

1 Imagining America

In this book, I trace the history of postsecondary literacy education and language policy at the turn of the 20th century at Syrian Protestant College (SPC), which today, as the American University of Beirut (AUB), is the longest-running American-style institution of higher education outside of the US.¹ I focus on SPC from its founding in 1866 until 1920, when it changed its name and institutional identity.² SPC/AUB was and is not affiliated with any institution of higher education in the United States, although the founders of the college were educated in elite Protestant colleges, including Yale, Harvard, and Amherst, in the Northeast United States.³ SPC was founded by a group of American Protestant missionaries under the leadership of Daniel Bliss, the school's first president and former missionary in Syria with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).⁴ The original mission of the college "was to give a thorough literary, scientific, and medical education" and the first language of instruction was Arabic to "fit the needs of [local] citizens and their country" (American University of Beirut Libraries, 2023).

The college opened its doors to a student body of 16 in December 1866, occupying only a few rented rooms near central Beirut. The college initially included two faculties, the Collegiate and Medical Departments, and in 1873 a Preparatory Department was added to serve students whose school backgrounds did not sufficiently prepare them for college-level study. The college's

1 By "American-style" higher education, I mean a curriculum that prioritizes the liberal arts (arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics) and includes general education as a key part of the curriculum, with specializations provided in the later years of an undergraduate degree. American-style colleges and universities grant bachelor's degrees after four years of study rather than the three typical in European universities.

2 The year 1920 is a logical endpoint for this study for several reasons: In 1920, SPC moved from being a college with an explicitly religious affiliation to the secular institution it is today. The transition also marks the point at which Arab faculty gained equal status (including voting rights) to their foreign counterparts. On a broader scale, 1920 marks the end of World War I, the end of the Ottoman Empire, and the beginning of the French Mandate in Lebanon, which eventually led to the creation of Lebanon as an independent nation in 1943.

3 Syrian Protestant College, and today the American University of Beirut, although unaffiliated with any institution of higher education in the United States, has operated under a charter granted by the New York Education Department. AUB is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and the Lebanese government recognizes degrees from AUB. See American University of Beirut (n.d.).

4 See Chapter 2 for a thorough history of American missions and the connection to SPC.

first two buildings, College Hall and the Medical Building (now called the Old Pharmacy Building), were finished in 1873; today, these buildings remain a central part of AUB's beautiful contemporary campus, which overlooks the Mediterranean on the west side of Beirut. The college grew steadily over the next five decades: Ten years after its founding, 77 students were enrolled at SPC; by 1885, the number had grown to 183; in 1897, the number was 309, and by 1902, the year Daniel Bliss resigned as president, the college boasted a healthy enrollment of 615 students (Annual Report; see also Appendix A).

As Betty Anderson (2011) put it in her history of the institution, "the campus has stood at a vital intersection between a rapidly changing American missionary and educational project to the Middle East and a dynamic quest for Arab national identity and empowerment" (p. 2). The field of rhetoric and writing studies, I argue throughout this book, has much to gain from investigating the "vital intersection" between America and the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 20th century, as represented in and through the literacy education provided by SPC.

As I elaborate later in this chapter, colonial epistemology—marked by linguistic, religious, and nationalist ideologies—was, and continues to be, deeply intertwined with the global project of imperialism. Scholars including Robert Phillipson (1992) and Alastair Pennycook (1998) have made clear connections between the history of British (and by extension European) colonization and the enterprise of English language teaching worldwide. Similar connections underlie the history of American missionary work and the emergence of American-style, English-language higher education outside of the US. I argue that the colonial epistemology that sustained the spread of English-language teaching globally—the focus of Phillipson's and Pennycook's work—is similarly foundational to the history of rhetoric and writing studies inside the US. SPC, therefore, offers a rich site for analysis of the circulation of colonial epistemology in and through postsecondary literacy education, both outside and inside the US.

This book presents a historical, transnational, translingual, and decolonial perspective on questions of identity, literacy, language, culture, and citizenship. In examining a variety of archival documents from the college's founding in 1866 until the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1920, I show how transnational and translingual negotiations among SPC faculty, students, and administrators, as well as the local and regional community, produced a tenuous and sometimes unsettling vision of America for foreigners and locals alike. I argue that examining these negotiations at SPC allows scholars and educators in rhetoric and writing studies, education, and related fields to consider how literacy education in English has, and often continues to, construct an imagined

America that is both grounded upon and reproduces colonial epistemology. Such constructions, I argue, work to uphold exclusionary practices that are all too vivid in our world today.

In this study, I consider a corpus of archival documents, many written by students, in light of several key moments in SPC's history. These moments include the decision to change the language of instruction from Arabic to English (Chapter 3); the development of a language-centered, liberal-arts curriculum (Chapter 3); two student-led protests against the administration (Chapter 4); and the proliferation of student-authored magazines and newspapers at the turn of the 20th century (Chapter 5). This set of documents, and these moments, illustrate how students, faculty, administrators, and members of the local and regional community negotiated the role of the American college in Syria over time. I contend that these groups used writing and multiple languages to make sense of, and to shape, the college's place as a bridge between an imagined America and the Arab world. Indeed, these translingual and transnational negotiations illuminate differing epistemologies attached to language(s) in the region, conflicting understandings of the meaning of America, and evolving definitions of Arab identity within a dying Ottoman empire and in response to the increasing influence of the West in the region.

This project provides a specific example of the history of colonial epistemology as it circulated historically within English literacy education in non-Anglophone contexts and explores its continued impact today. The following questions shape this work: What did literacy education at Syrian Protestant College look like between its founding in 1866 and the point in which it became the (secular) American University of Beirut in 1920? How was American identity represented and constructed through literacy education and language policy in Syria at the turn of the 20th century? How did SPC students engage, resist, and adapt this representation for their own purposes? In what ways do representations of America and English-language literacy sustain colonial epistemology in writing classrooms and programs? And finally, what are the implications of this study for contemporary students, writing instructors, and writing program administrators, both in and outside of the US?

My goal in presenting this research is twofold: First, I want to highlight the importance of looking beyond monolingual, Anglocentric contexts of literacy education to better understand how literacy in English and in other languages is shaped by multiple forces across borders. This study, on a practical level, expands understandings of the history of rhetoric and writing studies beyond the Americentric contexts upon which much historical work in this field has been centered. Second, I aim to demonstrate through this research that SPC's

geopolitical location outside of the US throws into high relief the American nationalist, English monolingual, and Christian religious ideologies underlying the college's literacy curriculum and language policies. These ideologies, which together are indicative of colonial epistemology, are made especially visible because they are constantly in tension with local religious, national, and linguistic ideologies of the time. I make the case throughout this book that such ideologies have similarly shaped the history of English-language literacy education in seemingly monolingual and Anglocentric contexts such as those in which many literacy educators who read this book find themselves working. As I discuss later in this chapter, histories of rhetoric and writing studies have rarely accounted for the ways in which literacy curriculum and language policies in these contexts are *constituted by and deeply responsive to* translingual and transnational discourse, even and perhaps especially when curriculum and policy has suppressed such discourse.

In this chapter, I first situate my argument theoretically, focusing specifically on nationalism, coloniality, and the idea of America. I argue that SPC complicates Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of the nation as a historically constituted "imagined community," in that the idea of America at SPC traveled beyond national borders and its *ideal* was imagined and constituted by students and faculty outside of the West. This complication moves me to understand SPC through a decolonial frame, illustrating how language and literacy education at SPC reflects a complex interplay of competing epistemologies. I define several key terms that are used throughout this book, including imperialism, colonialism, and decoloniality, and I explain why I have adopted a decolonial rather than postcolonial framework for my analysis. I then describe the historical relationships that exist among literacy education, colonial epistemology, and monolingual ideology. After explicating the theoretical frame, I review the conversations in rhetoric and writing studies to which I hope this book will contribute, including transnational, translingual, decolonial, and historical scholarship. Then, I elaborate my primary claim by deconstructing two seemingly "commonsense" narratives about the discipline's history through a decolonial lens. Finally, I provide a chapter-by-chapter overview of the remainder of the book.

It is through these theoretical and disciplinary frameworks that I articulate the central claim of this book: The history of rhetoric and writing studies must be understood as fundamentally transnational and translingual. This claim troubles some of the underlying and often implicit principles of the field, particularly its tendency to promote writing pedagogies limited by monolingual and Anglocentric thinking. As such, I argue that decolonial, transnational, and translingual historical analysis provides a path for the

discipline to (re)imagine the borders that have traditionally defined it, as well as its contemporary and future work.

Nationalism, Colonialism, and an Imagined America

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (2006) theorized the modern concept of the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (p. 5). The nation is imagined because no single individual can know all its members, and it is limited because it is contained by political and geographic boundaries. The contemporary concept of the nation, according to Anderson, emerges out of Enlightenment-era thinking, in which long-standing, dynastic empires were challenged and ultimately dismantled and replaced by sovereign nations. Nations form a sense of community in which members are bonded together by loyalty to the nation, a sense of nationalism.

Benedict Anderson’s (2006) understanding of the modern nation-state and nationalism—or the ideology of the nation—is tied to the rise of print culture (in Anderson’s words, “print capitalism”) beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This development created “unified fields of exchange and communication” that elevated written language above spoken dialects, and legitimized non-Latin (Western) languages such as Italian, English, French, and Spanish (B. Anderson, 2006, p. 44). In turn, conceptions of language became fixed and bounded, legitimizing the epistemologies of those in power and stigmatizing language use that did not fit the “standard” created in print (B. Anderson, 2006, pp. 44–45).

It is no small coincidence that the stabilization of language that occurred as a result of print capitalism also facilitated the emergence of modern nationalism: First, the printing press allowed for circulation of ideas on a much broader scale—for example, the success of the Protestant Reformation is largely credited to the invention of the Gutenberg press and the ability of Martin Luther to distribute his *Ninety-Five Theses* to a much wider audience than previously possible. Second, the visibility and circulation of “vernacular” (i.e. non-Latin) languages during the Renaissance and beyond—facilitated by the printing press—subverted the hierarchies and systems of exclusion that were otherwise preserved in and through the language of the Roman Catholic Church (and, in turn, the Holy Roman Empire). While the audience for these “vernacular” publications was still small due to limited access to education and therefore literacy, the disruption in power was significant, allowing for the rapid transmission of radical ideas that were then translated into action. The best examples of this process are the American and French

Revolutions at the end of the 18th century. At the same time, single languages became tied to the modern nation-state, tying nationalism to monolingualism in the West (Yildiz, 2012).

