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Critical Latinx Indigeneities and Education

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Critical Latinx Indigeneities and Education: An Introduction¹

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Indigenous Latinx children and youth are a growing population that has been largely invisible in U.S. society and in the scholarly literature (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Machado-Casas, 2009). Indigenous Latinx youth are often assumed to be part of a larger homogenous grouping, usually Hispanic or Latinx, and yet their cultural and linguistic backgrounds do not always converge with dominant racial narratives about what it means to be “Mexican” or “Latinx.” Bonfil Batalla (1987) argued that Indigenous Mexicans are a *población negada*—or negated population—whose existence has been systematically denied as part of a centuries-long colonial project of *indigenismo* (indigenism) in Mexico and other Latin American countries. This systematic denial in countries of origin often continues once Indigenous people migrate to the U.S., as they are actively rendered invisible in U.S. schools through the semiotic process of erasure (Alberto, 2017; Urrieta, 2017). Indigenous Latinx families are often also overlooked as they are grouped into general categories such as Mexican, Guatemalan, Latinx, and/or immigrants. In this issue, we seek to examine the intersections of Latinx Indigeneities and education to better understand how Indigenous Latinx communities define and constitute Indigeneity across multiple and overlapping colonialities and racial geographies, and, especially, how these experiences overlap with, and shape their educational experiences.

This special collection brings together empirical and conceptual papers that explore the experiences of Indigenous Latinx students and their families in U.S. public schools. Drawing on a range of methods and theoretical perspectives, the authors examine Indigenous Oaxacan mothers’ viewpoints on multilingualism and Indigenous language maintenance; the language socialization practices of Indigenous Mexican parents; the ways that Indigeneity and family

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socialization relate to the academic resilience of Yucatec-Maya students; racialized labor and language experiences and their association to indigeneity in the lives of Guatemalan and Mexican Indigenous youth; and the possibilities for engaging Critical Latinx Indigeneities (Blackwell, Boj López & Urrieta, 2017) as an interdisciplinary theory and practice to center Indigenous Latinxs experiences in education. Overall, these papers challenge dominant narratives about Latinidad that erase both Indigeneity and multilingualism. Collectively, these papers extend discussions of both Indigenous Latinx families, multilingualism, and U.S. schools.

To explore the nuances of Indigenous Latinx youths' experiences, we broadly ground this special issue in the Critical Latinx Indigeneities (CLI) analytic (Blackwell, Boj López & Urrieta, 2017). We engage the CLI framework with the field of education because im/migrant youth, including Indigenous Latinxs, are usually the first to be fully thrust into U.S. institutional contexts, such as schools, shortly upon their arrival. When Indigenous Latinx youth attend U.S. schools, they may share their Indigenous heritage, allowing for peers and teachers to learn about them. However, as Lourdes Alberto (2017) highlighted from her own experience in "coming out as Indian" as a girl in school, this is usually done with caution. Although Alberto's experience in "coming out as Indian" (Zapotec from Yalalag) was generally positive, Indigenous youth can become the subject of discrimination from other students and teachers due to their ethnoracial, linguistic, and cultural differences (Casanova, 2011; Ruiz & Barajas, 2012).

CLI and Indigenous Latinxs

When Indigenous migrants from Latin America enter the U.S., they challenge essentialist and monolithic understandings of both Latinidad and Indigeneity (Blackwell et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the historical discrimination Indigenous people endure in their Latin American countries of origin also often transfers/continues once they arrive in the United States (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Stephen, 2007; Kovats Sánchez, 2018). For instance, Indigenous Mexicans and Central Americans face intra-group racial stereotyping from non-Indigenous Latinxs (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Blackwell, et al., 2017; Boj López, 2017; Holmes, 2013; Pérez, Vásquez & Buriel, 2016; Poole, 2004). These forms of discrimination impact how Indigenous migrants and their children embrace (or not) their ethnoracial identity in the U.S. and also how they manage their visibility and invisibility (Batz, 2014; Machado-Casas, 2012).

