

# Othured by English. Smothered by Spanish?: A Critical Ethnography of Six Non Spanish Speaking Newcomer Immigrant Youth

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Boston College  
Lynch School of Education

Department of  
Teacher Education, Special Education, and Curriculum and Instruction

Program in Curriculum and Instruction

OTHERED BY ENGLISH. SMOTHERED BY SPANISH?  
A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF SIX NON SPANISH SPEAKING NEWCOMER  
IMMIGRANT YOUTH

Dissertation  
by

SWATI MEHTA

submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

Othered By English. Smothered By Spanish?: A Critical Ethnography of Six Non-Spanish Newcomer Immigrant Youth

Swati Mehta

Dissertation Director: Maria Estela Brisk, PhD

Drawing on Collins' (2009) framework on domination and seeing language as a signifier (Bhaba, 1994), this critical ethnography explores the relationship between language and power within the context of a school focused on serving the needs of newcomer immigrant youth in the United States, a country that has increasingly become polarized around issues of immigration, social, and educational policy. Conducting observations in multiple social contexts and informal/semi-structured interviews, the study focuses on six non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth navigating a particular phenomenon - English and Spanish being dominant languages in their social contexts inside and outside of school. Data were analyzed using guidelines of critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996). Salient findings include issues of assimilation, meritocracy, and invisibility at the school. The importance of transnational connection, restoration, and accessing social and cultural capital outside of school were also noteworthy. Suggested additions to theorizing work and research with this population as well as critical implications for newcomer schools are also presented.

## DEDICATION

*Kshama Arvind Shah (August 26, 1948 – April 1, 2013)*

You are my mother	તમે માતા	તૂ માઝી આઈ
You are my teacher	તમે જ્ઞાનદાતા	તૂ માઝી શિક્ષીકા
You are the language	તમે આપી ભાષા મને	તૂ માઝી ભાષા
That gave me roots	જેથી બંધાયા મારા મૂળ	મિલ્લી મલા સ્પુરતિ ત્યામુલે
You are the language	અને એજ ભાષા બની મારી	તૂ માઝી ભાષા
That gave me wings	પાંખો	મિલ્લાલે મલા પંખ ત્યામુલે
You are now nestled	તમે મારા હૃદયસ્થ છો	તૂ હયદયસ્થ આહેસ
In my heart	હું છુ યોદ્ધા અવે	આતા લડનાર મી
I'm now warrior	જીવનની લડાઈ લડતી	ભરારી મારનાર મી
Flying forward	આગળ વધતી	
You live in these words	માં, તમે વસો છો આ	આઈ, તૂ આહે યા શબ્દાંત
In these stories	શબ્દોમાં	
These stories of pain	તમે છો આ કથાઓમાં	યા કથાંત
These stories of strength	આ કથાઓની વ્યથામાં	યા કથા આહેત વ્યથાંચ્યા
These stories of hope	આ કથાઓની શક્તિમાં	યા કથા આહેત શક્તીચ્યા
Thank you Mom	આ કથાઓની આશામાં	યા કથા આહેત આશાંચ્યા
	આભાર, માતા	આઈ ધન્યવાદ

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My extension and connection to India came through my parents, Arvind and Kshama Shah. Their conviction towards education was situated through a commitment towards social justice, and this has been their greatest teaching. This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother who passed away in the midst of data collection. My mother—a poet, educator, and activist—epitomized the values of teaching. After her untimely passing in Spring 2013, I wanted to quit this endeavor. I am forever grateful to my father’s commitment and support, and the myriad ways he managed multiple domestic tasks for us during his own time of grief. Dad showed the power of shifting identities and modeled a sense of agency in the midst of suffering. He was especially a strong caregiver during the birth of our daughter Asha and during the final stages of writing. *Thank you Dad.*

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

When I was crossing the border I was afraid that I did not know Spanish. My first day in America was in a detention center. And I was scared. I felt like I was in jail and the only one who did not speak Spanish. I spoke Tigrinya and some English but no one knew Tigrinya. After few months because of political asylum I made it out to go live with my aunt. The airport had signs in English and Spanish. And I was like, oh, okay. And then as I looked around everywhere, even in my first days living free, I heard, press 1 for English and 2 for Spanish. Then I heard Spanish all around me on my first day of school at Immigrant High. And well I was like, okay, but I have to know English to survive. Press 1 for English, yes. (Mekseb)

### The New Immigration Context

Immigration is a social phenomenon that needs to be studied within its historical context. Waves of immigration to the United States impact societal change at multiple levels including changes within economic and power structures (Brisk, 2006). The context in which immigrants arrive to the United States shapes their social realities; each set of immigrants must negotiate the power structures of that particular historical time period. These structures of power include intersecting sights of oppression and domination (Collins, 2009) that are communicated through “exclusionary immigration laws that reinforce the subordination of domestic minority groups helping to maintain white privilege in the United States” (Johnston, 2004, p. 192).

The effects of September 11, 2001 added to the sentiments of suspicion and fear, giving rise to the xenophobia present in the new immigration context. As Johnston (2004) comments:

In modern times, American culture, taking a hint from the terminology of immigration laws, often demonizes current and prospective immigrants as “aliens” or, even worse, “illegal aliens.” Class and racial aspects of the stereotypes contribute to the conventional wisdom that immigrants are a pressing social problem necessitating extreme measures.

Both the term, ‘new immigration,’ as a sociological phenomenon and the term, newcomer immigrants, are signifiers of a community defined differently due to the current historical and political context, issues of time and space (Ngo, 2008). Ongoing immigration debates in the new millennium have largely circled around issues of legality, citizenship, and globalization (Louie, 2005). Forces of globalization in the new immigration context have taken away a nation state’s security of having “territorial boundaries” (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). With respect to globalization and language, Lam (2004) summarizes:

In the contemporary period of globalization, the construction of identity and social relations is increasingly taking place amidst the trans-border circulation of cultural and discursive materials that embed forms of belonging and subject-making beyond the nation. (p. 45)

Globalization and transnational migration are important factors related to language in the new immigration context. Multiple signifiers around language are found within varying local/global spaces of communication and identification (Oikonomidoy, 2011).

An example of the controversial role of Spanish and its place in society as it relates to the new immigrant context was brought to light in May, 2006. Rallies and marches historically signifying the fight for workers’ rights shifted to include activism around immigrant rights. “May Day” within the U.S. context now reflected a political sphere dominated by polarized viewpoints on immigration reform. During these rallies, the national anthem was sung in Spanish. The symbolic use of Spanish, instead of English, led to controversy and debate. This was just one example signifying a relationship between xenophobia and civic ostracism. Kim and Sundstrom (2014) state, “One of the central ways in which xenophobia as civic ostracism is expressed is the attribution of the cultural alienness of a subject or the felt sense that the subject does not rightly belong to the nation” (p. 25). One decade later as this dissertation is being completed, the social realities of immigration raids, debates around national policies regarding immigrants, and



matters around the use of language continue to be of issue. Criticism against the rise of the Spanish language in the United States, and a fear of the ‘browning’ of America (Chavez, 2008) continue to play out in the political sphere. English and Spanish are and continue to be significant languages to the new immigration context (Oikonomidoy, 2015).

### **Entering Immigrant High**

In the midst of immigrant activists organizing in my community in the spring of 2006, I became involved with \*<sup>1</sup>Immigrant High. A small team of professors and graduate students at my university were asked to conduct a professional development for Immigrant High teachers focused on issues of academic language. To situate the work with the teachers, I started to spend time with students at the school. Upon arrival, I was directed to two freshmen from Gujarat, India, who shared a language I spoke, Gujarati. An immediate linguistic connection with both students created a foundation for my role as an interlocutor in their lives for the next three years.

My first observation at Immigrant High was in a Humanities class. The class was comprised of fifteen students. Thirteen of the fifteen were Spanish speakers. The teacher had asked all of the students to work on a literature response activity. The two Gujarati youth engaged with the assignment in a group where most of the dialogue was happening between students in Spanish. At the end of the lesson, one of the Gujarati youth stated, “I knew I had to learn English when I came here, but I did not know I also had to learn Spanish.” After class, we proceeded to lunch. We entered a classroom instead of going to the cafeteria. A student from Bosnia and a student from Ghana joined, commenting that the “cafeteria was for the Spanish speakers.” Indeed, the classroom lunch eaters were all the non-Spanish speakers who came from

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<sup>1</sup> Immigrant High is the pseudonym for a high school located in urban part of northeastern United States that solely focused on serving the needs of recently arrived immigrant students.

different linguistic backgrounds. They chose to gather here and spend time working on assignments, talking in English. In this same classroom was a stack of dictionaries available for the Spanish speakers. The students commented that there were not any dictionaries available in their first languages at Immigrant High.

My first day at Immigrant High left a strong impression on me; non-Spanish speaking students in this school were navigating a particular reality through the negotiation of language. Outside of school, the relationship between Spanish as a language in the new immigration context was met with controversy. I became more interested in seeing how the phenomenon of language and power, within this site of school, and outside of school, manifested itself for these newcomer youth. I also became more committed to studying with/for the newcomer immigrant population through my work at Immigrant High.

### **Problem**

In addition to a lack of documentation of the experiences of non-Spanish speaking newcomers learning English, there is also limited research discussing how the new immigration context plays a distinct role related to specific controversies around language. Controversies around language in the United States have been waged at the site of school from the beginning of public schooling and into the current context (Brisk, 2006). The impact of the current immigration context and the negotiation and resistance of issues around language have manifested themselves in school spaces with newly arrived immigrant youth (Oikonomidou, 2015). A wave of policies in education, including English-only policy, are also products of new immigration. At the macro level, the neocolonial and hegemonic power of English as a global language is promoted as politically neutral, inevitable, and ultimately benevolent (Crystal, 1997). Education as an institution is used to disseminate the message of the polity and language is used

to make claims of national identity. As a result, newcomer immigrants are “othered by English” through language policy and language politics happening in the context of schooling (Orellana & Gutierrez, 2006).

In summary, language use and linguistic identity are wrapped up within the controversy of how, when, and where, young people are allowed to speak in their first language (Brisk, 2006). As a nation of immigrants, the power of English has been used as a particular force, “Othering” all non-English speakers (Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2003; Stevens, 2009), and creating a genre of difference through language markers (Orellana & Gutierrez, 2006). A dominant ideology around the English language has been the importance of achieving language capital to compete in a global marketplace (Grant & Lee, 2009). The continual push for English has been described in the literature as part of a market-driven discourse of globalization (García & Baetens Beardsmore, 2009), as well as one of the most pressing realities for newly arrived immigrant communities (Valdés, 2001). More recently, the power of English has again emerged through the passing of English-only language policies in the United States, leading to an emerging body of critical research specifically focused on the impact of this movement upon schools and second language learning (Kubota & Lin, 2009).

The prevalence of English is not a new phenomenon to the contentious issue of bilingual education, but the dynamic of language and power have shifted. In the United States today, the majority group of non-English speakers are speakers of Spanish, making up approximately eighty percent of the linguistic minority population (Short & Boyson, 2012). This language force has been met with resistance and racism. Described in the research as a socially constructed “Latino Threat,” the presence of Spanish by newly arrived immigrants has fed the notion of many Spanish speakers being a linguistic threat, rather than asset, in making the United

States a more multilingual nation (Chavez, 2008). Even with respect to Spanish speakers, a force of homogenization has also occurred; the “lumping” of all Spanish speakers has disregarded the diversity of Spanish speaking immigrant communities across the United States. This lumping has included the assumption that Latinos are all Spanish speakers, when in fact they are not.

Research has noted that Latinas/os are a multifaceted ethnic, racial, and cultural group (Marx, 2009). However, as a signifier, or symbol of language, the presence of Spanish as the majority language amongst linguistic newcomer minority youth (Short & Boyson, 2012) is an important demographic phenomenon in today’s new immigration context. In addition to the presence of Spanish, the issue of learning and gaining access to English has been pointed out in the research as a vital and important issue for all newly arrived immigrant families (Suárez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todovoro, 2008). Thus, in the current context, newly arrived immigrant youth, whose first language is Spanish, are also working on acquiring English. Concurrently, newly arrived immigrant youth whose first language is not Spanish are learning English and navigating a strong Spanish speaking school culture.

In their landmark research on immigration and education, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) summarize the overall lack of research in the area of new immigration and education:

Our understanding of the experiences of immigrant children and youth remains limited. This gap in our knowledge is troubling because immigrant-origin children are entering the United States in unprecedented numbers, making them the fastest growing segment of the youth population. Today, 20 percent of young people growing up in the United States have immigrant parents, and it is projected that by 2040, one in three children will be growing up in an immigrant household. (pp. 1-2)

Non-Spanish speaking students who have arrived to the United States represent a wide variety of cultures and languages. Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, and Herwantoro (2005) summarize:

The country of origin pattern from students grade 6-12 shows Mexico accounting for over one-third of the total, although the next nine most common countries differ. These students come from a range of places such as Canada, Russia, Haiti, and several Asian

and Latin countries, suggesting that-beyond Mexico-the population of foreign born children is very diverse. Apart from Canada, these countries are substantially poorer than the United States. (pp. 8-9)

With regards to newcomer immigrant youth and newcomer schools, Short's (2002) analysis of existing newcomer programs revealed there were 15,000 middle/secondary newcomer immigrant students enrolled in 115 varying programs. These students came from 90 different countries and spoke 60 different languages, with Spanish being the predominant language (95% of the programs) followed by Vietnamese, Somali, Mandarin, Filipino, Russian, Haitian Creole, Polish, Punjabi, Hindi, and Bengali.