Sam Haselby's (2015) *Origins of American Religious Nationalism* added a new dimension to Benedict Anderson's (2006) work, arguing that modern nations—and nationalism—depend not just on the imagination, but also on faith. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, Haselby (2015) argued that American Protestant missions' work created a connection between nationalism and Protestantism. America was seen by its Protestant founders as a nation chosen by God, and this American exceptionalism (a pronounced form of nationalism) was communicated in and through the evangelical mission movement (p. 14). Just as modern nations were formed, according to Anderson (2006), through print capitalism, so too, according to Haselby (2015) did the American Protestant missionary movement grow exponentially through print:

... [the evangelical missions had an] impressive array of schools, associations, and publications middle-class and modern. In quantitative terms, their literary output was astonishing, amounting to hundreds of millions of pages With their expansive bureaucracies, centralized authority, ambitious print media campaigns, and extensive scale of operations, these associations were comparable to modernizing nineteenth-century nation-states. (pp. 15–16)

In addition, the missions movement grew through language and print. While the Bible had been translated into 22 European languages over a 300-year period prior to the 19th century, American Protestants “published Bibles in 160 different languages or dialects, producing, in a single generation, Bibles in sevenfold the number of languages as had the previous 19 centuries of Christians” (Haselby, 2015, p. 260). The missionaries saw themselves as following in the footsteps of the first evangelist, Martin Luther, transmitting the word of God directly to people around the world.

As I elaborate in Chapter 2, SPC was founded by American Protestant missionaries attempting to spread the “good word” of American exceptionalism (nationalism) within the complicated geopolitical context of an empire on the verge of collapse. Benedict Anderson's (2006) theory of the modern “nation” conflates the nation—a bounded, limited political entity—with nationalism, an ideology that Anderson defined by those who “imagine” themselves to be members: citizens. For Anderson, as Bruce Masters (2001) pointed out, the nation is inherently political, “imagined” by

elites and pushed to the people from top down (p. 9). However, Anderson's theory of the nation does not map well onto the context of the Middle East⁵ (or other regions in the Global South), where "ethnic/national identities" were "primordial," and "tribal or dynastic regimes ... had served the peoples ... for centuries" (Masters, 2001, p. 10). SPC operated within a dying empire, bringing with it the unique linguistic, cultural, and colonial epistemologies of its American Protestant founders. As I describe in more detail in Chapter 2, the region of Syria within the Ottoman Empire saw itself as distinct in relation to the empire itself; various communities within the region, such as the Druze and Maronites, negotiated protection and autonomy through violence as well as manipulation of outside parties (including the British and French governments and Jesuit and Protestant missionaries). These demands for autonomy were based on their own ethnic, religious, and familial affiliations. In short, communities within Syria were no strangers to the negotiation of competing epistemologies.

American Protestant missionaries, in opening SPC after many years of failed efforts to convert the local population to Protestantism, instead determined a better approach would be to convert the local population to their imagined America, which could be transmitted through education regardless of geopolitical boundaries. Proselytization—a word derived from the Greek root *proselytos*, which means "one who has come over"—requires an invitation, and SPC invited its students to imagine themselves as part of the community represented by the college's American founders and the American-style education that the college was modeled upon. In this sense, SPC students were invited to become a part of the "imagined community" of America, even as they were never—and rarely became—citizens in a legal sense. There was an underlying tension, in other words, between the epistemologies of the faculty and those of the students, and it is the negotiation of this tension—the struggle to "imagine" America, defined by its very presence and absence at SPC—that I explore throughout this book.

5 Ironically, but importantly, the "Middle East" is a colonial descriptor for the region where Syria/present-day Lebanon is located, and it begs the question: East of what? I have limited my use of this term as much as possible throughout the book and recognize its colonial underpinnings, but many scholars who have studied the region, including Edward Said (1979), refer to the region as the Middle East, and the literal Arabic translation, الشرق الأوسط, is used regularly within the region. For this reason, I have used the term occasionally, and some quotes include the term. Possible alternatives include Southwest Asia-North Africa (SWANA) or the "Arab World," but there are limitations to nearly any alternative, including their lack of legibility in popular discourse. In general, I try to remain specific in my descriptors of the geopolitical location that I am studying by calling it Syria or present-day Lebanon. For an interesting discussion of the tensions related to term, see Jennifer Case, 2024.

The case of SPC forces us to consider how Benedict Anderson's (2006) *imagined communities* escape or exceed the boundaries of the geopolitical entity of the modern nation, go beyond traditional conceptions of who can hold national identity, and expose the coloniality of such imaginings. As Anderson explained, the only ones capable of imagining the nation and deciding who belongs within it are those who hold positions of power, such as those within the government or press. At SPC, challenges to such thinking emerged in the form of students and the local community, as they encountered a "nation" constructed through literacy education and the English language but outside of the geopolitical boundaries of the United States. America was offered to students and the local community in and through the college's curriculum and policies. Local stakeholders negotiated the meaning of America, attempting to show that they belonged to this imagined community through their behavior and performance at the college. They learned over time that they could not truly belong, and their attempts—and failures—to negotiate belonging show that nationalism and monolingualism can best be understood as attempts to demarcate difference. In other words, nationalism and monolingualism—embedded in literacy education as much today as in the past—are key ideological markers of colonial epistemology.

Imperialism, Colonialism, and Decoloniality

Before continuing, I want to define some key terms and justify my use of decolonialism as a theoretical frame of analysis. I rely on Barbara Arneil (2023) and Karen Pashby (2012) to define *imperialism* and *colonialism*. Both concepts refer to epistemology and should be understood as related but distinct from each other. Imperialism refers to the use of force by a foreign power to dominate peoples or lands in geographically separate locations. Colonialism refers to the cultural and social occupation of foreign or domestic spaces. Epistemologically, imperialism presumes the superiority of the empire and insists on the people's subservience to it, while colonialism justifies the occupation of lands and peoples on the basis of the presumed "backwardness" of the colonized; colonizers, who live with the colonized, offer "improvement" to the colonized land and peoples based on the colonizers' own values and beliefs (Arneil, 2023, pp. 6–12). Pashby (2012) pointed out that "both concepts involve overt, direct measures as well as less obvious discursive modes of power that work at the level of 'imagination' to govern powerfully both on a level of physical and social institutions and on an epistemological level by enforcing a particular worldview" (p. 12). This book examines how literacy education has used, and in some cases continues to use, discourse and imagination to propel and sustain colonial epistemology.

In relation to the historical account I provide in this book, Walter Mignolo (2007) pointed out that Western perceptions of the Ottoman Empire changed between the 16th and 19th centuries. Prior to the 19th century, Western powers conceived of the Ottomans through the lens of “imperial difference”—Ottomans were seen as mistaken (particularly in their beliefs as Muslims) but, because of the empire’s relative power and development, not necessarily unequal. Ottomans began to be viewed through the lens of “colonial difference”—as candidates for colonization—beginning in the 19th century, as the empire became weaker and the West took a more active role in the region (Mignolo, 2007, p. 474). Because the focus of this book is on the late 19th and early 20th centuries, I generally refer to Western, Eurocentric, Anglo-American, and Christian missionary epistemologies as *colonial*. When referring to empires that existed in the 19th and early 20th centuries, such as the Ottoman or British empires, I name the epistemology propelling their work as *imperial*.

Understanding colonialism’s power is productive for my account of literacy education because it helps build understanding about how the specific practices and processes at work at SPC were justified. The faculty and administrators of the college were never directly involved in colonization, and Syria was not officially colonized by a Western power during the 19th century, but the policies and education provided by SPC were founded on the logic of coloniality, and they operated through what Mignolo (2007), via Aníbal Quijano, has called the *colonial matrix of power*. The colonial matrix of power produces colonialism, racism, and patriarchy through the assertion of Western centrality and control over the local economy (including land and labor), authority (through military and government), knowledge and subjectivity (prioritizing Christian and Western knowledge and identities), and gender and sexuality (based on Christian understandings of both) (Mignolo, 2007, p. 478). Colonization does not always require force but it is always violent, in that it envisions the world through the “imperial concept of Totality,” and it deploys this vision to insist on the inferiority and displacement of other visions, other epistemologies, and other histories (Mignolo, 2007, p. 451).

A decolonial lens requires *delinking* from the centrality of the West in order to *recognize* and *re-place* the visions, epistemologies, and histories that have been subsumed in and/or interpreted through the colonial matrix of power. This means going further than adding to existing knowledge or “recovering” other voices. Delinking also requires the decolonization of knowledge—in other words, a decolonial perspective illuminates how existing knowledge and epistemology is framed within colonial thinking. While postcolonialism and postmodernism present other, perhaps more familiar, lenses of critical

analysis, for Mignolo (2007) via Quijano, they do not go far enough because their critique remains Eurocentric and focused on the West (pp. 451–452), a limitation that I discuss more thoroughly later. Decolonial analysis does not seek to replace Western views of the world—Western epistemologies exist and function in the world whether we like them or not—but rather, decolonialism seeks to engage in *border thinking*. Border thinking highlights plural (pluriversal) visions of the world that run equally alongside each other, and it also identifies and values the histories of those who have been subjected to, and negated by, imperial and colonial power (Mignolo, 2007, p. 493; see also Ellen Cushman et al., 2021, for a useful discussion of pluriversality and the discipline of rhetoric and writing studies).

This project analyzes the history of language and literacy education and the production of identity at SPC through a decolonial lens. Specifically, I trace how colonial epistemology worked within the college to produce and justify its linguistic and educational practices and policies. Additionally, I articulate how this epistemology was negotiated by local students and the wider community as they attempted to identify themselves in relation to it. Colonialism within SPC was deeply tied to conceptions of language, literacy, and identity—and the power of this epistemology can help explain why and how SPC survived and eventually thrived (as the contemporary American University of Beirut) in a most unlikely place. Within the Ottoman Empire and Syria in particular, SPC represented a White, Protestant America that was unattainable by students by virtue of their Arab and sometimes Muslim identities, but to which they were nonetheless expected to aspire. As John Willinsky (1998) put it, this “one-way gaze to another form of life ... left them suspended between worlds [which] they could learn to appreciate, but could never fully achieve” (p. 94). SPC’s colonial epistemology repeatedly ran up against local linguistic, ethnonational, and religious ideologies. It is this epistemological conflict, in relation to ideologies of language, literacy, and identity, that this book explores.

