

## A Raciolinguistic Genealogy of the Self

The original title for this final chapter was “Reclaiming a Race Radical Vision of Bilingual Education.” I was hoping to build on previous arguments that I had made, related to how the original race radical vision of bilingual education was co-opted by liberal multiculturalism in ways that removed bilingual education from broader political struggles by reframing it as fixing the supposed linguistic and cultural deficiencies of Latinx students.<sup>1</sup> Yet as I engaged in the analysis for the book, I came to realize that the distinction between liberal multiculturalism and race radicalism was not as stark as I had originally believed, with both circulating at the emergence of bilingual education as a policy option in the mid-1960s and sometimes even used by the same individuals. I came to realize that this more complicated interrelationship was made possible by the fact that at the core of both liberal multiculturalism and race radicalism was the image of a psychologically damaged racialized subject, produced by either socialization into a maladaptive culture of poverty (in the case of liberal multiculturalism) or the pernicious effects of colonialism (in the case of race radicalism). This is not something that I want to reclaim, nor do I think that strategically using it for political mobilization will have anti-racist and decolonial outcomes. Framing racialized communities as damaged and in need of fixing will continue to harm these communities no matter how much we emphasize that it is structural rather than individual factors that have created this damage.

One solution to such a dilemma is to create new discourses that are not wedded to these colonial logics. This may be easier said than done since colonial logics shape the foundation of the institutions we are socialized into from birth. Yet, the power of genealogical thinking is the recognition that these efforts at interpellation are never completely determined and that it is in the excesses that cannot be fully contained where subversive practices can and do emerge.<sup>2</sup> In this spirit, inspired by calls for educators to engage in archaeologies of the self that critically reflect on how one’s own life experience in relation to race impacts their pedagogy,<sup>3</sup> I have decided in this chapter to engage in a raciolinguistic genealogy of the self that situates my

professional trajectory in relation to the processes that I have examined in this book. Doing so allows me to reflect on the ways that my professional trajectory has been made possible as part of the reconfiguration of race in the post-Civil Rights era and the racializing discourses that were part of the institutionalization of bilingual education. I hope that implicating myself in this way serves to illustrate that my objective in writing this book was not to tear anybody down, but rather to use genealogical thinking to critically reflect on my own role as a Latinx professional working within bilingual education in the contemporary world.

Yet, the goal of implicating myself isn't to simply throw my hands up and say that whatever I do will inherently maintain colonial logics. Instead, I work to connect my own efforts to challenge these colonial logics throughout my professional career with the efforts of the previous generation of scholars and activists in the hopes of further teasing out the alternative worlds that have previously existed and continue to persist within the realm of academic knowledge production, which can be used to inspire a contemporary decolonial approach to bilingual education that colleagues and I have been working toward in recent years.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that as an academic my focus in this chapter is specifically on academic knowledge production because this is where I can have the most immediate impact in (re)shaping the discourse. That said, I believe raciolinguistic genealogy of the self also has implications for policymakers and practitioners; it can support them in critically reflecting on their complicity in reproducing long-standing colonial logics, while also identifying the alternative worlds that already exist, which they can more effectively work to strengthen within their locus of control.

### **The Modern/Colonial Geopolitics of My Existence**

A raciolinguistic genealogy of myself is situated within the white settler colonialism and trans-Atlantic slave trade that produced the Americas and subsequently Latin America. As Spanish colonizers created a permanent Creole class in the colonies, their claim to Europeaness came into question even as they and their European rulers continued to frame Black and Indigenous populations as not fully human and sought to eradicate their languages and replace them with Spanish. This shifting geopolitics between Spanish colonies and Spain, coupled with the rise of the United States as an imperial power, prompted Creoles to mobilize the image of "Latin people" with

