

ALIVE ON THE HIGH PLAINS: CONSTRUCTING THE SMALL RURAL COMMUNITY

by

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Major Subject: English

West Texas A&M University

Canyon, Texas

April 2017

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## ABSTRACT

On the High Plains, communities are constructed according to individual and social connections to regional landscapes, cultures, and histories. Identifying and examining those connections, in addition to helping us understand how communities work, also illuminates spaces of inadequacy where regional communities can address harmful social and environmental practices. Using the theoretical concept of thirdspace in conjunction with community asset maps created by community-focused non-profits, I evaluate two similar rural communities according to three different perspectives—space, language, and ecology. In doing so, I reveal that communities are constructed according to both real and imagined elements that are highly influenced by historical narrative, cultural production, language, and natural ecologies.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1901, a man by the name of E.B. Black purchased several hundred acres of land in Parmer County from the Capitol Syndicate Land Company. Once a part of the Escarbada Division of the famous XIT Ranch, this tract of land along with the surrounding acreage would eventually be sold and parceled out to a small group of hopeful farmers. In 1912, the community of Black—named for its “first” purchaser—was established. By 1940 the small community boasted a post office, a small grocery store, a school house, and a massive grain elevator—one of the first and tallest (at the time of its construction) in Texas. A mere forty years later, the community of Black was well on its way to oblivion. The majority of the community’s civic resources had been swallowed up by the neighboring municipality of Friona, leaving behind only the grain elevator, a newly minted feed-yard, and the little school house.

Today, the only remaining sign posts for Black are—fittingly—on the railroad. With the exception of railroad workers and people still living in the region, no one passing through the area would know that Black once existed as a thriving community. One might ask, then, if Black can any longer be defined as a community. Continuing this line of inquiry, we may begin to wonder when, if ever, a community becomes obsolete? For that matter, how does a community come into existence? Do communities die? To say they do would infer they live in the first place.

Motivated by the ostensible death of Black and the increasingly apparent peril threatening rural communities in the American Southwest, this thesis seeks to explore

and define the ways in which rural communities like Black are constructed; how they work; how we talk and think about them. To be sure there is no one simple explanation for the decline of Black. Certainly economic factors contributed to its deterioration, but we might also look to social, geographic, and ecological influences as potential answers.

Once defining characteristics of agrarian communities in the Great Plains Region, personal and communal connections to place are in decline as people turn their attention to new virtual frontiers. The internet has served to obliterate previously established borders and boundaries; once isolated communities now have a tangible connection to just about any other place in the world, and this kind of global access is reshaping the ways in which we as people, communities, nations, and cultures communicate and interact. The exponential growth of information technologies in recent decades has resulted in a substantial push toward a global consciousness. Far from measurable, the considerable effects of the digital revolution are recognized daily all over the world, but are perhaps more noticeable in the less populated, rural regions of America.

Though we may consider the changes accompanying the digital age to be unprecedented, this is not the first time technical advances have initiated considerable and far-reaching changes or redefined borders. In fact, it was the advance of burgeoning technologies in transportation that opened up the western United States for settlement in the late 19th century—the Great Plains regions in particular. Such was the case for Black, Texas, a community born of the Pecos Valley and Northern Texas Railroad. Without advances in agricultural and transportation technologies, life in the arid West—especially as we know it today—would not be possible. Historical precedents for technological revolutions have taught us that these types of changes, while exciting and productive,

also create uncertainty, tension, and conflict. The adverse ecological impact of industrial farming techniques and technologies developed in the late 1920's, for example, created the environmental conditions that resulted in the Dust Bowl; which, in turn, made way for federal involvement in matters of agricultural practice. Today, similar developments in irrigation and biotech farming technologies are steering the region dangerously close to environmental and economic disaster.

Critical regionalism has long since been interested in local and global relationships like those in the Texas Panhandle represented by global agribusiness and failing local ecologies. Scholars of the discipline have come to acknowledge that understanding regionalism is, in many ways, a study of space and place meanings. They have therefore endeavored to create working definitions and theories hoping that a better understanding of place and space might also shed light on the very real and potentially harmful tensions between local cultures and global homogeneity. While there is substantial scholarship dedicated to the examination of place and space in critical regionalism, relatively little attention has been paid to the idea of the community—a concept that often lurks beneath discussions of place.

In its first sense, the term community is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as, “a body of people or things viewed collectively.” A later entry defines community as, “a body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity. Hence: a place where a particular body of people lives.” According to these definitions, the idea of community becomes something of a paradox. The later conception of community suggests a close connection to place, even going so far as to infer that community is place; and yet the prior definition of the term requires a certain



amount of objectivity or distance from which one can “view” the collective body in question. Thus, it seems that the evaluation or exploration of any community would be conducted from one of two perspectives: from the inside-out or from the outside-in.

Human Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan also notes the particular roles of place and distance in defining community. In his essay “Community and Place: A Skeptical View,” Tuan develops a polarized vision in which conceptions of community and culture stand in direct opposition to those of society and civilization. In this dual model, community and culture are linked back to the archaic village; “the village itself,” he claims, “is an archetype of the community. By contrast...civilization offers, not intimate communion such as may occur in a small town or village, but rather social communication and public discourse” (47). So while community evokes pastoral images of local culture and intimate communication, civilization connotes urban images of global culture and public discourse. Tuan’s vision of the local and intimate community easily aligns with aspects of regionalism which “at its most basic, is a recognized association between culture and place” (Griswold 11).

The distinction made between community and society is both a social and historical one, with Tuan suggesting that this local and rather idealized image of community, one that evokes sentiments of fraternal intimacy, comfort, and peace, is ultimately false and at odds with the greater society. Rather, he posits that those feelings of fraternal intimacy and security arise as a product of distance and othering. “Communal passions,” observes Tuan, “are fueled by the presence of an external force...the external other gives people a glowing sense of solidarity,” especially when “perceived as alien and hostile.” As an example Tuan refers to the nation-state which “can become a warmly

cohesive community when threatened by war” (49). In this vision, the parameters of a community are socially constructed according to difference and are highly politicized.

This alternate vision of community has an affinity with subsequent definitions from both the OED and the *American Heritage Dictionary* where the term community becomes a matter of socioeconomic division and affiliation. The second sense listed by the OED defines community as “a commonwealth; a nation or state;” while the AHD cites community as “a group of people living in the same locality and under the same government; a group of people viewed as forming a distinct segment of society.” Both dictionaries briefly acknowledge that “shared place” is an essential component of community, but neither elaborates on the nature of that shared-ness. Rather, like Tuan, they lean toward defining communities as political or social divisions.

While I agree with Tuan’s observations—supported by the OED and AHD definitions—of community as locally situated and socially constructed, I find his unwillingness to reconcile the historically affective nature of community with social difference limiting and indeed “skeptical.” Missing from the OED, AHD, and Yi-Fu Tuan’s definitions of community is any emphasis on spatiality. Using the theoretical perspective of Edward Soja’s “Thirdspace,” I would like to suggest that selective social elements of Tuan’s dual perspective may be reconsidered along with additional perspectives of space and history making way for a more flexible and holistic definition of community.

Acknowledging that our “understanding of the world is, in its most general sense, a simultaneously historical and social project,” the concept of Thirdspace contends that “a third existential dimension”—space—be considered (Soja). “Without reducing the

significance of historical and social qualities or dimming the creative and critical imaginations that have developed around their practical and theoretical understanding, [Thirdspace] attempts to capture...a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings” (Soja 2-3). For example, Tuan’s description of community is historically divided according to premodern and modern conceptions, with the premodern vision of community deemed false and extinct—irreconcilable to modern notions of society.

Because thirdspace resists categorical and polarized interpretations in an effort to embrace multiple theoretical perspectives, contemporary notions of difference and fragmentation do not necessarily eliminate premodern notions of local intimacy. We need not assume that because communal intimacies are related to social difference, that they no longer hold a legitimate use or social function. Thus, thirdspace proves a useful approach for the understanding and consideration of community—a concept that absolutely necessitates a multi-faceted approach.

Moving forward, this project evaluates the real and imaginary construction of community according to historical, social, and spatial influences in what Soja refers to as “a triple-dialectic” (6). In an effort to aid in the discussion of the triple dialectic and also to establish a tangible link between theoretical and a real world communities, my proposed method of evaluation considers perspectives inspired by models of community assessment developed by the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and by Ogallala Commons.

When people talk about community planning and development, the discussion usually revolves around economic opportunities and capital wealth. Recognizing that the

challenges facing rural communities today run deeper than economics, community leaders in the Great Plains Regions are taking a step back from their focus on economic assets and attempting to generate what the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (CRE) terms a “strength-based approach” to community development. This type of approach recognizes that the “wealth” of a community is determined by far more than its monetary assets. Rather, the strength-based approach attempts to define communities more holistically by considering assets beyond the realm of economics. With this goal in mind, the CRE has developed a “wealth mapping” tool that identifies eight categories of wealth necessary for successful and healthy communities.

<b>Eight Forms of Wealth</b>	
<b>Intellectual:</b> The knowledge, creativity, and innovation needed to solve problems and develop new ways of doing things	<b>Social:</b> The trust, networks, and inclusive relationships needed to get things done.
<b>Cultural:</b> The traditions, customs, and beliefs, shared by the community including the way you see the world.	<b>Individual:</b> The skills and capacity, including health, that allows individuals to be productive.
<b>Natural:</b> The productive environmental assets in a region	<b>Built:</b> The fully functioning constructed infrastructure needed to support community well-being.
<b>Political:</b> The voice, power and influence over decisions needed to achieve your goals, including the distribution of resources.	<b>Financial:</b> Financial capital, including investments and personal savings that generates monetary returns used for further investments or consumption.