This historical account resists simply *adding to* our discipline’s existing historical knowledge. Instead, I follow the path of an emergent decolonial tradition in the field of rhetoric and writing studies as it “return[s] the gaze ... from colonized to the colonizer” (Ruiz, 2021, p. 55). This account sheds light on translingual, transnational discourses that, I argue, are a fundamental part of the history of rhetoric and writing studies; in the process, recognizing such discourses illuminates the colonial premises upon which the discipline has been grounded. Recentering our understanding of the history of rhetoric and writing studies through a decolonial lens requires us to “attend to the mechanisms where distinctions between the historical and the Other of history are

maintained, *both* in historical artifacts *and* in the methodological and theoretical tools of academics” (deTar, 2022, p. 197). In other words, we must investigate how colonialism has historically underpinned our discipline’s dominant conceptions of language, literacy, and identity, as well as how this epistemology has worked to conceal and devalue alternative conceptions of the same. We must study not only colonialism at work in the discipline’s historical discourse but also how those marginalized by it negotiated to be heard.

Because American identity is tied deeply to colonialism (Stuckey & Murphy, 2001), it can be difficult to separate the two in contemporary U.S. contexts of literacy education. It is often easier to identify colonialism in contexts seemingly distant from our own. Therefore, this historical account’s focus on a “foreign” site of literacy education outside the US at the turn of the 20th century—and the imagined America produced by it—allows us to see more clearly how American identity and colonialism are intertwined. We can then use this knowledge to (re)turn our gaze to our present context(s), to better understand how colonialism has altered our understanding of the history of rhetoric and writing studies, and how it continues to inflect contemporary approaches to writing instruction and research. Indeed, this decolonial, transnational, and translingual historical account can help us better understand the limitations of many of our disciplinary approaches, which, as Xiaoye You (2016) pointed out, continue to rely on American nationalism and English monolingualism (both a result of coloniality), even as they sometimes seek to disrupt these frames (p. 5).

The decolonial analysis in this historical project has the potential to help move the discipline away from colonial frames by “account[ing] for colonial knowledge practices [that] still limit[] the study of written language,” which in turn can lead to “anti-colonial resistance and transformation” (Ruiz & Baca, 2017, p. 226). Understanding how coloniality inflected the production of knowledge, education, and writing pedagogy outside of the United States 150 years ago demonstrates that the disciplinary history of rhetoric and writing studies is complicated not only because it is a transnational and translingual history, but also because it is a colonial history. To fully account for the discipline’s entanglement with colonialism, scholars and practitioners need to understand how colonial epistemology has been used to position the “other” in relation to writing and literacy practices, specifically how English and monolingual ideology has been used to suppress transnational and translingual discourses circulating in the same contexts. Additionally, studying how colonialism is and has been negotiated at a local level, and how this negotiation has materialized rhetorically, allows us to recognize pluriversal epistemologies that may otherwise be hidden in colonial contexts (see Jackson, 2021).

Competing epistemologies can be seen at work in literacy education by looking both historically and abroad, in places where Western epistemologies and literacy practices were “foreign” and therefore stand in marked contrast to the non-Western contexts in which they were situated. That is the work of this history. But for decolonization of disciplinary knowledge to occur, specialists in rhetoric and writing studies cannot stop there—we must bring what we learn from this historical account, and the workings of colonialism, back to the contemporary discipline. This work involves both reconsidering and rewriting the historical narratives that tell us who we are and where we come from, which in turn will prompt a rethinking of the assumptions that ground our contemporary pedagogical and programmatic approaches to writing instruction. This book helps substantiate other scholars’ efforts to decolonize the discipline’s present and future by highlighting the colonial underpinnings of literacy education in the past.

From Postcolonial to Decolonial

Throughout this book, I use a decolonial lens instead of a postcolonial one to conduct my analysis. However, readers may question why I have not used a postcolonial lens, particularly since the focus of my analysis, Syrian Protestant College, is located in Syria, in the same region that postcolonial scholar Edward Said (1979) focused on in his critique of Orientalist discourse. In this section, therefore, I explicate what I see as the shortcomings of postcolonial theory in making sense of literacy education, rhetoric, and identity at SPC, and I show how a decolonial perspective opens up more productive avenues for recognizing and investigating the complexity of this historical account.

From a postcolonial perspective, it is easy to claim that the work of Christian missionaries was inevitably colonial and inevitably Western. Indeed, it is impossible to separate missionary work from the larger colonial, racist framework in which the mission emerged and operated. The 15th-century Doctrine of Discovery, followed by the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, articulated the logic supporting the European slave trade and colonialism, including settler colonialism in the Americas.⁶ This context helped to produce the discursive logics that defined and justified the work of Christian missionaries.

6 The Doctrine of Discovery refers to Pope Nicholas V’s 1452 papal bull *Dum Diversas*, followed by the bull *Romanus Pontifex* of 1455. These two bulls gave authority to Catholic European powers to seize non-Christian lands and enslave non-Christians in Africa and the Americas. Pope Alexander VI released the *Inter Caetera* bull in 1493, which created the “Law of Nations,” in which Christian nations could not claim the right to other Christian lands (Indigenous Values Initiative, 2018).

For Said (1979), these logics are inherently Orientalist, “a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought” about how “the East” might be understood, as well as “the West’s” relation to it (p. 42). Modern conceptions of the nation, too, were supported by self-reinforcing networks of Orientalist discourse, in that national boundaries and languages encouraged distinction, and separation from, the Eastern “other.” This, in turn, produced artificial structures of power based on nationality, which were also tied to race, ethnicity, religion, and language.

However, as I discuss more thoroughly in Chapter 2, we must be careful neither to generalize all Christian missions as the same or necessarily holding nefarious intentions nor to assume that local communities were without agency in relation to the missions that targeted them. The missionaries themselves held different, sometimes incongruous, views of colonialism and slavery as well as the communities they targeted. There were conflicts within American Protestant missionary organizations about both American settler colonialism—the United States government’s illegal claim to native land—and slavery during the 19th century, with many arguing that both institutions were unjust and immoral.⁷ Although American missionaries largely failed to convert many within the communities they targeted, they were sometimes successful in cross-cultural interaction, and their writing helped bring cross-cultural awareness to Anglo-Americans.⁸

The missionaries’ conflicting intentions create important complications that prevent scholars from writing a cohesive narrative about American Protestant missionaries’ work in Syria, complications that I elaborate in more detail in Chapter 2. Alastair Bonnett (2004) and Claire Conceison (2004), neither of whom worked from an explicitly decolonial lens in the books I examine here, nonetheless offered important critiques of Said’s (1979) theory of Orientalism, suggesting that it is built on problematic generalizations about “the East” (and “the West”) that do not account for the rich diversity of the regions to which the term refers. These generalizations prove to be ironically similar to those criticized by Said. For Conceison (2004), who in her

7 For example, within the American Board of Commissions for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), there was dissension about the organization’s neutrality about the issue of slavery. Another organization, the American Missionary Association, was explicitly abolitionist and some Presbyterian churches affiliated themselves with that organization instead of ABCFM as a result.

8 For example, missionaries of the ABCFM Samuel Allis and John Dunbar “joined the Pawnees during their winter buffalo hunt in the Central Plains. During this five-month journey the missionaries lived beholden to tribal members for linguistic and cultural education, as well as for food and shelter. They developed a better understanding of Pawnee ways during the next few years, but they claimed no conversions. Pawnee leaders showed interest in the missionaries but ignored their appeals to abandon their semi-nomadic lifestyle” (Galler, 2011).

book was interested in the representation of Americans in China in Chinese drama, the West should not be understood as the sole “‘possessor’ of any given colonial or postcolonial discourse by virtue of its assumed pervasive political and cultural power” because such understanding reduces everyone who is not part of the so-called “West” as “Alien” (p. 52). Conceison argued that perpetuation of such essentialization relies on an inherently Orientalist logic even as it seems to be the very logic that Said’s argument is grounded upon (p. 58). Bonnett (2004), who explored in his book the origins of the idea of “the West,” argued that postcolonialism has questionably maintained the central role of the West in its scholarship, discursively essentializing what is meant by “the West” and, in turn, “the East” (pp. 6–7).

Additionally, both Conceison (2004) and Bonnett (2004) insisted that in focusing on Orientalism, or “the West’s” views of “the East,” postcolonial specialists have paid little attention to “the East’s” views of “the West”—a perspective Conceison (2004) called “Occidentalism” in an effort to recuperate the term from Said’s denigration (p. 41). Conceison argued that Occidentalism, according to her definition, allows scholars to understand “the West” as a discursive object, much as Said (1979) argued that Orientalism constructs “the East” through discourse. Conceison’s (2004) point was to highlight the constructed nature of both “the West” and “the East” and to challenge assumptions that suggest the structure of power critiqued by Said is unidirectional (p. 53). Bonnett (2004) claimed that it is useful to study “the political and social *uses and deployment*” of Occidentalism because of the ways in which it highlights “the mutually constitutive nature” of identity formation (p. 7).

Conceison (2004) defined Occidental discourse as: “(1) paradoxical (or contradictory/dialectical) in character and function; (2) existing in both paradoxical relation to and continuous dialogue with Orientalism (and other discourses); and (3) open-ended, changing, active, and self-consciously temporal” (p. 54). She argued that this definition allows scholars to disconnect conceptions of “the West” from “the Occident” and to see Occidental representations of “the Other” as far more complicated than Said’s (1979) Orientalist “Other.” Such representations are “*layered*” rather than hierarchical, within a range of positive and negative representations rather than within a binary (Conceison, 2004, pp. 54–55). Conceison’s theorization of Occidental discourse helps scholars move away from a postcolonial lens and toward a decolonial one, in that she resisted postcolonialism’s tendency toward Eurocentrism and uncovered a range of pluriversal discourses *about* the West, which Western scholars have historically ignored. Additionally, Conceison’s study highlights the agency of those who have been positioned as relatively powerless within postcolonial scholarship.