direct European lineage as a way of claiming their full Europeaness and of positioning themselves as leaders in shaping the future of the Americas. In this way, their vision of becoming modern continued colonial logics that disavowed the full humanity of Black and Indigenous people, in the hopes of gaining full status as Europeans for “Latin people” residing in “Latin America.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet these efforts did little to change the emerging dynamics between the United States and Latin America, with US imperialism part of the geopolitical restructuring of the region, first as part of the Third World within the context of Cold War politics, and more recently as part of the Global South within the context of neoliberal globalization. An early manifestation of this imperial relationship was the US colonization of what would become the American Southwest after their victory in the Mexican–American War. Here a new racial order was mapped onto the existing white settler colonial racial order, with Creoles now becoming part of a broader group of Mexican Americans who were now a colonized group with precarious rights. In contrast to African Americans, whose racialization was developed via the “one drop rule” that argued that any “Black blood” constituted Black legal status regardless of one’s phenotype, Mexican American racialization was developed via the “reverse one-drop rule” that argued that any “Spanish blood” constituted white legal status regardless of one’s phenotype.<sup>6</sup> While this access to whiteness provided certain legal rights, it was also used to justify the continued oppression of Mexican Americans by denying them the right to make claims under the equal protection clause in the face of systemic discrimination across societal contexts including labor, education, and housing.<sup>7</sup> Here, the Spanish language, which in Latin America was colonially imposed on Black and Indigenous populations, became a mechanism for racializing Mexican Americans based on the assumption that the presence of Spanish in their communities justified their segregation in schools and their marginalization within the broader society.<sup>8</sup> As had been the case for Black and Indigenous languages throughout the Americas, Spanish now became a racialized language used to justify the oppression of Latinx communities residing in the United States.

A second significant event in cementing the imperial relationship between the United States and Latin America was the US colonial incorporation of Puerto Rico after their victory in the Spanish–American War. Like with the American Southwest, Puerto Rico had its own existing racial hierarchies, created through white settler colonialism, with the addition of enslaved

Africans brought to the island through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As was also the case with the American Southwest, a new racialized category was created that framed all Puerto Ricans as on the one hand partially European, but on the other hand culturally, linguistically, and racially inferior. The goal, therefore, became to Americanize Puerto Ricans by offering them bilingual education that would provide them access to the English-speaking world, even as they were still denied equal political participation within US society or the right to self-determination because of a sense that their inferiorities made them incapable of self-governance. In this way, bilingual education was part of broader efforts to mold Puerto Ricans into becoming obedient laborers who accepted their inferior status within the US empire.<sup>9</sup> This colonial process continued in the post-World War II era with the implementation of Operation Bootstrap, which led to massive migration from rural to urban areas and an eventual mass migration from the island to the mainland, just as the agricultural and factory jobs that people were going in search of were on the decline—an economic modernization program that would become a model for the rest of Latin America and other parts of the Third World.<sup>10</sup>

As noted in previous chapters, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans became more directly linked with one another and with African Americans and Native Americans within the context of the culture of poverty discourse that rose to prominence in social science research in the 1950s. A major focus of this book has been the role of language in shaping the ideological foundation of this culture of poverty through verbal deprivation theory. In efforts to remediate this supposed verbal deprivation, African Americans received remediation solely through standardized forms of English, with the argument being that they had no additional legitimate language that could be incorporated.<sup>11</sup> Most Native Americans also received remediation through standardized forms of English, with the argument being that Native American languages did not have a sufficient literary tradition to be incorporated into educational interventions, with a few exceptions, most notably Navajo.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were framed as having an additional legitimate language with a sufficient literary tradition to receive remediation through standardized forms of both English and Spanish. Yet, the incorporation of Spanish should not be interpreted as somehow valuing the home-language practices that Mexican American and Puerto Rican students brought into the classroom. On the contrary, their Spanish-language abilities were also interpreted through verbal deprivation theory such that they were framed as semilingual rather than bilingual.<sup>13</sup>

It was within this broader context that my family's story begins in the United States. My mother arrived to New York City from Puerto Rico when she was 12 years old as part of the massive migration from the island during Operation Bootstrap, described above. She arrived in 1962 just as the culture of poverty discourse was ascending into prominence within mainstream social science research. No doubt this culture of poverty discourse was part of why the Catholic school that she attended decided to place her in fourth grade rather than sixth grade, which is the grade she would have been entering had she stayed in Puerto Rico. It was also a time when bilingual education was just emerging as a policy option. As a result, her education upon arrival in the United States was officially English-only. Yet, many of her bilingual classmates would provide her support by translating for her—a role that she would eventually take on with the many Puerto Rican children who would come after her. She also had one kind bilingual nun who allowed her to compete in a multiplication table competition using Spanish, which allowed her to win. However, this was the exception that proved the rule, with bilingual education not being officially supported by the federal government until she was about to graduate from high school.

