on their movement in a scene of circulation . . . [that] recognizes the multiplicity of discourse and . . . does not privilege the linguistic and textual over the visual."⁹⁴ In bringing such a focus and attitude to bear on "the people" and ideographs generally, attention to circulation encourages critics to examine the ways in which multifarious discourses produce rhetorical scenes and agents (social imaginaries) through the constellation and rearticulation of various ideographs. Add to this a consideration of how embodied practices (the liberation school, poetry performances, theatrical plays, etc.) were also part of the broader discourse, which is both a product and productive of the social imaginary, and we are left with a more nuanced understanding of how ideographs circulate and *do* socio-political work. As public-specific understandings, social imaginaries change, fluctuate, and are reinforced with changes in speech, writing, images, performance, etc. As new discourse is created or old discourse is reinterpreted and redeployed, social imaginaries are altered.⁹⁵

Decolonizing Rhetoric: Some Concluding Thoughts

The Young Lords Organization's 1969 takeover of the First Spanish Methodist Church in El Barrio was the second public, political "offensive" in which they engaged. Like their first offensive (the July 1969 garbage offensive), the church offensive was only moderately "successful" when viewed from an instrumentalist framework.⁹⁶ Although it was effective for the days in which the Lords held control of the FSMC, the revolutionary Latin@s capitulated to pressure from the city and police, surrendering after a week of occupying the space. While meeting material needs and establishing "community control" of local institutions were important to the Lords and their supporters, the significance of the church offensive was largely symbolic and operated on the imaginaries of those involved. As Luciano summarized, "It's important that we understand the importance of this institution. This is a symbol. And it must be won over."⁹⁷ And won over it was. Even though the Young Lords eventually lost permanent control of the FSMC, the "People's Church" and "the people" remained, through continued circulation, a powerful symbol of the group's activism and the possibilities of liberation politics "in the midst of occupied territory." The Young Lords' takeover of the FSMC, then, had constitutive implications insofar as they managed to secure a popular rearticulation of the space as the "People's Church" (a label that continues to be used today) and they modeled practices of liberation and community control in which they engaged until becoming the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization in 1972.

Such an alternative set of public sensibilities—the different modes and ideals of stranger relationality—was anchored by a rearticulation of "the people" enacting a material rhetorical challenge to the dominant modern social imaginary. Taken

together, this essay underscores the importance of putting ideographic theory into conversation with notions of social imaginaries because ideographs are, recursively, an important (perhaps *the central*) material rhetorical means by which social imaginaries do their work, as well as a product of revisions to social imaginaries. Understood as the verbal, visual, and embodied symbolic repertoire that is defined by (and defines) the social imaginary, ideographs facilitate ideologically, historically, and doctrinally constrained modes of stranger relationality, thus constituting social imaginaries and sociopolitical subjectivity. A focus on “the people” helps to underscore these connections, especially when examined in the context of the Young Lords’ challenge to dominant constructions of a homogenous “people.” McGee, for example, posits, “We the People of the United States’ supposes a cultural and political homogeneity.”⁹⁸ Such homogeneity, however, hangs its rhetorical hat on the articulation of individuals to a sense of common cause, purpose, and ontology. “The people,” in this sense, are individuals positioned as contiguous under the banner “American,” and operating in the absence of an “epistemic difference.”⁹⁹ In this hegemonic formulation, “the people” presumes a certain universality of identity and normative commitments, which Mignolo would argue is concomitant with a modern colonial imaginary. “The crooked rhetoric that naturalizes ‘modernity’ as a universal global process and point of arrival hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of ‘coloniality.’”¹⁰⁰

In advancing an alternative conceptualization of “the people” as an ideograph in the church offensive, the Young Lords decolonized the social imaginary and articulated liberation as an alternative to emancipation within the system. “What is at question in this paradigm,” writes Quijano, is “the individual and individualist character of the ‘subject,’ which like every half-truth falsifies the problem by denying intersubjectivity and social totality as the production sites of all knowledge.”¹⁰¹ Rejecting the universal individual as the basis for “the people,” the Young Lords sought an “other” way of thinking and being that, Quijano would agree, liberated “the production of knowledge, reflection, and communication from the pitfalls of European rationality/modernity.”¹⁰² This other way of thinking worked by supplanting homogeneous constructions of “the people” and discursive privileging of individualism with a different “perspective of totality in knowledge [that] includes the acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of all reality.”¹⁰³

