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## **Critical Latinx Indigeneities and Education**

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## **Indigenous Immigrant Youth's Understandings of Power: Race, Labor, and Language**

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### **Abstract**

One highly significant yet under-investigated source of variation within the Latinx Education scholarship are Indigenous immigrants from Latin America. This study investigates how Maya and other Indigenous recent immigrant youth from Guatemala and Mexico, respectively, understand indigeneity. Using a Critical Latinx Indigeneities analytic, along with literature on the coloniality of power and settler-colonialism, I base my findings on a year-long qualitative study of eight self-identifying indigenous youth from Guatemala and Mexico and highlight two emergent themes: youth's understanding of (a) asymmetries of power based on division of labor, and (b) language hierarchies. I propose that race is a key component that contributes to the reproduction of divisions of labor and the subaltern positioning of Indigenous languages. Findings from this study provide linguistic, economic, and historical contexts of Maya and other Indigenous immigrants' lived experiences to educators and other stakeholders in public schools working with immigrant Latinx populations.

*Key Words:* Critical Latinx Indigeneities, Indigenous youth, coloniality

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## Introduction

Latinxs<sup>1</sup> continue to be the largest racialized and minoritized group in the United States (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011; Stepler & Lopez, 2016) and its public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The number of recent unaccompanied minors coming into the U.S. from Mexico and Central America (Donato & Sisk, 2015), however, is currently changing the composition of Latinxs. Many of the recent unaccompanied youth from Guatemala, for instance, come from rural, often predominantly Maya, regions such as the Western Highlands (Stinchcomb & Hershberg, 2014). Destinations for the majority of the new Maya immigrant populations are urban centers that have historically consisted of Mexican immigrant and/or Mexican-descent communities (Peñalosa, 1984). This new Maya immigrant population is changing the Latinx student demographic in urban public schools (López & Irizarry, 2019). Such new change requires of educators, including teachers, practitioners, school staff, and researchers, working with recent immigrants from Latin America to understand the markedly different experiences of Maya and other Indigenous<sup>2</sup> youth in their countries of origin and their new contexts of reception (Dabach, 2014; Peñalosa, 1984).

Recently, Latinx Education scholars have started to investigate the experiences of Indigenous immigrants, primarily from Southern Mexico, mapping out identity development (Gonzalez, 2019; Kovats Sánchez, 2018), post-primary and secondary schooling experiences (Casanova, 2012; Casanova, O'Connor & Anthony-Stevens, 2016), linguistic diversity and characteristics (Pérez, Vasquez, & Buriel, 2016), and pedagogical interventions based on linguistic and cultural assets (Menchaca Bishop & Kelley, 2013; Ruiz & Barajas, 2012; Velasco, 2010). Others have examined negative experiences Indigenous youth face in and out of school contexts (Barillas Chón, 2010; Stephen, 2007; Urrieta, 2003). These studies are important contributions to an emerging field of Indigenous immigrant studies; however, they do not investigate the experiences of recent Maya immigrants nor sufficiently address Indigenous immigrants' self-understandings of indigeneity.

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx is used as a gender inclusive term with those traditionally not included in the gendered uses of Latina, Latino, Latina/o, or Latin@ in the field of education.

<sup>2</sup> In this study, "Indigenous" refers to a self-understanding process contributing to Indigenous group belonging and identification (Urrieta, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how recent Maya immigrant youth from Guatemala and recent Indigenous immigrant youth from Mexico understand indigeneity. I point out that the ways youth make sense of indigeneity is through their experiences with and understanding of asymmetrical relationships of power based on the dynamics of race, labor, and language in Guatemala, Mexico, and the U.S. I rely on a “Critical Latinx Indigeneities” (CLI) analytic developed by Blackwell, Boj Lopez, and Urrieta (2017) that accounts for the “co-constitutive relationships of multiple contexts of power and multiple colonialities” (p. 127) present in Indigenous immigrant experiences. Critical Latinx Indigeneities assists in analyzing flows of understandings the Maya and Indigenous youth engage in as they simultaneously make sense of their experiences in the U.S. and places of origin from their new contexts of reception. Youth’s flow of understandings reveals layers of coloniality present in their Indigenous experiences.

Empirically, findings from this study provide cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts of recent Maya immigrant youth’s lived experiences to educators and other stakeholders in public schools. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of utilizing analytics that foreground power and overlapping colonialities. Critical Latinx Indigeneities analytic gives crucial insights into how Indigenous youth make sense of power matrices and different colonialities that overlap in the U.S.

The following is the structure of this paper. First, I describe the importance of utilizing CLI as an analytic that expands understanding of Indigenous immigrant experiences. This is followed by a description of the methodology that includes a discussion of my positionality as Maya and immigrant. I include my positionality because it informed the focus and purpose of this study. I then discuss the major findings of the study: youth’s understanding of (a) asymmetries of power based on divisions of labor, and (b) language hierarchies. I argue that there is a racialization of labor and language produced by overlapping colonialities that contribute to asymmetries of power. Additionally, I propose that outcomes of overlapping colonialities is the subaltern positioning of Indigenous languages and the reproduction of divisions of labor. I conclude by providing recommendations for educators working with Indigenous immigrant youth.

### **Analytic Framework**

Analyzing the experiences of Indigenous immigrants from Latin America require expanding the usual analytics used in the study of Latinx immigration to include examinations of the complex social dynamics of race, indigeneity, power, and colonialities. Critical Latinx Indigeneities has taken on this task. Blackwell et al. (2017) developed CLI to understand the multiple contexts of power and multiple colonialities present, sometimes as overlapping structures, in the experiences of Indigenous immigrants from Latin America. Critical Latinx Indigeneities' interdisciplinary approach allows the use of distinct frames developed in Latin America and the U.S. to address racial constructions, power dynamics, and colonialities that overlap in the lived experiences of Indigenous immigrants. Frames that I find complimentary to CLI are coloniality of power and settler-colonialism.