**FIGURE ONE. Community Wealth Map as developed by the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship**

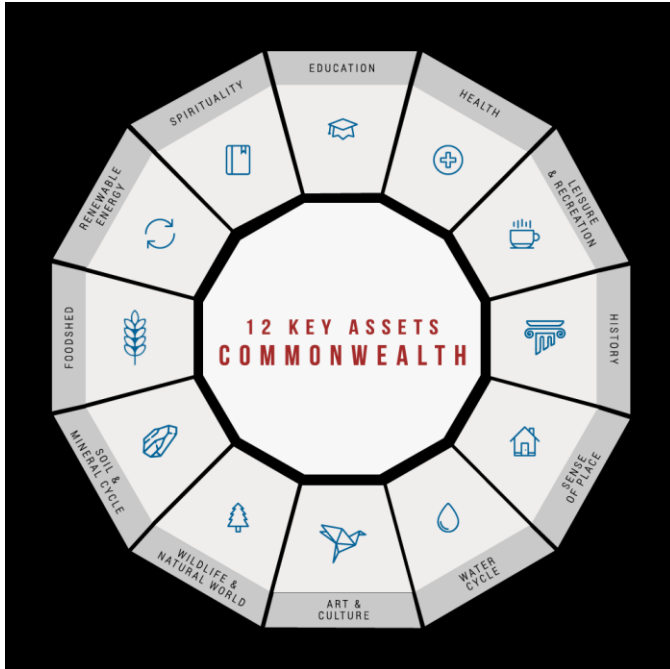
Figure one introduces and explains the eight categories of community wealth developed by the CRE. According to this model, *intellectual assets* reside in a community’s ability to harness other assets in order to solve

problems and develop new ways of doing things; *individual assets* refer to community assets like schools and hospitals that give individuals the tools they need to meet their most basic needs as well as develop new knowledge and skills; *social assets* are found in local social networks and relationships like study clubs and church groups; *cultural assets*

consider local histories and museums, traditions, and beliefs; *natural assets* refer to the productive environmental assets in a region; *built assets* consider the physical elements of a place, particularly the architectural infrastructure of a community; finally, *financial* and *political assets* consider monetary investments within a community and address issues of power and the distribution of resources.

While the categorical approach of this model considerably expands the notion of “wealth” as it pertains to community, its language still favors capitalistic notions of production, exchange, and accumulation. While it is to be understood that the financial and political components of any American community will be largely influenced by capital-driven motivations and rhetoric, I believe a failure to recognize and draw distinct boundaries between economic gains and the cultural and environmental wealth of a community is counter-productive to the general project.

This model fails to address one of the most significant problems facing rural communities today—the extraction of environmental resources for capital gain. Indeed, far from addressing the issue, the language of the model is complicit in its call for natural assets to be “productive” and in its definition of built assets as “fully-functioning constructions.” I do not mean to suggest that this model is not a good step in the right direction—the mere acknowledgement of community as more than an economic accomplishment is a fantastic place to begin, but it does fail to deliver a truly holistic view of community.



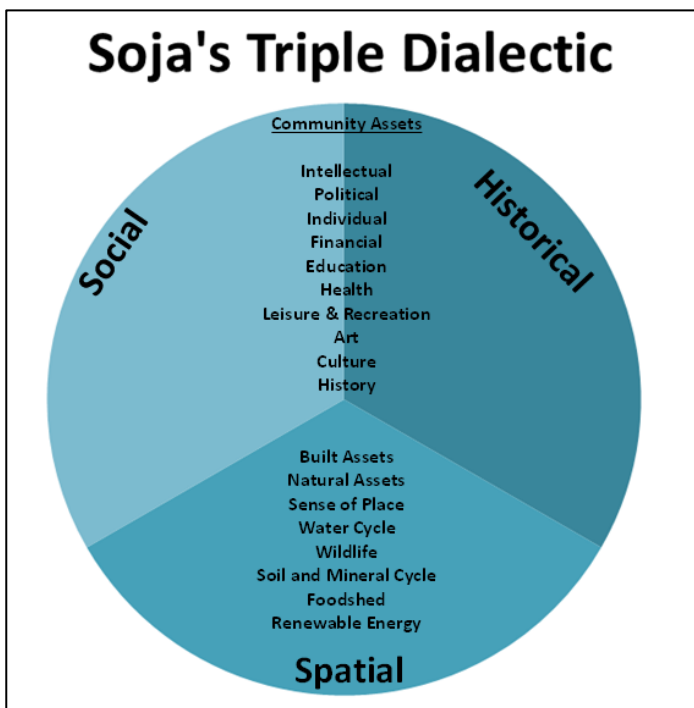
**FIGURE TWO. Commonwealth Map as developed by Ogallala Commons**

Using the same strength-based approach to community development, Ogallala Commons, a non-profit organization dedicated to sustainable agriculture and community investment, has developed its own model for community assessment—one that shifts the focus from economic development to sustainable living.

Looking at figure two, the categories defined in this model include education, health, leisure and recreation, history, spirituality, wildlife and the natural world, food shed, soil and mineral cycle, renewable energy, arts and culture, water cycle, and sense of place.

If the first model of community assessment leaned too heavily on economic assets, this model represents an opposite extreme by ignoring them entirely. It does, however, help fill out components lacking in Model One by emphasizing the vital importance of place and ecology to the community structure. Model Two advocates for sustainable living practices that “steward” natural resources as opposed to extracting productive elements from them. It also puts a greater emphasis on individual well-being. Assets that would be categorized as “Individual” in Model One—education, health, spirituality, leisure and recreation—are here emphasized as assets in their own right. Thus, Model Two promotes individual and ecological well-being as the basis for community development.

While each categorical model was developed and intended as a tool of measurement for community wealth, I propose that they are also useful in defining and discussing both real and theoretical constructions of community. Returning to Soja's triple dialectic, we can see how the community asset models provide productive points of access for the discussion of the historical, social, and spatial development of community. Pulling each model together and grouping similar points of interest, I have developed three areas of discussion that help illuminate each theoretical perspective.



**FIGURE THREE.** Community Assets and the Triple Dialectic.

Figure Three provides a simplified and combined vision of both models framed by a larger discussion of the triple dialectic. Here, community assets are viewed within the triple dialectic, with significant overlap between social and historical elements and equal weight lent to spatial components of community.

Beginning with an in depth look at the spatial components of community structure, the first chapter of this thesis examines the different ways in which we think about communities by focusing on the imaginary components of place and community construction. Next, Chapter Two discusses the importance and power of language in community construction through a study of how language policies and pedagogical

practices affect communal inclusion. Finally, moving to the physical space of community, Chapter Three evaluates community from a bioregional perspective. By following the use and development of water resources in the Panhandle Plains, this essay examines the vital influence of natural resources on community stability.

Overall, this thesis argues that on the High Plains, communities are constructed according to individual and social connections to regional landscapes, cultures, and histories. Sometimes those connections are imaginary, and at others they are literally rooted in the landscape. By identifying and examining those connections, this essay also illuminates spaces of inadequacy, where regional communities address harmful social and environmental practices.



## CHAPTER I

### COMMUNITY AND PLACE

By identifying “Sense of Place” as a key asset of a commonwealth, Ogallala Commons, a nonprofit organization dedicated to community development and sustainable living, touches upon one of the most fundamental and generally overlooked aspects of individual and social existence—place. To a large extent, the discussion of place is one of people and space. The convergence of a particular group, or community, of people with a particular type of space informs notions of place. As such, the parameters of a place can be defined according to the unique interplay between space and community constructions—each concept informs and is informed by the other.

Places and communities can occupy spaces as large as continents and perhaps even whole planets and solar systems; they can be as small as a neighborhood block, or a dwindling rural community like Black, Texas. Like Black, communities and places can be real, or, like Annie Proulx’s Woollybucket they can be fictional. Or, perhaps, as suggested by Benedict Anderson, a community can be simultaneously real and imagined. This first essay seeks to examine how individual relationships to space and place ultimately define or construct both real and imagined communities.

Looking first at the different spaces of community, I will establish two cooperative perspectives—the macro-community and micro-community—describing the

role of each in community construction. Then, through the evaluation of one literary community, Annie Proulx's *Woollybucket*, and one real community, Black, Texas, I will examine elements of community construction from the macro level to the micro level, paying particular attention to shared imaginary elements. Ultimately, individual relationships to space—both real and imagined—create a malleable base from which communities, and places, are built.

Remembering Yi-Fu Tuan's dual vision of community and society—where one is archaic, intimate, and local while the other is modern, disconnected, and global—we see that both terms are still, even according to Tuan, “spatially defined” (49). Rather than viewing society and community as opposing constructs, we may consider them as two variations of the same concept—particularly if we think of each term in reference to the nation. For example, most will agree that Mexico and the United States represent two distinct and separate social entities. Though they both exist on the same continental land mass, the people of each nation are viewed collectively as two different bodies occupying geographically specific spaces. In this sense, we can consider nations as individual communities, their divisions almost entirely determined according to politics. Similarly, each nation community contains numerous smaller states, cities, towns, and villages—all distinct social entities in their own right with each containing an even smaller subset of communities.