Drawing from embodied, historically and geographically particular experiences, the Young Lords engaged in an “other thinking” that delinked the ideograph “the people” from modern rationality and enunciated a pluriversal alternative to the modern social imaginary. The Young Lords crafted a “people” who had been (and continues to be) excluded from ethico-/theo-political culture; whose lived experience of coloniality has been silenced; whose strength comes from a diversity of experience; who resist racist constructions of docility; who operate on-the-ground rather than in a specialized or technocratic realm; and who is marked first by its collectivism, from which it garners strength and through which it articulates links of equivalence to other Third World sisters and brothers in struggle. Pluriversality, in this context, denotes the Young Lords’ attentiveness to “different

colonial histories entangled with imperial modernity.”¹⁰⁴ The pluriversity “of each local history and its narrative of decolonization,” Mignolo adds, “can connect through . . . common experience and use it as the basis for a new common logic of knowing” bound to “a universal project of delinking from modern rationality and building other possible worlds.”¹⁰⁵

In reading the Young Lords’ rhetoric of “the people” as a decolonizing rhetoric aimed at delinking from modern/colonial social imaginaries, I have argued that the Young Lords provide “an other thinking,” which Mignolo describes as “a way of thinking that is not inspired in its own limitations and is not intended to dominate and to humiliate; a way of thinking that is universally marginal, fragmentary, and unachieved; and, as such, a way of thinking that, because universally marginal and fragmentary, is not ethnocidal.”¹⁰⁶ In my read of their rhetoric, I have tried to demonstrate an other thinking of my own (to “think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them”)¹⁰⁷ by joining ideographs and social imaginaries, and demonstrating how the Young Lords enunciated a substantive challenge to modern coloniality.

Such “other thinking” is already a hallmark of contemporary scholarship in Latin@ rhetorical studies, but my particular engagement of decoloniality in the Young Lords’ rhetoric can push further the theoretical development of Latin@ vernacular discourse. In their essay on ChicanoBrujo performances, for example, Holling and Calafell argue, “A decolonial performance practice performs, embodies, and manifests the ills of colonialism.”¹⁰⁸ In their most recent work codifying a metatheory of Latin@ vernacular discourse, Holling and Calafell underscore the ways such discourse “implicates the decolonial; that is, the process of decolonization” through a “conscious awareness” and reflexivity about colonialism’s embodied marks.¹⁰⁹ Building from these recognitions, my extension of the scholarship on decoloniality in this essay offers a layer of specificity, suggesting that a defining characteristic of decoloniality is a critical delinking that offers pluriversal alternatives to modern coloniality. Such alternatives can coalesce in challenges to ideographs like “the people,” but must also include broader epistemic shifts privileging geopolitical location and the body politics of knowledge in contradistinction to the dominant social imaginary.¹¹⁰

Finally, it is important to recognize the general noteworthiness of the critical vocabulary offered by the literature on coloniality. While I acknowledge my place within privileged discourses of the academy and the discipline of rhetorical studies, like the Young Lords I have attempted a delinking of my own—one that draws from a scholarly literature operating within the same diverse geopolitical and epistemic traditions in which the Lords operated. Calafell reminds us, “If we are going to reach the texts produced by historically marginalized communities, we must meet these texts on their own terms.”¹¹¹ Echoing Calafell’s and other Latin@ rhetorical scholars’ demand to take up texts on their own terms, my turn to Quijano, Mignolo, and the literature on coloniality is an attempt to inject a kind of indigenous theorizing (what Mignolo ultimately calls “critical border thinking”) into an area of rhetorical studies (ideographs) and critical social theory (social imaginaries) that has been traditionally “blind to the colonial difference.”¹¹² In so doing, I hope to have shed light on the

understudied rhetoric of the Young Lords, as well as on the ways in which we might rethink rhetorical theory from an epistemic position cognizant of and opposed to modern coloniality.