The "coloniality of power" frame was initially developed by Quijano (2000) to conceptualize an axis of power based on the relationships between the construction of race and global capitalism. Subsequent scholarship has built on Quijano's original work by examining relationships and dynamic of power between literacy (e.g., Mignolo, 1995) and personhood formations (e.g., Maldonado-Torres, 2007). A coloniality of power frame gives us insights into the importance of Spanish in Latin America for maintaining power imbalances through the creation of racial categories, which became reified through linguistic practices (Dussel, 1995; Mignolo, 1995; Rama, 1996). In Guatemala and Mexico, for instance, Spanish is the primary language of instruction, learning, labor, and social interactions. The coloniality of power allows us to see that intentions behind teaching in Spanish are to create a uniformity of language while simultaneously erasing Indigenous languages and identities. These intentions and practices are rooted in the colonization of the Americas and the ontological and epistemological distinctions established by colonizers between Western Europeans and the newly invented *indio* racial category. Specifically, racial differences were created in order to establish and sustain power regimes and relationships of marginality between Western Europeans and the *indio* (Dussel, 1995; Mignolo, 1995; Quijano, 2000; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). Moreover, such differences were transformed into values whereby Western Europeans were seen as fully human and Indigenous people as sub-human. Therefore, all that was connected to indigeneity, that is, to a perceived inferiority, needed to be done away with. Instruments for sustaining this regime of power and differences in the Americas were race, Spanish, and the accompanied hierarchies of race and language (Mignolo, 1995).

In the U.S., settler-colonialism operates as a distinct structure (Wolfe, 1999)<sup>3</sup>. The basis for settler-colonialism was not originally race, but the dispossession of Indigenous people from the original lands they inhabited. Nonetheless, settler-colonialism, like coloniality, share the goal of Indigenous erasure. Some methods of Indigenous erasure are the establishment of citizenship categories and construction of race (Wolfe, 2006). For instance, the U.S. war against Mexico (1846-48) resulted in the creation of citizenship types linked to land, which then re-articulated racial categories. Thus, Indigenous Mexicans living in what was once Mexico not only became “illegal” in the lands they originated from, but also non-Indigenous according to U.S. racial formulations. Exercising power against Indigenous communities in the settler-colonial U.S., unlike in Latin America, was based on proving how White Indigenous people were in order to claim ownership of land. The Whiter, the less claims Indigenous people had to land. The case of Indigenous Mexican immigrants, thus, requires us to expand analytics used to understand Indigenous migration to the U.S.

The CLI analytic and complementary frames such as coloniality of power and settler-colonialism help us understand the multiple contexts of power and overlapping colonialities that Indigenous immigrants experience. Coloniality of power points out racial constructions in Latin America tied to labor, race, and language. Settler-colonialism illustrates relationships between Indigenous erasure and citizenship categories. Thus, CLI allows us to see “contemporary migration as a continual consequence of settler colonialism” (Saldaña-Portillo, 2017, p. 143) that intersects with colonialities and racial formations specific to Latin America.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on a year-long (2015-2016) basic qualitative research of eight self-identified Indigenous and recent immigrant male youth, between 16-20 year of age, from Guatemala and Mexico, in Northwest High (NH)<sup>4</sup>. The focal youth consisted of six Maya youth from Guatemala’s Western Highlands: Edward, Weas, Joaquín, Elías, Antonio, and Hernández. The remaining youth, Adler and Pedro, were from the Mexican states of Morelos and Oaxaca, respectively. While Adler and Pedro did not provide specific ethnic identifications (e.g., Zapoteco, Tlapaneco, Nahuatl, etc.), I include their experiences because they contribute to

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<sup>3</sup> See M. Bianet Castellano (2017) for a thorough discussion of debates regarding settler-colonialism as an appropriate analytic for understanding power dynamics in Latin America.

<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms were used for names of all participants and of places.

broader understandings of how recent indigenous immigrants make sense of indigeneity. At the time of the first interview, the youth had been in the U.S. between 6-24 months. Primary methods for gathering data consisted of semi-structured interviews with the focal Indigenous youth and three non-Indigenous Latinx peers. All interviews with youth lasted between 30-90 minutes and were conducted in Spanish. Other data consisted of classroom and school observations.

Northwest High, located in Evergreen, a midsize metropolitan city in the Pacific Northwest, was selected as the site for this study because it functioned as a newcomer center and high school, and it was in the midst of experiencing an increase of Maya students from Guatemala. Originally designed to be a newcomer center, NH served as a transitional space to orient recent immigrants to life in the U.S., help them gain English language skills, and then transfer them to a neighborhood school<sup>5</sup>. At the time this study took place, NH had transitioned into full high school status, serving 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade levels. The student population was diverse in terms of culture, language, and immigrant status. For instance, during the 2013-2014 school year, Spanish was the leading language spoken by the student population (29%) followed by Chinese (16%), Vietnamese (12%) and Somali (11%). Of the Latinx student population (46 students) during those years, only six were identified as speaking an Indigenous language. I learned through informal conversations with a staff in charge of student enrollment that the number of Indigenous language speakers from Latin America during the 2013-2014 academic year was underreported. Given the nature of the school serving as a transitional space for recent immigrants, the student population was constantly shifting. Therefore, there were no consistent records indicating Indigenous language speaking student populations from Latin America in the school during the time of this study.

It was primarily through my volunteering, starting in the Fall of 2014, that I got to know many of the Latin American youth at the school, including those that participated in this study. Other ways I met students was through recruitment methods in which I asked for participation from students who self-identified as Indigenous, were immigrants to the U.S., between the ages of 15 and 20 years, and had a working understanding of Spanish. I narrowed the age group to

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<sup>5</sup> Northwest High is an “option” school, meaning that students are given the option of attending, remaining, or leaving the school at any time. Varied reasons affecting students’ attendance include immigration status, work opportunities, family circumstances, or option of attending a neighborhood school.