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco's (2008) longitudinal study included recently immigrants from Haiti and China, in addition to Spanish-speaking youth from the Dominican Republic, Central America, and Mexico. Researchers noted the necessity to understand the broad impact of current immigration trends. However, even within this study, and the subsequent studies using the same set of data, a focus on how the non-Spanish speaking students dealt with the presence of the Spanish language and the English language was not emphasized. Non-Spanish speaking immigrant youth negotiating language within the larger frame of the new immigration context has had minimal attention in research. Oiknomidoy's (2015) study of underrepresented newcomer immigrant youth and Paris's (2010) study of immigrant youth navigating a multi-ethnic space considered the role of Spanish. Both studies found that the role of Spanish to be significant to the lives of students navigating issues of identity and power inside and outside of school.

### **Framing This Research Study**

This study is informed by theories of coloniality, intersectionality, and the role of language to make epistemic claims. Theorists conceptualizing dynamics of power in education

claim that within any school (a societal institution), and with any set of experiences with young people (subjects within that institution), particular signifiers of power take shape and form through language (Giroux, 1991). Language functions as a social semiotic; language symbolizes negotiation of context and power. Bhabha (1995) describes the importance of seeing language/power as a semiotic system, where the sign of language and its symbolic use functions as a historical and cultural struggle by/for oppressed people. In application to the new immigrant community, social semiotics considers how immigrant teens draw upon various representation resources to (re)define their identities and relations to multiple localities and communities in the process of migration (Lam, 2004).

Power dynamics in a social unit are embedded in relation to a social system, but are not deterministic. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) state:

Power is always a matter of both being positioned by proximal and distal social forces and responding to being positioned in unique and agentic ways...Institutions do indeed contribute to power asymmetries, but they do not determine them once and for all.  
(p. 111)

This understanding of power recognizes the multiple and relational narratives of both agency and resistance occurring within multiple contexts. This study seeks to explore how non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth are: 1) being positioned by proximal and distal forces; 2) responding to social forces and negotiating identity, agency, power; and 3) are not valuing or not responding to relations of power.

The purpose of this study necessitated a methodology that took into account the narratives of these immigrant youth along with a consideration of systems, or domains of power, that impacted these narratives. I understood that my choice of research methodology must center the stories of newcomer immigrant youth as multilingual, transnational, global individuals who belong to a new immigration Diaspora. Consequently, the methodology chosen for this study

was critical ethnography. Critical ethnography implies the particular attention of the researcher to cultural phenomenon explored over time and with depth (Luttrell, 2000) while questioning the social and cultural conditioning of human activity and prevailing social structures (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). This study focused on the specific experiences and perceptions of one such cultural group (non-Spanish speaking students negotiating language practices in multiple settings) in order to explore stories and themes related to issues of language and power.

The theoretical framework for this dissertation was developed by explicating concepts around signification and domination as it relates to the newcomer youth population. The notion of language as signifier of capital, race, identity, and culture, through the lens of critical theory, along with Collins' (2009) matrix of domination framework, provided a theoretical map to explore and explain various findings around issues of language and power. Guidelines from critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996) provided direction for data analysis and the theoretical framework was applied in the last two stages of analysis.

### **Purpose of Study**

The experiences of non-Spanish speaking newcomer youth navigating the presence of English and Spanish is minimal in the research literature on immigrant youth. In addition, there is a paucity of research studies recognizing how the new immigration context in the United States has particular dynamics of power and colonizing. Finally, issues of language need to be seen from frameworks that fit the complexities of these young people (Ngo, 2008). Noted by scholars in the field (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009), there is a necessity for educators to recognize the nuanced nature of new immigration studies; this study attempts to understand these immigrant students and their negotiation of language in nuanced ways.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the phenomenon of language and power in the context of new immigration through the language practices of non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth. Principles of critical ethnography were employed to answer the following question: How do non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth (attending a newcomer high school with 65% Spanish speaking population and living within a larger new immigration context) negotiate their language practices?

Sub questions included:

- How do students experience language in various school contexts (e.g. inside classroom, outside of classroom, and afterschool activities)?
- How do students experience language in various out of school contexts? (e.g. home and work?)
- How do students relate their language practices to issues of power?

### **Definition of Terms**

Newcomer immigrant youth: The students in this study entered formal schooling in the United States at the secondary level. They also attend a high school specifically designed to serve the needs of newcomer immigrant youth (Short & Boyson, 2012). According to federal No Child Left Behind legislation, newcomer immigrants are those students not born in the United States that have attended schools for less than three years. “According to NCLB, immigrant students are first-generation newcomers, namely individuals aged three to 21 who were not born in the United States and who have attended U.S. schools for less than three years” (Louie, 2004).

Language: I utilize the term, language, as inclusive of the oral, written, visual, and gestural. Consequently, observations of non-verbal, oral, and written language are all seen as important modalities for this study. Lam (2004) states:



It is crucial to understand language socialization as a site of struggle where language practices are governed by and used to produce configurations of power that determine the norms of conduct, and where the diverse affiliations or socialization experiences of the learner interact with each other to influence how the learner is socially positioned in any specific language learning context. (p. 46)

Negotiate: I define the concept of negotiation as the push and pull of identities that occurs between dominant and nondominant cultural forces, which are embedded in issues of power. Consequently, I employ the understanding of negotiation by immigrant youth as a “play of specific modalities of power” (Ngo, 2008, p. 3) which lead to key issues of agency/resistance.

New immigration context: The new immigration context is an understanding of the United States that considers the following factors: Post 9/11 xenophobia, English-Only legislation, Spanish as the second language of the United States, “Latino as Threat,” as a signifier, No Child Left Behind Legislation, anti-immigrant policies debated with regards to legality and citizenship, and global/transnational/migrant communities arriving to the United States. All of these factors and actors move and shape the context through which newcomer immigrant youth navigate and negotiate contesting issues within the duration of this study.

### **Significance of Study**

Newcomer immigrant students as a unit of analysis is, in itself, significant (Short & Boyson, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al, 2008). Review of ethnographic qualitative research studies and case studies done with immigrant youth reveal a lack of research on: 1) the experiences and perspectives of newcomer youth in general; 2) applying critical theory to frame issues of power and language within educational research, and 3) describing the experiences of non-Spanish speaking youth learning English within the powerful dynamics of new immigration. In addition, scholars also describe how the hyper focus on immigrant students’ acquisition of technical language has lead led to a continual misrepresentation of their social realities as a community of

immigrant youth (Gutierrez, 2006; Stevens, 2009). The focus of this dissertation, in particular how languages are signifying practices, reflecting important issues of power and oppression is also of significance. The focus on language brings to center an additional consideration of the intersectionality of race, class, gender, significant topics to the lives of historically marginalized communities.

The significance of this dissertation is not only its topic but also in its approach in adding to the conversation on theorizing work/research with immigrant youth. This study explores the experiences of newcomer immigrant students within the historical and political context in which they live. Anti-immigrant sentiment, pro-English social and educational policies pervade the current tone within the United States and the State of Massachusetts (Macedo, 2006), feeding a power structure where many immigrant families and children are between contesting issues of language and operating from modes of survival. This dissertation both drew from critical theory, and proposed additional knowledge to add to theory. Oikonomidoy (2011) states how such research is both vital and timely stating, “Such theoretical knowledge could transfer into the creation of immigrant-responsive educational approaches that could assist in the successful integration of into the schools of their receiving society. Newcomer students are the future of society” (p. 17). This dissertation is designed to add to the empirical knowledge on newcomer youth in newcomer schools and also add to the knowledge of reframing educational discourses on serving immigrant populations in more just ways.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Chapter one introduced the problem and study. Chapter two reviews the existing literature focused on newcomer immigrant youth attending newcomer schools. Chapter three discusses the theoretical framework that applies

critical theory to discussion of signification and domination. Chapter four describes the methodology, critical ethnography. Chapter five, six, and seven discuss the findings of the research by integrating voices of the participants, ethnographic details of the context, and analysis of important findings. Chapter eight, finally, discusses the findings through the theoretical framework, suggesting additions, and drawing implications for this research.

## Chapter II

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The research on immigration and education is vast and incorporates waves of immigration and varying immigrant groups, including 1.5 and second generation immigrant communities. Suarez-Orozco et al.'s (2008) seminal text, *Learning a New Land, Immigrant Students in American Society*, signified the research of a new wave of immigration. The subjects of this text are young people who are not only first generation immigrants, but also recent arrivals to the United States. The characteristics of the new immigration context include multiple contesting issues of language and immigration status. These issues are also tied to a national context that has become increasingly anti-immigrant and pro-English. In addition, the new immigration context requires an understanding of how global, transnational, migration narratives of newcomers impact their overall experiences with education. This field of inquiry is imperative and growing, as illustrated by the existing body of research. In the following chapter, I review literature that specifically focuses on newly arrived immigrant youth and the newcomer schools within the American context.

#### **Newcomer Immigrant Youth are Learning English**

Suarez-Orozco et al.'s (2008) five-year long seminal study on recently arrived immigrant youth sought out students who did not speak English in their native country. The selection criteria for their study emphasized the powerful role that English played for these young people. In their mixed methods study of 309 newcomer immigrant youth from multiple linguistic backgrounds, almost all of the students (99%) reported that they thought English was important to learn and be successful in school. Bennett and Jaradat's (2011) case narrative to build leadership for newcomer schools emphasized that the growing concern by educators for meeting

the varying needs of English are so pressing that they have led to a complete walk out by faculty in English and multilingual studies. Schools are not only at odds with how best to serve the growing newcomer multilingual population; issues around contesting language policy complicate the issues even more. Outside of the school context other facets of newcomer immigrant life are also hinged to acquiring English including building a sense of belonging in the larger social context, language brokering for their families, and applying for higher education (Louie, 2005; Morse, 2005).

The policy document, *The New Demography of America's Schools - Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act* (Capps et al., 2005), discussed the pressing national concern of acquiring with the new wave of immigrants. The policy document began with stating the problem: Immigrant newcomers arrived to the United States as limited English proficient and these students struggled with state assessments and classes taught in English. Consequently, according to the document, educational policy needs to figure out how best to increase the English language proficiency for these students. The positive benefit of the NCLB legislation was an accountability structure that required ELL students' development of English proficiency.

With respect to students as language learners, Short and Boyson's (2012) report on newcomer schools and Oikonomidou's (2015) study also pointed out how Spanish is the predominant first language of immigrant students. All other non-English language speakers came from diverse linguistic backgrounds. As a result, newcomer schools focused on creating programming for Spanish-speaking families, but providing resources for the other linguistic groups was a challenge. Morse's (2005) policy report summarized the pressure of learning English with respect to the demands of newcomer immigrant youth in multiple settings:

Immigrant teens can face unique challenges related to language proficiency, cultural and social adaption and poverty. Newly arriving immigrant teenagers have a very limited

time to learn English, study the required material for high stakes tests, and catch up to their native English speaking peers before graduation. On the other hand, immigrant youth who have mastered English often experience family role-reversal, when they are called on as translators or interpreters for family interactions with the outside world. (p. 1).

In the next section, I discuss the topic, newcomer immigrant youth are learning English, through four subtopics: language acquisition, academic literacy, family and language, and language for higher education.

Language Acquisition. The policy document, *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent English Language Learners*, emphasized the linguistic conundrum for secondary ELL students:

It should be understood that adolescent ELLs are second language learners who are still developing their proficiency in academic English. Moreover, they are learning English at the same time that they are studying core content areas through English. Thus, English language learners must perform double the work of native English speakers in the country's middle and high schools. And, at the same time they are being held to the same accountability standards as their native English-speaking peers. (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007, p. 1)

Short and Boyson's (2012) survey of newcomer schools revealed that all sixty-three of the newcomer programs that responded provided intensive English language instruction for their students through ESL, English language development, or English language arts courses. Nearly half (46%) used provided instruction in English only, while about one-third (30%) used English and Spanish. Menyuk and Brisk's (2005) volume on language development incorporated the experiences of newcomer immigrant youth and discussed the particular challenges for adolescent ELLs. Adolescent ELLs were learning academic subjects while simultaneously developing as language learners. Students not only came from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds, but their language proficiency in their first language and English varied. This variation included differences in oral language, written language, and academic language (Short & Fitzsimmons,

2007; Menyuk & Brisk, 2005). Musetti et al. (2009) further emphasized that it is vital to find as many opportunities as possible to link first and second language literacy. In addition, assessing newcomer immigrant youth was discussed as complex terrain. Oral proficiency could take two years, but advanced proficiency could take up to seven years. Therefore, any expectation of newcomer immigrant youth developing English proficiency in a few years in high school was unfair; alternative assessments that were linguistically and culturally appropriate should be developed (Menyuk & Brisk, 2005; Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2008; Thompson, 2004). In their study assessing newcomer programs, Stritikus and Nguyen (2010) found that in order to develop language acquisition quickly, teachers emphasized the technical aspects. The problem, however, was that over time students became disengaged because the technical aspects did not consider the whole picture of language development.

Brittain's (2009) empirical study of Mexican newcomer immigrant youth sharing transnational messages with peers back in Mexico found that the issue of language proficiency was a central area of concern. Overall, the students shared a negative perception around the English language because of language acquisition and stressed to their co-nationals that it was a difficult and frustrating experience. In addition, they suggested that lack of English acquisition could lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion; language proficiency gave validation and access to forms of capital. Their advice to their Mexican co-national peers was that they should learn as much English as possible. Oikonomidou's (2009) study of Somali students concurred with the frustration the young people felt around English, but pointed out that, over time, students expressed pride and progress as they acquired English. Brittain's (2009) and Oikonomidou's (2009) studies both brought attention to students' eagerness to build language acquisition in English in relationship to their first languages. In contrast, Yoon and Hang's (2010) study of

Korean newcomers described their annexing their first language for English language acquisition. Here, the students were very eager to assimilate with American peers through language acquisition and felt that, in order to do so, their first language needed to disappear.