Notes

- [1] Quoted in Robert L. Wilson, *The First Spanish Methodist Church and the Young Lords* (New York: United Methodist Church, 1970), 15.
- [2] There is no single convention for noting ideographs. While some scholars use angle brackets (e.g., <equality >) to denote the ideographic usage of particular terms, I find that such brackets can be cumbersome and risk interrupting the reader. Thus, I use quotation marks (e.g., “the people”) to draw attention to a term’s ideographic functionality.
- [3] Meg Starr, “‘Hit Them Harder’: Leadership, Solidarity, and the Puerto Rican Independence Movement,” in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 139. For a more detailed introduction to the group, see Darrel Enck-Wanzer, “Introduction: Toward Understanding the Young Lords,” in *The Young Lords: A Reader*, ed. Darrel Enck-Wanzer (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 1–7.
- [4] For the rhetoric of the garbage offensive, see Darrel Enck-Wanzer, “Trashing the System: Social Movement, Intersectional Rhetoric, and Collective Agency in the Young Lords Organization’s Garbage Offensive,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 174–201; Johanna Fernandez, “Between Social Service Reform and Revolutionary Politics: The Young Lords, Late Sixties Radicalism, and Community Organizing in New York City,” in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980*, ed. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodward (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 255–85; Agustín Laó, “Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory,” *CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 7 (1995): 34–49.
- [5] Fernandez, “Between Social Service,” 255–85; Jack Newfield, “Young Lords Do City’s Work in the Barrio,” *The Village Voice*, December 4, 1969.
- [6] Quoted in Wilson, *First Spanish*, 15.
- [7] Michael C. McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 242, emphasis in original.
- [8] Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Québécois,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133–50; Fernando Pedro Delgado, “Chicano Movement Rhetoric: An Ideographic Interpretation,” *Communication Quarterly* 43 (1995): 446–54.
- [9] McGee, “The People,” 249, emphasis in original.
- [10] On the intersections of the verbal, visual, and embodied in Latin@ communication scholarship and marginalized discourse, see Bernadette Marie Calafell, *Latina/o Communication Studies: Theorizing Performance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 1–9; Bernadette Marie Calafell, “Rhetorics of Possibility: Challenging Textual Bias Through the Theory of the Flesh,” in *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods & Methodologies*, ed. Eileen E. Schell and K. J. Rawson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 104–17; Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *The Drama Review* 46 (2002): 145–56; Enck-Wanzer, “Trashing the System,” 174–201.
- [11] Charles Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 106. See also Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction,” *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 1–19; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- [12] Michael Calvin McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 7.
- [13] Taylor, “Imaginaries,” 106.

- [14] Kevin DeLuca, "Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32 (1999): 334–48; Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treat, "Zombie Trouble: A Propaedeutic on Ideological Subjectification and the Unconscious," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91 (2005): 144–74. While DeLuca advances an argument against focusing on ideology, Gunn and Treat argue in support of a more (psychoanalytically) robust formulation of ideology and seek to explain why rhetorical scholars have turned away from ideological critique. I take no position, here, on the merits of either normative position.
- [15] I am very specific in my usage of terms here. I use "decolonial" and "decolonizing" instead of "postcolonial" because I am engaging a literature that operates on a different theoretical register and in contradistinction to postcolonial theory. The literature I engage has specific roots in Latin@ and Latin American politics, history, and theory. Furthermore, the scholars I cite throughout the essay reject postcolonial scholarship as undergirded by modernist rationality. In making the distinction, Walter Mignolo writes:

Coloniality and de-coloniality introduces a fracture with both, the Eurocentered project of post-modernity and a project of post-coloniality heavily dependent on post-structuralism as far as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida have been acknowledged as the grounding of the post-colonial canon: Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Hommi Bhabha. De-coloniality starts from other sources The de-colonial shift, in other words, is a project of de-linking while post-colonial criticism and theory is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy.

Honoring this distinction, I decline to cite the literature on postcolonial theory in rhetorical studies. Unfortunately, rhetorical critics, even in Latin@ communication studies, have neglected the coloniality literature. Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 452.