15-20 years of age because most of the Indigenous youth I had established relationships with were between these age ranges. I focused on students who had a working understanding of Spanish simply because I am a Spanish speaker. I realize the importance of gender and I made every effort possible to provide an equal representation of gender in this study. However, none of the young Indigenous women I met who fit my criteria were willing to participate in this study. It is possible that including their understanding of indigeneity might have provided different insights into racial constructions, power dynamics, and other claims made in this study<sup>6</sup>.

Peers often play significant roles in youth's self-perceptions. Moreover, they can impact youth's self-understanding in negative and positive ways (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Peers were interviewed in order to understand their perceptions of Indigenous people in their countries of origin and in the U.S. The peers in this study consisted of three recent immigrant male Spanish-speaking youth from El Salvador and Guatemala who were students at NH. These peers did not self-identify as Indigenous.

Similar to the youth in this study, I am a member of the Maya diaspora who at one point was an undocumented immigrant. Not being satisfied with traditional analytics use to understand Latinx immigrants and then applied to the experiences of Indigenous immigrants like myself, I turned to CLI. Critical Latinx Indigeneities affords me the opportunity to incorporate multiple frames that examine how different contexts of power and colonialities overlap in my own lived experiences and those of other Maya and Indigenous immigrants. My personal engagement in processes of Indigenous remembrance and reclamation (Barillas Chón, 2019) along with my work with immigrant and Indigenous communities over the last twelve years, have provided me with specific knowledge about the lives of immigrant and Indigenous people. In this case, I am an "insider" (Banks, 1998) to the focal youth in this study and their lived experiences. However, my age, documented status, research position, and doctoral degree among other identities that mark differences in power dynamics also makes me an outsider.

Foregrounding my positionality as an insider also does not guarantee a complete and full awareness of the youth's lived experiences. In fact, my "outsiderness" secures me a limited understanding of the youth's sense-making. Additionally, it is quite possible that my

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<sup>6</sup> For a more flushed out conversation on gender and Indigenous migration see Blackwell (2010, 2017).

interpretation of the youth's lived experiences and understandings are different than their own interpretations. Therefore, all interpretations being made about the youth's experiences and sense-making in this study reflects a partial understanding of them. It is not my intention to make generalizations regarding all Maya and Indigenous immigrant youth. Rather, my aims are twofold. First, to investigate the experiences of a specific set of Maya and Indigenous youth and make a type of localized generalization that is specific to the youth in this study. This localized generalization can be used to contextualize the experiences of other Maya and Indigenous immigrant youth throughout the U.S. My second goal is to expand the CLI analytic employed in making sense of Indigenous immigrant's experiences and understandings by including racialized labor incorporation as an important category of analysis.

## Findings

### Division of Labor and Race

The youth in this study made sense of Indigeneity through their experiences with and understanding of asymmetries of power based on divisions of labor in Guatemala and Mexico. Important to notice in this section are the youth's awareness of the mutual relationship between labor and language. In the next section I take a closer examination at how this division of labor has a relationship with language hierarchies identified by the youth. I propose that race is a key component that contributes to divisions of labor and language hierarchies.

The youth in this study were keenly aware that Spanish was the language of economic power in their countries of origin. Exemplifying this point was Adler's statement regarding how people in Mexico were able to obtain jobs: "well, [the language]...that was spoken the most [in Mexico] was Spanish, and based on that, you could get more jobs...and they [employers] would even ask you, 'do you speak Spanish or other [language]?' And when you said you spoke Spanish, 'Ok. We'll hire you tomorrow. Come at this time.'" While Adler pointed out that Spanish speakers were more likely to find work or be hired than non-Spanish speakers, Weas discussed the differences in jobs available to Spanish versus K'iche' speakers. He commented that Spanish was important to speak in Guatemala and further elaborated by saying that those that "*habla[n] bien español y tiene[n] un buen estudio*" ("speak Spanish well and have a good education") had better jobs than K'iche' only speakers. When I asked Weas what types of work K'iche' speakers did, he said, "*agricultura. Sembrando maíz. Trabajo duro*" or "agriculture. Sowing corn. Hard labor."

Apparent in the youth's accounts are understandings of a direct relationship between Spanish and the types of jobs, along with economic opportunities, available to Spanish speakers. For example, Weas believed that learning Spanish, along with a good education, could lead to jobs that were not confined to outside, hard, manual labor. Weas and Adler demonstrated awareness of relationships between divisions of labor and language. However, with the exception of Edward, the youth did not make any explicit connections to the role that race played in job obtainment. In Guatemala, Edward worked in construction and selling clothes and explained that “[one that] works in the *campo*, in construction, that is an *indio* [indian]”<sup>7</sup>. Here, Edward identified a relationship between labor and race that he did not further unpack. Building on his insight, I posit that there is a racialization of labor that parallels divisions of labor established by the coloniality of power. For Quijano, the coloniality of power established racial hierarchies and a new global capitalism that had a direct and reinforcing relationship to labor divisions (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). Quijano (2000) noted, that “the new historical identities produced around the foundation of the idea of race in the new global structure of the control of labor were associated with social roles and geohistorical places” (p. 536). Thus, the new global economic structure imposed a systemic racial division of labor in which each form of “labor control was associated with a particular race” (p. 537). Moreover, the control of a particular form of labor was at the same time the control of a particular racial group. In Latin America, the racial groups created were the Western European and the range of non-Western European, including *indios/as*. Indigenous people, because of their ontological and epistemological position as inferior human beings, were relegated to manual, and in many cases, indentured servitude; whereas white Western Europeans placed themselves in the top division of labor, often remaining there through exploitative policies (Rama, 1996). For Quijano, this new technology of domination/exploitation, manifested as race/labor, “was articulated in such a way that the two elements appeared naturally associated” (p. 537).

The coloniality of power articulated race and labor in such a way that they both became structurally linked and mutually reinforcing. There is a connection between race and labor evident in the youth's personal work experience as well as in their explanation of the types of

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<sup>7</sup> Edward used “indio” as synonymous to Indigenous people.

work Indigenous language speakers in their countries of origin did. Table I illustrates the relationships between Indigenous language and labor histories in countries of origin and the U.S.