While Puerto Rico has experienced direct colonization by the United States, Ecuador has experienced US imperialism in more indirect ways. In 1951, the year my father was born, bananas were the country's biggest export—a policy decision that had been made in response to the increasing demand from the United States. Continuing the feudal system that had been enacted at the beginning of the white settler colonialism that provided the foundation for the nation, most of the lands used to harvest these bananas were owned by large, wealthy landowners, with most of the people harvesting the land giving a large part of their crops to these landowners in exchange for access to a small plot of land. As part of the expanding US imperialism in the region, the bulk of the profits from the actual exporting of the bananas were made by United Fruit and Standard Fruit, two US-based corporations. Such concentrated wealth, coupled with such heavy reliance on one crop, placed the country in an economically precarious position. This became increasingly apparent when disease began to affect banana crops, leading to massive unemployment by the 1960s and political instability throughout the decade.<sup>14</sup> One area that was particularly hard hit by this economic decline was Cañar Province, leading my father to decide to migrate to the United States, as the eldest son of his family, at the very beginning of a wave from the province with 34% of families in the region having a relative in New York

City by 1990.<sup>15</sup> He arrived to New York City at the earliest stages of this wave in 1968 when he was 17 years old, though he had falsified documents to show that he was 18 years old and, therefore, was able to travel as an adult on his own. Yet, he didn't arrive to the United States for a vacation or to go to school—he arrived to work, which is what he did. This meant that, unlike my mother, he never received formal education in English and learned it through work and through navigating life in an English-dominant society. Soon after arriving he met my mother at one of her cousin's parties, and they would eventually marry in 1972.

In short, my parents were both geopolitically positioned as residing in the Third World within the context of Cold War politics, as an extension of an early imperial relationship between the United States and Latin America. Both of their countries of origin had been discursively produced as backward and in need of modernization because of racial, linguistic, and cultural inferiorities. Efforts to promote this modernization, either directly or in conjunction with the United States, led to their eventual displacement, and they would eventually find one another in New York City. While sharing certain geopolitical positions in relation to the United States and the world, as children it is unlikely that they would have seen each other as members of the same community and would have likely identified most strongly with their nationalities. This changed upon their arrival to New York City, where they were now living in the same community and navigating the same spaces because of a shared language. While their shared use of Spanish was part of what brought them together, it was also part of what continued to racialize them in the United States, where they were now part of a "Spanish-dominant" community that was described through the culture of poverty discourse. In this way, while the culture of poverty discourse was a continuation of US colonialism and imperialism in Latin America, increasing numbers of displaced persons created new identifications in relation to one another because of their shared language and experiences of racialization, which served to counter these broader discourses through everyday acts, including raising families that sought to sustain cultural and linguistic traditions, as well as broader political mobilization for more equitable access through efforts such as demands for bilingual education.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, it is important to reiterate the fact that this geopolitical position was made possible through the erasure of Blackness and Indigeneity. More specifically, on the 1950 US Census undertaken the year that my mother was born, she and her parents had been officially classified as white by the census

takers. In addition, the official racial designation that my father received on his passport was “mestizo.” They brought these racial designations with them to the United States and as a result primarily experienced racialization through their Spanish-language use—a racialization process that I would also inherit. My family’s experience connected with a broader universalization of a white and mestizo geopolitical position into what it meant to be Latinx in the United States. This would provide the ideological foundation for the discursive framing of the primary challenges of Latinxs in the United States as linguistic rather than racial, with bilingual education being well positioned to address these challenges. This framing continues to frame the field of bilingual education and Latinx studies in ways that fail to account for the fact that Black and Indigenous people from Latin America confront racial oppression that extends beyond the racialization of their language practices before their arrival to the United States, and they continue to experience this broader racialization upon their arrival.<sup>17</sup> As will be seen below, it was also the discourse that shaped how I made sense of my own racialization, as well as my professional trajectory into bilingual education.