- [16] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 243.
- [17] Mignolo, "Delinking," 453.
- [18] Mignolo, "Delinking," 459, emphasis in original.
- [19] McGee, "Ideograph," 1–16.
- [20] Celeste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xiii.
- [21] McGee, "Ideograph," 15.
- [22] Celeste Michelle Condit, "Democracy and Civil Rights: The Universalizing Influence of Public Argumentation," *Communication Monographs* 54 (1987): 3.
- [23] On visual ideographs, see Dana L. Cloud, "'To Veil the Threat of Terror': Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations > in the Imagery of the US War on Terrorism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 285–306; Janis L. Edwards and Carol K. Winkler, "Representative Form and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima in Editorial Cartoons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 289–310; John Louis Lucaites, "Visualizing 'The People': Individualism and Collectivism in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 269–89; Michael M. Osborn, "The Invention of Rhetorical Criticism in My Work," in *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media*, ed. William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair and Gary A. Copeland (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 92–94; Catherine H. Palczewski, "The Male Madonna and the Feminine Uncle Sam: Visual Argument, Icons, and Ideographs in 1909 Anti-Woman Suffrage Postcards," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91 (2005): 365–94. While not exclusively on visual ideographs, DeLuca also makes a significant contribution to this scholarly literature.

- Kevin DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999). Finally, one could also read Hariman and Lucaites's work on iconic photographs as an extension and reworking of the ideograph in the context of visual culture. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Altogether, ideographic theory has moved beyond McGee's focus on terms and phrases to address more fully the functionality of ideographs in discourse broadly considered.
- [24] On stranger relationality, see Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown V. Board of Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).
- [25] Gaonkar, "New Imaginaries," 5.
- [26] Gaonkar, "New Imaginaries," 12.
- [27] Lefort and Castoriadis are invoked implicitly and explicitly in the contemporary literature on social imaginaries. For an explicit attempt at recovering Lefort and Castoriadis on the subject, see John B. Thompson, "Ideology and the Social Imaginary: An Appraisal of Castoriadis and Lefort," *Theory and Society* 11 (1982): 659–81. For the contemporary discussions, see Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 191–213; Taylor, "Imaginaries," 91–124; Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*. While invocation of an "imaginary" cannot escape psychoanalytic considerations (e.g., Castoriadis turned to Jacques Lacan), I will not make such a move in this essay.
- [28] Gaonkar, "New Imaginaries," 4.
- [29] Enck-Wanzer, "Trashing the System," 195.
- [30] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.
- [31] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 24.
- [32] Gaonkar, "New Imaginaries," 11.
- [33] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25.
- [34] Michael Calvin McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric, Materiality, & Politics*, ed. Barbara A. Biesecker and John Louis Lucaites (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).
- [35] Ronald Walter Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15 (1998): 21–41; Dana L. Cloud, "The Materiality of Discourse As Oxymoron: A Challenge to Critical Rhetoric," *Western Journal of communication* 58 (1994): 141–63.
- [36] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 244.
- [37] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 169. Flores refers to this as the "lite colonial" in Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). See also, Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being"; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Mignolo, "Delinking."
- [38] Quijano, "Coloniality," 169.
- [39] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 38.
- [40] Michael Calvin McGee, "Power to the (People)," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4 (87): 436 and 434.
- [41] Mignolo, "Delinking," 456, capitalization in original.
- [42] Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse," *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 19–46. The example Ono and Sloop work through is of a Japanese American newspaper published during World War II. Newspapers (like the *Young Lords' Palante*) are particularly well suited for such an analysis. See also Bernadette Marie Calafell and Fernando P. Delgado, "Reading Latina/o Images: Interrogating *Americanos*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (2004): 1–21; Calafell, *Latina/o Communication*