Table I <i>Relationships Between Indigenous Languages and Labor</i> <sup>8</sup>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Indigenous Language: Community of Origin</b>	<b>Labor of Community of Origin</b>	<b>Labor of Family In Country of Origin</b>	<b>Youth's Labor: Country of Origin</b>	<b>Youth's Labor: U.S.</b>
<b>Hernández</b>	Mam	<i>Campesinos</i>	N/D	Started working at 12 years old	Dishwasher
<b>Pedro</b>	N/D	<i>Campesinos</i>	<i>Campesino</i>	<i>Campesino</i>	Dishwasher
<b>Edward</b>	K'iche'	<i>Campesinos</i>	Textile and artisanal work	Retail and construction work	Cook/dishwasher Part-time Janitor
<b>Adler</b>	Náhuatl	<i>Campesinos</i>	<i>Campesino</i>	N/D	Painting houses with father
<b>Weas</b>	K'iche'	<i>Campesinos</i>	<i>Campesino</i>	Non-wage <i>campesino</i> work	Dishwasher
<b>Joaquín</b>	K'iche'	<i>Campesinos</i>	<i>Campesino</i>	Worked at wholesale of onions	Restaurant work
<b>Elías</b>	K'iche'	<i>Campesinos</i>	<i>Campesino</i> and Merchant	Non-wage <i>campesino</i> work	Not working

<sup>8</sup> "N/D" indicates No Data. Also, no information is provided for Antonio

The table shows that across indigenous groups in my study there is a relationship between the types of labor done in the communities the youth originated from and Indigenous languages. In this relationship, Indigenous language speakers' labor was characterized as general work in “*agricultura*” (agriculture) and “*campo*” (field). Subsistence living such as harvesting, sowing corn, and “*vender lo que ellos hacen mismo*” or “sell whatever they themselves made” (Elías) characterized some of the youth's families' socioeconomic background, including their labor. Most of the youth described the types of labor Indigenous language speakers did as *campesino* work. Weas described this type of work as “hard labor,” because as Adler said, it was “labor under the sun” that was “*muy mala para la gente*” or “very bad for people.” There were some exceptions to this pattern, however, as for Edward, Indigenous people also worked in construction or in textiles (crafts). Seen in this table is also a relationship between their families' labor and their Indigenous language use. Hernández, Edward, Weas, Elías, and Joaquín were born to parents (or grandparents who raised them as it was the case with Elías) whose primary (or only) language was K'iche' or Mam. Pedro was the only youth who was not born into an Indigenous speaking family. Additionally, five out of the seven youth originated from families with some history of being *campesinos*. We see in the table that two out of the three youth that worked for wages associated with *campesino* labor were primarily K'iche' speakers (Edward and Joaquín). Out of those who did not work for wages (Weas and Elías), one was primarily a K'iche' speaker (Weas), and both helped family with *campesino* work.

The table also evidences that Indigenous language speakers—as illustrated by the Indigenous languages spoken by the youth, their families, and/or their linguistic communities—were relegated to specific labor sectors. More specifically, Indigenous language speakers were most likely to be *campesinos* or do manual labor associated with *campesino* work. I posit that this demonstrates a division of labor along the lines of race. What is more, such racial/division of labor parallels the coloniality of power whereby Indigenous people occupy the lower ranks of the division of labor. For the youth, other forms of labor, that paid better and was less physically demanding, was reserved for Spanish speakers.

Stephen (2007) described a similar labor division along the lines of race that took place in the agricultural work between immigrant Oaxacans and non-Indigenous Spanish-speaking Mexican workers in the U.S. Because her analysis is situated in the U.S, it provides insights into how colonialities overlap. Stephen wrote that the intersections of “the hierarchies of color

found in Mexico, on the U.S. border, and in Mexican communities throughout the United States” results in “formidable hierarchy of power differences experienced in its most intensified form by recent undocumented Indigenous workers who come from rural Mexico” (p. 176). Stephen’s work illustrates a hierarchy of labor reflecting a hierarchy of race present in agricultural work in the U.S. Stephen described how Indigenous migrant workers were often under the direct surveillance of and economic exploitation from non-Indigenous/non-Indigenous speaking, Mexicans. According to Stephen (2007), non-Indigenous/non-Indigenous speaking Mexican foremen would identify indigenous workers in order to exploit their labor. Indigenous migrants were in turn dependent on these Spanish-speaking foremen as intermediaries because they shared a language in common.

The exploitation of Mexican Indigenous labor by their Mexican co-workers illustrates overlapping colonialities. Many Mexicans are *mestizos*, however, their Indigenous roots often are de-emphasized, and in many cases erased. One reason for de-emphasizing their Indigenous ancestry is that *mestizos*, depending on their skin color, education, and language, benefit from the race/labor division made possible by “hierarchies of economic, legal, and cultural power” (Stephen, 2007, p. 176) that are foundational to a settler-colonial state. These hierarchies of power overlap with racial/labor dynamics reproduced in Mexico, creating “hybrid hegemonies” (Blackwell, 2010). The consequence is that agribusinesses take advantage of racial divisions maintained in Mexico to utilize non-Indigenous/non-Indigenous-speaking Mexicans to exploit the labor of Indigenous/Indigenous-speaking Mexicans.