We use the term ethnoracial² in relation to *indígena* (Indigenous) to disrupt the grey ambiguity between ethnic and racialized understandings of indigeneity in Mexico and other Latin American countries, especially because these have wavered in the ways that Indigenous peoples have been referred to and have experienced life in Latin American societies. These ethnic and racial understandings then shift in the U.S. due to the collectivized racialization of minoritized groups, including Latinxs, within the racial hierarchies of the white settler state. This creates a context of multiple mappings of multiple colonialities and hybrid hegemonies for Indigenous Latinxs in the U.S. (Blackwell, 2010, 2017), both in relation to other Latinxs and in relation to the Whiteness of the broader society. *Critical Latinx Indigeneities* highlights these multiple colonialities and hybrid hegemonies that are formed in the United States as Indigenous people from Latin America encounter translocal spaces, overlapping colonialities, and imposed logics of erasure that marginalize Indigenous people (Blackwell et al., 2017; Alberto, 2017).

Critical Latinx Indigeneities rejects the idea that Indigenous people cease to be Indigenous when they migrate (*leave the pueblo*) or when they cross the political borders of modern nation states. Instead CLI examines and interrogates the perception and constitution of Indigeneity across nations, including how particular racial logics and hierarchies shift and change across political borders. Most important, CLI recognizes complex, multivocal, and multilayered ways of being Indigenous from local self-understandings to larger scales of imposed state regulation, surveillance, criminalization, and erasures of indigeneity (Blackwell et al. 2017). CLI allows us to understand indigeneity in education in a more dynamic way, and in more durable ways across migration, generational, and linguistic experiences. These complex understandings of indigeneity serve this special issue well as the contributing authors center the varied cultural, linguistic, and identity experiences of Indigenous Latinx youth that might otherwise be overlooked, dismissed, or invisibilized within *Hispanidad* or *Latinidad* in U.S. educational contexts.

Using a settler colonial frame, Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) referred to schools as instruments of settlement that explicitly and implicitly justify the theft and occupation of Indigenous land in the U.S. and other settler states. *Critical Latinx Indigeneities* encourages

² Goldberg (1997) uses the term ethnoracial to identify social groups that have been interchangeably defined, viewed, or classified as both ethnic and racial over time. Alcoff (2009) further argues that ethnorace encompasses a group with both ethnic and racialized characteristics that allow them collective affinities but are also a source for others' exclusion and denigration.

the complex understanding of the historical and contemporary matrices of relations inherited and in place as a result of multiple and hybrid colonial formations (Blackwell, 2017; Quijano, 2000), including the *settler grammars* of U.S. schools (Calderón, 2014; Urrieta & Calderón, this issue). Latinx im/migrant schooling experiences are thus enmeshed within multiple colonial formations, especially since schools as state institutions have been used to assimilate, Americanize, and implement cultural genocide (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Within these colonial entanglements, CLI encourages us to recognize that Latinx im/migrants are also intersectional, multiracial, multivocal, and multilingual, and that this diversity of experience cannot be collapsed into a generalized approach or pedagogy for working with Latinx im/migrant children and youth in schools. CLI emphasizes the lived experiences, struggles, and survivance (Vizenor, 1999) of Indigenous Latinxs, and this emphasis is an entry point for engaging with the growing body of work in education that focuses on Indigenous Latinx families' experiences in U.S. schools, and especially Indigenous Latinx youth's assertion that "somos [Latinos] pero no somos iguales" experiences within U.S. schools (López & Irizarry, 2019).

Finally, CLI recognizes that Latin American Indigenous people arrive on the lands of other Indigenous peoples, and this recognition challenges the colonial narrative of *terra nullius*, as well as the U.S. master myth that this is a nation of immigrants. Recognition of settler colonial logics, CLI argues, necessitates responsibilities and alliances with U.S. Northern Tribal peoples. Indeed, Renya Ramírez's study (2006, p. 22) with unrecognized Tribes, enrolled Tribal members, and Indigenous Mixtec migrants in California, shows that "Native hubs" can be important gathering sites for Northern and Southern Indigenous peoples' collective empowerment, regeneration, and identity resurgence. For Ramírez, these sites can be the coming together of peoples from various Indigenous groups where "community, identity and belonging are created in an unbounded network of culture and relationships."

Indigenous Migrants in the U.S.

While there has been an increase in the number of Indigenous migrants to the U.S. in recent years, Indigenous migration from Latin America to the U.S. is not new. Dating back to the Bracero Program (1942-1964) and beyond there are *testimonios* of Indigenous men who were part of the Mexican labor force that was brought to the U.S. Most recently, Mireya Loza's (2016) book *Defiant Braceros*, details the accounts of several Indigenous men, including Pedro Domínguez and Félix Flores, both P'urhépechas from Janitzio, contracted in Texas in the 1940s;

Isaías Sánchez a Zapotec from San Pedro Apóstol, Oaxaca, who in 1955 was contracted in Southern California, and Julio Valentín May-May who left his Mayan community of Cansahcab, Yucatán, in 1962 and worked in Caléxico, California. This record of Indigenous migration *al norte* is not new. María Herrera-Sobek also identified “Tarascan” (P’urhépecha) speakers in her studies of braceros published in 1987.