- Studies*; Fernando P. Delgado, "When the Silenced Speak: The Textualization and Complications of Latina/o Identity," *Western Journal of Communication* 62 (1998): 420–38; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Gender Politics, Democratic Demand and Anti-Essentialism in the New York Young Lords," in *Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces: Somos de Una Voz?*, ed. Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette Marie Calafell (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 59–80; Michelle A. Holling, "Retrospective on Latin@ Rhetorical-Performance Scholarship: From 'Chicano Communication' to 'Latina/o Communication?'" *The Communication Review* 11 (2008): 293–332; Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell, "Tracing the Emergence of Latin@ Vernaculars in Studies of Latin@ Communication," in *Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces: Somos de Una Voz?*, ed. Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 17–29.
- [43] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 67.
- [44] The Young Lords had numerous programs in place, starting in late-1969, which focused on issues of health, food, clothing, and addiction. These "Serve the People Programs" were modeled after similar programs the Black Panthers established, but they targeted and were unique to the needs of people in Latin@ communities, particularly East Harlem/El Barrio. See, for example, Darrel Enck-Wanzer, *The Young Lords: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 218–30; Johanna Fernandez, "The Young Lords and the Postwar City: Notes on the Geographical and Structural Reconfigurations of Contemporary Urban Life," in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 60–82; Fernandez, "Between Social Service," 255–85; Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 200–44.
- [45] The Black Panthers had been similarly harassed the previous week. Yoruba and Graciela M. Smith, "Interview with Yoruba, Minister of Information, Young Lords Organization, Regarding Confrontations at the First Spanish Methodist Church in El Barrio (Spanish Harlem); December 19, 1969," in *Young Lords Organization*, ed. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (New York: NCC Communication Center, December 19, 1970), 28.
- [46] See, for example, Walter D. Mignolo, "Huntington's Fears: 'Latinidad' in the Horizon of the Modern/Colonial World," in *Latin@s in the World-System: Decolonization Struggles in the 21st Century U.S. Empire*, eds. Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and José David Saldívar (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 57–74.
- [47] The FSMC also became an institution of interest because one friend of the Young Lords, founding Nuyorican poet Pedro Pietri, had grown up attending the church.
- [48] Yoruba and Graciela M. Smith, "Interview with Yoruba," 27.
- [49] Spokesman for the United Methodist Spanish Church in Spanish Harlem, "Unofficial Statement of First Methodist Spanish Church in El Barrio; Re: The Confrontation by the Young Lords," in *Young Lords Organization*, ed. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (New York: NCC Communication Center, December 19, 1970), 41.
- [50] Michael T. Kaufman, "8 Hurt, 14 Seized in A Church Clash," *New York Times*, December 8, 1969. While Kaufman does not identify the police as already waiting for the Lords, numerous interviews by the author confirm this was the case.
- [51] Kaufman, "8 Hurt, 14 Seized in A Church Clash," 53.
- [52] Liberation school was an educational program for youth that focused instruction on political, cultural, and social history of Puerto Ricans and other Third World peoples. There was also an emphasis on critical thinking and community political consciousness. It was a core part of their efforts to transcend their colonial imaginary.
- [53] Felipe Luciano and Graciela M. Smith, "Speech by Felipe Luciano, New York State Chairman, Young Lords Organization, at the First Spanish Methodist Church in El Barrio

- (11th St. & Lexington) on Sunday December 21, 1969,” in *Young Lords Organization*, ed. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (New York: NCC Communication Center, December 21, 1970), 1.
- [54] Michael T. Kaufman, “Puerto Rican Group Seizes Church In East Harlem In Demand For Space,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1970.
- [55] Quoted in Wilson, *First Spanish*, 15.
- [56] Arnold H. Lubasch, “Young Lords Give Food and Care at Seized Church,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1969.
- [57] Quoted in Miguel Padilla, “How N.Y. Young Lords Developed,” *The Militant*, January 30, 1970
- [58] Quoted in Wilson, *First Spanish*, 15.
- [59] Mignolo makes the connection between organized religion and coloniality in multiple places. See Mignolo, *Local Histories*; Mignolo, “Delinking,” 449–514.
- [60] Michael T. Kaufman, “105 Members of Young Lords Submit to Arrest, Ending 11-Day Occupation of Church,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1970.
- [61] Enck-Wanzer, “Introduction,” 1–7. In 1972, the Young Lords transformed into the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization in 1972, a decidedly internationalist organization guided largely by their interpretation of Maoism.
- [62] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), 80.
- [63] Rodgers, *Contested Truths*, 84.
- [64] Kenneth Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” in *American Writer’s Congress*, ed. Henry Hart (New York: International Pub., 1935), 87–94.
- [65] McGee, “The People,” 235–49; McGee, “Power to the (People),” 432–37.
- [66] We could probably turn to numerous other Young Lords examples and arrive at a similar point of analysis about “the people.” I root my discussion of ideographs generally and “the people” in particular in a case study of the church offensive because it is the most overt example and was a defining moment in the history of the Young Lords.
- [67] Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 139.
- [68] Yoruba and Smith, “Interview with Yoruba,” 28, emphasis added.
- [69] A similar rationale explains why the Young Lords saw a large part of their role in the community as being focused on education (e.g., “We’re educating the people to what it is to be born in Kenya, what it is to be Puerto Rican, and also to the contradictions in the society”). See Yoruba and Smith, “Interview with Yoruba,” 28.
- [70] McGee, “Ideograph,” 10.
- [71] See footnote 23 on visual ideographs.
- [72] Lucaites, “Visualizing,” 281–84.
- [73] Lucaites, “Visualizing,” 274.
- [74] Yoruba and Smith, “Interview with Yoruba,” 29.
- [75] On markers or “keys” of performance, see Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art As Performance* (Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers, 1978), 16–24.
- [76] See Enck-Wanzer, “Trashing the System,” 185.
- [77] Mignolo, “Delinking,” 499–500.
- [78] *El Pueblo Se Levanta* offers the best documentation of these activities.
- [79] Quoted in Wilson, *First Spanish*, 15.
- [80] Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán, “The United Front Against the People,” *Palante* 2, no. 1 (1970): 3, capitalization in original.
- [81] Photo by Michael Evans in Lubasch, “Young Lords Give Food.”
- [82] This idea of moving the social is consistent with Michael Calvin McGee, “‘Social Movement’: Phenomenon or Meaning?” *Central States Speech Journal* 31 (1980): 233–44.
- [83] Luciano and Smith, “Speech by Felipe Luciano,” 2.