The division of labor, within marginalized labor, in the U.S. was evident in the type of jobs the youth in this study held. For example, two-thirds of the youth in this study did restaurant work. It is quite possible that the metropolitan location in the Pacific Northwest where the youth lived contributed to the types of work they did. Researchers on agricultural and social networks (e.g., Runsten & Kearney, 2004) point to how migrant workers use networks to secure jobs. One result of these networks is the concentration of particular migrants in specific geographic sectors associated with agricultural work. While the youth in this study did not work as migrants, it is quite possible that they relied on labor networks to secure restaurant work. For example, Hernández, Weas, and Edward got their jobs because of family connections. López and Runsten (2004), in their investigation of the labor sectors Indigenous immigrants from Southern Mexico end up in, showed that Mixtecos’ labor was

concentrated in California's agricultural sector, while Zapotecos worked in urban service sectors doing restaurant related work. In my study, the youth's work history in the U.S. reflected the types of work Indigenous Zapotecos did in urban sectors. What I want to highlight here is that there are other interpretations situated in overlapping colonialities that account for why two-thirds of the youth in this study ended up doing restaurant work, dishwashing in particular. Critical Latinx Indigeneities allows us to see that structural practices, which are a product of overlapping colonialities, contribute to divisions of labor reflecting the division of race in Guatemala, Mexico, and the U.S.

### **Language Hierarchies and Race**

Another way youth made sense of indigeneity was through their understanding of asymmetries of power based on language hierarchies. Here, I discuss how language hierarchies parallels a division of labor established by the coloniality of power. Specifically, I argue that similar to labor divisions, race is a key component that informs hierarchies of language.

I begin with two quotations, one from Antonio and one from Adler, to show youth's awareness of and understanding of language hierarchies in Guatemala, Mexico, and the U.S. Asked about the importance of Indigenous languages, referred to as "*dialectos*" by the youth, Antonio said,

In Guatemala, some people have told me, because *dialecto* is only used in your town with those that understand it. On the other hand, Spanish is utilized in different countries. In other places. Well then, "don't use it [*dialecto*]. Focus more on Spanish." Some people have said that to me, because that is what is always used. On the other hand, *dialecto* is also good, but is only used in some places. Then is better to learn Spanish.

Adler responded to the same questions with: "there are people that sometimes say, 'I prefer to speak English than to speak Spanish or this other language [Náhuatl]. It's not even known. No one is going to speak it.'" For Antonio and Adler, English, Spanish and Indigenous languages occupied specific spheres of social and linguistic importance, or lack thereof. When Adler said that others preferred to speak English or Spanish because no one knows or speaks Náhuatl, he was pointing out the global linguistic currency of English and Spanish. Adler understood the importance of learning Spanish in Mexico; he specifically said, "they learn the most famous one like Spanish. The one [language] that everyone speaks." Other youth such as Hernández and

Elías expressed similar views. When I asked what it meant for them to learn English and Spanish they said the following: “for me English is very important in order to look for more opportunities; to be able to talk to people... Learning Spanish is also very interesting, like for people from other countries to be able to communicate with our [Spanish-speaking] people” (Hernández), and “learning English is something that will help a lot in studies [education], at work. In many things, too. Learning Spanish is to be able to communicate with people from different Central American countries” (Elías). Here the youth showed understandings of Spanish being a transnational language of communication in Spanish-speaking countries. This was supported with their view that Spanish was “utilized in different countries” (Antonio), and that it facilitated communication across Latin America.

Spanish being a “famous language” that “everyone speaks” demonstrates its position as the main language of communication and social interaction in Latin America. However, the sphere of influence Spanish had, while broad, was limited to Spanish dominant geographic locations. This is evident when the youth understood that English in the U.S. was important for the social and economic benefits accessible to English speakers. The youth demonstrated a complex understanding of economic and social matrices of power tied to language hierarchies.

From the youth's awareness of the hierarchies of languages in the U.S, and in their countries of origin, we begin to see how they understand the overlapping of colonialities. *Critical Latinx Indigeneities* allows us to situate the youth's experiences and understanding of language hierarchies within the history of colonial languages as mechanism of control. One goal behind imposing Spanish as the language of social and linguistic interactions in the Americas was to sustain particular relations of power and domination between the colonizers and the colonized (Dussel, 1995; Mignolo, 1995). The imposition of the Spanish language had the effect of molding Indigenous people into the image of the Western European colonizer through the control of thought and behavior. For instance, Indigenous people were made to adapt and reproduce Spanish text and thought if they wanted to be part of the new social and political order established by the colonizers and their language of power. In this way, Spanish inserted new logics into Indigenous people's everyday understanding of themselves, each other, and the colonizers.

When Antonio was told to focus more on speaking Spanish than K'iche', because that was the language that was “always used” in Guatemala, he was underlining the entrenchment of

Spanish in Guatemala's everyday linguistic interactions. Adler's statement, and Hernández and Elías' views about the importance of Spanish also exemplify the role of Spanish as the dominant language in Latin America. This power was evident in that Spanish was the language of social and linguistic interactions at school, in their everyday life, and in accessing medical services. When asked how they learned Spanish, the youth who grew up monolingual K'iche' or Mam speakers—Weas, Joaquín, Edward, and Hernández—responded that it was through schools. Edward said, “before when I was five-four years old, I couldn't speak Spanish. It was until I started school, around six years old when I, little [by] little [started to] read in Spanish. And like that, little by little I learned.” Adler and Weas' following experiences demonstrate examples of how Spanish mediated important everyday linguistic interactions. Adler shared the following story of helping a Náhuatl speaking woman to buy soap at a store back in Morelos, Mexico:

Once, a woman went to [the store to] buy *jabón* (soap) and was saying “*jamón*” (“ham”) [to the clerk]. She was asking for *jamón*. And she was given a kilo of *jamón*. But this woman didn't want ham. She wanted *jabón*. Then she asked me, “hey friend, do you speak *dialecto*?” I responded yes in her *dialecto*. I tell them [the clerk], “listen, she wants *jabón*.” “Oh, *jabón*! [said the clerk].” And she was given a kilo of *jabón*.

While it may appear that going to the store and not being able to ask for what they want is a minor inconvenience or inconsequence to their personal lives, such experiences, nonetheless, reveal the impact of Spanish in the everyday linguistic interactions of Indigenous people. Other experiences that were of far more consequence are apparent in accessing medical services. Weas provided a glimpse of this when he talked about his family's experience with hospital visits. Weas shared that his K'iche' only speaking parents had difficulties when going to the hospital because “Spanish is used there only, and they don't understand it.”