Respective nation-communities and the smaller communities contained therein are distinguished from one another according to the demarcation of space. How and where borders are drawn and spaces delineated from one another become significant topics of discussion when describing the construction of a community. Processes of

demarcation are complex and rarely definitive because they involve a variety of social, temporal, historical, and ecological influences. For this reason, it is perhaps helpful to envision community constructions from two different, yet simultaneous, positions: the big-picture, macro-community and the small picture, micro-community. These distinctions may also be thought of in terms of other familiar dichotomies such as global and local or, outside and inside.

The macro-community may be considered from multiple viewpoints. In this essay, it is evaluated from the perspective of the nation as described by Benedict Anderson. However, the macro-community is not limited to the nationalistic perspective. It may manifest as a geographic region or a cultural institution, each providing a valid lens through which large groups of people may be conceived and/or categorized. By contrast, the micro-community exists around and between the most intimate of spatial interactions. It encompasses innumerable connections between individuals and the land they live upon and interact with; the spaces they build, create and name; the relationships they forge between one another. The many variables of micro-communities work together to create what we call place, and often serves as the locus from which macro-communities emerge.

Benedict Anderson has famously suggested that a significant portion of community structures are imaginary. As evidence Anderson turns to the notion of nationality. Defining the nation as “an imagined political community” (6), Anderson’s theory approaches the idea of the nation as a large community. This community, he claims, “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their

communion. In fact,” he continues, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by the falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). In describing the imaginary elements of community, Anderson introduces a fundamental component of community construction that this essay seeks to address.

I have taken as examples two similar micro-communities, communities that may easily be defined as “primordial villages of face to face contact.” The first, Black, Texas, is a physically real and tangible community. It is a place that a person can visit, see, and touch. Its signpost declares its name; and, should you wish to visit, Google will happily point you in the right direction. The second, Woolybucket, is a literary representation by author Annie Proulx. Outside of her novel, *That Old Ace in the Hole*, Woolybucket will not be found on any map. Seemingly, one community is absolutely real and the other is absolutely imaginary.

However, Woolybucket, even as the product of a literary imagination, is still based upon real and observable communities; and Black, Texas, even as a concrete physical entity, encompasses many imaginary elements. In fact, the two communities have, by far, more in common than not. Before moving forward, I would like to specify that this essay is not an examination of existential reality. I do not seek to disorient and blur the lines of reality. Rather, I seek to establish the importance of imagined elements in community construction. A side by side comparison of an “imaginary” community and a “real” community, one the reflection of the other, will serve to illuminate those imagine spaces. Moving forward I will focus on two such imaginary elements. The first is

revealed when considered within the larger construction of the macro-community, or nation. The second is exposed through historical narratives produced at the micro-level. According to Anderson, the nation is a largely imaginary construction. Expanding on this claim, he explains that nations are imagined in three specific ways: as “limited” or having finite boundaries; as “sovereign” or possessing absolute political power; and as communal “because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Micro-communities like Woolybucket and Black operate within this larger imagined community, and, unsurprisingly, national influence is reflected in their communal identities and structures.

In *That Old Ace in the Hole*, evidence of the nation-community manifests in two particular ways: global enterprise and the sovereign state. In general, the people of Woolybucket are resistant to national politics and trends. While they undoubtedly consider themselves Americans, the community identifies more closely with its state—Texas—and even that identification is portrayed as strained at the political level. The most dominant national influences in the novel is capitalist economics, and Proulx portrays the citizens of the Texas panhandle at odds with that influence.

The novel is framed according to the perspective of Bob Dollar, a Colorado native who comes to Texas at the behest of his employer, Global Pork Rind, a hog farm corporation “headquarter[ed] in Tokyo and Chicago” (5). The opening chapters follow Bob’s drive south from Denver to the Texas Panhandle; his job is to scout sites for possible hog farms. Dollar, a stranger to the region, must rely on his own powers of

observation and the often misguided direction of his “regional operations manager” (5) Ribeye Cluke.

Cluke’s character is anything but “regional.” Rather, his affiliation with Global Pork Rind symbolizes the outside economic influences of the macro-community. Cluke, more than any other character in the novel, appeals to American ideology. He invokes “the American way” as justification for the corporation’s exploitative practices, claiming that “free enterprise, economic opportunity, and the value of entrepreneurship” all contribute to “the general good and the well-being of America” (302). His rhetoric is an attempt to obscure—beneath popular American ideology—the incredibly negative impact on regional cultures and ecologies operations like Global Pork Rind have in rural communities like Woolybucket, and his ruse works, initially convincing Bob Dollar.

Cluke instructs Bob to lie about his intentions as a scout, claiming that otherwise “folks down there...will prevaricate and try to take us to the cleaners, they will carry on with letters to various editors, every kind of meanness and so forth, as they have been brainwashed by the Sierra Club to think that hog facilities are bad” (6). Bob, of course, is oblivious to or chooses to ignore the red flags raised in Cluke’s statement. Unaware of the region’s proclivity toward conservative politics, Bob misses the humor in Cluke’s suggestion that Panhandle residents have been “brainwashed by the Sierra Club.” More importantly, he ignores the very clear implication that the Panhandle, as a community, has been fighting against corporations like Global Pork Rind. In this moment, Proulx establishes the primary conflict of the novel—corporate globalism vs. marginalized rural community; global vs. local; outside vs. inside; etc.

In Proulx's vision, the influence of the macro-community is harmful, and she builds her characters with a strong sense of political autonomy in order to counteract that negative influence. When Bob Dollar first arrives in Woolybucket, he notes that "the center of Woolybucket featured a small tan lawn like a grass tuft around a tan brick courthouse, a tan sidewalk leading up to a portico where a sign with an arrow directed visitors to the sheriff's office" (64). The center of the community, then, is the courthouse—an emblem of political power with substantial ties to national sovereignty. Next to the courthouse is the Sheriff's Office—the enforcer of state and national policies. The character of the Sheriff, however, is a peculiar presence throughout the novel.

A far cry from the rugged, romantic hero of the American West, Sheriff Hugh Dough's authority among the citizens of Woolybucket is more pageantry than authentic. The citizens of Woolybucket do not respect him so much as they accept his role as an official watch-dog. Dough's work as Sheriff is far from exciting or spectacular; the majority of his days are spent following up on false sightings of bobcats and convicts reported by elderly ladies. Portrayed by Proulx as neurotic and bedwetting, Dough's personal life—his incestuous and prolonged relationship with his married sister—completely undermines the tone of moral superiority he wields as a law enforcement agent, and his constituents are not fooled. Sheriff Dough isn't so much respected by the citizens of Woolybucket as accepted as a part of the landscape.

Notably, his story is Proulx's first departure from Bob Dollar's narrative. The first of several character abstracts included throughout the novel, his presence helps frame the narrative. From the perspective of the community, Hugh Dough represents the closest individual connection to the nation-community at the micro-level; and, in a sense, Bob

Dollar has to first go through Dough, before he is allowed admittance to the inner community.

The influence of the macro-community is felt a little bit differently when applied to a real world community like Black, Texas. In contrast to Woolybucket, Black's status as a community is challenged by a lack of affiliation with national institutions. The community's post-office has long since been closed down, and it never boasted a courthouse or sheriff's office. The community's only official existence is recorded in the United States census record, where in 1990 one hundred people were reported to live. During the 1980's, Black's social and political organizations were swallowed by the neighboring community of Friona, politically decentralizing what was once a tight-knit community.

Today, residents of Black are generally viewed from the outside as rural outliers to the Friona community. The impetus for decentralization was the closing of the community's post-office. Once citizens were forced to travel for their mail, the inconvenience of traveling for food, supplies, and education became less daunting. In the closure of a nationally funded and organized institution, we can see the very significant effect of the nation community on Black. Nevertheless, the "deep horizontal comradeship" of the imagined nation and state communities prevails. It is not unusual for remaining residents to fly United States, Texas, and Friona Chieftain (Friona ISD mascot) flags or to display similar identifiers such as stickers on vehicles.

Despite Anderson's claim that communities are to some degree imagined, he concedes that at some point "finite" boundaries are established. For the nation, the establishment of borders is largely a political process that, from a practical standpoint,



hinges on two specific social practices—cartography and legal agreement. The geopolitical borders drawn by nations provide the most obvious process of spatial demarcation, and contribute to the illusion of hard and fast borders.

While the nation-community maintains a seemingly clear relationship to space—land is surveyed, treaties signed, lines are drawn, maps are engineered—this macro conception of community with clearly defined national borders potentially dissolves in the face of individual connections to land. When scaled down to a more individualistic perspective, place and community constructions sometimes work to disrupt geopolitical borders. Sometimes, familial connections across national and state borders can work to blur borders. In contrast, the individual landowner reinforces political borders at the individual level. Shifting focus from the macro-community to the micro-community, we can see how individual relationships to space form the basis of community structures and ultimately conceptions of place.

At the heart of community construction in its smallest form is the existential need of the individual to make sense of space. In his introductory section titled “The Concept of Space,” architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz details historical perceptions and philosophies of space in the Western tradition. Moving into the modern era, the essay addresses psychological formations of space. Building upon J. Piaget’s observation that “perceptions of space involve a gradual construction and do not exist ready-made at the outset of mental development” (11), Norberg-Schulz develops five spatial conceptions that encompass anthropological experiences of space:

1. The *practical* space of physical movement
2. The *perceptual* space of immediate orientation and observation
3. The *cognitive* space of the physical world

4. The *existential* space that forms the individual's stable image of his/her environment
5. The *abstract* space of logic and reason

Though Norberg-Schulz considers space from a predominantly psychological perspective, each of his five constructs of space help pave the way toward an explanation of what David Harvey describes as “territorial place-based identities” (4). The first two constructs described here (practical and perceptive) imply physical relationships to space—they encompass our first-hand experiences and observations. Cognitive, existential and logical spaces, though, are characteristically abstract and imaginary. Norberg-Schultz claims that the five spatial constructs, “viewed together, create a stable system of relations between meaningful objects that inform our individual image of the environment” (11). The physical spaces we daily encounter and perceive, then, create the basis from which we are able to develop abstract and imaginary constructions like that of the nation community. Furthermore, interactions with these spaces serve as the basis for both community and place constructions. For examples we can look first to Annie Proulx's development of place and community through different narrative voices in *That Old Ace in the Hole*, and second to social and cultural productions in the community of Black, Texas.