- [84] Another good example of this deployment is in Jose Yglesias, "Right on with the Young Lords," *New York Times*, June 70, 1970.
- [85] On jaiberia in the garbage offensive, see Enck-Wanzer, "Trashing the System," 190. Also see Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 30–31.
- [86] See, for example, Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 3–20.
- [87] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 67. Mignolo's understanding of borders and border thinking is informed greatly by Gloria Anzaldúa's scholarship. See, especially, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
- [88] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 23.
- [89] Luciano and Smith, "Speech by Felipe Luciano," 3.
- [90] Mignolo, "Delinking," 460.
- [91] Whether ideographs circulate amongst a public, counterpublic, or both is not at issue here. Whatever one wants to call the audience of the Young Lords, the fact remains that ideographs are circulating and are addressed. For the distinction between public and counterpublic, see Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 65–124.
- [92] José Ramón Sánchez, *Boricua Power: A Political History of Puerto Ricans in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 171–209. Sánchez demonstrates some of the ways in which the Young Lords were media savvy and got their images to circulate.
- [93] In what has become a far-too-regular ritual, people continue to gather at the FSMC to commemorate the lives of former Young Lords as they pass away.
- [94] Cara A. Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang, "'Sighting' the Public: Iconoclasm and Public Sphere Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 396.
- [95] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 109–10.
- [96] On the garbage offensive and instrumentalist frameworks, see Enck-Wanzer, "Trashing the System," 186–91.
- [97] Luciano and Smith, "Speech by Felipe Luciano," 4.
- [98] McGee, "Power to the (People)," 434.
- [99] McGee, "Power to the (People)," 436.
- [100] Mignolo, "Delinking," 450.
- [101] Quijano, "Coloniality," 172.
- [102] Quijano, "Coloniality," 177.
- [103] Quijano, "Coloniality," 177.
- [104] Mignolo, "Delinking," 497.
- [105] Mignolo, "Delinking," 497–98.
- [106] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 68.
- [107] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 67.
- [108] Michelle A Holling and Bernadette Marie Calafell, "Identities on Stage and Staging Identities: ChicanoBrujo Performances As Emancipatory Practices," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27 (2007): 78.
- [109] Holling and Calafell, "Tracing," 22.
- [110] Although he does not talk about Latin@ vernacular discourse or decoloniality, Fernando Delgado's work on Chicano movement ideographic challenges could be another example of the kind of decolonial work in which the Young Lords and other Latin@ vernacular discourses engage. See, Delgado, "Chicano Movement Rhetoric," 446–54.
- [111] Calafell, *Latina/o Communication Studies*, 7. See also Calafell and Delgado, "Reading Latina/o Images"; Enck-Wanzer, "Trashing the System"; Holling, "Retrospective"; Ono and Sloop, "Vernacular Discourse."
- [112] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 38.