Coloniality established Spanish as the language of social and linguistic power in Latin America through its public sanctioning. Thus, Spanish had the effect of controlling behavior in the form of Indigenous people's public linguistic interactions. The importance and urgency of speaking Spanish was apparent in Weas' example of accessing medical services. Youth's understanding of the importance of Spanish in their countries of origin and in the rest of Latin America demonstrates the great pressure they were under to learn this colonial language. Worthy to note is that not all in Mexico and Guatemala learn Spanish. The fact that Weas',

Hernández's, and Edward's mothers did not speak Spanish points to gender and schools as additional factors that mediate the learning of Spanish<sup>9</sup>.

Missing from Adler's comment that Spanish was the language that "everyone speaks," is that it is the language everyone speaks *in public*. Spanish is not only a sanctioned language in Mexico and Guatemala, but also among Latin Americans and Latinxs in the U.S. In my observations at NH I noted the following:

During lunchtime I went to sit next to "V" and "M" [two male K'iche' dominant speakers]. Soon after, "Bal" [Mam and Spanish speaker] and "Teo" [Mexican and non-Indigenous youth] came over to us and sat at the end of the table [across each other]. [At the same] time, "Fran" [Mexican non-Indigenous youth] joined us.

"V" did not talk much and neither did "M." I saw "M" trying to get "V's" attention and lean over to talk with him [almost whisper like]. I overheard "M" say something to "V" in K'iche'. (Field Notes, 1/26/2016)

The above is one example that shows how Indigenous language speakers would speak their language very softly, almost to a whisper, when in public and communal physical spaces such as the school cafeteria and the hallways. Moreover, the frequency of Indigenous language use was rare in the cafeteria and infrequent in the hallways. One reason for these patterns might be attributed to the youth guarding themselves from being overheard speaking their Indigenous languages. Because I was paying particular attention to them, I was able to pick up on their use of Indigenous languages. The only exception to youths' frequency and use of Indigenous languages was in the sports field, during their lunch break. In these instances, Indigenous language speakers would cluster around each other while being further away from Spanish speakers. Moreover, Indigenous speaking youth, especially the young women, would sit together and speak a mix of their Indigenous languages and Spanish, with Indigenous languages prominently spoken. I did not overhear Indigenous language speaking youth speak to one another in Indigenous languages in any of the classrooms where I volunteered with classwork. Additionally, just because I did not overhear youth speaking Indigenous languages in classrooms, it does not mean that they did not do so. It is also possible that they spoke their Indigenous

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<sup>9</sup> See Blackwell (2010) and Martínez-Salazar (2012) for more nuanced investigations of gender and indigeneity.

languages in others spaces, and/or that the frequency of their Indigenous language use was higher than I observed.

Nonetheless, the sanctioning of Spanish in physical and social spaces at NH shows overlapping of colonialities. Colonizers utilized Spanish in Latin America to structure the everyday social and physical life of the colonized. This resulted in the creation of social, physical, and linguistic centers and peripheries where literate White Europeans occupied the former and Indigenous people were relegated to the latter (Rama, 1996). The spaces where the youth in this study frequently spoke their Indigenous languages without whispering them were away from Spanish dominant linguistic centers. Here we see that sanctioned linguistic interactions continued even when the youth no longer lived in their Spanish dominant countries of origin as apparent in the public spaces the youth spoke Spanish, while reserving their Indigenous language use for (semi)private settings.

The history of the English language in the Americas as a settler-colonial power is different from that of Spanish as a power of coloniality. However, the result of English as a mechanism of settler colonialism, much like Spanish for the coloniality of power, is the control and marginalization of Indigenous people. In their essay analyzing immigration, educational and nation building policies in the U.S., Cervantes-Rodriguez and Lutz (2003) propositioned that the coloniality of power “informs power relations and regimes designed to regulate behavior, including language-regulating mechanism” (p. 523). For the authors, this asymmetrical relationship is rooted in power differentials between the U.S. and Latin America that stem from colonial relationships. Such power differentials play out in the linguistic experiences of immigrants in the U.S. as English becomes an additional colonial language of power that youth must learn.

Indigenous language speaking youth in this study are positioned at the intersection of colonialities by the asymmetrical relationships of power between English and Spanish. In order to access social and economic resources in Guatemala, youth like Edward and Weas, along with their families had to learn and speak Spanish. Once they were in the U.S., these youth, while still learning and improving their Spanish, must also learn English in order to be part of the linguistic and social settings, outside of their Spanish-speaking enclaves (e.g. Batz, 2014; Ruiz & Barajas, 2012; Peñalosa, 1984; Urrieta, 2013). As Hernández said, English was important in order “to be able to express [one self] to the people of this country [U.S.]”, moreover, “*sin el*

*inglés no puedes hacer nada acá*" or, "without English you can't do nothing here." Even Spanish speaking enclaves and Latinx spaces in the U.S can be exclusionary and discriminatory of Indigenous people (e.g., Barillas Chón, 2010; Fox, 2006; Pérez, Vasquez, & Buriel, 2016); thus, preventing Indigenous monolingual speakers to benefit from Spanish-speaking networks and communities.

The focal youth in this study were aware of English as a language of power, while simultaneously utilizing their Spanish to navigate linguistic interactions and dynamics established in their countries of origin that immigrated with them to the U.S. From the youth's awareness of the language hierarchies in the U.S, and in their countries of origin, we see how they understand the overlapping of colonialities. The colonial logic of dehumanizing Indigenous people is not left behind in Latin America as immigrants settle into the U.S. Rather, it is carried over into the U.S where it is sustained by settler-colonialism and implicitly by Latinxs' exclusionary practices.