Proulx constructs the community of Woolybucket through the inclusion of two differing viewpoints analogous to the macro/micro perspectives of community discussed thus far. From the outside, or macro, perspective is the character of Bob Dollar—a Colorado native sent to the Texas Panhandle at the behest of a hog farm corporation. By contrast, the inside, or micro, perspective emerges from the residents (past and present) of

Woolybucket county; both perspectives are rooted in the place and landscape of the Texas Panhandle.

At first glance, the novel gives the appearance of having little or no structure. The chapters come together like a rough, poorly sewn patchwork quilt—the kind sutured together purely for function, no aesthetics necessary. However, a close look at the relationship between the novel's narrative frame and subsequent character development as represented by Bob Dollar and several Woolybucket citizens reveals an intricate network of associations that inform the construction of the Woolybucket community, and ultimately the overall construction of the novel itself.

The novel begins from Dollar's outside perspective and gradually incorporates narratives from members of the Woolybucket community. Dollar's first observations of the Panhandle establish a sense of the region's landscape, providing a solid foundation from which the community of Woolybucket eventually emerges. Bob's first glimpse of the Panhandle reveals that: "It was all flat expanse and wide sky [...] Irrigated circles of winter wheat, dotted with stocker calves, grew on land as level as a runway. In other fields tractors lashed tails of dust" (1-2). The initial description goes on for several pages, laying out in extreme detail the complex, grid-like composition of the Panhandle region—a topic discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three. Notable in this context, though, is the way in which Proulx strives to connect her characters to the landscape.

As Bob Dollar's narrative progresses, Proulx sometimes diverts from the main story line to include historical flashbacks which focus on select members of the Woolybucket community. The first such departure in chapter six—which highlights the life and oddities of Sheriff Hugh Dough—has already been discussed. Subsequent

flashbacks occur in chapters eight, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. After chapter fourteen, the main narrative progresses with the characters introduced in flashback, or their descendants, joining the greater storyline. Though the arrangement of the chapters reveals no particular pattern, chapter fifteen, following the final flashback, features Bob's passive participation in a ladies weekly quilting circle. Titled "Able and Cain," the chapter highlights two notable elements of regional culture—the ladies club and the quilt.

The sentiment of the ladies club still lingers among small communities where the practice is continued in the guise of church groups and bible studies. In some instances, women's clubs have developed into more specific roles such as community service organizations, historical societies, or charity groups. Historically, women's clubs were all of these things. They were socially acceptable spaces in which women came together for both individual and communal enrichment. The community of Black had one such women's group called the Black Study Club.

The Black Study Club began meeting formerly in the late 1940's and continued to do so through the early 1990's. The Club, as they informally styled themselves, was dedicated to self-improvement and charity works. Monthly meetings were held alternately at the private homes of each member with each meeting featuring a program related to any number of topics—housekeeping, decorating, child care, and book reviews were popular subjects. Diane Tatum, an active member during the 60's and 70's, fondly recalls doing charitable work for Girlstown, USA, a regional home for abused and neglected girls:

Between official monthly meetings, we would get together and sew for those girls. It was such fun; we would sew, sew, sew, and laugh and just have the best time. Then, once a year, we'd take all those clothes to Girlstown and throw them a

party. We did many, many, other things too, but that was always my favorite.  
(Tatum)

Along with charitable works, the Black Study Club also focused on collecting and maintaining local histories; many of its members were also members of the Parmer County Historical Society which published *A History of Parmer County* in 1974.

Proulx's depiction of the quilting circle pulls from the history of groups like the Black Study Club, and many similarities can be drawn between the two. Like the Black Study Club, the "Round Robin Baptist Bible Quilt Circle" has met frequently for the "last 50 years" and sews for charity: "to raise money...for the church" (172). The members of the quilting circle also support their fellow member, Lavon Fronk, in her endeavor to compile a local history she titles *The Rural Compendium*. Perhaps most notable about Proulx's quilting circle, though, are the quilts themselves. Veritable works of art, the group's quilts go on to be featured in art galleries and magazines, esteemed for their "fabulous work of stitchery, embroidery, and applique" (173). The quilts feature famous biblical scenes with a western twist. Inspired by the story of Cain and Abel, the quilt Bob observes depicts "the fallen sheep man, Abel," as wearing "jeans and a plaid shirt with pearl buttons." In the scene, Abel's "dented cowboy hat lay[s] on the stained ground near several broken teeth [while] nearby a Border collie snarl[s] at Cain" (176). The picture is set against an arid western background with blue skies, dirt, and blooming cacti.

The regional flavor of the quilt is surpassed only by its method of production. Sections are stitched at home by individuals and later brought to the quilting circle where the whole scene is painstakingly compiled—a process masterfully reproduced by Proulx in her construction of the novel. Her technique, like a quilt, successfully stitches together

elements of landscape, history, and social connection that compile a very real and authentic feeling vision of the Woolybucket community.

The structure of Proulx's novel also evokes another element of cultural production linked to both Black and Woolybucket—the written local history. *A History of Parmer County* is a regional history book that records the establishment of the Black community among several other Parmer County communities.

Though the history is ostensibly a work of non-fiction, its claim to be a “factual record of people and events” (Forward) is rather easily disproved. Rather, the volume is a cooperative compilation of sections written by interested locals. Though the volume occasionally misses the mark in regards to hard facts, it remains a valuable source of cultural history, and in some cases the only remaining historical record. The history begins, like *That Old Ace in the Hole*, by establishing the importance of the region's landscape:

To obtain a true understanding of Parmer County, one must start with the land itself. [...] at the site of the original Court House the scene is one of awe inspiring grandeur. The imagination is confounded, even dwarfed, by viewing thousands of acres of profitable farm land that was once spoken of as the Great American Desert. (Preface)

Much like a literary author, this Parmer County historian acknowledges that the history of a community is unequivocally tied to physical landscapes. Also like Proulx, the historical volume patches together multiple written histories. The volume is not organized along a timeline; rather, it is arranged according to the history of each individual community within Parmer County and the first families to inhabit in the region after the sale of the XIT. It includes newspaper clippings, photographs, recipes, and family histories penned by the children and grandchildren of those first families. Perhaps most notable of A

*History of Parmer County* is the need of its author to establish an origin story, unremarkable as it may be. The community of Black was named after E.B. Black who, by all accounts, was an ordinary individual—a furniture maker who never even lived in Parmer County. However, his name and the story of how Black came to exist—simple as they are—still receive the epic treatment of origin stories so popular in historical narratives. The authors of the volume, in this way, exhibit pride in their place and by extension their community.

Proulx reveals a similar interpretation in the figure of Lavon Fronk, a retired magazine writer who is putting together a county history she describes as “*The Woollybucket Rural Compendium*, hundreds of memoirs and photographs from families of the region” (68). Like the authors of *A History of Parmer County*, Lavon organizes her material “by family, not by year” (68). We can imagine that Lavon’s *Rural Compendium* will read much like *A History of Parmer County*—a historical scrapbook filled with personal items and origin stories.

What Proulx and the authors of *A History of Parmer County* offer is an imaginary space in which community structure and identity can be manipulated and challenged at the micro-level. It is the micro-community that makes possible the imagined macro-community—and eventually conceptions of globalism. We can see how this works by looking at Proulx’s narrative structure. Bob Dollar’s perspective, along with the reader, is from the outside. We recognize Bob’s locus and status with Global Porkrind based on our personal conceptions and experiences with global corporations and nationalism. We follow Bob to Woollybucket and, through Proulx’s technique, learn about the landscape, community, and its people along the way. But once the narratives merge, and we finally

see a complete picture of Woolybucket, a shift in perspective occurs. In retrospect, it is Bob Dollar that has joined the greater narrative of Woolybucket, and not the other way around. Furthermore, it is our own relationships to our homes, our families, our neighbors—to the places we own and frequent—that make Proulx's construction of Woolybucket viable. We assume, based on individual connections, that the communities we never know or see are, nevertheless, defined by similar relationships.

By observing the histories and customs of the micro-community, we can see that the primary inspiration for cultural production and the establishment of historical narratives is defined by individual and local interactions, thus proving that individual connection to space do indeed form the building blocks from which communities are built and places conceived.



## CHAPTER II

### LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY

In 1980, thirteen-year-old Ruben Chico crossed the U.S.-Mexico Border for the fourth time in his young life. Previous attempts to cross on foot had been unsuccessful, each failure resulting in his capture and subsequent release back into Mexico. “Like a fish,” laughed Rueben as he shared his experiences. This time, though, it was different; this time Ruben’s older cousin had found them a ride. Passing from Juarez into El Paso, Ruben rode with his cousin and two other men in the trunk of a brown Oldmobile Cutlass. To ensure that they were not apprehended, the men remained in the trunk until the vehicle was well beyond El Paso—more than three hours. Ruben and his cousin were on their way to Clovis, New Mexico where another family member had already successfully found work and a place to live. When asked if he had left for the purpose of finding work, his response was surprising: “What people don’t understand is that in Mexico, people like me only have two options: either run drugs or die. So yes, I came for work, but I also came to live.” Ruben recalls his experiences as an illegal immigrant with a flare of humor, and his sons laugh with him. Terms like “meskin” (a regional slur for Mexican) and “wetback” are thrown around as good natured jibes, and practical jokes abound in their now cheerful household. His son Andrew told me later, more seriously, that Ruben had left his parents and a large extended family behind in Mexico, many of

whom were murdered for their refusal to cooperate with regional cartels. It's not something his dad likes to talk about.