**Academic Literacy.** The issue of academic literacy was central to newcomer immigrant youth. Short and Fitzsimmon (2007) define academic literacy as “a complex endeavor that involves reading, writing, listening, and speaking for multiple school-related purposes using a variety of texts and demanding a variety of products” (p. 8). Short and Boyson’s (2012) report summarized that all 63 programs surveyed emphasized academic literacy and none of the programs taught reading and writing in isolation, but rather emphasized integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2008) developed a model of academic engagement in which English-Language proficiency was a key factor:

The ability to perform on multiple choice tests, to extract meaning from written text, and to argue a point both verbally and in writing are essential skills for high levels of academic attainment...we found higher oral academic English language proficiency to be significantly correlated with higher grades and even more strongly related to achievement test outcomes. (p. 41-42)

Newcomer students were highly motivated to learn English. In their report of the quantitative findings using data from the five-year mixed methods study, Suarez-Orozco, Bang, O’Connor, Gaytan, Pakes, and Rhodes’s (2010) concluded that “students with lower academic English proficiency were more likely to be found among the low achievers” (p. 11). Emphasizing language skills development sometimes left teachers with myopic views of what was happening with language, in particular how language was constructed socially (Stevens, 2011, Strikus & Nyugen, 2010). In addition, students with low English proficiency were also likely to get lower grades. English skills seemed to overshadow teacher perceptions of other academic skills in determining immigrant students’ grades (Bang et. al, 2009). Franquiz and Salinas’s (2011) study



of newcomer students developing historical thinking through developing academic literacy emphasized the importance of the ESL certified teacher's sensitivity to literacy skills of her newcomer students while simultaneously bringing the students' knowledge of lived history to the classroom in order to engage with academic literacy.

Academic literacy development for newcomer immigrant youth that does not occur through the first language was critiqued by Garcia and Bartlett's (2007) empirical case study of a school in New York. This school focused on educating Latino newcomers through a bilingual speech community school model. In their study, they argued that a huge part of the problem of monolingual models was the impact of NCLB and the pressure to mainstream students in dominant English contexts. They also argued that an understanding of language acquisition and academic literacy in the high school setting is precisely why newcomer immigrants need to have their first language in order to learn content. Their study did not focus away from newcomer immigrant youth learning English, but emphasized that the learning should happen with and through the students' first language, Spanish. In contrast, Feinberg (2000) stated that newcomers are "at danger of minimal learning due to impoverished input of English in the context of a segregated newcomer school" (p. 224).

Lam's (2004) study of the bilingual transnational activities of newcomer immigrant youth highlighted that English was being learned through online chat rooms outside of school. Students were using their second language to learn English; the chat room proved to be a safer place for youth to engage in language learning. Over time, the young people preferred the bilingual chat rooms over classroom learning so that they could learn more English. Lam's studies indicate that newcomer immigrant youth are developing academic literacies through multiple social literacies in multiple settings (Lam, 2004, 2009). Steven's (2011) study on

literacy, capital, and newcomer immigrant youth also echoed the myriad ways through which immigrant youth navigate literacy including using critical literacy to develop academic literacy.

When first languages were not recognized or developed in the classroom a sense of loss was reported by immigrant youth (Musetti et al., 2009). Gaytan et al. (2007) emphasized that beyond language acquisition of English through the first language, the problem with not developing the first language was a matter of adolescent development. Students overtime lost fluency; their oral and literacy skills in their first language did not keep up with learning English. The problem was that students did not develop more subtle understandings of their first language. Their family and community, on the other hand, would have these abilities; over time, language misunderstanding and language isolation could occur within their cultural community. Yoon and Haag (2010) stressed that newcomer youth's loss of their first language was driven by the larger desire to assimilate; additionally, there was not a culture supporting the development of their first language because the population of students was so small. Oikonomidou's (2009) study on Somali students pointed out that many students came to school with knowledge of two to three languages. A combination of factors including ethnic isolation and religious discrimination led students to hide their multilingual language knowledge in school. Another issue of making language knowledge evident in school included the ways in which schools were negatively serving as gatekeepers, obscuring the linguistic repertoires of newcomer youth (Stevens, 2011).

Family and Language. Discussion of newcomer immigrant youth across the literature emphasized factors beyond language that impacted English language acquisition. Language acquisition was thought of as a dynamic fluid process that was highly dependent on both the context in which it was developed and the range of opportunities that one had to use it (Suarez-

Orozco et al., 2008). This sense of belonging emerged through multiple social factors and access to social capital (Louie, 2005). Suarez-Orozco's (2008) longitudinal study revealed multiple factors impacting English language proficiency including: prior schooling, parents' language proficiency, time in the United States, attendance in school, and English use in informal settings. A key factor found throughout the literature was the connection between family engagement, language, and learning English. The relationship between social capital, the role of families, and the educational experiences of immigrant youth were deemed important. Louie (2005) summarizes the work of immigration scholars (Kao, 2004; Portes, 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001):

Working class immigrant parents face a daunting set of possible disadvantages: Not only do they lack financial resources and have low levels of formal schooling, but they are also unfamiliar with American social norms, the American educational system, and, all too often, English language, and thus they are unable to be involved—or, indeed, comprehend---their children's schooling experiences). (p. 88)

Caretakers' level of English acquisition varied. In addition, experiences in the educational system in their home country or United States varied (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). Gaytan et al. (2007) summarized that many immigrant families were not able to help with homework because of their own schooling backgrounds. Newcomer immigrant youth were struggling with language and content when they brought homework home. The relationship between language, English, and family proved to be important across the literature. Short and Boyson's (2012) report reviewing sixty-three newcomer programs emphasized the connection among newcomer programs, families, community, and social institutions as essential and vital components to the lives of newcomer immigrant youth, in particular when it came to issues of language.

Language and Higher Education. The connection between English language learning and academic achievement for secondary students is vital from the standpoint of access to higher

education. Louie (2005) analyzed newcomer immigrants and the education pipeline by emphasizing the history of the Education and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in relationship to current high stakes educational policy (e.g. NCLB). Newcomer immigrant youth were not simply learning English and living within multiple social realities; they were also trying to access a powerful piece of capital – the pursuit of higher education. The status connected with gaining higher education was, in fact, a key measure of evaluating the success of newcomer programs (Short & Boyson, 2012).

Key arguments in relationship to newcomer immigrant youth seeking higher education were: 1) globalized economies impact the degree to which higher education was needed for employment; 2) immigration status was a powerful identifier with regards to accessing higher education; and 3) pressure to be the first in the family to make a large leap up the educational ladder was linked to pressure to gain higher education (Louie, 2005). The English language as global capital and concepts of being a citizen in the American context were linked to English. In addition, learning English was linked to family success and family responsibility (Suarez-Orozco, et. al, 2008). In relationship to issues of discrimination, resources, and documentation status, newcomer immigrant youth reported the primary issue was to learn English; English was necessary to gain access to these sources of capital and higher education (Gaytan et al., 2007; Yoon & Haag, 2010).

### **Newcomer Immigrant Youth Attend Newcomer Schools**

The pressure of accountability and the need to provide language instruction to the newcomer immigrant population were discussed in the literature on programs and schools that have been specifically designed to serve the needs of this population. In addition, the literature points to issues such as school segregation, low teacher expectations, limited resources, school

violence, limited information about access to college, and high dropout rates as impetuses to developing an array of solutions to serve the newcomer population (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2007). Short's (2002) analysis of existing newcomer programs revealed that 15,000 middle/secondary newcomer immigrant students enrolled in 115 varying programs. These students came from 90 different countries and spoke 60 different languages, with Spanish being the predominant language (95% of the programs) followed by Vietnamese, Somali, Mandarin, Filipino, Russian, Haitian Creole, Polish, Punjabi, Hindi, and Bengali. Short and Boyson's (2012) report on 63 newcomer programs (10,899 students) reported students came from 90 different countries, speaking more than 55 languages or dialects. The languages that were most common across the programs were Spanish (in 90% of the programs), Arabic (38%), Mandarin (19%), French (17%), and Korean and Vietnamese (both 14%).

The main focus of these programs was teaching English language through sheltered instruction. This form of instruction focused on aspects of academic language where the purpose was to learn English through the explicit teaching of content. Emphasis on English language acquisition and content learning for secondary newcomer immigrant youth were identified throughout the research literature analyzing newcomer programs (Feinberg, 2000; Short, 2002; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2010).

Differentiation? Short and Boyson (2012) learned that most newcomer programs enrolled students for a limited period of time, one to two years, and then transitioned students into the regular language support program (ESL or bilingual). Other newcomer programs were full fledged schools and offered ESL levels and content courses typical of schools in the district. Analysis of the literature on newcomer programs pointed out that differentiation of students into schools focused on language development and newcomer issues was not simply ideal because of

separation. Stritikus and Nguyen (2010) discussed the ideological positions of universalism and differentiation as conceived by (Reeves, 2004) to explain the ways in which educational equity for newcomer immigrant youth were conceived. According to Stritikus and Nguyen (2010), the intention behind newcomer schools and programs aligned with the ideology of differentiation – schooling designed to match the students’ individual needs:

Thus, in terms of ELL students, there is a strong tradition of conceptualizing equality as differential treatment through the establishment of differentiated programs such as English as a Second Language, Pull-Out, Newcomer Centers, Sheltered Instruction, and Transitional and Maintenance Bilingual Education (p. 331).

Garcia and Bartlett’s (2007) qualitative case study of a successful bilingual high school serving Latino newcomers was an example of differentiation found in the literature. They argued:

The school’s vision of second language acquisition as a social process building on the speech community itself, and not just as the individual psycholinguistic process of students, is a key to success. (p. 1)

In their study, the majority Dominican population was able to access their first language in order to learn English. In addition, language connection between students and with Spanish speaking faculty created connectedness. Spanish was used to “educate rigorously, connect deeply, and was given high status” (p. 9).

Garcia and Bartlett stated that one of the study’s limitations was that there were Spanish-speaking students who were not Dominican and felt segregated. Spanish may be thought of as a homogenous force of connection, however the Spanish speaking youth came from varying transnational narratives. In addition, students were also segregated from other cultural groups who lived in their neighborhoods. The study also pointed out that while such a school environment for newcomer immigrant youth could serve the dominant non-English speaking population, Spanish speakers, the speech community model would be harder to create with the remaining diverse newcomer immigrant speaking community. Orozco et al. (2010) stressed that

Latino students who were linguistically isolated faced particular academic risks. Garcia (2005) stated, however, that the failure of academic achievement was in relationship to the language program in the school, not the fact that there was a collective group of language learners.

Feinberg (2000) agreed that, while recognizing that a newcomer program was part of differentiating, it was the level of commitment towards this immigrant population that impacted issues of quality. Her analysis of three existing newcomer schools and a school district's plan for developing a program, revealed the difference between meeting the needs of students vs. a program designed to "hide these students and their needs from the public view" (p. 221). An earlier analysis of newcomer schools also warned of critical issues occurring at the sight of four different schools, questioning the quality of instruction as well as the rationale of segregating these students (Constantino & Lavendz, 1993). Stritikus and Nguyen (2010) emphasized that any newcomer program needed "well-grounded conceptions of students' cognitive, linguistic, and social needs with approaches to maximize the resources of immigrant students" (p. 343). In addition, Hersi and Watkinson (2012) and Feinberg (2000) emphasized the need for newcomer programs to attend to social and psychological needs; successful programs were safe places for these students to acculturate to a new society. Salerno and Kibler's (2015) study analyzed the efficacy of newcomer students attending a vocational training program as part of their program. Their findings warned that such programs, while promising new skills, can lead to even more linguistic isolation. In summary, the quality of newcomer programs was largely dependent on the intentional attention paid to meeting the needs of the students rather than simply creating differentiated spaces.

Teachers, Supportive Relationships, and Resources. Literature specifically focused on newcomer programs designed to serve youth showed that simple differentiation of these students

into programs did not dictate better educational opportunity. Schools, in fact, played one of the largest roles in the success of newcomer immigrant youth, even if students found themselves in racially and ethnically segregated schools and programs (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). Hersi and Watkinson (2012) and Suarez-Orozco et al. (2009) discussed that a key component to academic engagement in school was the myriad of relationships built with teachers, counselors, coaches, and school personnel. These non-parental adults eased newly arrived immigrant students' cultural transitions.

Another key finding was the role that caring teachers played in the education of the students. This ethic of caring allowed the school to help students build both social and cultural capital (Hersi, 2011). The students' interactions with teachers illustrated the tremendous role that teachers and schools could play in building relationships with students, and assisting them in acquiring cultural and social capital beyond language acquisition (Britain, 2009; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012). Suarez-Orozco et al. (2009) concurred that effective teachers elicited feelings of protection, encouragement and support within students. Garcia and Bartlett's (2005) study emphasized the role that teachers played in helping students engage with Spanish and English, which in turn helped them build a sense of belonging through language. Students spoke to teachers about their personal lives and difficulties adjusting to the United States through their first language and this in turn helped them feel safe at the school. As a result, a key finding was the level of engagement in schooling because the school personnel used their own cultural and linguistic Dominican Spanish speaking backgrounds to connect with their students.

Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices were major factors in creating supportive environments for newcomer youth (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012). Hopkins et al.'s (2013) study of Latino newcomer young men summarized: "Specifically, teachers leveraged



students' nondominant cultural capital through bilingual instruction, and, in doing so, used culturally consonant pedagogy to foster relationships with students" (p. 292). Bang's (2011) study of eight teachers illuminated the importance for teachers to recognize the myriad social factors that lead to the completion of homework, supporting the idea that teachers' knowledge of students' lives outside of school was a key factor. The social context of the classroom, including language interaction, and the grading of homework by teachers were also considered an important factor in relationship to language. Bang et al.'s (2009) study also explored issues around teachers, homework, and newcomer immigrants. They explained how an immigrant student's low performance related to their English language fluency, not necessarily their content knowledge. In the NCLB context, homework had become even more of a required and demanding task. Teachers felt that homework could provide additional practice for acquisition of skills and language proficiency (H.J. Bang et al., 2009). Students' completion of their homework strongly correlated to higher grades. English proficiency was considered more of an important marker for grades with teachers although teachers placed the same emphasis on completion of homework no matter the English proficiency. The research noted that teachers needed to realize the important role they play in making demanding academic tests more meaningful and fair for students.

Brittain's (2009) study of transnational messages sent between Mexican newcomer immigrant youth revealed that a key area of discussion among youth revolved around the helpfulness of free materials, services, and resources provided by U.S. schools. Short's (2002) and Short and Boyson's (2012) report of newcomer programs found that support services ranged from physical health services, mental health services, career counseling, tutoring and included programs for adult ESL, cultural orientation, and native language literacy classes. The literature

also highlighted unique resources for immigrant parents, including a teen radio show broadcasting advice for immigrant parents from the youth perspective. Montgomery County, Maryland created a program to help parents navigate the educational system; this guide was produced in English, Spanish, French, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese, and became publically available on the web (Morse, 2005).

Oikonomidou's (2009) study of Somali newcomers also emphasized the importance of creating support through group affinity and a sense of family both inside and outside of school. The participants actively created a Somali centered community in order to have a place where they could talk about their experiences and help each other with homework. These students, however, did not cling to their ethnic group or this community, but rather moved in and between multiple cultural groups. They were comfortable with students from other backgrounds, even though the safety of their own newcomer group was unique. This research finding supports the important need to create spaces of emotional and social support with and across cultural and linguistic groups for newcomer immigrant youth. Oikonomidou's (2015) study of underrepresented newcomer youth emphasized the sophisticated ways in which the students established their connections with peers and in the process, built intercultural capital.

Suarez-Orozco et al.'s (2009) study on academic engagement emphasized the importance of peer relationships for linguistic connection, help with homework, and even motivation to not give up during trying times as a newcomer youth. Roxas and Roy (2012) drew from the perspective of intersectionality of events that impacted one Somali student's refugee status and concurred that it was not only the relationships, but the communication between individuals and outside resources, that was vital to the student's success. When such communication was lacking or non-existent, students lacked a connection to school. The students in Oikonomidou's

(2009) study concurred that a large part of success with learning involved the resources that were accessed afterschool including school programs, resources in the library, neighbors, and computer programs. After-school programs, tutoring, and programming to aid with access to higher education were all deemed important resources for academic engagement, social engagement, and a sense of belonging (Hopkins et al., 2013; Orozco & Milburn, 2009; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009; Short & Boyson, 2012).

### **Newcomer Immigrant Youth are Global Transnational Migrants**

Oikonomidou (2009) reconceptualizes multicultural education based upon the understanding of new immigration and newcomer immigrant youth, as global transnational migrants:

At the global level we envision the space that transcends the borders of the host country. Students' connections to the home country can be positioned in this field. The students' cultural ways of being and original meaning making processes are not wiped out when they enter their host country. On the contrary they provide a strong foundation for their cultural negotiations in the host country. (p. 25)

The social and linguistic realities embedded within a transnational and migrant narrative were revealed in the experiences with newcomer immigrant youth. These experiences described negotiations of various structures of schooling and replaced traditional locations of literacy (Stevens, 2011). In addition, the understanding of the global, transnational, and migrant realities of these youth pointed to divergent directions of studying these young people as well as some of the important challenges they faced based on the structures of society, issues of migration, and the global context. The sub topics of migration/family/stress, migration/documentation status/discrimination, and transnational literacies/identities explicate the third topic: Newcomer immigrant youth are global/transnational migrants.

Migration, Family, and Stress. The narrative of relocation is the starting point for understanding newcomer immigrant youth. The migration process involves multiple negotiations that occur before arriving, en route, and after arrival (Oikonomidoy, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Gaytan, Carhill, and Suarez-Orozco (2007) state “the driving motivation for migration was to be reunited with family members who emigrated earlier...for newcomer immigrants children, a period of separation from both parents is normative” (p. 10). In addition, migration can be directly correlated to the desire to achieve higher education; many newcomers come to the United States with the hope of achieving academically, gaining higher education, and then migrating back to their homeland. Ethnic communities who were part of the newer wave of immigration to the United States were “part of a newly formed ethnic network – thus their ethnic collective community as a collective was still in transition” (Oikonomidoy, 2009, p. 34).

Immigrant youth did not grow up in a vacuum (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, and Onaga, 2010). Family characteristics such as migration status and level of parental education had historically been important in research focused on understanding immigrant communities. Immigrant newcomer families were not necessarily working class. Newcomer immigrant youth often lived in “varied and complex household configurations. Some live in traditional two-parent families, or with nonparental caretakers (such as grandparents, godparents, aunts, and uncles)” (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009, p. 715). As a result of varying household makeups, general levels of financial stability depended on how many adult members had secured employment (Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2008). In addition to challenging issues such as schooling and employment, family characteristics of resiliency and engagement were also described as forms of social capital in relation to immigrant families (Louie, 2005). Suarez-Orozco et al. (2009)

described the tangible support received by family members in terms of homework help and advice, in addition to emotional support such as encouragement and care.

Gaytan et al. (2007) reported that newcomer immigrant youth navigated social and cultural identities in school that their parents could not identify with as a result of having not attended schools in the United States. According to their study immigrants felt vague to intense embarrassment about their parents' cultural practices, while immigrant parents feared that acculturation would lead their children to behave like 'Americans.' Negotiating linguistic and cultural identities also changed over time. As more English was acquired and first languages were not spoken as often, young people experienced more distance from families. Parents' level of schooling and English proficiency also added to the complexity of home school connections.

Factors regarding language, identity, and relocation were only a window into the complicated and complex factors involved in the journey of migration and relocation (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). Gaytan et al. (2008) describe the impact of immigration on the development of newcomer immigrant youth:

Immigration is one of the most stressful transitions a family can undergo. Immigrants are stripped of significant relationships with extended family members, best friends, and neighbors. Additionally immigrants who were esteemed members of the community prior to migration may take on low-status jobs after migrating to the U.S. and youth who were good students may struggle to keep up in schools as they learn English. These changes in contexts, relationships, and roles are disorienting and generally lead to a sense of loss. Immigrant youth in particular face many challenges that can have a lasting impact on their development (p. 11).

Family separation impacted mental health and caused stress for newcomer immigrant youth. In addition, caretakers who were left behind also caused heartache for newcomer immigrant youth. Suarez-Orozco et al.'s (2011) study found that youth who had undergone the longest separation from their mothers reported the highest level of anxiety and depression. The highest levels of distress were reported by the youth who underwent medium and long-term separations.

Newcomers who were not separated from their mothers or who had gone through less than two years of separation showed the lowest levels of stress. Reunification for these young people, and the relative impact on their health correlated to whether their migration was understood as necessary to reunite with family or whether their migration felt like being abandoned. Over time, however, newcomers adjusted. The findings from the study identified the qualities of “strength, determination, resilience, and resourcefulness” (p. 249) as important to the psychological negotiation experienced by these youth.

Migration, Documentation, and Discrimination. Gutierrez’s (2014) study of youth social justice engagement against issues of racism and immigration described the ways in which young newcomer Mexican youth counteracted a hostile school climate, pointing out the extent to which discriminatory immigration and educational policies had impacted the lives of these young people. The level of documentation of parents and families could differ; many immigrant youth had undocumented parents (Capps et al., 2005) and documentation status impacted a number of factors in terms of access to capital and feelings of belonging (Jefferies, 2009; Louie, 2005; Patel, 2013). Issues of discrimination plagued the lives of many newcomer immigrant youth, stemming from transnational narratives of migration in their home countries. The impact of discriminatory practices included issues of psychosocial well being in their daily lives (Patel, 2015). Discriminatory practices also included the racist narratives told of even their civic engagement, painting their actions as violent, extreme, and anti-American (Gutierrez, 2014). Patel’s (2013) ethnography on the politics of exclusion emphasized the issues of oppression present in policies built on racism, in particular around documentation status.

Hamann and Reeve’s (2012) study of a community’s response to ICE raids at the workplace, on the other hand, described a resistance to the racist tactics of framing newcomer

families in dehumanizing ways, emphasizing cultural models that, while not stopping the raids, promoted a humanizing way in which Latino newcomer youth could be supported. Gutierrez's (2014) study recognized the importance of newcomer youth building coalitions as young people charged with both the knowledge and understanding to fight injustices, and in turn, through this active civic participation to engage as learners, turning their troublesome issues around migration into spaces to fight oppression in community. Patel's (2013) study put at center the consideration of how society structured amongst a group of newcomer youth. Although documentation status held great power in the lives of newcomer youth they found networks of support to navigate such social realities.

Transnational literacies/identities. Lam's (2009) study highlights how complex linguistic and semiotic economies such as AAVE, hip-hop, dominance of Cantonese in the local community, and the use of a new regional dialect, Shanghainese, crossed genres of talk, modes of communication, and multiple digital platforms. These interactions and crossings of language, culture, and space emphasized the impact of the new immigration context. Transnational identity formation with respect to the phenomenon of expression of varying language practices lead to a wide variety of informal literacy practices inside and outside of school (Bruna, 2007).

Oikonomiday's (2009) study emphasized the multilayered hybrid identities that newcomer immigrant youth were forming in this era of globalization and worked from the assumption that the students' "academic identity construction is a dynamic, contextual process that transcends both space and time" (p. 25). Davila's (2015) study of the reading practices of newcomer immigrant youth from the African diaspora highlighted the myriad ways in which transnational connections were being made, in particular outside of school. From a similar perspective, Bruna's (2007) study documented how three newcomer girls used 'tagging' or

displayed their transnational knowledge in school through picture, voice, etc. This ‘tagging’ suggested that when literacies of display traveled into the classroom context, they constitutes literacies of assistance. These were in fact requests by these youth to make connections between their transnational backgrounds into the classroom context. Lam’s (2009) study of two different students showed that through the written communications of a student in the IM context, a Mandarin speaking student started to pick up another regional dialect, Shanghainese, so she could learn something new and keep up with the online youth culture. Her study questioned the ideology of global English as colonizing by asking, how students with this local context could use global contexts to build their own multilingual identities.

Issues of language ideology and language capital were impacted by transnational language interactions. Lam’s (2004) study of newcomer youths’ navigation of a bilingual chat room pointed out that, over time, a kind of “third space” (Gutierrez, 2006) of language was created between Chinese and English. As a result of their socialization practices in a Hong Kong chat room, they developed a unique ethnic identification. She found that the choice to speak English in the American context was no longer simply a choice of being a Chinese emigrant or a Chinese-American according to the ethnic and language ideologies of the United States (Lam, 2004). Lam’s (2009) study showed that the capital one language was given over another impacted transnational literacy practices. In her study, the Chinese speaking newcomer immigrant who was Mandarin speaking was a minority amongst the larger Cantonese population. Cantonese had more of a “social and economic cachet” in the community, and provided better opportunities. With respect to acquiring capital and being global and transnational, Oikonomidou (2007) summarized that an understanding of academic achievement was in relation to the success felt in their home country. The desire to return to the homeland with this



capital was also an important component. To understand the global dimensions of a newcomer immigrant's life involved taking into account students' connections to their home country and the connection through which these exchanges happened.

Bruna's (2007) study found that the young people were forming hybrid identities as transnationals; "they are not on the margins at all, but embedded within and arising out of those multi-cultural, multi-discursive interactions" (p. 251). In contrast to Lam's findings of the hybrid literate spaces being communicated, Yoon and Haag's (2010) study of Korean newcomers showed that they used the internet and chatting to speak with "euphoria" on all the capital they were gaining including the quality of schools, English, and culture. In actuality, the students were experiencing discrimination, language isolation, and other challenges. Communicating the ideal identity of success and pleasure as "American" through a transnational space was important to this group; the ideology of English, success, and Americanization were considered global capital in their home country.

Religious affiliation and identity markers of religion were difficult sites for some newcomer immigrant youth to navigate. Oikonomiday's (2007) study of Somali students' journey to belonging described the challenges the students faced with religion. The schools in their home country were centered around the Muslim religion; in post-9-11 United States, their religion not only had minority status but also led them to being targeted in and out of school. A central example of the marker of religion for these young women was their head scarves or comments about Osama Bin Laden. Although students did not choose to become victims of comments, and found strategies to create agency, their transnational narratives and connections with their religion did impact their school experience.

Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard's (2004) study probed the issue of gender in relationship to academic engagement; findings showed that newcomer immigrant girls did better in school than boys. Two possible reasons were given. First, girls were more likely to stay at home because of their gendered responsibilities and thus had less free time. Second, it had been shown that girls had stronger relationships with school staff and felt more supported. Gender had come into discussion with regards to identity and negotiation as well. Drawing from the work of Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) and Espiritu (2003), Oikonomidou (2009) summarized how gender had been theorized as central force to transnational migration; girls have been more responsible for carrying on traditions from their home countries than boys. Davila's (2015) study also recognized how the reading practices of the newcomer youth in her study related to their gendered transnational identities which included how they saw themselves in terms of learning new literacy practices.