### **Outcomes of Overlapping Colonialities: Labor Divisions and Language Subalternity**

Youth's labor and linguistic experiences demonstrates the reproduction of labor divisions in their contexts of departure and reception as well as the subaltern positioning of Indigenous languages. I rely on Weas' experiences and understandings of K'iche' to illustrate how subalternity of language intersects with the reproduction of specific labor done by Indigenous youth. First, however, I begin with discussing how the imposition of Spanish on Indigenous people resulted in the subaltern positioning of Indigenous languages and in the *learning not to learn* them. This subaltern position is evident in the youth's use of the word "*dialecto*" when referring to Indigenous languages and their descriptions of the importance, or lack thereof, given to them. Kovats' (2010) identified in her study of identity among Mixteco youth in Southern California that "*dialecto*" within this community was referred to as "*tu'un nda'vi*, meaning 'the poor language'" and Spanish was referred to as "*tu'un jaan*, 'the rich language'" (p. 47). Evident here is that *dialectos* are placed in economic positions of inferiority. Conversely, Mixtecos placed Spanish as a "proper" language because it was one that was connected to economic and linguistic power. Kovats' work shows that some Indigenous communities inadvertently adopt a coloniality of power logic that reproduces Indigenous languages as linguistically and economically inferior.

The youth in this study were proud K'iche' or Mam speakers and understood the cultural importance of Indigenous languages. However, similar to what other scholars have documented (e.g., Kovats, 2010; Pérez, Vasquez & Buriel, 2016), the youth continued to refer to Indigenous languages as “*dialectos*.” The use of *dialectos* to refer to Indigenous languages demonstrates their subaltern positioning even if the youth did not believe that their languages were inferior. *Dialectos* are subaltern languages because they are not the primary or normalized language of communication and linguistic interactions, and they do not yield well-paying jobs.

In other cases, the youth referred to Indigenous languages as “*un otro idioma*” or “an other language.” The usual translation of “*un otro*” is “another,” by which is meant “one more” or is used to reference one thing from one already mentioned or known about. While it is true that the Indigenous languages some of the youth spoke was “one more” language they knew, the term “another” does not correctly translate the youth’s understanding of the positioning of Indigenous languages in the larger linguistic, social, labor, and cultural context they are located in. An accurate translation of “*un otro*” is “an other.” When the youth said “*un otro idioma*” they did not mean Indigenous languages were lesser. Nonetheless, their use of the modifier “*un otro*”/“an other” reified Indigenous languages as “other than” the normative language of communication and power<sup>10</sup>.

Indigenous languages occupy a subaltern position as evident in the youth’s descriptions of the importance, or lack thereof, given to Indigenous languages in their countries of origin. When asked if it was important for him to speak or understand K'iche', Weas responded, “*para mí, no. Porque siento que k'iche' no, casi no sirve nada*” (“for me, no. Because I feel K'iche', no, it's almost no good at all”). Weas statement indicates that Indigenous languages were “no good at all” in Guatemala. It must be clear that for him, K'iche' was not intrinsically “no good;” however, he viewed it as no good because he was understanding its positioning in the larger social-linguistic and economic contexts he lived in and operated from. One outcome of seeing Indigenous languages as no good, or being locally useful, is their extinction as evident in Adler’s statement that the “[Náhuatl language] is becoming extinct; and just we...Indigenous people or our people are going extinct and are becoming less.” Hernández expressed a similar view when he said that Indigenous languages “are becoming lost.”

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<sup>10</sup> See Said’s (1978) work on “Othering” as mechanisms of maintaining differential power relations.

Whereas Weas perceived K'iche' to be no good at all, Antonio and Elías believed that Indigenous languages were locally important. For instance, Antonio and Elías respectively said “*dialecto* is...good, but is only used in some places,” and “I don't think that everyone is going to want to learn K'iche' because that [language] is only used in Guatemala.” Even when acknowledging their local importance, Indigenous languages remained subaltern as they had no transnational, social, and economic authority. Here I highlight Weas' negative associations with K'iche' and his push for learning colonial languages. I focus on him to show the intersections of labor divisions with the subaltern positioning of Indigenous languages.

Weas expressed a deep desire to disassociate himself with K'iche' and K'iche' speakers, primarily because these youth spoke mostly in K'iche' or some Spanish. He wanted Indigenous people in Guatemala to speak Spanish and for his immigrant Spanish speaking peers to speak English. His perceptions, attitudes and experiences with K'iche' and Spanish illuminate the complexities of learning Spanish and Indigenous languages along with their intersections with labor. Weas' linguistic, social, and labor experiences as a K'iche' speaking person in Guatemala shaped his views about the utility of the language in Guatemala and the U.S. He specifically spoke about the invisibilization of K'iche' people by the Guatemalan government: “*Porque algunos [que hablan k'iche' fueron] encontraron muerto en la calle y no hacen nada [el gobierno de Guatemala]. No hacen nada porque [los de la comunidad] son indígenas (sic), sólo que hablan k'iche', y no nos quiere ayudar el gobierno. Ayudan más lo que, lo que hablan español (sic)*” (“Some [K'iche' speakers] were found dead in the streets and they [Guatemalan government] don't do nothing. They [government] don't do nothing because they [people in his community] only speak K'iche'. The government helps more those that speak Spanish”).

The experiences as someone who comes from a *campesino* community that speaks a subaltern language have greatly influenced Weas' decision to want to learn Spanish and English. His wish for Indigenous people to learn Spanish was made out of a deep desire for them to “*no sufrir mucho*” or “not suffer much” socially, politically and economically. That is to say, he saw Spanish as an instrument for mitigating “*trabajo duro*” (“hard labor”) and the hard life associated with being Indigenous—specifically, political persecution and *campesino* work in Guatemala, and dishwasher/restaurant work in the U.S. There is much agency to his desire to speak Spanish and English instead of K'iche'. For him, part of learning colonial languages was about survival, about not becoming invisible. Weas' desire must also be understood against the backdrop in which

colonialities created hierarchies of race/language and race/labor divisions. The coloniality of power and settler-colonialism made it possible for the youth in their countries of origin, and other Indigenous peoples in the U.S., to *learn not to learn dialecto*. Adler's experiences not learning Náhuatl is exemplary of this: "I was taught since little that I should not learn that language [Náhuatl] because there was a lot of bullying toward [Náhuatl speaking] children. People that spoke Spanish really well would do a lot of bullying. So, that's why my family members stopped learning that language." While Adler is the only youth that talked about the reasons why he stopped speaking Náhuatl, his account is important because it points to a process of *learning not to learn* their Indigenous languages.