Ruben found work at a regional meat-packing plant called Excel located between Friona and Bovina on US Hwy 60. He eventually left Clovis to live in Friona. There, in 1985, he met his wife Delia Trevino. Delia, a born US citizen, remembers language being a significant barrier for the couple. Encouraged by her parents to become proficient in English, Delia did not learn Spanish until after she met her husband. The couple was married in 1986, despite questions of legality. Theoretically, because Delia was a natural born citizen, Ruben's pathway to citizenship should have been relatively easy. However, fear of deportation hindered the couple from pursuing a legal marriage certificate and citizenship for Ruben. Over the course of their marriage, Ruben would be deported a total of four times. Each time, Delia would cross legally to find her husband in Mexico, and bring him home illegally.

Among Hispanics exists a deep mistrust of official offices and institutions. Delia and Ruben's marriage, while ordained by their faith and family, was not initially state official. Despite the fact that legal avenues were available to Ruben, he did not pursue them until much later in his life. The reasons why Ruben waited so long to attain legal citizenship, while certainly a matter of choice, may also be regarded as a matter of both education and access. On the one hand, Ruben may have simply been ignorant of his rights. With the shadow of his illegal status ever-looming, processes of naturalization would have exposed Ruben's vulnerable position as an illegal immigrant; and on the other hand, Ruben, knowing no English, was not in a position to successfully navigate or access official avenues to citizenship. Thus, he did what millions of other illegal

immigrants have done over the years. He practiced avoidance. Ruben's first ten years in Texas can be described as turbulent at best. He and Delia worked very hard for very little and lived in poverty. Their oldest two sons grew up knowing hunger, uncertainty, and hard labor. Ruben's path to citizenship was arduous, but would eventually be pushed to fruition by his American born sons.

As Ruben's story illustrates, language constitutes a fundamental aspect of community structure and participation. As the basis for individual development and social interaction, language is the primary vehicle through which human communities are built. This is perhaps best illustrated in the realm of public education. Returning to the community map, we can see that education is an important aspect of communal wealth. The idea is that, through education, individuals develop the intellectual tools necessary to become contributing members of the community. Therefore, access to education along with healthcare and reliable food sources are major indicators of wealth, or community strength. *Access* is the operative word here. A potential failure of the community wealth maps is the assumption that all persons living within a community have equal access to its resources. Delving deeper into the spaces of micro community, this essay observes the ways in which language affects community development and structure. Returning to the community of Friona as an example, this essay examines how language is used to facilitate or deny community participation.

Any discussion of community structures should address issues of access and inclusion. Though persons may share the physical spaces of community, proximity does not necessarily mean they will share equal access to community resources or equal rights to civic participation. Tuan, of course, stipulates that communities are constructed on the

basis of inclusion and exclusion. He claims that “for people to have a strong sense of cohesion, there must be something external to fight against” (51). He qualifies further that “the external ‘other’ . . . need not be an immediate threat. It does, however, have to be perceived as alien and hostile” (51). Though Tuan’s claims are limited, as discussed in chapter one, they speak to popular conceptions of social structures—particularly in regards to the nation community. If we view the nation, specifically the United States of America, as a community, inclusion and exclusion become explicitly political processes.

With each technological revolution, humanity becomes increasingly mobile, changing the dynamics of communal inclusion and exclusion. Really, the politics of communal inclusion and exclusion are an age-old tension that has evolved right alongside homo-sapiens. It seems that the formation of groups, tribes, communities, cliques, etc. is a fundamental characteristic of our species. Today, communal inclusion is negotiated at the national level according to a complex system of customs, rules and regulations which define both physical access to and inclusion in its citizenry.

For the United States, citizenship has always been complicated. With substantial colonial ties to England, France, and Spain, the United States was founded nearly 240 years ago as a conglomeration of immigrant groups. Since then, the nation has developed increasingly exclusive attitudes towards immigration. Up until 1920, immigration to the US was relatively unrestricted. Persons of Chinese and Japanese decent were the only groups to be actively excluded. After 1920, the United States adopted a quota system that set quantitative limits to immigration according to nationality (USCIS). This basic quota system would remain in operation, with periodic changes and reforms, until the 1990s when legislation became far more complex. To that point, the amount of immigrants

allowed into the country was in constant sway, but the system consistently maintained a preference for European immigrants. Notably, the Southern Hemisphere was exempt from the quota system, leaving the Southern border relatively fluid. In fact, immigration policy in relation to the US southern border didn't change until 1942 when the Bracero Program was implemented. Though the Bracero Program didn't promote permanent immigration, it did provide incentives for persons willing to seasonally cross the border as farm laborers. The program was initially intended to supplement US labor during WWII, but it remained in effect until 1951. Far from limiting immigration, the Bracero Program inevitably encouraged multiple waves of Hispanic migration.

Within the United States, methods of cultural inclusion and exclusion—both historically and at present—create social conflict and strife. Despite the advancement of civil rights for minority groups like African Americans and Hispanics (among many others) issues of rights, access, and inclusion continue to be highly politicized at both national and local levels, perhaps now more than ever. Though tolerance for various immigrant, refugee, and minority groups has waxed and waned since the birth of the nation, the United States has never welcomed immigrants with arms wide open. This claim is evident, not only in the history of national immigration policies, but also in national attitudes towards language and education. Citizenship tests, for example, have long served as a gateway for communal participation. And while the United States does not have an official, national language—a stance intended to support the diverse origins of the American population—proficiency in the English language is nevertheless a prerequisite for citizenship.

Benedict Anderson marks language as one of the most important factors in the construction of the nation-community. According to his perspective, the nation-community as we know it today is rooted in the evolution of language, print technologies, and the development of capitalism. He claims that the “convergence of capitalism and print technology...created the possibility of a new form of imagined community...the modern nation” (46).

For Anderson the historical effect of the printing press cannot be overstated. Among its many influences, the printing press allowed for the dissemination of information to an audience that was previously unconnected. Early newspapers were revolutionary in their capacity to connect audiences in a new way, and it is through the example of the newspaper that Anderson illustrates his point. Through the mass publication of print news, people who would otherwise have nothing in common began to conceive, or imagine themselves, as a part of a larger whole.

Also notable is the effect of the printing press on languages. Where language tends to be fluid, diverse, and ever-evolving, print served to slow that process down. It also served as a homogenizing influence as official languages developed a more influential role in governing bodies. Anderson’s observations illustrate the fundamental role of language and print technologies in the construction of the nation-community. We need look no further than the Constitution of the United States of America—a living document—and the countless associated documents which spell out both the governing and boundaries of that nation. In this sense, the physical borders of the United States are written as well as drawn—in English.

As previously noted, the United States of America does not currently have an official, national language: “nowhere in the U.S. Constitution is English privileged over other languages” (Baron 1). Despite this fact, American culture, legislatures, and schools often assume monolingual competence in English. In *The English-Only Question* Dennis Baron details the history of English-Only perspectives from the birth of the American Nation up to the English-Only movement of the 1980’s and early 1990’s. His project contends that the “highly charged attitudes towards official English and minority languages in America...have been present in the United States since before the country’s founding” (Baron xiii). Baron’s opinion falls in line with Anderson’s history of the nation, which holds print-capitalism as essential to the construction of the nation. As the United States paved the way towards a democratic republic and free market capitalism, the role of documentation took on a new importance.

Baron’s argument traces American emphasis on monolingualism back to Western roots in Judeo-Christian ideology where “language came from God and proceeds to polylingualism following the incident at Babel. This language myth,” Baron points out:

presupposes a natural tendency of languages to decay along with public morality. It assumes that, since a nation’s language is evidence of its moral well-being, we must all honor an obligation to return, if not to the monolingual paradise whose loss provides clear evidence of human guilt, then at least to a linguistic state that signals through good grammar a return to sound moral principles. (29)

The deep seated influence of this philosophy in American culture explains why U.S. policies regarding language in relation to education and citizenship has historically promoted monolingualism. As his argument progresses, Baron ties this founding ideology to the rising tides of nationalism through WWI and WWII in which schools became unofficial vehicles for Americanization—largely through the acquisition of English.

In establishing English as a static and morally rooted language tied to national interests, policies in the realms of education and naturalization have often been homogenizing—but not always so. The challenges of linguistic diversity differ widely over time and region with each state implementing policies that sway with the tide of public opinion.

Language policy in the Texas Panhandle has been generally sympathetic towards English-Only philosophies. Baron notes an instance in 1986 when “an official English statute, explicitly targeted at Mexican Americans, initially failed in Texas, though Republicans vowed to resurrect it” (19). Today, attitudes towards English Language Learners are generally more sympathetic than they were ten years ago; however, looking at ESL pedagogies and policy offers an insight into how language affects communal participation and development—particularly in regards to citizenship.