Subsequent studies of South to North Indigenous migration have included rich ethnographic accounts of Mixtec, Zapotec, Triqui, P’urhépecha, and Maya migration³. Some of these works have been praised and others critiqued, but they did produce research that brought attention to the diversity of Indigenous migration experiences. There are increasingly more studies of Indigenous migrants in the U.S. and their future generations by members of these communities themselves⁴. These emerging bodies of scholarship engage colonialism, genocide, U.S. imperialism, migration, and *sobrevivencia*⁵ of the Latin American Indigenous diaspora primarily through interdisciplinary comparative ethnic studies approaches that center the migrants’ lives, communities, and their generations in the U.S. (Blackwell et al., 2017). These studies generally tell us that the diversity of Indigenous and Afro-Latinxs challenges collectivized notions of Latinidad that usually homogenize and revolve around an imagined Latinx community that is most often thought of as Mexican and mestizx (Laó-Montes, 2005).

In recent years, we have seen increased numbers of Indigenous Central American migrants coming to the United States. Unaccompanied minors, refugees, and asylees are among the most vulnerable of the dislocated, including Maya youth arriving primarily from Guatemala, and Garífuna from Honduras and other nations in Central America (Hernández, 2015; Saldaña-Portillo, 2017). Indigenous and Afro-Latinx migrants then experience Mexicanization, Latinoization, and Americanization as overlapping colonialities (Castañeda, Manz, Davenport, 2002). Despite the growing presence of Indigenous migrants, research on Latinxs in the United

³ This includes works by Michael Kearney (1995, 2000), Inés Hernández Ávila & Stefano Varese (1999), Néstor Rodríguez & Jacqueline Hagan (2000), Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera Salgado (2004), Lynn Stephen (2007), and Allan Burns (1993) to name a few.

⁴ This includes the growing body of work by scholars such as Floridalma Boj Lopez (K’iché), Giovanni Batz (K’iché), Elizabeth Gonzalez (Zapotec), Lourdes Alberto (Zapotec), Noé Lopez (Mixtec), Griselda Guevara Cruz (Mixtec), Luis Sanchez Lopez (Zapotec), Brenda Nicolás (Zapotec), Daina Sanchez (Zapotec), Patricia Baquedano Lopez (Yucatec Maya), Isabel Altamirano (Zapotec), Melissa Mesinas (Zapotec), David Barillas-Chón (Maya), Rafael Vasquez (Zapotec), Margarita Machado-Casas (Creole/Miskito), and Gabriela Spears Rico (Matlaltzinca/P’urhépecha), to name a few, that are part of diaspora communities.

⁵ Trinidad Galván (2005:11) drawing from Vizenor defines *sobrevivencia* as survivance beyond responding to the global political economy to include everyday cherished interactions and measures.

States continues to assume a homogenous experience and neglects to discuss racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic variability within Latinx immigrant families (Boj López, 2018; Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Oboler, 1995, 2006; Stephen, 2007). While Indigenous families share some similarities with their Latinx immigrant counterparts, they also participate in distinct cultural practices such as Indigenous language use, organized hometown associations, and different traditions and customs (Mesinas & Pérez, 2016). These distinctive forms of social organization and cultural expression warrant further attention and awareness, especially by educators. Indigenous communities organize around language, transnationalism, and youth cultural practice to resist their displacement and migration with creative forms of cultural unity, including through do-it-yourself (DIF) theories and aesthetics such as book publishing and Zines (Boj López, 2017, 2018). These practices and forms of organization are a part of Indigenous communities' resourceful and creative adaptation processes as they settle into the United States. It is also important to note that we cannot assume Indigenous communities practice their cultural traditions in the same ways across communities. CLI recognizes that Indigenous migrants bring with them language, epistemologies, translocal practices, identity, youth practices, and cultural cohesion that challenge the homogenizing and normative discourses that collectivize Latinx experiences, including their school experiences.