### **My Raciolinguistic Socialization into Latinidad in the United States**

My raciolinguistic socialization<sup>18</sup> was situated within the broader colonial histories that brought my parents to New York City and framed their Spanish-language use within broader discourses of the culture of poverty that framed it as, at best, a temporary tool for the development of English. This transitional mindset is reflected in the shifting language patterns of my family across time. Before having children, Spanish was the primary language that they used with one another, as well as within the broader community since most of their neighbors were bilingual. This continued when my oldest brother was born in 1973, though it quickly changed when my parents decided to move to a predominantly white working-class neighborhood in Philadelphia in 1977, which one could imagine was not an option available to Black and Indigenous people with origins in Latin America for a range of different reasons. After this move, my older brother quickly began to prefer English over Spanish and eventually stopped using Spanish completely after he began school.

By the time I was born in 1981 as the third of what would eventually become four children, English was the primary language used by my siblings and would, in turn, be the primary language I used. This did not mean that Spanish disappeared from our home. My parents continued to communicate with one another primarily through Spanish. In addition, they typically communicated with us bilingually, with my father typically using more Spanish than English, and my mother more English than Spanish. As a young child, I assumed that everybody communicated the way that my family did. It was only when I began to attend school that I realized that my family was different and that while I identified as an English speaker, some of the words that I assumed were English were labeled as Spanish by many of my peers and teachers. While I was soon able to reserve these words for home and produce “pure” English with friends and teachers, something about my English was still deemed strange. Many of my peers continued to insist that I had a “funny accent.” My attempts at producing “pure” English were an apparent failure due to continued “contamination” from Spanish.

My apparent lack of Spanish-language abilities baffled people even more than my funny English. Students in my high school Spanish class often complained that because I was Latino I had an unfair advantage because I already spoke Spanish. When I told them that I did not speak Spanish very well, they looked at me quizzically and demanded to know how I could be “Spanish” and not speak the language. It was not just my classmates who thought this. One day a substitute teacher chastised me for not wanting to expand my horizons by learning an actual foreign language. He couldn’t seem to understand that I might be taking Spanish as a way of reconnecting with my heritage, nor could he fathom that English might be my primary language. To him, I was clearly a Spanish speaker who wanted an easy A. The irony was that Spanish was not an easy A for me since the Spanish I had been exposed to at home was different from the idealized standardized Spanish of monolingual speakers from Spain and Latin America that was the focus of our textbook. I concluded that while my non-Latinx peers were exposed to proper Spanish, I had been exposed to “Spanglish” on a regular basis in my home and community, and that this placed me at a disadvantage in relation to them.

In short, my raciolinguistic socialization as a child consisted primarily of messages about the inadequacy of both my English and my Spanish. While I identified as a native English speaker, many of my interlocutors refused to accept that this could be possible—even after I had learned to reserve words



that were part of my family language that most of my interlocutors perceived as Spanish solely for home and when engaging with other Latinxs. In addition, while my non-Latinx classmates may have thought that my being a Latino gave me an unfair advantage in Spanish class, the reality is that the Spanish knowledge that I did bring into the classroom was, at best, ignored by my teachers and, at worst, was framed as incorrect because of its failure to adhere to idealized monolingual norms. In this way, I was framed as lacking legitimacy in my use of either of the two languages I grew up with. While at the time, I attributed this positioning to my own personal inadequacies, a raciolinguistic genealogical perspective situates these experiences within broader ideologies of languagelessness that have been used to racialize US Latinxs since the beginning of the US colonial relationship with Mexican Americans in the American Southwest.<sup>19</sup>