This essay approaches the concept of citizenship from multiple angles summarized here by Ariel Loring:

Citizenship is a term with various nuanced interpretations in a context that is often high stakes, political and official. To government officials citizenship is the acquisition of a certified document, to district judges administering the naturalization swearing-in ceremony it is a petition to be granted, to citizenship teachers it is often a process of test preparation. When discussed in the media it is something that can be sought, promised, and questioned. (188)

Acknowledging the various nuances of citizenship described here helps illuminate the political components of the term and, in turn, reveals the complexity involved in becoming a citizen. According to the OED, a citizen is “an inhabitant of a city or town; *esp.* one possessing civic rights and privileges.” Given these definitions, we assume that upon being granted citizenship, a citizen then possess civic rights and privileges. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Moving forward, we will see that



citizenship is neither a prerequisite for communal inclusion at the local level, nor a guarantee of access to civic rights and privileges.

Studies have shown that “problems with literacy usually correlate with problems related to poverty, unemployment, and unequal access to education” (Jolliffe, Hayde, Waller 55), which indicates that the socioeconomic and political characteristics of place directly affect literacy.

Friona is a small rural town in Parmer County Texas, which shares its western border with New Mexico. The closest border crossing into Mexico is El Paso, Texas, roughly 350 miles to the southwest. Latest census records indicate that 4,123 people live within the city’s limit, 69.9% of whom are Hispanic, and 19.7% of whom are living at or below the national poverty level. Those figures rise when looking at the city of Friona’s Independent School District. Of its 1,115 reported students, 88% are Hispanic, and 81% are categorized as economically disadvantaged (TEA).

Other ethnic minorities such as African Americans and persons of Asian descent only account for 1% of the student population, thus the rest of the student body (21%) is white (TEA). While it is, perhaps, unfair to assume that most Hispanics in the region are direct descendants of migrants or immigrants with Spanish as a first language, personal observations, as well as school records indicate that this is frequently the case. Of the 88% of Hispanic students in the FISD, 26% are reported as English Language Learners. To qualify as an English Language Learner (ELL), the student will have little to no grasp of the English language (TEA). In Friona, the first language of most ELL students are Spanish. Looking at these demographics, we can infer that the implementation of

language policy at the local level in the Texas Panhandle is more than just about reading and writing, but also include issues of bilingualism, literacy and citizenship.

A wide range of studies have been conducted regarding the effects of English-Only philosophies in the classroom. One such study presented by David Jolliffe, Donnelley Hyde, and Jeannie Waller in their essay “A Tale of Two Regions: Politics and Language in Belize and the Arkansas Delta,” compares two different pedagogical approaches to teaching multilingual students—code-meshing and code-switching. Though a community in Belize and a small town in the Arkansas Delta may seem too disparate, the authors establish several points of commonality. Both settings are shown to exhibit “surprising social, cultural, and political similarities—similarities that foster uneven distributions of power and polarizing attitudes about power and language” (58). In Belize, English language teachers are shown to use a pedagogical approach that enforces code-meshing, while high school teachers in the Arkansas Delta enforce code-switching.

The difference between code-meshing and code-switching as described by Young and Martinez is that, code-switching “arises from traditional English-only ideologies that require multilingual students to choose one code over the another while privileging codes associated with dominant races and further alienating the codes of traditionally oppressed peoples” (xxiv). Code-meshing, however, “promotes linguistic democracy, as students are not called to choose but are rather allowed to blend language and identities” (xxiv). The authors of the Belize-Arkansas Delta study found that students who learn language through code-meshing out-performed their code-switching counterparts in both reading and writing assessments. Furthermore, they noted stark differences in the dynamics

between students and teachers. Code-switching classrooms were notably more “tense” and the students of those classrooms consistently report that “they don’t think they would be able to succeed in college” (61). Unfortunately, the pedagogical approach of teachers in the Arkansas Delta is similar to those in the Texas Panhandle. Using the community of Friona again as a case study, we will clearly see how language policies have promoted division and exclusion for ESL students.

Not only is the majority of the FISD’s student body Hispanic, but they are also bilingual. However, the school’s curriculum and policies regarding language have been aggressively monolingual. As late as 2006, ELL classes took a predominantly immersive approach, meaning that students who come to school speaking only Spanish receive one or two hours of bilingual instruction each day, and are then thrown into regular classes with little or no interpretative assistance offered. Curriculum allowed for only one class in which bilingualism is encouraged, and that is in its foreign language requirement for upperclassmen. What happened, then, is that young, Spanish-speaking children who enroll at Friona ISD were immersed in an English-only environment. They were encouraged to speak only English, and were consistently discouraged from speaking Spanish. Some students began Kindergarten knowing only Spanish, and entered their first “foreign-language” class (Sophomore year) knowing only English.

The lasting effect of these processes is apparent in Hispanic households. Returning to Ruben’s story, we can remember that his wife knew little or no Spanish when he first met her. This was a purposeful choice made by her parents who struggled to learn English as a second language. In an effort to spare their children the embarrassment and stress of immersion, Spanish was not encouraged in the home. Such arrangements are

not unusual in Spanish speaking homes, but they create an undeniable rift between parents and their children. Ruben and Delia raised their children in this manner. While he was growing up, Andrew recalls Spanish as “the language of adults.” His parents would switch back and forth between Spanish and broken English, speaking Spanish when they didn’t want their children to understand. During this time, Ruben picked up enough English to communicate on a basic level with his children. When asked how he communicated with his father, Andrew recalls that his relationship with his father revolved entirely around work—which didn’t require a lot of talking. Notably, Andrew describes learning Spanish as a rite of passage. When he began addressing his father in Spanish as a teenager, Andrew recalls that his father’s demeanor towards him began to change. From that point forward, he addressed and treated his son as an equal.

Years of discipline and hard work eventually paid off for Ruben. Over time, Ruben developed a solid reputation in the region as a talented welder and hard worker. In 2005 he had saved up enough money to strike out on his own. His sons, now old enough to help him communicate with customers, and better navigate legal avenues, helped him finally begin the process of naturalization. In 2006 he and Delia obtained an official wedding certificate, and not long afterward, Ruben became a citizen of the United States. Today, he runs a very successful, and legitimate, welding and millwright operation.

Ruben’s story is a happy one despite the huge challenges he faced as an individual who did not meet the standards of inclusion set forth by a national government. The majority of his life has been spent in the margins, or under the radar, actively avoiding official figures of authority. In space, place, and community, I evaluated two different communities, the real community of Friona, and the imaginary community of

Woolybucket from Annie Proulx's *That Old Ace in the Hole*. Remembering Woolybucket as a small, imaginary community inspired by the Texas Panhandle and therefore of similar construction as Friona, we can see the absolutely pervasive influence of language in cultural participation. Despite the overwhelming presence of Hispanic persons in the Texas Panhandle, even in the late 90's when she was likely researching the project, Proulx manages to almost entirely ignore them. The majority of the novel focuses on English-speaking, Anglo citizens, most of whom are landowners—a minor demographic, but one that nevertheless makes up the majority of all real civic representation—Friona's current city council is made up of five members only one of which is Hispanic, or female.

As in real life, Proulx's inclusion of the Hispanic community is marginal and shrouded in a veil of illegality. Bob Dollar, the novel's protagonist, attends a cock-fight in a very small community called Wasp. Wasp, Proulx writes, is "a hamlet so small there was nothing there but the ancient Esso station in a state of collapse. In a muddy field half a mile beyond stood a galvanized metal building surrounded by broken machinery and parked pickup trucks" (234). At the cockfight Proulx describes "about fifty people [...] many of them very large men in overalls but also twenty or so short, slender Mexican and Vietnamese men in T-shirts and jeans. They had wide jaws and soft throats, round eyes like black spots and small mustaches barely larger than the wings of a moth" (234). This is the only moment in the entire novel in which a person of color is described. The language of the setting is indicative of life on the margins words like small, nothing, collapse, and broken paint a desolate scene. The muddy field evokes a sense of dirtiness and underdevelopment—a place that has been utterly left behind.

When Proulx came to the Texas Panhandle to conduct research and gain a feel for the region and its inhabitants, she spent a substantial amount of time with those inhabitants. In one instance, Proulx was escorted to a small community in the northern Panhandle called Cactus. Cactus has a large Hispanic population with deep roots in Hispanic culture. One of Proulx's escorts recalls the trip, claiming that the group had a lengthy discussion regarding the city's cultural ties to Mexico and the ethnic make-up of the region (Birkenfeld). Based on this testimony, we know that Proulx was undoubtedly aware of the large Hispanic population in the region, which leaves their lack of inclusion in the novel suspect. It's possible that Proulx was simply hindered by constraints of time and length. Perhaps she struggled, like many others, with the incorporation of diversity in a cultural narrative dominated by Anglo Americans.

Sadly, in this sense, Proulx's narrative reinforces dominant American ideologies rather than subverting them. This example along with previous examples of teaching pedagogies illustrates the ways that language constructs borders and dictates inclusion and exclusion; the ways language policies bleed into the very methods in which language is taught; the ways language serves as a reflection of community ideals even in fictional representations—all illustrate the pervasive effects of English-Only ideals. Furthermore, they reflect the ways in which these ideals reinforce inequality and restrict access to communal participation at all levels. However, they also reveal, like the essay before this one, areas in which small changes might institute wide-ranging effects

## CHAPTER III

## FRIONA AND WOOLYBUCKET: COMMUNITIES OF THE LLANO ESTACADO

According to Wallace Stegner, “the Western landscape is more than topography and landforms, dirt and rock. It is, most fundamentally, climate” (46), and while there are perhaps many versions of “the West,” many different climates and regions to observe, they all exhibit one common element—aridity. As a fundamental characteristic of the High Plains region of the West, aridity has historically acted as a staunch barrier to settlement in the region. In the Texas Panhandle, “the scarcity of water and the semi-arid nature of the area presented an even more serious obstacle to settlers than the presence of the Comanche” (Green 5). It was the discovery of groundwater that made living in the region a possibility for European settlers, and it was the subsequent development of irrigation technologies that made possible the growth of an agricultural industry that competes, today, on a global scale.