### **Framing this Study Through the Literature**

Louie's (2005) review of research on immigrant newcomer students, educational policy, and the pipeline to higher education, critiqued the designation of immigrant students in NCLB policy:

While the federal designation of immigrant student is quite narrow, its racial and ethnic categories are by contrast very broad, namely African American, Latino, Asian American, and White non-Hispanic. The very complexity of national origins and ethnicity among the children of immigrants means that we have to develop better ways of parsing out these existing categories. (p. 283)

From a larger policy framework, the designation of newcomer immigrant youth occurred by policy makers lumping students into larger national/linguistic groups and defining them against the dominant missing language, English. In contrast to sole designation of these students as limited English proficient and within a broad racial category, Suarez-Orozco et al. (2008)

emphasized the inclusion of more nuanced social realities. Consequently, the eighty participants in their five year long study were identified by place of origin such as Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico, and were studied in relationship to the larger new immigration context including forces of globalization and migration. However, within the multiple sets of studies using the LISA longitudinal data set, findings related to migration, stress, academic achievement, and belonging, for example employed a western model of psychology. In contrast, students' cultural backgrounds could impact their notions of "stress" as well as issues of language and migration (Oikonomidou, 2015). For example, in India, the religious/ethnic concept of "dharma," or duty, guided newcomers' sense of responsibility; they reported stress, but did not conceptualize stress in the same way. The focus was on navigating the pressures and demands of newcomer life from a spiritual perspective on duty and this allowed the youth to feel they had agency, or choice in their attitude, despite a sense of exhaustion (Mehta, 2011).

Literature on newcomer immigrant youth has grown in the past decade, however the key emphasis remains on managing issues of language and transition to the United States. There is limited discourse in the literature on the critical issues of power, structure, and social context, all of which undergird the experiences of newcomers' youth experiences around education and language (Paris, 2010; Patel, 2013).

Gutierrez (2006) employs Gotanda's (2003) concept of white innocence to critique what has been naturalized in the study of nondominant communities:

White innocence here is not about whiteness, the racial category; rather, it is about the dominant subject position, about dominant discourses that sustain the dominant framework and block opportunities for non-dominant groups.

In keeping with a critical awareness of the ways in which non-dominant communities have been naturalized, the following questions guided the viewpoint developed for this study:

What is the dominant framework at play in the research literature on newcomer immigrant youth? What do we know about newcomer immigrant youth from this framework? What's missing? What new constructs are being employed in reframing educational research with this population? What do we know about newcomer immigrant youth from these constructs?

These questions revealed that the dominant framework through which newcomer immigrant youth are being studied is academic achievement and the acquisition of English. What we know about newcomer immigrant youth from these frameworks is indeed useful in terms of the schools that support their development; the factors that lead to academic achievement, and the level to which English plays a powerful force in guaranteeing sources of capital in the new immigration context. Although there was little doubt that issues of language were the dominant social reality for these students, the dominant framework of how language was being situated was also apparent in the literature. Steven (2009) states why this poses a problem:

I suggest that ways in which education has framed immigrants solely as language learners destructively obscures both their needs for educational and societal achievement and society's responses to those needs. Language is a crucial to immigrant populations, but how this is framed from educational perspectives falls short of critical language awareness, favoring necessary but insufficient skills acquisition.

The review of literature also emphasized a differing direction and set of questions being asked in studying this population. The inclusion of the global, transnational, and migration narratives of newcomer immigrant youth proved to a direction that included and embedded the social contexts and structures through which youth navigated social and linguistic practices. Emphasis on agency, negotiation, a more complex narration of these young people, revealed a small area of recent research that took up a call for 'critical language awareness' as opposed to a focus on the technical aspects of second language acquisition.

The framework of studying newcomer immigrant populations fails to address critical questions of how historical narratives of immigration and oppression cast shadows on how we approach the community, how we interact with this community, and how we, in the end, represent this community (Patel, 2013). Reframing educational research with nondominant populations requires putting issues of language within a framework of capital, race, culture, and identity, and through an understanding of the ubiquitous forces of power that govern the new immigrant community (Oikonomidou, 2015; Paris, 2010; Patel, 2013). In addition, reframing educational research with this population requires an understanding that the immigrant community is not static, stable, or functioning within a vacuum; efforts of resistance are inclusive to the narration of this community.

This dissertation study follows the lead of those scholars who are reframing methodology so it is appropriate to underrepresented populations (Gutierrez, 2014; Patel, 2013) and also emphasizes a research design that takes into account how language navigates between multiple social contexts, including a perspective that honors experiences of language from a transnational perspective (Lam, 2009). In addition, this dissertation privileges linguistic and cultural groups that have had limited exposure in the literature. Oikonomidou's (2015) study of underrepresented newcomer youth discussed how Spanish functioned as a symbol of power/resistance with non-Spanish speaking youth. Paris's (2010) study of multi-ethnic youth navigating issues of language, power, and identity also revealed the politics of inclusion and exclusion when Spanish is the primary language in a multi-ethnic youth space. This dissertation builds upon this direction for research including framing the theoretical perspective through concepts of signification and domination which I discuss in the following chapter.

### Chapter III

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Immigrant language experiences are entrenched in the sociopolitical issues of both individual and society (Han, 2014). Exploring the lives of newcomer immigrant youth involved addressing the varying social systems and structures of power at play. In this chapter, I present a framework to study newcomer immigrant youth that combines the concepts of signification and domination developed through the work of contemporary critical theory. This theoretical framework addresses ideology, language, and context, drawing from important issues stressed in the literature on newcomer immigrant youth. The key issue is addressing language as a signifier in relation to capital, culture, race, and identity. Collins (2009) “matrix of domination” framework that takes into account social systems at play, proved to be useful to frame the concept of domination. Seeing language as a signifier of race, capital, identity, and culture, as intersecting sites of power/oppression, applied to Collin’s framework took into account the dynamic nature of the participants’ migration narratives, location with the institution of school, and the social contexts outside of school. This chapter explains the theoretical concepts of signification and domination while also providing examples that connect back to the population of newcomer immigrant youth being studied in this dissertation.

The theoretical framework in this chapter served as the tool for analyzing qualitative data collected through the methodology of critical ethnography. Additionally, the findings chapters in this dissertation were crafted and constructed through this framework; each of the findings chapters explored themes of signification and levels of domination. The discussion chapter, in turn, expanded on the proposed theoretical framework in this chapter, explaining further the findings of this study.

### **Critical Theory to Contemporary Critical Theory**

The movement to conduct critically conscious research in the field of education starts with the acknowledgement of the foundation of critical theory (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, Burke, & Herrera, 2008). Critical theorists understand how power relations in society impact the human experience, emphasizing the relationship between self and society, the connection between power and oppression, positioning research with emancipatory aims. Essential to the basic principles of critical theory are the incorporation of the historical, political, and social context of the time period under examination. For example, Marx's desire for the people to develop a consciousness around the power of capitalism was in reaction to his observations of how the lower class was being oppressed by the upper class. Marx was concerned with the alienation of the working class as a consequence of the power of capitalism.

Inclusion of context, however, was only one part of the agenda of critical theorists. The second part, and essential to the building of critical consciousness over time, was a call for action. The foundation of critical theory included a message for oppressed people – react, organize, and even revolt against those in power (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Critically conscious research seeks to liberate the voice of the oppressed, emphasizing the role of voice, the creation of safe spaces, and the ability for individual and collective narratives to be spoken (Collins, 2009).

Contemporary critical theory sought to raise consciousness while also probing the history of those who did the critique (Fine, 1994). Willis et al. (2008) state that the evolution of criticality was essential. As the inclusion of varying viewpoints came to bear, contemporary critical theorists reacted to the 'founding fathers' of critical theory. These early philosophers

were critiqued as white males who still held a dominant western-Eurocentric consciousness.

This critique lead to the call for critically conscious research today:

Current critical theorizing seeks to more openly address race/ethnicity and gender, moving oppression and its intersection with class from the margins to the center of criticality. Moreover, other forms of oppression – including immigration status, language, sexual orientation, and religion – are addressed in current theorizing. (p.13)

Collins (2009) discussed the need to recognize the intersecting nature of oppression and domination, happening at multiple levels including at the level of biography, community, and institution. Theorizing oppressed communities who have been ‘othered’ by issues such as immigration status and language status needed to include the dynamic critical issues of context. In addition, taking such a critical perspective brings to bear more nuanced perspectives of marginalized communities (Gutierrez, 2006).

### **Language & Signification**

Criticalists consider it crucial to assess and critique ideologies that are part of any given signifying system. For example, taking into account Eurocentric ideology includes the recognition of the covert function of empowering members of a dominant social caste at the expense of others. From a shared understanding of how language functions in relationship to systems of power, the basic premise of critical studies is that language functions as a signifier.

Han (2014) summarizes the conceptualization of language as a symbol and informed by Bourdieu (1991):

I recognize that language differences are underpinned by material conditions of acquisition of linguistic capital and circulation of linguistic products, which subsequently shape socioeconomic opportunities and constitute processes of social reproduction or contestation. The symbolic value of a particular language is intimately related to legitimation and enforcement by nation-states and their institutions, including media, school, home, workplace, and court, through language-related ideologies, legislation, policies, and practices. (p.56)

From this perspective, the modalities of communication depend upon what they can



accomplish socially within contexts laden in power. Fairclough (2001) explains how the content of what is said or done, the social relations that people enter into, and the subject positions people occupy, are all part of the interplay between language and power. A key inquiry is thus how people use language in the context of interpersonal and institutional power relations to achieve specific aims. Thus a key concept from this perspective is that language does not simply function as a mode of neutral communication; language is a modality through which signs and symbols of power are communicated (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988). In this dissertation I emphasize the symbolic use of the language, as a signifying practice, rather than the content of what is expressed through language, a focus of discourse analysis.

Another key concept is that language as a symbol assumes that both interests and ideologies impact signifying practices (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Understanding language as a symbol moves beyond seeing language as a neutral, apolitical tool of communication equally available for everyone; language is not simply a technical endeavor, although it may often be presented as one (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Because language is always laden in ideology, language cannot be defined as objective, value free, and simply a process of learning skills. Thus, significant to this view of language, is a commitment to recognize the dominant ideologies that are at play regarding language in any given social system.

Taking up a dominant language, for example, is a complex negotiation. Language functions as a reminder of the position and power of the individual in society. The use of the dominant language can serve as a safe medium to address higher powers, but the use of language also varies depending on power relations (Ashcroft, 2001). With regards to the English language, for example, the passing of laws and policies to require English only as well the requirement to speak English at school are representative of both the ideology at play, as well the

negotiation of language use at the site of an institution asked to support this ideology. In this dissertation, I focus on the use of a specific language or to symbolize issues of power, rather than the content of what is said from a linguistic paradigm. The following sections: language as a signifier of capital, race, culture, and identity, are the building blocks to a framework that explores issues of signification with the newcomer immigrant youth population. I provide examples that apply to this population in each section.

### **Language as a Signifier of Capital**

Learning the languages of capital that are situated within the current transnational borderless economies and communication technologies of globalization is critical (Garcia & Baetens-Beardsmore, 2005). Language is a signifier of economic capital. Political and economic factors underscore issues around capital. The critical work of Marxism highlights the power of economic capital. Marxism showcases that societal dynamics are shaped by economics- these economic relationships are identified as wealth, power, and status. Marx knew that unequal distribution of this wealth and power is what led to the development of the ruling elite. He argued that the elite, because they needed to hold onto and maintain their power, used institutional spaces to exert their influence. Although Marxism was contested and criticized, Marx's conceptual framework for the analysis of capital in relationship to institutions was important (Willis et al., 2008). Murphy (2007) states:

A key Marxist concept is that of the relationship between base and superstructure; the base is the economic structure underpinning a society (e.g. capitalism) while the superstructure consists of the culture and institutions that depend on this economic system. The text forms part of the superstructure of society, and it is the role of the critic to trace the relationship between the individual text and the wider social, political, and economic base (pp. 181).

In the current context, the institutions of power extend to world power relations, making globalization an inadmissible force, in particular as it is tied to economic capital. Language is a

signifier of global economic capital. The emergence of Global Capitalism can be viewed as the “superstructure,” or culture and institutions that depend on this economic system. With regards to language, the signifying practices of any institutional system are in relationship to this force of Global Capitalism (Dirlik, 1997). It is important to keep in mind how this current time period of contemporary capitalism shifts, for example, the migration process.

Language is also a signifier of social capital and cultural capital. Bourdieu (1991) described how society reproduced class structures and how the dominant class retained their position. Bourdieu recognized that this reproduction comprised several forms of capital including but not limited to economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Cultural capital includes the ways in which people gain cultural knowledge to gain position/power. Cultural capital can also include the official gaining of institutional credentials, paving the way for the system of education to be a key signifier of cultural capital. Social capital refers to the powerful network of relationships that increase one’s set of resources. Gaining social capital can include the social practices gained by belonging to various communities impacted by institutions such as clubs, churches, organizations. Signifying practices are impacted by the motivation to acquire these forms of capital.

Language as a signifier of capital yields important considerations for newcomer immigrant youth. One example is how the migration narratives of newcomer immigrant youth often include contesting demands of gaining economic, social, and cultural capital in order to survive various structures of living and schooling. Many of these young people’s histories were located within contexts of colonization that asserted the importance of English long before their arrival to the United States. In addition, English signified power within their communities in relation to the global context. Issues around gaining access to the code of the elite, the cultural

processes of the elite, and a social network of relationships that could position them within the hierarchy of capitalism were thus considerations that framed how they positioned themselves as migrants.