CLI, Indigenous Saberes, and Education

In addition to naming the erasure of Indigenous Latinx communities from educational discourse and policy, CLI highlights the intersectional dimensions of their/our experiences in relation to multiple and intersecting colonialities, as well as everyday forms of active *survance*—or what Casanova (this issue) calls *resilient indigeneity*. The CLI framework also helps disrupt simplistic and essentialist notions of indigeneity by reframing practices and phenomena that are not typically understood as “Indigenous” in order to understand the role that they play in processes of transmigration. For example, a CLI lens allows us to see how Spanish—a colonial/colonizing language—can come to signal different meanings and serve different purposes for Indigenous migrants in the U.S. context than it might in Latin America, even serving as a vehicle or tool for Indigenous *survance/sobrevivencia* (Martínez & Mesinas, this issue; Morales, Saravia, and Pérez-Irbe, this issue).

Despite the invisibilization of Indigenous communities in the U.S., some Indigenous migrant communities have been able to maintain re/create their cultural practices. According to

Urrieta (2013), Indigenous heritage *familia* and *comunidad*-based *saberes* (knowings) are “complex ‘knowings’ or understandings’ of the world, tied to *familia* and *comunidad* knowledge(s), but also encompassing larger social, natural, and spiritual well-being” (p. 321). Urrieta explains that Indigenous heritage *saberes* are learned through community participation. Although such *saberes* originate in Indigenous pueblos of origin (in Latin America), they transcend borders and are brought to the United States (Urrieta, 2016). Indigenous Latinxs have adapted to their new home by re/creating spaces such as sports clubs, hometown associations, and binational organizations, that serve as social capital (Malpica, 2008). Scholars of human development argue that educators and researchers can only fully understand learning when they include culturally heterogeneous processes of engagement in repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Nasir, Rosebery, Warren, & Lee, 2006). Educators cannot continue to exclude the learning experiences in which Indigenous Latinx youth engage in with their family and cultural communities because these encompass critical forms of Indigenous knowledges and cultural assets that contribute to the development, education, and well-being of Indigenous youth, their families and communities (Urrieta, 2015).

Participation in *bailables*, or traditional dance performances, intergenerational philharmonic bands, basketball tournaments, and trips back to the *pueblo* are a few examples of how Indigenous youth engage in their cultural traditions (Urrieta & Martínez, 2011). Some of these activities result from the organization of hometown associations, hosting and attending pueblo/regional specific events that Indigenous Latinx migrants prioritize maintaining in the U.S. The availability of these cultural practices provides parents with an opportunity to engage in the cultural socialization of their children through language use, social and cultural values, and religious and spiritual traditions (Buriel, 1993). Recent work by Boj López (2017, 2018) highlights the work that Indigenous Latinx youth are doing themselves to understand and represent their own experiences through technology and youth cultural practices. Distinguishing these varieties of social and cultural practices existent among Indigenous Latinxs, especially by youth themselves, is important because children and youth are exposed to and have various levels of engagement with the Indigenous languages their parents teach them at home and in their extensive communities (Casanova, 2011; Menjívar, 2002; Mesinas & Perez, 2016, Morales, 2016, Martínez, 2018). For example, Morales (2016) found that transnational Zapotec youth developed multiple identities that were influenced by Zapotec and parents had

an additive framework of language use for their children to learn multiple languages. Ruiz and Barajas (2012) advocate for researchers to learn more about the strengths of Indigenous Latinx students and families and how they contribute to their learning in schools.

The presence and accessibility of cultural practices that entail community engagement vary based on the levels of resources and organization available to Indigenous Latinxs. Los Angeles, for example, has become a huge receptive location for Indigenous communities. Given their larger population, Indigenous Latinxs have been able to organize various communal traditions. The arts, such as *danzas* and *bandas filarmónicas*, have become prominent activities. The example of the philharmonic band presents a salient form of intergenerational knowledge that uses various languages—Indigenous languages, Spanish, English, and music—to teach youth about the inner workings and purpose of this tradition (Sánchez, 2018). These communal spaces offer youth opportunities to develop their sense of belonging and Indigenous identity formation (Nicolás, 2012; Sánchez, 2018). Most important, youth have created their own spaces for cultural and political identity development as Indigenous Latinx youth. *La Comunidad Ixim*, for example, is a 1.5 and second generation Maya youth grassroots collective in Los Angeles that uses self-published literature, such as *Las Aventuras de Gaby*, that create narratives that embrace not only their family and school experiences, but also their own political investments in how their Maya community is represented and written into existence (Boj López, 2018).