In this book, I am interested in building on the work of Conceison, Bonnett, and recent decolonial scholars because their theorization of colonial discourse and epistemology allows one to better understand the relationships among local stakeholders, including SPC students, and the college's American faculty and administrators as multilayered relationships. As problematic as the colonial epistemology of the college's founders and faculty was, the relationship was not one-sided; rather, a decolonial perspective allows one to see the interactions between the local community and the college administration and faculty as a *negotiated* relationship, where identities were co-constructed against the backdrop of an imagined America, a settler-colonial nation still emerging in the real and abstract distance. Within this relationship, all parties struggled to identify themselves and each other within the liminal space of the American college in the semi-autonomous region of Syria before the fall of the Ottoman Empire. SPC's curriculum, student protests and faculty responses, as well as student writing, all provide examples of how this negotiation played out over time. Understanding SPC—as a representative of the American mission (and the nation itself)—and local stakeholders—representatives of the mission's targets—through the lens of decolonialism allows for an identification of power relations and identities that were far more complex than what is allowed for in an analysis informed only by postcolonial theory.

Literacy (Education), Coloniality, and Monolingualism

In order to fully value SPC's place in the history of rhetoric and writing studies, those of us living and working in monolingual Anglophone contexts must first make connections between our contemporary contexts and a much longer history of English-language literacy and literacy education that emerged out of colonialism and empire. This history, in turn, helps us to denaturalize monolingualism and English as a *lingua franca* as developments over time rather than ahistorical "givens." These contextualizations can then lead us to question some of the fundamental principles of rhetoric and writing studies—questioning that is aligned with the work of decolonization and to which this book aims to contribute.

Let us first step into the history of Western literacy as it emerged in the context of colonialism and empire. As already discussed, the Enlightenment led to print capitalism in Europe, which in turn led to linguistic hierarchies that privileged formal, print-based language over spoken vernaculars throughout the continent. This elevated literacy itself to a higher status, privileging writing over speaking, and in turn privileging Western epistemologies (Canagarajah, 2019, p. 9). But language hierarchization occurred outside

of Europe, as well, through colonization. Speaking from the Global South, Finex Ndhlovu and Laketi Makalela (2021) noted that colonizers stabilized non-Western languages by inventing and recognizing “standard” versions of non-Western languages, which resulted in the “invisibilis[ation of] other language practices” (p. 17). So-called “standard ‘national languages’—also known as vernacular languages—were invented [by colonizers] and then deployed towards sociocultural and political engineering processes that produced skewed versions of local native/Indigenous identities” (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021, p. 17). The process of stabilizing language and making Indigenous language practices invisible is tied, for Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021), to “the project of Christianisation,” which created “self-proclaimed colonial linguists” including “native affairs commissioners, missionaries, anthropologists, diarists, hunters and travellers” (p. 28). Such stabilization of language through colonization and religion in and outside of the “West” thus worked in favor of privileging those who did the stabilizing over those who actually used language, in all its messiness, in everyday life.

Additionally, as Benedict Anderson (2006) pointed out, colonization required multilingual workers, “who to be useful had to be ... capable of mediating linguistically between the metropolitan nation and the colonized peoples” (p. 115). Beyond these practical purposes, multilingualism was also valued as a component of secular and private education for its role in transmitting modern Western culture and knowledge to colonized peoples—a practice justified on the basis of colonizers’ sense of a so-called moral imperative. This worked, also, to bring “models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere” to colonized spaces (B. Anderson, 2006, p. 116).

While multilingualism initially supported colonization for the reasons I have described, modernity—tied inextricably to colonialism (Mignolo, 2007)—required the invention of monolingualism, a language ideology in which “individuals and social formations are imagined to possess one ‘true’ language only, their ‘mother tongue,’ and through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation” (Yildiz, 2012, p. 2; see also Phillipson’s, 1992, discussion of English linguistic imperialism). Even as multilingualism *as practice* was valued by the colonizers for its economic and political uses in advancing empire and colonization, monolingualism *as ideology* reinforced the hierarchies of knowledge, cultures, and peoples that are lasting hallmarks of colonial epistemology.

The modern development of monolingualism is connected to colonial epistemology, which can likewise be connected to the emergence of English as a *lingua franca* and the teaching of English worldwide, as both Phillipson (1992) and Pennycook (1998) have discussed. Phillipson (1992) traced the

history behind the global spread of English and the ways in which the language “has been equated with progress and prosperity” worldwide (p. 8). He called English’s global dominance *linguistic imperialism*, describing its deeply permeating modes of communication and constructions of culture, occurring at least in part through the teaching of English. For Pennycook (1998), English is deeply interwoven with the history of British empire and colonialism, and for this reason he claimed we must consider English—and English language teaching—as a “product of colonialism not just because it is colonialism that produced the initial conditions for the global spread of English but because it was colonialism that produced many of the ways of thinking and behaving that are still part of Western cultures” (p. 19). Pennycook (1998) argued, and I agree, that “it is not so much that colonialism produces unique behaviours, words and ideas, but rather it makes a set of practices and discursive frames more available, more acceptable” (p. 25). These ways of thinking include persistent hierarchical distinctions between “native” and “non-native” speakers of English and characterizations of “Self” and “Other”; assumptions about the incontrovertible value of English around the world; and broad generalizations about “non-native” students’ home cultures, rhetorical practices, and epistemologies. It is important to note that these ways of thinking were, and continue to be, produced and reinscribed not only in Western contexts but also globally through the teaching of English.

While imperialism and colonialism as economic and political forms of control fell out of vogue in the 20th century, colonial epistemology remains particularly sticky even in contemporary life, including in the context of the teaching of English. Although multilingualism continues to characterize the everyday lives of the vast majority of people worldwide, English’s status as a *lingua franca* exists as a reminder of colonization’s lasting global impact. English language pedagogy outside of Anglophone contexts, according to Phillipson (1992), perpetuates the dominance of English worldwide: Demand for English exists not to support colonization *per se*, but rather to accommodate so-called “market” forces, born out of colonization, which continue to privilege English. In other words, as Suresh Canagarajah (2019) pointed out, “literacy is a contested activity with ramifications for social and geopolitical life” (p. 9).

Rhetoric and Writing Studies as Transnational and Translingual

Throughout this book, I characterize SPC as an inherently *transnational* institution, by which I mean it was an institution comprised of “relationships that transcend the nation-state There are social ties and relationships that

are not constrained by or contained within nation-state boundaries” (Canagarajah, 2018, p. 47). Although transnationality is characterized by relationships that go beyond the nation-state, it does not mean that ideas about *nation* and *nationality* are abandoned. The case of SPC shows how nationalism produced an imagined America that came into conflict with the college’s students, faculty, and the local community specifically because the relationships among these parties was transnational. The transnational transformed language and pedagogical practices at the college, as well as created conflict due to competing epistemologies. In this section, I provide an overview of transnational and translanguing research in rhetoric and writing studies with the aim of showing how this history contributes to this area of research.

Though the vast majority of its scholarship remains centered in the United States, rhetoric and writing studies has explored transnational sites of writing instruction, including transnational literacy practices.⁹ Transnational research is important in rhetoric and writing studies because it can allow the discipline to “adapt, resituate, and perhaps decenter” our assumptions about writing programs and pedagogies (C. Donahue, 2009, p. 215). In other words, a transnational lens pushes the field to recognize writing research, pedagogy, and practice in languages other than English and in a variety of geographic locations around the world. The recognition of pluriversal traditions of writing research, pedagogy, and practice, in turn, disrupts the colonial epistemology that has historically limited the discipline and defined our work.

Even as awareness of international and transnational locations of writing grows in the field, transnational histories of literacy education are relatively scarce.¹⁰ As You (2018) pointed out, historically, “writing education,” even in

9 Scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies that focuses on transnational literacy practices include Charles Bazerman et al., 2012; Suresh Canagarajah, 2002; Conference on College Composition and Communication Statement, 2017; Nancy Bou Ayash, 2016, 2019; Rebecca Dingo, 2012; Christiane Donahue, 2009; Amber Engelson, 2014, 2024; Steve Fraiberg, 2017; Eileen Lagman, 2018; Jerry Won Lee & Christopher Jenks, 2016; Rebecca Lorimer Leonard, 2013, 2017; Mike MacDonald, 2015; David Martins, 2015; Vivette Milson-Whyte et al., 2019; Esther Milu, 2021; Mary Muchiri et al., 1995; Iswari Pandey, 2015; Anne Marie Pederson, 2010; Angela Rounsaville, 2015, 2017; Tricia Serviss, 2013; Rachael Shapiro, 2019; Patrick Sullivan et al., 2012; Chris Thaiss et al, 2012; Kate Vieira 2011, 2017, 2019; and Xiaoye You, 2016, 2023. Additional transnational scholarship has been published in special issues and sections of journals such as *Research in the Teaching of English*, Ellen Cushman & Mary Juzwik, 2014, and Mya Poe, 2014; and *College Composition and Communication*, Kathleen Blake Yancey, 2014, June, and also in the books published in the WAC Clearinghouse International Exchanges on the Study of Writing series.

10 A few of the transnational histories of college-level literacy instruction published in English include Lisa Arnold, 2014, 2016, 2018; Damián Baca, 2009; Joseph Jeyaraj, 2009; Paul Kei Matsuda, 2006; Susan Romano, 2004; Milson-Whyte, 2015; and You, 2010.

seemingly monolingual contexts, “has almost always been transnational” (p. 20). However, most disciplinary histories fail to recognize the ways in which students’ literacy practices, even in monolingual or American contexts, represent transnational exchange. You (2010) noted that “for centuries, English ... has been utilized by both monolingual and multilingual writers for various situated needs and desires” (p. 180). Transnational histories can help contemporary scholars and teachers better understand the different ways in which “English” and “writing” are defined, used, and valued across the globe. This will, in turn, help serve increasingly diverse student populations in the US and abroad. You (2010) critiqued rhetoric and writing scholars for generally lacking “cognizanc[ce] of the geopolitical differences and stakes involved in the teaching of English writing” (p. xi). I argue that English at SPC was—and continues to be today—laden with “a whole different constellation of values and practices” than those that we tend to attach to English in the United States (You, 2010, p. xi).

Transnational histories of literacy education contribute to the decolonial project in that they delink the history of the discipline from presumed English monolingualism and highlight that knowledge is not universal but rather pluriversal and geopolitically situated. In other words, transnational histories emphasize the idea that knowledge “emerg[ed] from different historical locations in the world that endured the effects and consequences of Western imperial and capitalist expansion” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 462). Transnational histories of writing instruction such as this one illustrate how colonial epistemology, linked to the teaching of English and conceptions of the nation, was received, rejected, and negotiated—and with what consequences—in different ways by local populations around the world.