### **Resisting My Professional Funneling into Bilingual Education**

When I decided to pursue a college degree in educational studies, my initial desire was to use this degree as a way of improving the education of Latinx students. I had never heard of bilingual education, nor would I have considered it an area of much relevance to meeting the needs of Latinx students since all the Latinx friends and relatives I grew up with were proficient in English (or so I thought). Yet, I soon realized that it was one of the few research areas that centered the educational needs of Latinx students. At the time I assumed it was because bilingual education provided a solution to the problems confronting Latinx students and that for this reason it was under political attack by conservative political opponents. While this may be true to some extent, what I didn't realize at the time was that I was being professionally funneled into bilingual education because of funding mechanisms connected to the culture of poverty that had helped to fund the emergence of bilingual education as a cohesive body of research that pointed to the benefits of these programs. Of particular note here was the Title VII fellowship program that was used to support predominantly Latinx bilingual educators in pursuing doctoral degrees that they could then use to create and shape the growing number of bilingual teacher education programs that were also being supported by BEA funds.<sup>20</sup> This not only contributed to the emergence of bilingual education as a legitimate research agenda within

schools of education, but also paved the way for increasing numbers of Latinx academics and allies who, while perhaps most interested in improving the education of Latinx students, were funneled into a focus on bilingual education because of the increased resources received to further pursue their education in this area.

While not necessarily individually on board with the verbal deprivation theory that shaped the ideological foundation of the BEA, the growing number of bilingual education researchers had to navigate their position in relation to it. As documented previously in this book, a dominant framing that would gain currency in the field that attempted to balance verbal deprivation theory with more culturally and affirming pedagogical strategies was that coercive relations of power had led to subtractive bilingualism for many Latinx students where Spanish was gradually replaced with English, and that additive bilingualism could help to challenge these coercive relations of power by ensuring that these students develop academic language in Spanish that they could then transfer to English.<sup>21</sup> In conjunction with this framing was the argument that dual-language programs that brought together Spanish-dominant and English-dominant students were most effective at ensuring that Latinx students developed a strong basis for academic language in Spanish that they would be able to transfer to English.<sup>22</sup>

Applying this framing to my own life, I began to wonder if many of my Latinx friends and relatives had, in fact, been truly English proficient, or if perhaps they had mastered social but not academic language, which might explain why many of them didn't do as well in school as I had. Ironically, I had gone from being a Latino child whose English and Spanish were deemed as not good enough to a Latino adult questioning the English and Spanish abilities of my Latinx friends, relatives, and students. I am now embarrassed about how easily I began to question the legitimacy of the language practices of friends and relatives with whom I had communicated in English my entire life. I am even more embarrassed by the ways that I sought to apply this framework to my students officially classified as "long-term English learners," as discussed previously in this book. In many ways, I became the Latinx professional seeking proximity to whiteness by positioning myself as a community leader seeking to fix the supposed cultural and linguistic deficiencies of Latinx students, which I have been critiquing in this book.

Yet, it was my own personal experiences with linguistic marginalization that gradually made me begin to question this narrative. I began to wonder how it was possible for students whom I observed using English

and Spanish on a daily basis to be simultaneously English learners and deficient in Spanish. Why was the bilingualism of my students deemed not good enough? How did this connect to my own experiences as a US Latino who had always been made to feel that my bilingualism was not good enough? It was these questions that would eventually lead me to pursue doctoral studies in Urban Education at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City.

Based on my interests in issues of language in education, I soon connected with Ofelia García, who would become my dissertation advisor. As a Cuban American who has dedicated her career to serving the Latinx community, she was a pioneer in educating students bilingually before bilingual education became institutionalized within the discourses of verbal deprivation theory. She was professionally funneled into the institutionalized form of bilingual education when she was appointed as a professor in City College's bilingual teacher education program, which would eventually lead her to the Graduate Center, in my second year of doctoral studies, as an internationally recognized scholar in bilingual education.<sup>23</sup> In the fall of 2008, I took my first course with her, in which she shared with us page proofs of what would become her groundbreaking book, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*, where she would lay out her original theorization of the translanguaging theory that she has continued to develop over the past fifteen years.<sup>24</sup> What Ofelia made clear to us in that course, which in subsequent years she has increasingly leaned into, is that translanguaging is not solely a linguistic or educational theory, but a political stance that centers the knowledge and meaning-making of racialized bilingual communities as a starting point for reimagining linguistic and educational theory and practice.<sup>25</sup>