Given the sociolinguistic and economic power of colonial languages, Indigenous language speakers are restricted in their options for the languages they can use in different social and labor spheres. In their countries of origin, Spanish mediates social and linguistic interactions. There is also a belief that speaking Spanish allows access to different types of labor. In the U.S., Spanish also mediates social and linguistic interactions, but English becomes important for accessing well-paying jobs. However, we see that in both contexts, while learning colonial languages mitigates some of the social and linguistic spheres of interactions, they do not necessarily translate into different labor strata. On the contrary, while the youth may no longer be doing *campesino* work in the U.S., the type of labor they do continues to be marginal within the already marginal work of Latinxs. Thus, Indigenous people continue to experience the effects of overlapping colonialities through the subaltern positioning of Indigenous languages and labor exploitation in their contexts of origin and new contexts of reception. Nonetheless, youth, along with other Indigenous people, make calculated risks when deciding, or not deciding, to speak colonial languages, in their countries of origin and in their new contexts of reception.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Mignolo (2000) wrote that there is an inherent asymmetry as it pertains to colonial and Indigenous languages. The reason for this is that languages are connected to larger social, political, economic and cultural institutions that legitimize or place them in subaltern positions. Being Indigenous or speaking Indigenous and colonial languages means living this asymmetry. For Mignolo (2000), this asymmetry of languages is about power (p. 231). The youth in this study understood this asymmetrical relationship of power. This understanding was evident

when they described labor divisions and language hierarchies they experienced or perceived in their countries of origin and in the U.S. For the youth, Spanish and English were of transnational and global importance, respectively. Indigenous languages were of local importance. In the U.S., English took on the role that Spanish did in their countries of origin, as it became important in order to communicate with others and because of the belief that knowing it could yield better economic opportunities. The youth also saw links between a division of labor and the hierarchies of languages. Utilizing a Critical Latinx Indigenities analytic, specifically, the “multiple contexts of power,” (Blackwell et al 2017, p. 127), I highlight that there is a racial component to this division of language/labor. The coloniality of power created racial categories, and such categories were tied to language, among other ethnic indicators. Race, language, and division of labor have, thus, been inextricably linked since the invention of the Americas and they overlap in the Indigenous youth's self-understandings through their immigrant experiences with U.S. racial constructions.

Education scholarship on native Spanish speakers positions the “home language,” which is proxy for Spanish, as assets to be utilized by educators in order to enrich their students' classroom learning (e.g., Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Nieto, 2002; Valdés, 2001a, b). This scholarship continues to be of utmost importance. However, when it relates to Indigenous immigrant youth, this scholarship operates under the problematic assumption that “home languages” are situated under the same matrix of racial, linguistic, social, and economic power as other languages spoken in their countries of origin. For the youth in this study, Indigenous language speakers, and their languages, are marginally positioned in their countries of origin. Often, Indigenous languages are invisibilized as evident in that the language of everyday economic, social, and linguistic interaction in their countries of origin is Spanish. Therefore, when focusing on the strength of home languages, educators must be attentive to the fact that such “home” languages for Latinx youth may not be Spanish. In some cases, the home language became a language that was adopted in order to navigate broader labor, linguistic, and social spheres. For some of the Indigenous youth in this study, a home language included their Indigenous language of origin *and* Spanish. For this reason, educators working with Latinx youth, including immigrants from Latin America, must be aware of the complex relationships between race and language within different groups of youth in their classrooms and schools. Language relations operate under more nuanced ways than educators might be

aware of. Simply relying on Spanish as a home language and asset can have the unintentional effect of reproducing inequitable power dynamics, which contribute to further invisibilizing and marginalizing Indigenous languages.

The youth in this study were aware of power codes and the matrices of colonialisms. The youth still had to speak and continue to learn Spanish because it is useful for their everyday life, based on the racialized labor incorporation that they enter into. This includes the particular labor sectors where the youth find authorized and unauthorized employment, such as in restaurants. Educators must be aware that these youth often work many hours late into the night in the restaurant industry and still manage to attend school early the next morning. English, however, supersedes Spanish, as it is the U.S. language of power—one that they are also learning and a primary reason why they are attending school. Under these matrices of power, Indigenous languages slowly fade and become invisible, reproducing the goals of the multiple and overlapping colonialities—Indigenous erasure.

Lastly, educators working with Latinxs, Latin American immigrants, and specifically Indigenous immigrants should be attentive to the power dynamics between different Latin American groups. One way of being attentive to how power dynamics play out within Latinx youth is to notice the subalternity of Indigenous languages within their schools, classrooms, and peer cliques. As this study shows, some youth are reluctant to speak their Indigenous languages in public settings. Educators must pay attention to such moments of silence by Indigenous immigrant youth. Speaking or not willing to speak an Indigenous language is both a form of survival and resistance. At no point should Indigenous youth be forced to speak their Indigenous language, among other reasons, because that may expose them to unwanted negative attention. Educators can co-create with Indigenous youth and other Indigenous allies (Boj Lopez, 2016) spaces where Indigenous youth may feel comfortable to be their Indigenous selves. This includes facilitating educational programs or projects in which Indigenous youth can improve their Spanish and English while maintaining their Indigenous languages so that they can pursue educational, social, and economic opportunities. In the case of high school age youth who work, such educational programs should also include information on labor rights and opportunities. Finally, educators must be aware that this type of work must be accompanied by larger campaigns aimed at ending racist practices maintained by the multiple and overlapping colonialisms in the U.S.

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