Transnational research also promotes new thinking about language, in that most sites of transnational literacy education are also multilingual, even when multilingual people and practices are devalued and oppressed. For this reason, I characterize SPC not only as transnational but also as an inherently *translingual* site of literacy education. Examining SPC as translingual means studying “the ways people come in contact through language and assum[ing] that most of the world’s peoples, through much of the world’s history, have used language in multiple and varied ways” (Kimball, 2021, p. 7). The translingual approach to writing practices and pedagogies addresses questions of language difference in writing (Horner, Lu, et al., 2011, p. 303) and emerges out of conversations related to the politics of globalization, multilingualism, second-language writing, World Englishes, and the *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* statement (Smitherman, 1999). All of these conversations provide important critiques of the monolingualism that haunts our research and pedagogy, despite the fact

that “language use in our classrooms, our communities, the nation, and the world has always been multilingual” (Horner, Lu, et al., 2011, p. 303). Literacy scholars including Eileen Lagman (2018), Jerry Won Lee and Christopher Jenks (2016), Rebecca Lorimer Leonard (2013, 2017), Esther Milu (2021), and Kate Vieira (2011, 2017, 2019), among others, have gone beyond the theoretical to trace tangible connections among multi- and translingual practices, mobility, and migration in transnational contexts of literacy.

A number of histories of the field have focused on multilingual populations in North America, even as they treat multilingualism itself with varying levels of emphasis. In *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, for example, Jessica Enoch (2008) focused two chapters on women educators for Mexican/Mexican American and Native American students around the turn of the 20th century, highlighting especially the racial and gender identities of the pedagogues and students with relatively less attention paid to the multilingualism that also characterized their identities. Hui Wu (2007) examined the writing curriculum and pedagogy of Japanese internment camp schools during World War II, considering particularly the racialized identities of the students in relation to the injustice they suffered at the hands of the U.S. government. Wu mentioned but did not consider deeply how multilingualism may have influenced the educational environment or student-teacher interactions. In her book *Vernacular Insurrections*, Carmen Kynard (2013) considered Black student protest rhetoric in the context of the 1960s civil rights movement in the US. She focused particularly on the relations among race, language—including African American Vernacular English—activism, and literacy education. Additionally, Cristina Devereaux Ramírez’s (2015) analysis of writing in Spanish and English by Mexican and Mexican American women journalists from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries adds to the field’s understanding of how these public-facing writing practices contributed to Mexican politics, culture, and identity. Throughout the book, Ramírez highlighted the multilingualism of her subjects and included Spanish primary texts along with their translations.

Two other scholars specifically uncovered histories of multi- and translingualism in the United States to demonstrate that the emergence of English as the dominant language was not a given. Focusing on the turn of the 19th century, Elizabeth Kimball (2021) analyzed archival materials from three different language communities in post-revolutionary Philadelphia through an explicitly translingual lens in *Translingual Inheritance*. Collectively, the three case studies she presented in the monograph argue that the story of English in the United States cannot be understood as a foregone conclusion but rather the result of “a story of the sedimentation of standard language ideologies in key moments of public deliberation” (Kimball, 2021, p. 38). Kimball’s

(2021) book presents a productive roadmap for translingual historiography, suggesting that such an approach provides a way to “read in and around [the influences of a particular language], examining both how people entered into conversation with ideas about language and how they used language itself to exercise agency” (p. 37). Jason Peters (2013) provided a historical account of an early-20th-century conflict between French-speaking New Englanders and the English-only educational policy of the Catholic Church. In this article, Peters drew on decolonial and Indigenous scholars to show how language hierarchization and enculturation has historically manifested in the United States. He argued that studying the conflict itself allows for a recognition of the geopolitics of language, including “the linguistic construction of racial and ethnic identity among white monolinguals,” which in turn reveals Whiteness itself as a construction that covers up histories of oppression even in seemingly homogenous contexts (p. 578). The historical account that I present takes up a similar translingual historiographic approach in its exploration of the range of responses, and the agency, with which students and the local population approached and negotiated English literacy education at SPC.

A few rhetoric and writing scholars have specifically presented histories of the field that have emphasized both translingual and transnational relations, although they have not always explicitly named them as “translingual.” Susan Romano (2004) highlighted translingual and transnational negotiation at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlaltelolco, a 16th-century college in the Valley of Mexico, in order to prove the central role that colonialism has held in the field’s history. She argued that the rhetorical negotiations that took place between Spanish colonizers and the Indigenous colonized in “New Spain,” as seen at Tlaltelolco, have parallels to the contemporary history of rhetoric and writing studies in that the college was a “site designed for those perceived as needing instruction in the dominant culture’s uses of language ... [and] a site perceived as not properly carrying out this function” (Romano, 2004, p. 258). Paul Kei Matsuda (2006), in “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition,” presented a useful history of international students in U.S. higher education throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. He argued that rhetoric and writing studies’ neglect of second-language writing and writers has problematically grounded the discipline on an assumption that the vast majority of students are English-speaking monolinguals. You’s (2010) *Writing in the Devil’s Tongue* is notable for its book-length treatment of the status and role of English, and its relationship to Chinese, in college-level writing instruction in China from the second half of the 19th century onward. Throughout the book, You underlined the political and cultural forces at work in and outside of formal educational contexts as China moved from a primarily

monolingual educational system to a bilingual one through the introduction of English. More recently, Florianne Jimenez (2023) described translingual student writing in the colonial context of the Philippines around the turn of the 20th century. Her historical and decolonial analysis focused on “language’s role in colonization and resistance” and found that students displayed translingual agency even in English-only educational environments (Jimenez, 2023, p. 110).

For Cushman (2016), a translingual approach has the potential to support the decolonial project in rhetoric and writing studies in that, at the paradigmatic level, it can “hasten the process of revealing and potentially transforming colonial matrices of power” and at the pedagogical level, it “can also work ... wherein students’ languages and categories of understanding can be expressed in the classroom in ways that allow these knowledges and practices to persevere” (p. 235). At the same time, Cushman expressed caution about assuming that translingual theory is *inherently* decolonial—she argued that many liberal movements in the field, possibly including translingualism, have failed to achieve the goals of decoloniality because they do not question the core principles that comprise the foundation of the discipline (pp. 238–239). Translingual scholarship, Cushman (2016) argued, faces similar challenges, in that it “reveal[s] the ideologies established in modernity’s colonial matrix of power” but does not necessarily “generate pluriversal understandings, values, and practices” (p. 239). In other words, while translingual theory succeeds in critiquing language ideology, it does not automatically transform the foundations of disciplinary knowledge or writing curriculum and pedagogies which are based upon that knowledge.

The historical account presented here attempts to circumvent the potential shortcomings raised by Cushman (2016) in that it asks questions about some of these principles—specifically, this study exposes the English monolingual and Anglocentric assumptions upon which the discipline’s historical narratives, and its subsequent scholarship, are often grounded. I argue that the discipline’s history is fundamentally transnational and translingual—a shift in perspective that allows us to rethink the work of the discipline. This perspective calls into question the field’s reliance on writing pedagogies and curriculum that continually privilege the monolingualism, graphocentrism, and logocentrism that characterize colonial epistemology.¹¹ This perspective

11 See Canagarajah’s (2024) critique of dominant conceptualizations of writing pedagogy, which have continually privileged dominant (i.e. White, Western) epistemologies. He articulated well how the majority of these pedagogical approaches over time—including product- and process-oriented, social and cognitive, posthuman and multimodal, and second-language writing—maintain monolingual, graphocentric, and logocentric orientations toward knowledge (pp. 291–295).

thus creates an imperative for the field to redefine itself beyond the borders it has historically drawn, and it helps pave the way for the field to recognize other, pluriversal ways of knowing and doing writing and rhetoric.

Decolonial Scholarship in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

In the field of rhetoric and writing studies, a discipline historically situated within the settler-colonial context of America, it is difficult to dislodge English from its ties to colonialism and to recognize the ways in which these ties continue to inflect our work as writing scholars and teachers today. Position statements such as Federico Navarro et al.'s (2022) "Rethinking English as a Lingua Franca in Scientific-Academic Contexts" and Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, et al.'s (2011) "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach," and journal articles such as Horner, Samantha NeCamp, and Christiane Donahue's (2011) "Toward a Multilingual Composition Scholarship," Matsuda's (2006) "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition," and Horner and John Trimbur's (2002) "English Only and U.S. College Composition," to name but a few, contribute to this work by imploring the field to question the standardization and dominance of English in the teaching of writing and publication of academic scholarship.

However, facing a 500-plus-year history of linguistic oppression *vis-à-vis* colonization and its related institutions (i.e., Indigenous boarding schools, slavery, Christian missions, English language teaching), rhetoric and writing studies is likely to be more successful in its efforts to dislodge monolingual ideology if it invests more deeply in adopting a decolonial perspective on its work. This means explicitly recognizing the colonial epistemology that underlies English-language literacy education and pushing for meaningful curricular and pedagogical change that investigates and invites pluriversal ways of thinking and doing rhetoric and literacy. In this section, I provide an overview of decolonial scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies and how my work contributes to this conversation.

A number of scholars in rhetoric and writing studies have recently shown the necessity of decolonial perspectives for the discipline.¹² Decolonial scholars

12 Some of the rhetoric and writing studies scholars who have taken up a decolonial lens include Maryam Ahmad, 2023; Kristin L. Arola, 2018; Baca, 2009; Resa Crane Bizzaro & Patrick Bizzaro, 2023; Canagarajah, 2019, 2023, 2024; Ellen Cushman, 2016; Cushman et al., 2021, 2015; Tabitha Espina, 2023; García et al., 2023; Tamara Issak and Lana Oweidat, 2023; Rachel C. Jackson, 2021, 2023; Florianne Jimenez, 2023; Kelsey Dayle John, 2023; Eunjeong Lee, 2022; Cruz Medina, 2019; Mya Poe, 2022; Nora K. Rivera, 2020; Iris Ruiz, 2016, 2021; Ruiz and Baca, 2017; Rachael Shapiro and Missy Watson, 2022; Vieira, 2023; and Qianqian Zhang-Wu, 2021, 2023.

in rhetoric and writing studies collectively ask: “How can teachers and scholars move beyond the presumption that *English* is the *only* language of knowledge making and learning?” (Cushman, 2016, p. 234). Decolonialism moves the discipline from graphocentric to geopolitical orientations: Iris Ruiz and Damián Baca (2017) argued that “decolonizing [writing studies] involves rethinking and revising the field’s teleological macro-narratives of human progress, with whitened, Europeanized fourth-century Greeks cemented as the field’s intellectual cradle” (p. 226). Ruiz (2021), in her chapter on disciplinary research traditions, argued we must question “current critical methods” because they “are embedded in traditions of Whiteness and Western oriented epistemologies” (p. 39). And Canagarajah (2024) traced “‘autonomous’ and ‘graphocentric’” conceptions of literacy to a Eurocentric ontology that has “had powerful influences on writing pedagogy in educational institutions” (p. 291). Historically, these pedagogies have valued the finished text and approached writing and reading as primarily *mental* processes over which individuals can gain control through a focus on structure, cohesion, and coherence (p. 292). While contemporary approaches to the teaching of writing emphasize its social, contextual, and multimodal components, Canagarajah noted that these approaches “also lack the geopolitical perspective, critical edge, and archival work that inform decolonizing approaches” (p. 293; see also Canagarajah, 2019; Rivera, 2020).