For communities on the High Plains, the relationship between land and economics is a matter of survival. Returning one last time to the community asset model, we can see that natural and financial assets represent two separate categories. For communities on the High Plains, however, these elements are anything but separate. Natural assets form the physical base from which the community is constructed, and in the case of the High Plains, from which economic growth and stability is inextricably linked. In an effort to better understand the relationship between the natural assets of the High Plains region

and its communities, this essay examines the High Plains community from a bioregional perspective. Looking first at the concept of bioregionalism, I follow the use and development of water resources from the initial settlement of the region to its status today as one of the world's leading producers of agricultural commodities. In doing so, the vital influence of the region's natural resources on its communities becomes apparent as does the failure of those communities to come to terms with its bioregional realities.

Bioregionalism is a particular way of delineating and talking about place. It defines regions, not according to arbitrary political boundaries, but rather according to naturally occurring landforms and ecosystems. Unlike the imaginary or linguistic elements of space discussed previously, "bioregions can be seen as more phenomenologically real than politically constructed places" (Lynch, Glotfelty, Armbruster 2). In this way, bioregions deal wholly in the "perceptual space of immediate orientation and observation" (Norberg-Schultz 11), they "look, smell, taste, sound, and feel different" (Lynch Glotfelty, Armbruster). Kirkpatrick Sale defines bioregionalism as simply "knowing the land" (44). For Sale, merely being conscious of native varieties trees and perineal plants; birds and other wildlife; annual climatic conditions and other natural elements of place is a valid form of bioregionalism.

While the goals of bioregionalism are forward thinking, bioregional criticism almost always begins in the past. In order to fully understand the context of current practices, especially with the intent of making changes, it is imperative that the history of and interaction with any bioregion be thoroughly explored. According to Elizabeth Brooks and Jacque Emel, "the explanation of a region's history and present conditions must strike a balance between narrative and analysis; the reconstruction of the past in a



narrative prefigures the depiction of current situations and conditions” (7). This requires a look at how regions have been settled in the past, as well as the cultural practices and economic productions that have occurred as a direct result of environmental influences. Using, again, the rural community of Friona in conjunction with Annie Proulx’s *That Old Ace in the Hole* this essay explores the history, culture, and economic development of the Llano Estacado as a bioregion of the U.S. Southern High Plains.

The Llano Estacado is a sub-region of the Southern High Plains that is specifically “bounded on the east and south by the Caprock Escarpment, a series of bluffs and cliffs cut back by several small surface streams, on the west by the Pecos River valley in New Mexico, and on the north by the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle” (Brooks and Emel 9-10). Climate on the Llano Estacado is characteristically semi-arid, with an average rainfall of less than twenty inches per year (Calvert). The region boasts the highest percentage of sunny days in the continental United States, though many of those sunny days are marred by wind, which Brooks and Emel describe as “largely chaotic and highly variable as to direction and speed” (11). The region’s soil composition is made up of predominantly of sandy loams, clay loams, with some areas of clayey loams, and caliche. These soils tend to be very rich in organic material and therefore provide optimal conditions for growing crops. Unfortunately, they are also very “susceptible to wind and water erosion, particularly after the removal of the native vegetative cover” (11). Perhaps, though, the most important feature of the Llano Estacado lies beneath these rich, organic soils.

The Llano Estacado, along with the larger Great Plains region, “overlay[s] an immense network of subterranean water deposits known as the Ogallala Aquifer”

(Brooks and Emel 9), the importance of which cannot be overstated. The Ogallala Aquifer takes its name from the geological formation from which it is primarily composed—The Ogallala Group or Formation. Described as “a porous body of complex sediments and sedimentary rock formations that conducts groundwater and yields significant quantities of water to wells and springs” (Wishart). The Ogallala Aquifer underlies approximately 174,000 square miles, and provides water to eight different US States. Currently, the aquifer sustains up to 200,000 irrigation wells across the Great Plains (Wishart).

The effects of living within this bioregion are highly visible in the history, culture, and economic development of its communities. This is perhaps best illustrated by Annie Proulx’s 2002 novel, *That Old Ace in the Hole*. Renowned for her portrayal of regional communities and landscapes, Proulx is famous for her intense attention to detail when describing a particular place. Extensively researching her novels, Proulx has spent copious amounts of time acquainting herself with regions of interest, hoping to discover the many and varied nuances which help define a certain place and the people who live there. She once commented in an interview for *Time* her particular approach to writing, “I believe that if you get the landscape right the characters will step out of it, and they’ll be in the right place. The story will come from the landscape” (Skow). Unsurprisingly, the novel’s structure firmly establishes the regional landscape before moving forward to examine the personal and social constructs that exist there.

Proulx introduces the Panhandle landscape through the perspective of Bob Dollar who was raised in Denver, Colorado. Dollar’s origin lends an important contrast to the novel’s perspective. His eyes would be accustomed the urban and mountainous landscape

of Denver—a perspective that contrasts sharply with the arid, rural flatscape of the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles. Dollar’s journey represents the greater thesis, as discussed in Chapter One, in that we see his perspective shift from the outside to the inside through community development and interaction. Once Dollar begins to observe and cultivate his knowledge of the region’s history, geography, culture, language, etc., the community of Woolybucket comes into fuller relief.

The Panhandle Plains is characterized by vast spaces of flat grassland. Persons viewing the Panhandle for the first time are struck by its seeming emptiness. What they perhaps do not notice, or comprehend, is how much actually goes on in the region: the vast, grid-like infrastructure represented in miles of highways, caliche roads, railroad tracks, pipelines and electrical wires. The only way to garner any real comprehension of these elements, and Proulx nails this in her introduction, is through movement.

Bob’s first experiences with the region occur from the highway where “gradually the ancient thrill of moving against the horizon into the great yellow distance heated him, for even fenced and cut with roads the overwhelming presence of grassland persisted [...] it was all flat expanse and wide sky” (1). As he “passed the Kar-Vu-Drive-In,” Bob Dollar observes:

a midtown plywood Jesus, dead cows by the side of the road, legs stiff as two-by-fours, waiting for the renderer's truck. There were nodding pumpjacks and pivot irrigation rigs (one still decked out in Christmas lights) to the left and right, condensation tanks and complex assemblies of pipes and gauges, though such was the size of the landscape and their random placement that they seemed metal trinkets strewn by a vast and careless hand. Orange-and-yellow signs marked the existence of underground pipelines, for beneath the fields and pastures lay an invisible world of pipes, cables, boreholes, pumps and extraction devices, forming, with the surface fences and roads, a monstrous three-dimensional grid. This grid extended into the sky through contrails and invisible satellite transmissions. At the edge of the fields he noticed brightly painted V-8 diesel engines (most converted to natural gas), pumping up water from the Ogallala

aquifer below [...] In the fallen windmills and collapsed outbuildings he saw the country's fractured past scattered about like the pencils on the desk of a draughtsman who had gone to lunch. (2)

Though lengthy, this excerpt beautifully illustrates the complex relationship between the region's natural assets, its economy, and its culture.

From a cultural perspective, the Kar-Vu-Drive-In characterizes the region as one of extensive movement, meals eaten in a vehicle on the go—a sentiment Bob Dollar will soon discover when he is forced to move between communities in order to procure food and shelter. Also notable is the symbolic juxtaposition of cheap religious imagery, dead cattle, and modern mechanical devices. This odd trinity puts two pillars of Western culture—Christianity and cattle—in conversation with mechanical equipment now associated with extractive economies, in this case water and oil. This symbolism contributes to Proulx's greatest criticism of the region, which is the over-use of its natural resources for the benefit of global economy.

The four dimensional grid comprising the physical and technological elements of oil production establishes the presence of industrial oil and therefore characterizes the Panhandle as a site of extraction for the benefit of global economy. The grid also recalls the physical geographic settlement of the Panhandle, where land was sectioned off in squares. Additionally, the image of the grid echoes the aesthetic quilt-like structure of the novel itself, as discussed in Chapter One. The oil-field machinery, like the novel's chapters, seems “strewn by a vast and careless hand,” but we learn that the supposedly “random” placement of the mechanics is in fact dictated by an “invisible” subterranean structure. Finally, the presence of modern “brightly painted V-8 diesel” powered water pumps in contrast to the “fallen windmills” of years passed introduces the cultural

friction existing between the mythological past and the globally influenced present. The image of the windmills also recalls the origin of this massive grid, for without the discovery of groundwater, the region could not have developed such complex systems. Furthermore, the abandoned windmill serves as a warning—a physical embodiment of what happens to dead technologies.

From the massive grid imposed upon the region over many years of settlement and economic development to cultural productions such as roadside décor, Proulx's depiction of the region's ecology is highly accurate and provides a valuable insight to the multiple layers of the regional economy and culture. While the novel gestures towards many of the actual complexities of life on the Llano Estacado, it leaves one significant issue lingering just beneath the surface—water.

It is a popular sentiment that cattle ranching—that romantic Western livelihood—shaped the growth and development of communities in the Texas Panhandle; and it certainly did to a large extent. When the State of Texas sold off a massive tract of land, including Parmer County, to finance the building of its state capital, the famous XIT ranch was born. The later liquidation and sale of the ranch in smaller pieces ultimately led to the settlement of the region by individuals looking to establish farms—Black, Texas got its start in this way. However, behind each venture was the need to manipulate water resources in order to ensure the survival of men, cattle, and their respective industries.