It was this political stance that I brought to conversations that I began to have with my friend Jonathan Rosa, whom I had met as an undergraduate and had taken courses in Educational Studies with. At the time, it seemed as if our professional trajectories would be quite distinct, with Jonathan pursuing Educational Studies in conjunction with Linguistics and immediately entering a doctoral program in Linguistic Anthropology post-graduation and me pursuing Educational Studies in conjunction with Political Science and immediately becoming a classroom teacher post-graduation. Yet, what I have come to realize through this raciolinguistic genealogy is that our trajectories were never as distinct as they appeared. Like me, Jonathan had initially gravitated toward the study of language as one of the few viable disciplinary options for understanding his own experiences of racialization as a US Latinx. Also like me, his own personal experiences as a Latino had made

him increasingly aware of the limitations of adopting a purely linguistic frame to understanding the racialization of Latinidad. This would eventually lead to our collaborations toward creating a raciolinguistic perspective that we would use to call into question contemporary approaches to language education.<sup>26</sup>

In our first collaboration in 2015, we called into question the notion of appropriateness that undergirds dominant approaches to language education. It is here that we first introduced the concept of raciolinguistic ideologies to describe how race and language co-construct with one another in ways that overdetermine racialized communities to be engaged in inappropriate language practices even when engaged in communicative practices that would be perceived as appropriate if used by white speakers. We have since developed this perspective into a conceptual framework that can be used to systematically study the co-construction of language and race.<sup>27</sup> At the core of these efforts has been a shift in focus away from what racialized speakers purportedly do with language to what the white listening subject perceives, and consequently the focus of intervention away from modifying the language practices of racialized communities to challenging these hegemonic modes of perception. Adopting the raciolinguistic genealogical stance in this book has helped me to further connect the institutionalization of bilingual education in the post-Civil Rights era with broader histories of white settler colonialism and anti-Blackness. I have also been able to connect this with a broader global geopolitical reconfiguration of race where certain racialized people would receive contingent proximity to whiteness in exchange for maintaining the colonial logics that have produced their racialization to begin with.

In short, while broader sociohistorical forces professionally funneled me into bilingual education, the marginalization that I experienced as a US Latino pushed me into eventually resisting this professional funneling by developing a conceptual and methodological approach that could be used to connect the dominant discourses within bilingual education research, policy, and practice with broader colonial histories that have shaped not only my own family history, but also the geopolitics of the world. While doing this has allowed me to call into question the basic assumptions of the dominant framing of bilingual education, it has also pointed to the possibility of thinking through the role that a politics of language might play in the creation of new forms of solidarity that seek to develop new, more inclusive ways of being in the world that are not premised on the dehumanization of any populations.<sup>28</sup>

As I have presented my thinking that has gotten me to this point over the years, I have encountered many senior Latinx scholars who shared stories about how they have made similar points throughout the years and have felt marginalized in the field because of their more radical position in relation to the hegemonic consensus around academic language and uncritical support for dual-language education. This can be seen in the fact that while my work has been critiqued by some prominent senior scholars in bilingual education,<sup>29</sup> it has been taken up by prominent Latinx scholars in their continued efforts at critiquing the hegemonic narrative of the field that they have been enacting throughout their careers.<sup>30</sup> This indicates that bilingual education scholarship has never been just one thing, and that there have always been scholars working to imagine decolonial approaches to bilingual education. I don't want this statement to be used to sugarcoat the reality that colonial logics remain hegemonic in the field and have historically and continue to be used to marginalize Latinx scholars, teachers, students, and communities. I also do not want these efforts to be romanticized, since working to imagine decolonial approaches within fundamentally colonial institutions will always be fraught and contradictory. Nor do I wish to imply that this work is only being done in academia, since I have strong personal connections with many bilingual education teachers, administrators, and policymakers working to enact decolonial approaches in their areas of control. Nevertheless, I think it is fitting, as a current Latino academic who studies bilingual education, to end this book recognizing the scholars who were able to use bilingual education as a point of entry for opening previously closed doors and not only ensuring to keep them open for those of us who followed, but encouraging us to continue to grapple with our ethical responsibility as Latinx scholars to navigate and resist the colonial logics that permeate the institutions we have been offered contingent acceptance into. I hope that the efforts that I have undertaken in this book are able to continue in that tradition by opening new pathways to imagine decolonial futures in bilingual education as part of the broader political project of developing new, more inclusive ways of being and knowing.