Additionally, rhetoric and writing scholars who have taken up decolonial perspectives highlight language and literacy practices as embodied, relational, and racialized, in contrast to the “deracialized and disembodied politics” of the monolingual ideology that has historically saturated the discipline (Do, 2022, p. 453). Recognizing language practices as both corporeal and networked, Canagarajah (2024) pointed out, disrupts colonialism’s—and the discipline’s—prioritization of “cognitivism, logocentrism, and individualism” (p. 292). Indeed, Mya Poe (2022) advocated for a writing pedagogy that complicates the development of Western thought as “a series of epistemological developments and exchanges” among a variety of stakeholders rather than a straightforward, linear progression of thought over time. Milu (2021) and Tom Hong Do (2022) both problematized the discipline’s tendency to homogenize multilingual and globally connected student populations in the US. Instead, they argued, racial, national, and linguistic differences are tied to colonialism and therefore produce embodied experiences of literacy and literacy education that cannot be universalized (see also Do & Rowan, 2022; Jiang, 2024; E. Lee, 2024). Such embodiment, Cushman et al. (2015) highlighted, should not be reduced to only those who are “marked” in Western culture by the color of their skin or the accent on their tongue: In their critique of the discipline for “reify[ing] the position and imposition of English

only,” they tied English’s position “at the top of the language hierarchy” to Whiteness, an invisible racial presence that produces “a monolithic baseline against which all other [people] are labeled” (p. 333).

All these scholars suggest that a decolonial lens offers more promise than other approaches (such as those informed by Marxism or postcolonialism) in forwarding the discipline’s social justice efforts. Other approaches often, according to Cushman (2016), “fall short of their social justice goals because they critique a content or place of practice without revealing and altering their own structuring tenets” (p. 239). In fact, “social justice” is a term used broadly within the field to designate any approach meant to lessen social inequality. However, as a “structuring tenet” of much research and curricular development within rhetoric and writing studies, the idea of “social justice” cannot be understood as universal. In her discussion of “linguistic justice,” Ligia Mihut (2020) noted that transnational writing teacher-scholars’ definitions of what constitutes “linguistic justice” are dynamic and “largely geographical/socio-politically dependent,” informed by individuals’ social positioning and their experience(s) with(in) U.S.-based and extra-U.S. contexts of teaching, writing, and research (p. 273). Along similar lines, Keith Gilyard (2016) gently critiqued translanguaging theory—a strand of writing studies generally assumed to promote social justice—for its tendency to present “language as an abstraction” and to universalize or “flatten[] language differences” (p. 284). I too have called attention to the ways in which power inflects language practices and is particularly heightened in non-Anglo contexts where English carries what I have called a different “weight,” or “a power dynamic that affects those using so-called ‘non-standard’ varieties of English” (Arnold, 2021, p. 189; see also Vieira, 2019). And Milu (2021) called for a pedagogy that highlights rather than reduces Black students’ experiences with language ideology as differently *raced* and *colonized* depending on those students’ transnational affiliations and backgrounds. Even when students are encouraged to draw from their many linguistic resources in the writing classroom in the interest of promoting social justice, rhetoric and writing studies scholars have shown that many students still conceive of literacy through a monolingual lens and are unwilling or reluctant to take risks that run counter to English monolingualism (see for example Arnold, 2018; Medina, 2019; R. Shapiro & Watson, 2022; Zhang-Wu, 2023). Definitions of “linguistic social justice,” then, must be understood as highly contextual, heterogeneous, and historically situated. Chapters 3 and 5 in this book provide concrete examples that resist universal understandings of language and power.

Another “structuring tenet” of rhetoric and writing studies is the concept of “citizenship.” The concept of citizenship, and the development of a “critical

citizenship,” has long been assumed to be an unquestionably positive outcome of writing pedagogy, as well as higher education more generally. Amy Wan (2011) critiqued the rhetorical power of the concept of “citizenship” that pervades scholarship in English studies as well as many of the discipline’s professional documents, writing: “At its core, the citizenship we create through literacy is aspirational, a promise” (46). The field’s contemporary attraction to the ostensibly “uncontrovertible” stronghold of the “production of the citizen” (Wan, 2011, p. 28) in the writing classroom can be linked to public nationalist rhetoric and official U.S. policy surrounding the “new” wave of immigrant populations around the turn of the 20th century. Both NeCamp (2014) and C. Kendall Theado (2013) suggested that the “army” of immigrants (as cited in NeCamp, 2014, p. 12) who arrived in the United States between 1880 and 1920 prompted legislation linking the concept of Americanness with literacy. Specifically, many of the educational projects developed in response to the wave of immigrants were intended to “creat[e] a literate public that could support democratic government and preserve ‘traditional’ American values” (NeCamp, 2014, p. 13) and thus “[link]” literacy “with the ideal American identity” (Kendall Theado, 2013, p. 712).

In contrast to its approach toward enculturating new immigrants to American culture and values, the US has also historically allowed for the disenfranchisement of African Americans and other minority populations by using literacy as a weapon with which members of these groups were barred from voting and not provided with equal educational opportunities. A decolonial approach highlights the historical connections between literacy, history, culture, nation, and citizenship—effectively delinking them—and asks in response: When educators promote “citizenship,” what kind of citizen do they mean? To which nation, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender do ideal “citizens” belong, and what kind of literate behavior is expected of them? What are the goals of literacy education for those who have historically been excluded from civic or social life, who are denied or cannot obtain citizenship in the nation where they reside, or for whom citizenship has been used as a tool of oppression (see Bloom, 2018; Ribero, 2016)? In the context of SPC, I problematize universal constructions of citizenship in Chapter 4.

A decolonial perspective helps identify and complicate the uncritical deployment of “social justice,” “citizenship,” and other key concepts in writing studies, which are often understood as universal when they in fact represent one of many ways of thinking about literacy and literacy education. We can approach the seeming inevitability of monolingualism and English as a *lingua franca* similarly and draw from a more nuanced understanding of the history of these developments to productively question the modern

history of rhetoric and writing studies. This history traditionally has been conceptualized as a monolingual, monocultural, and Anglocentric history. This key assumption about the field has shaped (and continues to shape) scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies in fundamental ways, resulting in limiting perspectives about the scope of the discipline and approaches to writing instruction and curriculum. In the next section and throughout the rest of this book, I expose the “structuring tenets” (Cushman, 2016, p. 239) of English monolingualism and Anglocentricism as ideologies grounding the discipline’s historiography, and I make the case for a decolonial (re)imagining the discipline’s history as transnational and translangual.

Toward a Decolonial Historiography in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

As part of the process of its stabilization and legitimation as an academic discipline, rhetoric and writing studies has, over decades, constructed historical narratives about itself that have in many ways determined the field’s focus and scope. These narratives, I argue, rely on historiography grounded in colonial epistemology, and they have been used even in contemporary scholarship that seeks to disrupt the same narratives. The first historicization of the discipline is often traced to Albert Kitzhaber’s (1953) dissertation, *Rhetoric in American Colleges* (published as a monograph in 1990), which one reviewer characterized as the study that “ushered in the discipline as we know it” (Morris, 1991, p. 472). This trend toward disciplinary historicization grew significantly in the 1980s and 1990s with the publication of histories of the discipline, including those written by James Berlin (1984; 1987), Susan Miller (1991), Robert Connors (1997), Thomas Miller (1997), and Sharon Crowley (1998). These historians, focusing primarily on 19th- and 20th-century elite colleges with textbooks and other written materials as evidence, constructed an Anglo-centric disciplinary history. Later histories published over the last 20 years have sought to complicate these initial constructions of the discipline with sharper focuses on non-elite, working class, and sometimes transnational sites of adult writing instruction, as well as on diverse student populations.¹³

13 Some of the historians who have complicated these initial historical narratives include Arnold, 2014, 2016, 2018; Baca, 2009; Amy Dayton-Wood, 2012; Patricia Donahue & Gretchen Flesher Moon, 2007; Katherine Fredlund, 2021; Jessica Enoch, 2008; Candace Epps-Robertson, 2018; David Gold, 2008; Jane Greer, 1999, 2015, 2023; Jaclyn Hilberg, 2020; Susan Jarratt, 2009; Jeyaraj, 2009; Emily Legg, 2014; Sue Mendelsohn, 2017; Milson-Whyte, 2015; M. Amanda Moulder, 2011; Samantha NeCamp, 2014; Susan Romano, 2004; Jacqueline Jones Royster & Jean C. Williams, 1999; Ruiz, 2016; Mira Shimabukuro, 2011; Patricia Sullivan, 2012; Hui Wu, 2007; You, 2010; Michelle Zaleski, 2017; Scott Zaluda, 1998.