Another example of how language manifests itself as a signifier of capital is at the site of schooling for newcomer immigrant youth. The pressure to gain access to higher education through the entry point of high school impact issues of language as it relates to economic, cultural, and social capital. Beyond the signifier of English holding capital, for this particular study, newcomer immigrant youth are attending a newcomer high school with a dominant Spanish speaking population. This community of newcomer immigrant youth are thus in the midst of considering the role of Spanish as a signifier of capital in their school and in the context of the United States, in particular how these languages are nested in the region they live. Non-Spanish speaking young people in this environment are thus in the midst of negotiating capital around two languages that hold more power than their first languages.

### **Language as a Signifier of Race**

Eurocentrism is an ideology that presents the ideas and experiences of Whites as normal, normative, and ideal (Collins, 2009). Eurocentrism is a key concept of Western consciousness. Issues of racism are integral to communities that were historically colonized. Colonizing and colonizer are defined as the tangled relationships where those who are “colonized/oppressed internalize the ways and language of the colonizer/oppressor in order to survive extant structures” (Asher, 2005, p. 1080). Eurocentrism does not simply refer to the West by mere geography, but also to the Western beliefs and values that permeate minds. Nandy (1983) states:

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal

entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds. (p. xi)

Western ideology was constructed around issues of race and language. The struggle for and against a racially constructed whiteness is signified by language. Fanon (1967) describes the basic importance to the phenomenon of language.

Every colonized people-in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality---finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the civilized country. (p.18)

As Fanon asserts, a key issue related to whiteness as the dominant position, holding historical locations with colonization, becomes the issue of civility. With regards to colonization, the social construction of language was to promote Eurocentric languages as those that promoted reason, civility, and education. A citizen who is privileged, white, and representative of the dominant power is considered civilized; language functions to assure the displacement of morals, values, and beliefs and these are tied to issues of race (Pennycook, 2001).

Eurocentric ideology includes issues of race and language that have been termed linguicism. Phillipson (1992) describes linguicism as the relationship between dominators and dominated with respect to language. Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gouna (2003) take the definition of linguicism a step further and coined the term, linguoracism, as the racism involved in all forms of linguistic imperialism. The indoctrination of language is considered a rational project of the elite in which individuals are brought out of the darkness; racism prevalent in such agendas often goes unquestioned (Achebe, 1989). Therein lies what is considered the hegemony of Eurocentric ideology; what is considered a natural, logical, rational project of providing access to dominant language can easily go unquestioned. In addition, at a time period when it is no longer acceptable to be outwardly racist per se, condemning people for their language, is

often framed as neutral. Language, now, more than ever, is an important terrain where issues of racism are being played out (Han, 2014).

Language as a signifier of race yields important considerations for newcomer immigrant youth. Newcomer immigrant youth narratives of colonization are connected to issues of race and language. The impact of the Eurocentric construction of English as the language of civility, government, and progress started long ago; arrival to the United States for purposes of education only exacerbated the importance of English as a signifier of the superior race. In fact, research has shown that newcomers often separate themselves from “Westerners,” using the dominant subject position to regard themselves as linguistically deficient immigrants (Han, 2014). This is consistent with how official institutions, through which languages of power were disseminated in the process of colonization, positioned English as the code of the elite (Achebe, 1989). In addition, upon arrival to the United States, the institutional processes of attending public schools and gaining access to higher education are largely hinged upon acquiring the code of the United States citizen, in other words English. Issues of being “up against whiteness,” a force of implicit racism (Lee, 2005) for immigrant youth thus included the baggage of colonized histories, as well as the necessity to gain language through a medium of instruction codified through varying registers of English. While this is not true across all immigrant groups, this is true amongst many of the newcomer immigrant youth that have arrived from a global diaspora marked by colonial rule.

In addition, newcomer immigrant youth living within the current context of immigration tie together issues of linguoracism and xenophobia, signifying a fear of non English speaking foreigners as well as signifying fear of large waves of Spanish speakers. The construction of the ideal U.S. citizen is not one who is browned by Spanish, but rather whitened by English (Chavez,

2008). Kubota and Lin (2009) state, “Critics of the English-only anti-bilingual education movement in the United States have pointed out that racism, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism against Hispanic immigrants are hidden behind such political and educational initiatives” (p. 14). Barkers and Giles (2002) remark on the signification of the threat, rather than the reality, stating:

“Dominant groups may feel a sense of threat not based on objective fact but upon sheer supposition. Therefore, if Anglos believe that Spanish is likely to overwhelm English (even if objective evidence shows it is not likely) they may take steps to limit the promotion of the use of Spanish” (pp. 357).

However, it is important to note in this framework that issues of race and language are dependent on the social construction of who counts multilingualism as a source of capital. For example, the construction of Spanish as a racialized inferior language vs. Spanish signifying as an asset-based language is dependent on the dominant subject status. For affluent communities who have garnered the power to recognize English and Spanish as languages of status, such models of multilingualism are in fact encouraged.

### **Language is a Signifier of Identity, Concept of Hybridity**

Hall (2000) emphasizes that it is critical to understand identity as not fixed or stable, but rather as a constant production and reproduction that is situational and shifts from context to context. Identity formation is a two-way process. Central to Hall’s conceptualization of identity is the understanding that it is through discursive practices that possibilities of identity are made available. Hinged to this is the understanding that identities are only formed when an individual takes up or invests in these positions; this is where the concept of agency as it connects to identity comes into play; identity, no matter how temporary, involves some kind of action or agency. Even inaction as action, or silence as a discursive moment, understood from this perspective of identity, can be seen as acts of representation (Allen, 2014).

Rather than emphasize identity, the concept of hybridity becomes useful to explore language, representation, and the politics therein. “Identity itself is the function of a network of differences rather than an essence” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 279). Bifurcating identities into ‘one or the other’ is called into question by hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity occurs as a result of cultural suppression, economic/political control, or forces of assimilation. People continue to negotiate and figure out their places and identities. A kind of cross-fertilization occurs between elements of the past and present, and an ongoing process of recovery and reinscription also occurs (Ashcroft et al., 2006).

The concept of hybridity stresses that although relationships refer to the dominance of power, the complications of such power relationships cannot be simplified. In other words, once the oppressed have taken up or rejected thoughts of the oppressor, processes of both resistance and agency, and hybrid formations of meaning alter consciousness (Achebe, 1989). Hybridity is conceived through “the fact that the transaction of the world is not a one-way process in which oppression obliterates the oppressed in absolute terms” (Ashcroft et al., 2006, p. 137). Hybridity is not a static process, but an active negotiation between power dynamics in cultural contexts (Bhabha, 1994).

The process by which language functions as a signifier of hybridity is central to the construction of meaning. Language as a constitutive force (Foucault, 1972), and language as a signifier of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) also generates the importance of representation, and the politics therein. Hall (2000) emphasizes that the site of language is where the subjectivities, identities, and politics inherent within culture and ideology coalesce. The regimes of representation within a culture do matter, and language is the signifying force of the politics of hybridity.



The power of language used for social control, the construction of nationalism through signifier of language, and the construction of the ideal citizen through language, all impact the politics of identity and subsequent practices of hybridity. Language is used as means for promoting a sense of identification to/with the dominant power, as well as a way to script requirements for belongingness to powerful institutions. Many individuals and communities resist dominant powers while simultaneously claiming identity to gain capital. Language serves as the medium through which to promote varying agendas of nationalism, an example of language functioning as a signifier of identity/hybridity. The force to assimilate through language was thus an important consideration of power. Consequently, the politics of identity, resulting in practices of hybridity, included both acceptance and resistance of one language, while also contending with the issues of claiming identity through citizenship.

Homogenization is seen as strategic social processes that also employs language control for social control as it relates to the politics of identity. However, an important point is that the force of homogenization through the use of only one language (e.g. English Only) is in fact contradictory to a global context that is in fact multilingual and promotes multilingualism (Garcia & Baetens Beardsmore, 2009). Again, the concept of hybridity, the idea of the push and pull of locations with both identities and languages, is a more accurate representation of issues of language, power, and representation.

Newcomer immigrant youth to the United States find themselves both claiming and rejecting a network of identities, impacted by the politics of inclusion and exclusion. These politics include accepting and rejecting English, for example, based on push and pull of forces that often require the production of language in order to fit in. America's language of citizenship, English, is seen as superior in its ability to share knowledge and show the correct

direction for the construction of a citizen; English can enact the feeling of affinity, allegiance, and provide access to resources. Language as a symbol of nationalism is not a new concept for these young people. The power of English as an identified language of schooling, for example, was part of many colonized contexts.

Multilingual newcomer immigrant youth migrated from contexts where language was a signifier of hybridity into contexts in such a high school designed for immigrants where language continues to be a signifier of hybridity. The promotion of a singular English identity goes against the social reality of newcomer immigrants who are constantly moving in and out of language communities and making decisions about group affinity and allegiance (Bruna, 2007). The forces of globalization through which newcomer immigrant youth live also impact the way in which the hybrid negotiation of language is taken up through varying modalities of language. Possible hybrid linguistic identities are formed through contesting sources of power (Lam, 2009). As Achebe (1989) points out, the issue is not to replace one language with another in order to assert a reinstating of identity, but instead to understand the complexities in figuring out the construction of new hybrid spaces as a result of the changes within social realities. There is a purposeful and pragmatic use of language in accordance with situation, context, and circumstance (Bruna, 2007).

### **Language is a Signifier of Culture, Concept of Diaspora**

Culture, as a way of life and a way of thinking, communicates itself through contested spaces. “Culture can be seen both as a historically constituted domain of significant concepts and practices and as a regime in which power achieves its ultimate apotheosis” (Dirks, 1992, p. 59). Culture, along with identity, serves as the force behind the project of nationalism; notions of culture that marked off groups from one another through language, race, and history gave rise

to the ruling elite powers. Those historically ‘othered’ by dominant powers are strategically positioned as part of the collective by being marked as diverse and different. Bhabha (1988) critiques the project of cultural diversity. “Cultural diversity is the recognition of pregiven cultural contents and customs, held in time-frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity” (Bhabha, 1988, p. 155). This way of seeing culture works itself as a charitable project bringing those ‘othered’ into the framework of the dominant power, often through a stagnant and categorical account of culture and cultural groups. Cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements on culture differentiate and discriminate.

An understanding of cultural difference within the context of historically colonized subjects, as well as the dominant position of language, creates a complex tapestry of cultural diaspora. Diaspora here refers to the differentiation and reference of communities whose journeys are “embarked upon, lived and re-lived through multiple modalities: modalities, for example, of gender, race, class, religion, language, and generation” (Brah, 1996, p. 444). The navigation of meaning by people across and within a diaspora is signified by particular economic, political, and cultural specificities. “The sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland not as something simply left behind but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity,” (Clifford, 1994, p. 453) is at the heart of a diaspora.

Each construction of a diaspora is in conjunction with the complex relationship of culture traveling through language. Language differences are signifiers of cultural differences; contested language spaces can be understood as forces of power in play (Achebe, 1989). The sense of connection to a place of home, even if the feeling is one of displacement, occurs through the

signifying practices of language within varying cultural communities. The language of a 'diaspora' replaces minority in this perspective:

Diasporic language appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse. Transnational connections break the binary relation of 'minority' communities with 'majority' societies – a dependency that structures both projects of assimilation and resistance. (Clifford, 1994, p. 455).

Finally, with respect to culture, the notion of imagination has become part of the concept of engaging in a diaspora community. An understanding of global diaspora communities is leading to contemporary possibilities of organizing through mediums in 'space' such as language in virtual transnational communities (Appadurai, 1996).

Living through, and arriving from, varying diasporas, signifies the migration narratives of newcomer immigrant youth. Diaspora reflects the idea that culture and language are things communities bring with them wherever they go. These are young people who belonged to communities with long standing histories of power/oppression through colonization. Upon arrival to the United States, and attending a secondary school specified to immigrant populations, newcomer immigrant youth are immediately given minority status. With this status comes the politics of representation. The institution of schooling, within the context of an English-only educational policy context, ascribes the dominant positioning of English as a force of cultural assimilation and homogenization. Contesting relationships, however, to one's first language, as well as forces of multiple living languages amongst the newcomer youth create a new diaspora. In addition, the role of Spanish as a dominant second language of the United States (Chavez, 2008) as well as within community and school, adds another layer of language signifying culture. Recognizing that newcomer immigrant youth are living within difference while also experiencing language and power from the perspective of being part of a diaspora are important to the framework of language as a signifier of culture. Recognizing that newcomer immigrant

youth are living within the powerful context of language signifying cultural practices within a global context of digital language tools creates a different imagining of cultural diaspora; transnational connection is communicated through these signifying practices.

### **Domination**

Collins (2009) explicates a useful framework to explain issues of power and domination that she calls the matrix of domination. The matrix of domination provides a schema to explain the overall organization of hierarchical power relations inclusive of various social contexts. The matrix of domination framework takes into account how issues of oppression, resistance, and agency are experienced in relationship to personal biography, institution, and to other social contexts including community and society.

This framework explains varying domains of power including interpersonal, hegemonic, disciplinary, and structural. The interpersonal domain of power takes into account the day to day lived experiences of discrimination that have become so routine that they go unnoticed or remain unidentified. The disciplinary domain of power is a way of ruling that relies on bureaucratic hierarchies and surveillance techniques. The hegemonic domain of power is a mode of social organization that uses ideology to absorb dissent, thereby depoliticizing oppressed groups. The structural domain of power is a set of practices that work to maintain the unjust distribution of resources. Structural domains of power operate through the laws and policies of institutions (Collins, 2009).