The U.S. education system should recognize these forms of knowledge and educational experiences that go beyond the limited dimensions of how they currently define education, and how they define Latinxs. According to Nasir et al. (2006), learning environments need to be restructured by “changing our collective understanding of the routine language use and social practices of daily life and their relation to the practices of academic disciplines, and on the other hand, designing classrooms that support the myriad pathways along which learning can proceed” (p. 700). Indigenous Latinxs can lead the path of this restructuring if U.S. educators allow the children and youth to use all of their forms of knowledge, learning, languages, and understandings, including do-it-yourself (DIF) publishing and Zines (Boj López, 2018), to guide these processes.

The Special Issue

Using the CLI framework, the contributors to this special issue emphasize issues of language, identity, and survivance, highlighting the varied and dynamic ways in which Indigenous

Latinx youth and families preserve, construct, and interpret notions of Indigeneity in ways that promote self-understandings, intergenerational socialization and learning, and educational success. In his article “*Indigenous Immigrant Youth’s Understandings of Power: Race, Labor, and Language*,” David Barillas-Chón, highlights how segmented labor incorporation is closely tied to racialization processes across regions for Indigenous Guatemalan and Mexican youth in the U.S. His study highlights youth’s understanding of asymmetries of power based on divisions of labor, and language hierarchies, arguing that there is a racialization of labor and language produced by overlapping colonialities that contribute to asymmetries of power. Barillas-Chón proposes that, within the context of overlapping colonialities, the subaltern positioning of Indigenous youth reproduces divisions of labor.

Saskias Casanova, in her article entitled “*Aprendiendo y Sobresaliendo: Resilient Indigeneity and Yucatec-Maya Youth*,” invites us to consider indigeneity as a dimension of intersectional inequality for U.S. Latinx youth. She examines how indigeneity and family socialization relate to the resilience of California-based Yucatec Maya youth. Her study highlights the psychological construct of resilience as an asset that also serves as protective factor facilitating the agency of Maya youth despite living in overlapping colonialities.

In *Zapotec Identity as a Matter of Schooling*, Rafael Vásquez explores how Zapotec-origin youth’s identities can positively impact their education. Through in-depth interviews, Vásquez reveals how the Zapotec high school students in his study assert their Indigenous, Oaxacan, and Mexican identities as a basis for developing viable educational approaches that promote their overall educational success. In *Multilingual Mexican-Origin Students’ Perspectives on Their Indigenous Heritage Language*, P. Zitlali Morales, Lydia Saravia, and María Pérez-Irribé trace the trajectories of three Oaxacan-origin students from elementary to middle school. Examining these students’ perspectives on their Indigenous heritage language—Zapoteco—and their related experiences in a Spanish-English dual language program, their study has important implications for how out-of-school spaces can support authentic language use, as well as for how school-sanctioned language programs might promote multilingualism.

In *Linguistic Motherwork in the Zapotec Diaspora*, Ramón Antonio Martínez and Melissa Mesinas explore Indigenous Mexican mothers’ perspectives on multilingualism and Indigenous language maintenance. Drawing on interview data from a larger qualitative study of language and ideology in California, they examine the perspectives of four Zapotec mothers who have

children in a local public school with a Spanish-English dual language program. The interview data highlight what these women *think* and *do* with respect to their children's maintenance of the Zapotec language. The authors draw on Critical Latinx Indigeneities and the feminist notion of *linguistic motherwork* to highlight the intersectional nature of these mothers' efforts to construct and sustain indigeneity in diaspora.

Finally, in *Critical Latinx Indigeneities: Unpacking Indigeneity from Within and Outside of Latinized Entanglements*, Luis Urrieta and Dolores Calderón highlight an important, but difficult conversation about the erasure of indigeneity in narratives, curriculum, identities, and racial projects that uphold settler colonial logics that fall under the rubric of Hispanic, Latinx, and Chicanx. Urrieta and Calderón provide diverse examples of how this process works to advance a theory and praxis of Critical Latinx Indigeneities to decolonize Latinidad and mestizaje in order to envision Indigenous futurities within and outside of the Latinized entanglements of the present.

Taken together, these articles contribute to a more robust and critical understanding of how Indigenous Latinx youth and families experience education in the United States. This understanding can help prepare teachers to work with an increasingly diverse Latinx population, and it can enrich and add important nuance to current scholarly discussions of immigrant education, bilingual instruction, and culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies. As these articles illustrate, a CLI frame can help begin to challenge the erasure and misrepresentation of Indigenous Latinx students and families in U.S. schools.

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