According to J. Evetts Haley, a famous regional historian, and author of *The XIT Ranch of Texas*, the story of the XIT, while featuring cattle, horses, and cowmen, ultimately became a “story of the pioneer farming settler...the story of the struggle of

men with the soil” (5). With the purchase and establishment of the XIT ranch by the Capitol Syndicate, the open range of the High Plains was transformed into a working ranch dependent on fences and windmills to manage and sustain livestock. While fencing often establishes boundaries of ownership—separating one ranch and its cattle from another—it also serves as an invaluable mechanism for the management of cattle—particularly in terms of feeding and watering.

In the case of the XIT, water played a substantial role in the early stages of the ranch’s development. The northern portion of the ranch contained permanent sources of water, and, as a result, was the first section of the ranch to be fenced and stocked with cattle. The southern half of the XIT, however, did not have a permanent water source and therefore the placement of artificial reservoirs, tanks, and windmills was necessary (Haley 85-86). The initial placement of the windmills proved to be a difficult task. Drilling was greatly complicated by adverse geological formations, and where drilling was successful, water did not flow in substantial quantities. As a result, cattle arrived to the Southern portion of the ranch before enough water was available. Haley goes on to describe a harrowing account in which cattle, dying from thirst, were watered by hand and bucket while cowboys frantically constructed a horse-driven water pump. He concludes that a great number of cattle eventually died of dehydration.

As the ranch continued to improve, more locations across its draws were developed for wells and dams. Many artificial reservoirs were formed by catching and holding water after heavy rains, and by 1900 there were 335 windmills and 100 dams upon the ranch, artificial facilities enough to supply one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand head of cattle with water” (Haley 96). Windmills, however, were only the

beginning of what would become a culture reliant upon irrigation at an industrial level. Modern irrigation came to the Panhandle Plains through the gradual settlement of the area.

Beginning in the late 1800s, small farms, subsisting mainly on water produced by windmills, began to pop up across multiple counties in the Panhandle. The windmills were utilized mainly for the sustenance of small gardens, and as late as 1890, “few people outside of the Great Plains believed that irrigation in the semiarid region was either desirable or possible” (Green 15). However, after 1890, a variety of factors converged to bring settlers to the region in greater numbers. First, the advancement of railroads upon the plains broke open what was hitherto an isolated area. Second, a series of wet years from 1895 to 1906 in which the region experienced above average rainfalls obscured its potential for drought. Third, cheap land prices and liberal credit terms alongside the recovering price of agricultural commodities after the depression of the 1890s heightened the appeal of buying land (Green 64-5). Consequently, between 1900 and 1910 land speculation gained substantial momentum. Land speculators played a particularly cunning and important role in bringing the farming settler to the Panhandle. Capitalizing on the more-than-usual amount of rainfall, they also craftily downplayed the potential difficulties associated with locating and drilling water wells. In some instances land speculators would outright lie about the depth of a water well (Connell).

It was in this way that the first farms were sold to settlers, woefully unaware of the region’s propensity for drought and the difficulties present in drilling for well water. In 1910 a major drought hit the area, bankrupting many farms and causing land sales to plummet. Eventually, it would be the land speculator who brought irrigation to the

Panhandle. Unable to sell dry land to a now more informed public, speculators began searching for ways to make farming more feasible, but the real push for irrigation wouldn't take off until the late 1930s.

After the Dust Bowl, farmers turned to irrigation as a viable solution to drought and began investing in pump technologies. From that point forward, irrigation practices expanded until they became a cultural norm. Through the 1940s most regional farmers believe that their supply of groundwater was inexhaustible. It wasn't until the late 50s and early 60s that a clear conception of the Ogallala Aquifer, and its status as a limited resource, became common knowledge. But even with that new information, legislation that would limit water usage was met with fierce resistance. Indeed, despite knowledge of the Aquifer, and the alarming statistics revealing the amount and speed with which the water table was dropping, irrigation practices continued. This excerpt from *A History of Parmer County*, published in 1974, well after awareness of the dropping water table had been raised, reveals the prevailing attitude of willful ignorance: "In this Eden millions of acres of topsoil ranging from three to eight feet in depth await the plow. Although rainfall, which averages only 16 to 20 inches a year, creates a hazard for the 'dryland' farmer, his brother who practices irrigation is almost assured of success" (Preface).

Today, the economic stability of communities on the Llano Estacado continues to hinge on agricultural production—the whole of which depends on a substantial and consistent supply of water. This is true for the community of Friona in Parmer County where, in addition to several feed yards and multiple farming and ranching operations, the city's main source of revenue derives from a corporate entity called Cargill. In addition to operating a massive meat-packing plant between Friona and Bovina, Cargill



also runs a feed mill and a complex network of transportation which hauls beef and feed. Cargill operates worldwide, with “150,000 professionals in 70 countries” (Cargill).

For an arid region such as the Panhandle Plains, the attainment, distribution, and use of water has always been a relevant issue, perhaps today more than ever. Simply put, the High Plains is running out of water; and while water conservation has always been a topic of discussion since the 1960s, very little has actually been done to address the issue. One study projects that if water consumption continues at its present rate, we can expect to see a decrease in agricultural production in as early as 2040—a mere twenty-three years from the date of this essay. The social, cultural, and economic effects of the situation—regardless of its outcome—will be substantial. Even at this late hour, curbing water usage by even 20% in the region, would help extend the life of the Ogallala Aquifer for an additional 60 years—enough time, perhaps, to develop a plan for long-term sustainability. In fact, many local farmers are betting on that very sentiment. *In Land of the Underground Rain*, Donald Green points out that regional farmers have faith that new technologies will develop in time to address the problem (230-31). In *That Old Ace in the Hole*, Proulx’s titular character of Ace Crouch, approaches the issue with a similarly narrow and unrealistic perspective.

A windmill and something of an antique himself, when Ace Crouch intersects with Bob Dollar the two represent a point of contact between regional and global forces. Returning to Bob Dollar's initial description of the Panhandle Plains, Ace's character is thematically linked to Proulx's contrasting depictions of modern and antique water pumps. Though Ace Crouch may be allegorically read as Proulx's manifestation of the “fallen windmill...the country's fractured and scattered past” (2), Ace's dominant role in

the novel's resolution leaves room for another interpretation—that the decaying past may yet gain control, and positively influence the region's present. Arguably, Proulx foreshadows this resolution in Bob Dollar's description of the metaphorical “droughtsman who had gone to lunch” (2). In this sense, Ace comes back and mends the region's fractured past with an idealistic proposal to return the Panhandle Plains back to their previous glory as unfarmed grasslands supporting large buffalo herds. Like popular attitudes regarding the unsustainable use of water, Proulx relies on Ace as a *deus ex machina*.

Though Proulx's subject matter ultimately makes no claim to a realistic interpretation of the region, her vision nevertheless reflects dominant attitudes and ideologies. The arid landscape and availability of water has largely shaped the growth and development of communities in on the Llano Estacado. Today, these same communities face economic and ecological disaster due to the rampant and unregulated use of water for global agribusiness. Let us hope that, unlike Proulx, the region is not left waiting for a sudden and unprecedented resolution.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I return to my initial inquiry regarding the community of Black, Texas. Despite the fact that Black is no longer recognized by either state or federal governments as an incorporated municipality, I argue that it remains a viable community structure. As a community it is certainly lacking in political assets, but those needs are met by the community of Friona, just six miles east—a distance hardly worth quantifying by today’s standards. One could argue that Black is no longer distinguishable from Friona as a separate community, but I suggest its unique history provides grounds for a continued distinction. Moreover, local community members continue to reinforce the distinction in both language and imagination. The community is still used as a point of reference when discussing directions and people still living in Black will, given the opportunity, make the distinction between living in Friona and living at Black. If anything, Black remains a viable community simply on the basis that it exists in my imagination and the imaginations of those who still have ties to its particular place.

Though this thesis has only addressed communities on the High Plains, I believe the framework of analysis is applicable to all communities and is especially useful in determining where communal strengths and weaknesses exist. This thesis project has approached the idea of community constructions from three different perspectives. The first, in chapter one, examines how individual connections to space, place, and history

ultimately form the basis for both real and imaginary community structures. The second, in Chapter Two, looks at the influence of language in regards to community participation and access, ultimately finding that attitudes regarding language are culturally pervasive and ultimately define if and how individuals are included or excluded in communal participation. Finally, Chapter Three approaches community from an ecological perspective, revealing the vital importance of the region's natural resources to community structures and the subsequent failure of those communities to recognize the natural limitations of those resources.

As the thesis suggests, this project is largely informed and inspired by my personal connections to and experiences with the region. I grew up on a farm in Black, Texas and attended FISH where I witnessed first-hand the effects of English-Only policies on my peers from a very early age. Both my maternal grandmother and great-grandmother were members of the Black Study Club, the later was a member from 1952 until 1996 when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. As a small child I occasionally attended club meetings, and while I don't remember much about them, they clearly help shape my interests in community participation and development. My close ties to the region's history and natural resources leaves me deeply conflicted in regards sustainable agriculture—I know that farmers, though they mean well, are a tough crowd to turn. I make no claims to be entirely unbiased in regards to my subject, which would be a justified criticism of this thesis project. However, given the claims I've made here, I feel that a critical approach to community challenges by invested locals is imperative for initiating productive conversations and ultimately change.

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