These domains of power account for the relationship between various actors, in various social contexts, and in relationship to various social forces. Recognizing the intersecting sites of oppression is integral to the way in which Collin theorizes issues of dominant power. However,

Collins makes a distinction between the work of intersectional paradigms and matrix of domination:

Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example intersections of race and gender. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression. (p. 21)

Newcomer immigrant youth are navigating multiple signifying practices that are rarely questioned. These can include assumptions made on how English, for example, came to be the central language, without question, in many contexts. These also include thoughts and feelings around how Spanish is considered “less than” in one context, and “more than” in another context based on interpersonal notions of how language is being situated. The interpersonal domain of power includes the various experiences around issues of oppression based on personal biographies and the interpersonal nature of relationships. Issues around language, race, and capital, for example, begin with the individual’s connection to family, home, and community.

Within the context of a newcomer immigrant high school, the disciplinary domain of power includes the hierarchies typical to schooling, including headmasters, teachers, and the curriculum. In addition, this includes the monitoring of language within contexts of schooling, or in matters related to gaining education. For example, requiring the use of the English language in the context of schooling through forms of disciplinary control is part of this domain of power. Within the lives of newcomer immigrant youth, the disciplinary domain of power also includes the domains of power that governed their decisions to leave their home country. Hierarchies of government, legacies of colonialism, war, and dictatorship all created contexts in which surveillance was essential to social control.

The hegemonic domain of power provides the rationale for many of the policies, laws, and practices within institutional settings. For example, within the context of newcomer immigrants, the ideology of Eurocentrism presents itself as the rational reason to accept and invite English as the primary marker of success in the pursuit of schooling. Hegemony also establishes the ideology of meritocracy where hard work is seen as the equalizer to any inequities present in the lives of these immigrant youth. The mode of social organizing through which hegemony maintains its power is through the language of schooling and the language of society. When it comes to immigration and immigrant students, the ideology of Eurocentrism presents itself through the logic of capitalism; many students seek higher education and economic self-sufficiency.

The structural domain of power extends to the context of globalization, national policy, state laws, and the working of various structures and institutions. Within the context of newcomer immigrant youth, institutions of government, education, and places of work, worship, and other social contexts are impacted by the structural domain of power. For newcomer immigrant youth these include issues and laws related to legality around citizenship, access to higher education, English only language policy, and the policies and rules at the sight of schooling.

Collins' (2009) matrix of domination framework outlines a schema where various signifying practices of language can be seen in relationship to issues of context and power. This framework informs this dissertation's research questions and employs this framework to the methodology of critical ethnography for the purpose of analysis. The following chapter explains the methodology that employed this framework for subsequent analysis.

## Chapter IV

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Purpose, Research Questions, and Organization of Chapter**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the phenomenon of language and power in the context of a newcomer school through the language practices of non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth. I employed the principles of critical ethnography and qualitative analysis to answer the following question and subquestions:

- How do non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth attending a newcomer high school where English is the language of instruction negotiate their language practices?
- How do student experience language in various school sites (e.g. inside classroom, outside of classroom, and afterschool activities)?
- How do students experience language in various sites outside of school (e.g. home and work)?
- How do students relate these language practices to issues of power?

The following chapter is organized by first describing the assumptions and principles involved in taking a viewpoint of critical qualitative research. In addition, an overview of critical ethnography is discussed. Following this overview, the second part of the chapter will describe the research site, participants, and include discussion of what information was gathered to answer the research questions. Next, the research design, including data collection methods, and data analysis, are described. Finally, this chapter concludes with discussion on ethical consideration and limitations of the designed study.

#### **Situating the Methodology**



The application of a theoretical framework must move within and across methodology; in other words, methodology is not simply methods. Maintaining a synergy between theory and method is vital to critically conscious research (Quantz, 1992). The proposed theoretical framework is grounded in principles espoused by critical theory and is situated within the context of newcomer immigrant youth and how language functions as a signifier of power, capital, race, culture, and identity from a located “time-space,” or chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981). This chronotope includes the assumptions and values of the researcher and are like “x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 425-426). Borrowing Bakhtin’s term, chronotope, as it applies to qualitative research on language, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) state:

For our purposes, then, chronotopes of qualitative inquiry index durable historical realities that constitute what is common, natural, and expected by collectives of social scientists who conduct particular kinds of qualitative research. (p. 25)

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis lay out four predominant chronotopes of qualitative inquiry and situate each chronotope through the assumptions social scientists make around knowledge, truth, subjects, and language. The methodology for this dissertation falls between Kamberelis and Dimitriadis’s (2005)’s Chronotope III: Skepticism, conscientization, and praxis and Chronotope IV: Power/knowledge and defamiliarization. Both chronotopes align with the theoretical framework, situated through concepts from contemporary critical theory used in this study. The following chart describes the basic assumption made by qualitative research methodologists who work within these chronotopes:

Table summarizing Chronotope III &amp; IV (Kamberelis &amp; Dimitriadis, 2005).

SKEPTICISM, CONSCIENTIZATION, AND PRAXIS	POWER, KNOWLEDGE, AND DEFAMILIARIZATION
Knowledge is socially constructed and inextricably linked to power relations	Knowledge is an effect of existent power relations.
Truth is produced through dialogue	Truth is an effect of power knowledge
Subjects and objects are separate but mutually constitutive	Subjects and objects are both produced within existent relations of power
Language constitutes thought and is a function of existent power relations	Language is a force among other forces that produce the real.

Qualitative researchers, like myself, who locate their research questions within both of these chronotopes utilize methodologies that attend to issues of power. In both chronotopes, critical research is not simply for critique; “at the heart of critical theorizing is a clear commitment to addressing the needs of the oppressed, to social justice, and to educational equity” (Willis et al., 2008, p. 56). Carspecken (1996) describes critical ethnographers as concerned with issues of power, language, and truth:

We are all concerned about social inequalities, and we direct our work toward positive social change. We also share a concern with social theory and some of the basic issues it struggled with since the nineteenth century...the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency. We use our research, in fact, to refine social theory than merely to describe social life. (p. 3)

Finally, working within these chronotypes, also rests upon the researcher’s perceptions of knowledge, truth, subjects, and language and how they are being constructed in the research process (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Consequently, in the research design, examining and articulating one’s own narrative, is considered essential to working with a community (Noblit et al., 2004).

### **Critical Ethnography**

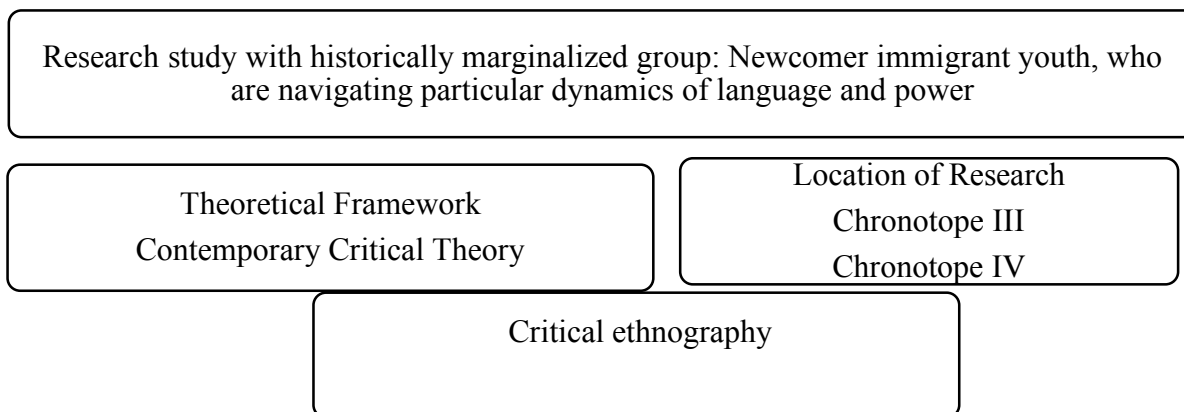
Understanding how a specific group of newcomer immigrant youth, non-Spanish speaking learning English at a newcomer school, negotiate language and power, necessitates a

research approach that explores the research participants' language experiences in multiple contexts both inside and outside of school. These experiences need to be understood as nuanced stories and recognized for how issues of power function in asymmetrical ways.

This dissertation is a critical ethnography of the language practices of a particular social group (non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth) who are living within a phenomenon of language and power in their school and in the larger social context. Ethnography is a form of qualitative methodology that involves a more in depth study of a social or cultural group (Heath & Street, 2008). The social and cultural group in this study is a group of non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth. Important aspects of ethnography include a study that takes place over a longer period of time in the field, qualitative data that is collected through multiple sources (observations, interview, focus groups, archival data), formal and informal processes of observing and interviewing, and data gathered to link to structures and social systems at play.

Critical ethnography questions the social and cultural conditioning of human activity and prevailing social structures and constructs (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). In this study, critical ethnography situates its theoretical orientation through contemporary critical theory. Critical theory is employed to make connections to the historical/social histories regarding language and power in order to reframe an understanding of this newcomer immigrant community.

The following diagram summarizes what has been discussed in this section:



### **Research Setting, Research Site, & Research Participants**

Research Setting—National Context. The setting for this research study is embedded within the larger social context of the United States and a new immigrant population living within the global era. Ngo (2008) summarizes the new immigrant population within a larger setting:

While educators and educational researchers have been concerned with the education of immigrant students for several decades, globalization and the new immigration make attending to the education and experiences of immigrants in U.S. schools and society more important than ever before. Immigration in the global era is marked by the fact that large numbers of immigrants are from the non-European, non-English-speaking developing world.

The waves of globalization and migration are tied to demographic changes in the national setting. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2008) have noted that the flow of newcomer immigration includes multiple cultural and linguistic groups - “migration from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia are the source of nearly 80 percent of all new arrivals to the United States today” (p. 6).

Even though newcomer migration represents various languages, Spanish has emerged as the second language of the United States amongst newcomer immigrants (Paris, 2010). The debates around the use of Spanish across the United States is representative of a rising Latino population. This rise of Hispanic or Latino origin immigrants led the 2010 census to design a

new set of questions between race and ethnicity for this population. According to the 2010 census, “‘Hispanic or Latino’ refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” According to the Census Bureau, the population estimates show that there were roughly 54 million Hispanics living in the United States, representing approximately 17% of the U.S. total population, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or race minority. The Hispanic population increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010, accounting for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total population of the United States ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), retrieved May, 2014). The research setting for this study, a newcomer high school with a majority Spanish speaking population, is situated within this larger global and national context where language is functioning in powerful ways.

Research Setting—State, City and Public School System. The research setting for this study is a state that passed English only legislation dismantling bilingual education and requiring almost all public schools to be taught solely through English immersion. English only legislation has impacted schools across the state, in particular schools with a dominant English language learner population (De Jong, 2005).

The city of A Town in which this study is located is a vibrant urban metropolis. According to United States census data, 35% of the residents in A Town spoke another language besides English in their home, compared to the estimated 18.3% of the residents in the state with the city of A Town. A Town is also home to a large concentration of institutions of higher education in the United States supporting a strong emphasis on students going to college after high school. A Town is also known for its scientific, financial, and cultural institutions. Juxtaposed to this backdrop economic and academic capital are the often impoverished

communities in which the participants of this study settle, live, and work, including the community in which Immigrant High resides. Accessing a number of services for immigrant communities, including assistance and support for learning English are a challenge. In addition, navigating a system of education differing from their home country in a new city is also a challenge.

The history of this city's public school system includes social movements such as challenging issues of equity including busing students to different schools across the city. A key issue for the school system today is finding ways to serve the growing number of students whose first language is not English. As part of the mission statement of the 2012-2013 report, the year in which this ethnography was conducted, a key objective is for "English language learners to acquire academic language mastery and fluency." Below is information regarding the English language learning population from the 2012-2013 school report (the year this study was conducted).

	<u>Number of Students (% of total)</u>
Total Enrollment	57,050
Speak a language other than English as their first language	24,950 (44%)
<u>English Language Learners (ELL)</u>	<u>16,960 (30%)</u>
ELL students born in the United States	10,440 (18%)
ELL students not born in the United States	6,520 (11%)

ELL students speak 73 different languages as their home language.

The top nine first languages spoken are Spanish, Haitian creole, Cape Verdean creole, Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Somali, French, and Arabic.

Research Site—Immigrant High. The A Town public school system is made up of 134 schools. Of the 29 secondary schools, one secondary school, Immigrant High, was opened in 2003 with a specific focus on English language immersion and serving the needs of newcomer

immigrant students. The mission behind Immigrant High was initially centered on the growing concern that the newcomer immigrant youth in the city were growing and yet their needs were not being adequately met at the site of larger public schools. At the time of the school opening, a central focus was an international model of newcomer schooling in which the focus of the school was to support bilingual education as well as the development of critical academic language. This included the school leadership finding support from local universities to train teachers in best practices. This also included a vision for the school that sought to maintain the culture of international identity which included finding support services for families and students as well as create projects and opportunities for students to gain learning through service in various transnational studies and site visits including the Dominican Republic. In 2005 with the passing of the English Only legislation the culture of the school started to shift towards greater pressure placed on teachers placing more emphasis on English. When the school shifted in focus, administration, and buildings in 2009, the curriculum started to be more aligned with discourses of secondary schooling that included more emphasis placed on AP courses, raising test scores in English, and a stronger focus on achievement measured by acquisition of English. From a systems perspective, it is important to note that the history of Immigrant High shifted over time and by 2012-2013 the culture of school reflected a system of secondary schooling that mirrored practices that were more reflective of an American schooling focus rather than an international schooling focus of newcomer schooling. Newcomer schools themselves, in review, show that shifting ideologies and priorities reflect the changing demands of the larger American landscape of education (Short & Boyson, 2012).