In spite of more recent historical work, the discipline's first historians and their historiography were highly influential, and the narratives they produced are repeated almost without question today. These narratives are particularly important because they emerged at a time when rhetoric and writing studies was marking itself as a discipline distinct from closely related fields, including literature, linguistics, and communication. Two narratives that have proven especially important to establishing rhetoric and writing studies as a discipline, and which remain familiar today, include what I call the "Harvard narrative" and the "decline and fall narrative." The Harvard narrative ties the foundations of the contemporary discipline to the establishment of first-year writing at Harvard in the late 19th century, when Harvard moved from the classical model of education to the modern liberal arts curriculum that we associate with most American or American-style universities today. The "decline-and-fall" narrative is similar to the Harvard narrative in that it identifies Harvard's shift away from a classical, or rhetorical, curriculum as key to the disciplinary history of rhetoric and writing studies, but it ties the discipline to a much longer and renowned history—the Western rhetorical tradition. For example, Connors (1997) lamented the "decline and fall" of rhetorical instruction in the American university and linked this fall to composition's low status in contemporary higher education; according to Connors, rhetoric courses were "sought by students" prior to the Civil War, but by the turn of the century, such courses were instead "despised and sneered at"; and while professors of rhetoric once occupied the "empyrean of named chairs," they became, over time, "oppressed, ill-used, and secretly despised" (pp. 171–172). Rhetorically speaking, the decline-and-fall narrative enables the field to construct a "narrative of retreat [from] and return [to]" a much longer Western rhetorical tradition (Hawk, 2007, p. 14). Both narratives have worked to help establish rhetoric and writing studies as a stand-alone discipline: Tying the discipline to Harvard is useful because it provides a concrete and recognizable origin point for the establishment of first-year writing in American higher education. Tying the discipline to a longer rhetorical tradition is useful because that tradition holds a high status in academia that is comparable to the status of literature.

At the same time, both the Harvard and decline-and-fall narratives prove problematic when examined through a decolonial lens. The Harvard narrative has been constructed through evidence based on textbooks and other written materials from selective and primarily White institutions of higher education. Such archival materials are limited in scope and representation. The Harvard narrative assumes that rhetorical education ended on a broader scale after Harvard changed its curriculum—a fact that has been persuasively

challenged by a number of disciplinary historians over the last 20 years.¹⁴ The decline-and-fall narrative is problematic through a decolonial lens because it assumes there is a logical throughline that can be traced from ancient Greek rhetoric to present-day American literacy education. The narrative assumes a linear historical progression that relies on Western thought as the primary marker of progress—what Mignolo (2007) called the colonial rhetoric of modernity. Further, the narrative seeks to create an ahistorical equivalence between the past and the present that fails to acknowledge important geopolitical, historical, and linguistic differences that make such equivalence deeply problematic. Finally, true to its colonial foundations, the narrative constructs a hierarchy of knowledge that assumes that Western “classical” or “rhetorical” approaches to literacy education are superior to others.

Rhetoric and writing scholars have relied on and repeated these narratives in different forms to substantiate their contributions and add legitimacy to the discipline. This historicization has worked, rhetorically and politically, to highlight and complicate some of the central concerns of the field, such as best practices for the teaching of writing, the role of first-year writing and its legacy as a “service” course in American higher education, and the field’s interdisciplinary ties to rhetoric, literature, communications, education, and linguistics. This historicization has also raised questions about, and prompted proposals for, the future of the discipline. Disciplinary historiography and historical understanding, in other words, affect contemporary teaching and research in rhetoric and writing studies. For this reason, scholars must consider not only how these historical narratives have shaped the discipline, but also how to productively question and potentially dislodge the assumptions underlying those narratives.

For an example of what can be gained by rethinking these narratives through a decolonial lens, I would like to show how one historical account of the discipline makes a valuable, potentially decolonial argument about monolingual ideology but falls short of shifting disciplinary knowledge because it relies on both the Harvard and decline-and-fall narratives. Horner and Trimbur’s (2002) article, “English Only and U.S. College Composition,” won the 2003 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Richard Braddock award for the best article published in *College Composition and Communication* (CCCC, n.d.), considered one of the discipline’s flagship journals. This article is significant because in it, Horner and Trimbur (2002)

14 For example, Enoch, 2008, Gold, 2008, Jarratt, 2009, and Ruiz, 2016, have effectively complicated this assumption, providing evidence from other institutional, geographical, and cultural contexts demonstrating that rhetorical education continued in other institutions around the turn of the 20th century.

questioned how “a tacit, unidirectional monolingual language policy” came to dominate the teaching of writing at Harvard (and ostensibly other American colleges and universities) in the mid- to late-19th century (p. 595). Horner and Trimbur relied upon both the Harvard and decline-and-fall narratives to argue that Harvard’s shift from a classical to liberal arts curriculum effectively “territorialized” and sidelined foreign languages in the modern curriculum, leading to the reification of a problematic English-only approach to writing pedagogy and programs that persists today. Following the same logic as the decline-and-fall narrative, they implicitly suggested that the classical curriculum that preceded Harvard’s shift in curriculum was superior because it centered the study of multiple languages. At the time of its publication, Horner and Trimbur’s article was one of the first to analyze the workings of monolingual ideology in writing pedagogy through a historical lens.

While Horner and Trimbur’s (2002) analysis is important when contextualized as a new reading of the discipline’s history that exposes how monolingual ideology gained traction in the field, it is problematically grounded on both the Harvard and decline-and-fall narratives. Specifically, Horner and Trimbur did not question the accuracy of the Harvard or the decline-and-fall narratives as representations of actual writing curriculum and pedagogies throughout the United States in the mid- to late-19th century. Additionally, while they acknowledged that students and faculty were dissatisfied with the “translation English” approaches to language instruction at Harvard prior to the shift, Horner and Trimbur did not question the implications of the fact that only Western languages (i.e. Greek, Latin, French, German, and Italian) were taught at Harvard prior to, and after, the shift (p. 596).

Possibly because they relied on previously published historical narratives about the discipline to make their case, Horner and Trimbur (2002) focused on *the fact of the shift* at Harvard, rather than asking *why* the shift at Harvard occurred or even whether the previous historical accounts they relied on are representational. If we scholars in rhetoric and writing studies shift our focus to *why*, we can (re)consider the foundation of modern writing instruction in the US, and thus the roots of our disciplinary knowledge, as colonial. A decolonial lens would suggest that Harvard and other elite colleges changed their curriculum in part as a response to translingual and transnational discourses that existed and circulated in the same historical and geopolitical context of the mid- to late-19th century. Institutional curricular changes and language policies deliberately meant to suppress these discourses.

Transnational and translingual discourses—visible in the US during this time period as a result of waves of new immigrants, the abolition of slavery, and the continued displacement of Indigenous people from their land—posed

threats to the settler-colonial structures, ways of life, and established social hierarchies foundational to the new United States and at institutions such as Harvard. These threats pushed Harvard and other institutions to change the curriculum to promote English and Anglophone culture—and with it, American nationalist and monolingual ideologies—while suppressing multilingual practices and transnational perspectives. Transnational and translingual discourses in the context of colonial epistemology constitute an absent presence that much of the discipline’s historiography has ignored or has treated as separate and disconnected from primarily White, monolingual contexts of education. As much value as Horner and Trimbur’s (2002) analysis has brought to the discipline in raising awareness about how English-only monolingualism gained traction in U.S. writing classrooms, it falls short of questioning the roots of disciplinary knowledge, which is based in part on the discipline’s historical narratives.

Institutional curricula and language policies were (and continue to be) responses to extra-institutional realities. The historiography of rhetoric and writing studies has focused more on the *inside* of institutions of higher education than on the discourses circulating *outside*, and it has not gone far enough in analyzing how those (sometimes competing) discourses affected institutional decision-making. An example of such analysis would consider translingual and transnational discourse in the context of Harvard’s founding in the early 17th century, as well as broader shifts in American culture and American higher education during the mid- to late-19th century, in relation to the introduction of a general writing requirement. Harvard and other elite colleges and universities were founded in a pre-revolutionary American colonial context. The Anglo-European wealth upon which these early institutions were built was generated in large part through the deeply transnational and translingual enterprise of slavery (Smith & Ellis, 2017).

Moving forward into the 19th century, the United States continued to expand through settler colonial practices that were transnational and translingual; in order to build the nation, the federal government illegally gave away to settlers, including new immigrants, land owned by Indigenous nations across the continent. In tandem with these developments, “land-grant” colleges and universities were established on stolen land (see U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.). Much of the success of settler colonialism in the United States was dependent on English-language literacy, a rejection of Indigenous sovereignty, the suppression of Native languages and voices, and the maintenance of existing social class structures.

The establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) particularly during the post-Civil War Reconstruction era attests

to both the success of former slaves in demanding and acquiring higher education but also the reality of Jim Crow laws in the U.S. south, which maintained racial segregation and prevented many Black people from enrolling in already established colleges and universities. Scholars recognize today that HBCUs played (and continue to play) an important role in supporting the translingual practices of African Americans.

Another example of the largely unacknowledged circulation of transnational and translingual discourse was uncovered in Matsuda's (2006) account of international students in U.S. higher education during the 19th and 20th centuries. The presence of these students, and the transnational and translingual discourses they brought with them, led to the development of policies of what Matsuda called "linguistic containment," or multilingual exclusion, in writing curriculum. Linguistic containment, Matsuda argued, further reified monolingual ideology and the construction of what he terms the "myth of linguistic homogeneity" in rhetoric and writing studies today.

To add another layer to this analysis, as Kimball (2021) made clear, English was not the inevitable language of the United States in the late 18th century, when the republic was new. Other colonial languages, such as French and Spanish, circulated throughout North American colonial territories during the 18th and 19th centuries. Together, these colonial languages contributed to the erasure of other languages, such as those spoken by newer immigrants, African Americans, and Indigenous peoples. What's more, the emergence of the doctrine of individualism (Spack, 2002, p. 29) and nationalism, both of which are linked to colonial epistemology and spread through discourse, contributed to the erasure of languages other than English in the United States. In her study of how English was imposed upon, and then used by, Native peoples in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries, Ruth Spack (2002) argued that 19th-century individualism led European Americans to understand the communalism characteristic of Native tribes as "barbaric"; English was "the language of individualists," and as such, Anglo Americans "believed" the language was "capable of breaking [the] barrier [to Native peoples' acculturation] and thus of improving students' lives" (Spack, 2002, p. 29). English, therefore, was used as a tool for colonization, in that it became "[tied] ... to the notion of progress in civilization" and was promoted at the same time as other languages were wiped from the mouths of Indigenous peoples (Spack, 2002, p. 30). As such, we must understand institutional moves to promote English, within and outside of the United States and often at the expense of other languages, not merely as internal curricular decisions but as responses to translingual and transnational realities outside of the institution.

A decolonial lens allows for seeing that institutional shifts such as those that occurred at Harvard in the mid- to late-19th century run parallel to, and in conversation with, larger cultural shifts in which colonial epistemology is both foundational and oppressive. Calling her historiographic approach translingual, though I would also call it decolonial, Kimball (2021) urged researchers to “first recognize an overarching, centripetal power of ‘English’ over ... discourses, and ... then do our best to read across—to transgress—our own familiar ideas of ... discourses and languages alike, keeping the languaging of the languages always in the foreground, and reading especially for the absences created” (p. 62).

The decolonial historiographic approach that I take in this book builds upon Kimball’s (2021) approach in two important ways. First, this approach highlights the value of examining transnational and translingual histories such as SPC’s history through a decolonial lens. Second, this approach allows for an understanding of histories such as this one as evidence of the power of English monolingual and American nationalist ideologies in determining literacy curriculum and language policy more generally. Throughout this book, I show that SPC’s curriculum and policy were meant to suppress translingual and transnational discourses both internal and external to the college. Indeed, monolingualism and American nationalism *are evidence of* the presence of transnational and translingual voices: Monolingualism and nationalism are direct ideological responses to the threats posed by such discourse. While translingual and transnational discourses were certainly more visible at SPC than they were at Harvard and other American institutions during the same period due to SPC’s specific geopolitical location, a decolonial examination of seemingly monolingual literacy curricula and language policies can illuminate extant translingual and transnational discourses and therefore show how these discourses in fact shaped seemingly monolingual literacy curricula and language policies both in and outside of the US.

In this way, I argue, the history of rhetoric and writing studies can be understood as deeply transnational and translingual. The discipline’s representation of its history—through a historiography grounded in colonial epistemology—has been limited by primarily focusing on monolingual practices and pedagogies rather than investigating the translingual and transnational contexts in which monolingualism and nationalism operate. A decolonial, translingual, and transnational historiography requires not only an exploration of contexts of literacy education outside of the United States, as I do here, but also an examination of the transnational and translingual contexts in which institutions such as Harvard were motivated to promote monolingual and Anglocentric ideologies. Traces of translingual and transnational discourses

in histories of the field that have accounted for the educational experiences of non-White and multilingual populations inside the US can be seen (see my discussion of these histories earlier in this chapter). These traces can be interrogated further. But scholars can also reconceptualize the discipline's history as translingual and transnational by revis(it)ing the foundational accounts of seemingly White monolingual and monocultural contexts of higher education. Even when translingual practices and transnational perspectives are not visible in institutional records, scholars can re-examine language policies, curricular decisions, and other archival materials as *responses to* a larger context that included translingual and transnational discourses, which institutions of higher education have long sought to suppress. This revisioning of the discipline's historical foundations also encourages contemporary writing scholars and teachers to study and learn from non-Anglophone contexts of writing instruction and apply this new knowledge to their own teaching and research going forward.

Chapter Overview

In the next chapter of this book (Chapter 2), I provide deeper context for Syrian Protestant College as an institution that has a specific geopolitical and transnational history. This context helps establish the significance of SPC as a site of colonial literacy education and its relevance to the field of rhetoric and writing studies. Specifically, I outline social and educational developments in the Ottoman Empire and Syria during the 19th century. Additionally, I provide an overview of the modern history of Christian missions in the region and the missionary organization that was tied to SPC: ABCFM. Throughout this discussion, I establish the strong ties that bind colonial epistemology and American nationalism to literacy education at SPC as well as the ways in which the larger geopolitical context fostered the establishment of such ties. Appendix A, which provides enrollment and demographic information for Syrian Protestant College, supplements this chapter and the next three.

The following three chapters analyze specific moments in SPC's history that illustrate well how colonial epistemology is transmitted and sustained through literacy education. In Chapter 3, I show how common, specifically American, understandings and assumptions about literacy move across national, cultural, and linguistic borders through curriculum and policy. Specifically, I analyze archival documents such as SPC's annual reports, course catalogues, and other materials in light of existing histories of writing instruction in the US in order to make connections between SPC and its North American counterparts. This inquiry demonstrates how the idea

of America was exported in and through literacy curriculum and language policy at SPC while interacting with the colonial logics of Christian missionary work. The process of exportation was never smooth or complete, however, as it interacted with sociocultural, political, and linguistic realities on the ground in Greater Syria and the Ottoman Empire. For example, in contrast to the shift toward monolingualism that occurred at many U.S.-based institutions of higher education at the turn of the 20th century, SPC's curriculum remained solidly multilingual. At the same time, while SPC's administrators and faculty debated the merits of teaching primarily in the Arabic vernacular or in English (ultimately deciding on English), the terms of the debate upheld the power, paternalism, and coloniality of the college's American founders.

The analysis presented in Chapter 3 illustrates how colonial assumptions about culture, language, and identity become rooted within literacy education and policy, resulting in the racism and xenophobia that underlies much of the history (and to some extent the present) of writing instruction. The example of SPC also points to the limits of scholars' and educators' understandings of what writing and literacy in English (and in other languages) mean outside of Anglophone contexts, where English carries a different "weight"—a different material value—for multilinguals. This analysis, in other words, arms teachers and scholars committed to social justice with a way to recognize the processes by which colonial epistemology becomes attached to literacy education through seemingly mundane features of writing education, such as curriculum and policy.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on two moments of student protest at SPC, during which students drew upon their literacy education and an imagined America to negotiate their educational goals with the college's American administrators and faculty. In the first moment of protest, the 1882 "Lewis Affair," students spoke up in response to the forced resignation of a beloved professor in the medical school. They wrote a series of petitions to the college administrators, using rhetorical appeals that leaned heavily on American values and beliefs. During the academic year 1908–1909, students staged a second, more prolonged protest after a visiting missionary gave an Islamophobic sermon during the college's required chapel service. Muslim and Jewish students of the college refused to attend chapel and attempted to force a change in the college's policy, which required attendance at all chapel services regardless of students' religious identities. This protest, known as the "Muslim Controversy," is notable in that it demonstrates how SPC students drew upon their literacy education to spark debate not only within the college but also among local and regional community members: By the end of

the year, more than 60 articles in Beirut- and Cairo-based newspapers and journals had been published about the controversy, largely as a result of the literacy work of the protesting students.

Both student protests failed to enact change, and my examination in Chapter 4 of the petitions and other written documents surrounding the protests identifies this failure as largely epistemological. Specifically, the protests highlight competing understandings about what America represented in the region, what an American education meant, and whom such an education was for. Additionally, students' writing during the protests illustrate their attempts to identify themselves as distinct from, but also a part of, the America signified in and through the college. Students learned through their failed protests that the literacy education that they received at SPC was not neutral and was ultimately meant to serve colonial interests rather than their own. This analysis provides rhetoric and writing scholars a more nuanced picture of the ways in which contradictory definitions of literacy and the desires of stakeholders define writing instruction today. Additionally, scholars and educators can gain a better appreciation for the reasons why students from historically underrepresented groups may resist writing pedagogy or otherwise struggle in the American writing classroom. SPC students' experiences of the tension between the epistemologies attached to literacy education, particularly in English, have parallels to the experiences of many students today.

Similar tensions are explored in Chapter 5, in which the focus is centered on student writing produced in nearly 50 English- and Arabic-language student magazines and newspapers published between 1899 and 1920 at SPC (Appendix B provides a full listing of these publications). On the one hand, the student writing produced during this time period is important to the history of rhetoric and writing studies because it illustrates not only student and teacher engagement with and support for writing at the college but also the college's role in sponsoring literacy even outside the bounds of the classroom. However, more than its significance for the historical record, the student writing analyzed in this chapter reflects students' negotiation of their identities as multilingual Arabs living in a rapidly changing geopolitical context and schooled within a Western colonial frame.

Throughout Chapter 5, I provide specific examples of the relationships among extracurricular student writing, language, nationalism, and identity. Additionally, I show how their publications highlight how students both constructed an imagined America through writing and at the same time also used writing—particularly writing in Arabic—to critique and sometimes resist the dominant colonial epistemology characterized by SPC as an institution and also the literacy education it provided. My analysis in this chapter

suggests that the English language served as a constraint for students, as they expressed themselves in markedly different ways when writing in Arabic. Rhetoric and writing scholars and teachers benefit from the examination presented in this chapter in that it drives us to conduct a more thoughtful accounting of the ways in which multilingual learners may encounter and experience the English-language writing classroom. Specifically, our classrooms may unwittingly (pre)determine the rhetorical stances and claims that historically underrepresented students and multilingual students can make due to the historical ties between coloniality and the teaching of English.

I conclude the book with Chapter 6 by synthesizing six ways in which SPC's version of literacy education, as explicated in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, conveyed implicit and often false promises to its students about what might be achieved in and through literacy. Literacy education at SPC, I argue, was deeply tied to ideologies of American nationalism and English monolingualism, clear markers of colonial epistemology. I first trace how the archival evidence presented in the book explicates the relationship among power, language, and literacy education through its nuanced examination of materials in both Arabic and English as well as in the experience of multilingual students. Second, the archival materials examined in this study also reveal that the "weight" of English is highly variable and contextual, dependent upon historical and geographical factors as well as personal identity and even imagined futures. Third, I reiterate how the analysis presented throughout the book affirms Phillipson's (1992) and Pennycook's (1998) claims that English literacy education outside of Anglophone contexts is profoundly entwined with colonial epistemology. As a fourth point, I review the evidence presented in earlier chapters that reveals how language constructs place, identity, nationhood, and belonging through epistemology. Fifth, I highlight how the specifically transnational and translingual context of SPC created the conditions for the high stakes and implicit promises that students experienced in their pursuit of literacy, particularly in English. Sixth, I point to evidence in the historical record that reveals student agency in their literacy education and their deployment of this agency to complicate the imagined America constructed by the college.

Finally, I underline in Chapter 6 the larger implications of this study for the field of rhetoric and writing studies. I argue that scholars, program administrators, and teachers have much to gain from the decolonial historiographic approach that I enact throughout this book. Studies such as this one add to a growing body of evidence that the history of the discipline is, at its foundation, deeply transnational and translingual. This new understanding of the history of rhetoric and writing studies, in turn, calls the discipline's

“structuring tenets” (Cushman, 2016, p. 239) into question and enables us to more clearly see the limitations that such tenets have created for the field’s scope. A decolonial lens, I argue, brings into view not only the problems of our past but also pluriversal understandings of writing and rhetoric that can enrich our work in the future and ultimately serve *all* our students well.