Immigrant High is representative of the range of newcomer programs across the United States (Short & Boyson, 2012; Short, 2003). Below is the 2012-2013 (the year this study was conducted) demographic information for Immigrant High:

- 1) 100% newcomer immigrant students
- 2) English is the second language for 100% of students
- 3) The majority (65%) of the students speak Spanish as their first language
- 4) Non-Spanish speaking students (35%) come from a range of linguistic backgrounds including: African tribal dialects, Albanian, Amharic, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese Creole, Tigrinya, Serbian, Somali, Swahili, Vietnamese

The curriculum at Immigrant High emphasizes acquisition of academic language in the content areas through Sheltered English instruction. The high school works under the pressures of high stakes testing and students' goals to access higher education. Students are offered additional classes to prepare for state and college entrance exams. Students also engage in afterschool academic activities such as sports teams. In addition, students are supported through close relationships with personnel, teachers, and counselors at Immigrant High. The staff helps students with transitions to a new social setting and to the demanding academic tasks required.

Historical Location with Research Site. In the spring of 2006, I was part of a team from my local university working at Immigrant High to provide professional development. We presented a 20-hour institute called Teaching Reading and Writing to Limited English Proficient Students. As part of this work, I started observing and interacting with two Gujarati-speaking students and one Humanities teacher. Through this work, I became a part of a team working with the school in the spring of 2007. This experience gave me the opportunity to inquire into the needs and questions of these two youth and the Humanities teacher. During the 2007-2008



school year, I explored issues of academic language through classroom-based professional development with two teachers at Immigrant High. We worked together on finding ways to improve student writing. From 2006-2009, I interacted with the two youth through weekly bilingual interaction (Gujarati-English) both inside and outside of Immigrant High. We took the stance of inquiry probing into issues that came up inside and outside of school. At times I served as a language/cultural broker.

As a result of these ethnographically rooted experiences over three years mainly with two students and two teachers, my re-entrance into Immigrant High in 2011, with a different purpose, was familiar ground. Although the high school had moved campuses and was now housed and connected with an additional newcomer program in the same building, I was in a familiar context and had knowledge of the research site. In addition, my history with the school deepened my overall conviction of working with the newcomer immigrant population.

Upon re-entrance to the school, I met with the new principal and student coordinator of the school. After hearing about my history with the school site, and the objective of my research study, the student coordinator recommended that I shadow one non-Spanish speaking student to orient myself to the school and student setting. I spent eight afternoons doing what Dyson and Genishi (2005) refer to as “casing the joint” in 2011. This concept refers to spending initial time in the social context of a study in order to design the study. The purpose of this time was to get to know the new school campus, think through my research proposal, and to take note of how the school campus and school curriculum had changed. My formal collection of data for this critical ethnography with six non Spanish speaking newcomer youth began in the Fall of 2012 and ended in the Summer of 2013. These six students were new to me in the Fall of 2012. I gained trust from them in the research process by first sharing with them my history at Immigrant High and

second by spending many hours with them in the Fall of 2012 during stage one of the research process.

### **Research Site—Outside of Immigrant High**

A Town is made up of urban communities where multiple immigrant groups have settled. Typical to new migration narratives, the students hold many responsibilities and navigate multiple contexts outside of school where the interplay between language and power are central. These include after school programs, places of work, and functioning as language brokers with family. Immigrant High is representative of the range of newcomer students who are acculturating in varying ways based on the multiple contexts inside and outside of school.

### **Research Participants**

The unit of analysis for this study, or the social and cultural group being studied, were one group of non-Spanish speaking students at Immigrant High. During my time at Immigrant High, my identification as a woman mattered. The immigrant youth who were girls had more interaction with me during my time interacting with students in multiple contexts inside and outside of school. In addition, because my research question includes observation in contexts outside of school hours (after-school, home, and work), my dissertation advisor suggested recruiting young women for the study, commenting that especially with out of school research with youth, identification as a woman mattered.

Four seniors and two juniors, all young women, of varying ages participated in this study. Although I had initially hoped to recruit participants who had different points of arrival at different grade levels, the participant recruitment of this study proved challenging, for many of the youth had trouble giving up time, especially outside of school, for this study. This was not out of lack of interest; at the first meeting, twenty-two non-Spanish speaking young women

showed up to learn about the study and were interested in the topic. Their lives, however, were complicated and included issues around scheduling, holding multiple jobs, and the demands of academic work at school. There was also concern and fear about issues of paperwork, including the signifier of what it meant to sign consent forms. All of these concerns well represented this population. The six young people who did sign up for the study, filling out consent forms, did so after considerable conversation to understand fully what participation entailed, in particular on how much it would interrupt their hectic lives.

The six participants represented six differing transnational locations and linguistic backgrounds. In addition, the age range (16-20) represented a common phenomenon amongst newcomer students at newcomer school. That is that the participants were older to the typical high school age. This was considered a part of the “adolescent ELL problem,” as many of these students considered themselves beyond the adolescent years of schooling (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Mekseb, Likica, and Augusta, in particular, regarded themselves as young adults rather than teenagers who were attending Immigrant High. This was also reflective of the fact that they had attended years of high school prior to arrival to the United States. The following table summarizes the participants:

	Age of Arrival	Age at Onset of Study	Country of Origin	Languages Spoken	Grade Level
Augusta	18	20	Cape Verde	Cape Verdean Creole Portuguese English	11
Cassou	14	16	Haiti	Haitian Creole French English Learning Spanish	11
Likica	18	20	Serbia	Serbian English	12
Lulu	16	18	Vietnam	Vietnamese English	12
Mekseb	18	20	Eritrea	Tigrean	12

				English	
Naila	16	18	Rwanda	Kinyarwanda Swahili French English	12

### **Research Design, Data Collection, and Data Analysis**

Research Design. The research design for this study brought together principles of critical ethnography and qualitative methodology. The goal of this research study was to explore the narratives of one social and cultural group in relationship to larger social system/phenomenon. I sought to create a research design that fit the goals of the study as a bricoleur. Denzin and Lincoln (2003)

urged qualitative researchers to become bricoleurs, mixing and matching the multiple logics and tools of qualitative inquiry in pragmatic and strategic ways to “get the job done,” whatever one imagines that job to be. The goal of research, according to this metaphor, is to produce “a complex, dense, reflexive collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis. (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 3)

A research design combining critical ethnography and qualitative analysis allowed me to explore the dynamic and complex relationship of language and power in the context of a newcomer school and the context of immigration. The phenomenon of language/power, English/Spanish, and analysis of various domains of power within the contexts, emphasized the critical orientation of this work. The emphasis placed on the necessity to study this group through an immersion of their lives in multiple contexts, and in relationship to a phenomenon, illustrates its ethnographic approach.

The research questions are centered around conceptualizing language as a signifier of power in relationship to context. Ethnographers describe language through multimodalities. Multimodalities are semiotic resources in their combinations- linguistic, gestural, kinesthetic,

and visual (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Thus, modes are expressed to support and display identity, power, and expertise of language. In this study, language was seen as a signifier and drew from an understanding that language use happens through multiple modalities and for multiple purposes. In addition, multimodalities push ethnographers to see the larger social context, history, and time/place in which these ‘signs’ take place (Heath & Street, 2008). In this study, data collection and analysis of language occurred through the process of knowing participants through their modes of language use. Consequently, a research design that followed students in multiple contexts supported how language was being considered in this study. In addition, these modalities of language were considered in relationship to a larger historical/social context of how language was played out in this current time/place of new immigration.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) state that, in addition to theoretical and conceptual information gained from existing research studies, contextual, perceptual, and demographic information are needed, in general, for qualitative research methodology.

Data included:

- detailed fieldnotes from observations inside and outside of school
- analytic memos
- semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A & Appendix B) and informal interviews
- focus group (see Appendix C)
- archival data such email/text communication with participants

The following table summarizes the data sources:

Data Source	Participants	Frequency	Approximate Total Hours
Observations inside of school	6	20+ observations at minimum of 1 hour	120

Observations outside of school	6	20+ observations at minimum of 1 hour	120
Interviews (formal)	6	2	12
Interviews (informal)	6	1 per week, 40 weeks, approximately ½ hour	120
Focus group	6	1	1.5
Archival Data		All school media Texts Emails	n/a

Fieldwork-observations. Observations with six participants took place in multiple-sites (inside of school and outside of school). Over the course of one year, each participant was observed approximately 40 hours—approximately 10 hours for each participant in the fall of 2012, 10 hours in the winter of 2013, 10 hours in the spring of 2013, and 10 hours in the summer of 2013. The schedule of observations and collection of data between four seasons to match four stages was part of the research process. This allowed for various stages of data collection. Both nonparticipant and participant observation occurred. Nonparticipant observation in the fall of 2012 involved building “rich description”. Here, field notes, written notes, recordings, and diagrams around the social contexts the participants inhabited allowed for building an understanding of the ‘locale’ or research site/participants. This phase of nonparticipant observation was considered essential to critically document and recognize researcher assumptions, values, and perceptions of the site and group being studied. Participant observation involved some interaction with participants in their social settings.

As part of observation, video recording was initially proposed as a way to document the visual and gestural ways in which language use occurred in multiple settings. However, multiple parties involved in the approval of this study were not comfortable with the use of video recording, including two classroom teachers and two participants, reflecting both the culture of

surveillance at the school and the desire by the newcomer immigrants to not be recorded in this fashion. For the purpose of creating a sense of safety essential to this research process and to this population, the use of video recording was abandoned as a data source. Instead, an iPad and the program EverNote was used, which involved taking multiple on-site sound recordings, photographs to capture the memory of the social setting for memoing, as well as to document field notes. The iPad was seen as a lot less threatening to the participants who got so used to it being there they considered it a notebook.

Emerson et al. (1995) describe how the documentation of field notes in ethnographic research is considered a complex and messy process. The “jotting of notes” and preparing “research memos” is a constant process involved in taking ethnographic field notes. The transferring of these notes to narrate what is being observed in the social setting comes with not only application of principles of coding and writing, but also the involvement of participants in checking into the truth or knowledge claims being made. As a result, observational data included fieldnotes, research memos, a researcher journal, and member checking as part of the iterative process of collecting this form of data.

Interviews. The interviews in this study were both informal and semi-structured. The ongoing informal interviews with the participants allowed for the natural generation of questions, conversation, and checking with participants regarding their experiences over time. In addition, they built on the critical idea of holding both space and dialogue with participants, processes considered essential to doing critically conscious research (Collins, 2009). These types of informal interviews were also important to a research design that valued formal and informal contexts inside and outside of school including the observation of informal uses of language in these various contexts.

There were two formal interviews with each participant, totaling 12 formal interviews. The first, which took place in the winter of 2013, lasting about 90 minutes, focused on their migration narratives to the United States and how it related to language. The second, lasting about 60 minutes, which took place in the spring/summer of 2013, focused on their thoughts about the future outside/after Immigrant High (see appendix A & appendix B for interview protocol).

The migration narrative interview's purpose was to develop a description of each participant as it related to their experiences in their home country, their arrival into the United States, and their experiences with language across these contexts. These interviews took into account the decisions around migration that were largely made in relationship to family decisions around issues of survival. It is important to note, however, that while newcomer youth are in many ways dependent on their families and do not make decisions to migrate as individuals, they are also often pushed into adulthood as a result of the roles and duties that they take upon themselves in the migration process. This includes leaving their home country without their parents, working multiple jobs, and playing the role of learning English and language brokering for their families (Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2009). The future story interview's purpose was to allow newcomer youth to narrate their future aspirations and thoughts as they considered the research process at the end of the study. Again, these interviews emphasized the continued impact migration narrative had on their decisions to stay in America, pursue higher education, and thoughts about returning to their home country. Both interviews emphasized open-ended questions that allowed for inclusion of the global/transnational connections to their home country, supported by research on newcomer immigrant youth.



Riessman (2008) supports interview protocol that allow for maximum flexibility during the interview process. Through interviewer responses, participants can then be led into further discussion. The evolving discussion through semi-structured interviews can elicit participant perceptions and generalizing of their experiences to larger issues. Ethnographers working from critical perspectives prioritize the use of open narrative/informal interviewing when documenting and interviewing the journeys of a historically oppressed people. Although participants chose to speak in English during their interviews, all participants were given the opportunity to speak in their first language. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in English.

Focus group. Labov (1997) stated that narrative data that has humans in participation with each other is important data for narrating the experiences of a group. In the interest of bringing the participants together to narrate across experiences, I conducted one focus group as a way to observe and record interaction amongst the participants (all non-Spanish speaking and from diverse countries). This focus group occurred with all six participants in the spring of 2013.

The ongoing narratives of the individual participants guided the discussion between the six participants in the focus group. The conversation was audio recorded and field notes were taken to document the additional visual bodily cues between participants. Participants were reminded that translation could occur should they choose to explain something in their first language. The participants all chose to speak in English, commenting that English is what connected them as a group. The attention of power dynamics not only between subjects, but between the historical location of their first languages and home countries was necessary during the focus group. I did not assume identification of being non-Spanish speaking made these

students alike or homogenous. To do so would be counterintuitive to a research design striving to recognize the asymmetrical power relations that occur between actors within the social unit.

**Reflection.** Murillo (2004) notes that the entire research process needs to include a “second notebook” of journaling that details the subjective experience of the researcher in the social setting. This kind of reflexivity of the researcher’s experience is necessary to develop a critical understanding of the social phenomenon and avoid the potential pitfalls of projecting researcher assumptions. Critically conscious research recognizes that claims around truth and knowledge, with and of a community of people, are in itself a representation. Re-presenting, thus, walks a potential troublesome path of re-inscribing a historical colonizing of communities through ethnography (Noblit. et al., 2004). Reflection and checking in as critical ethnographer occurred through the keeping of a reflexive journal, recording critical reflections on this iterative and complex process.

**Data Analysis.** Issues of power are at the center of designing an ethnographic case study that identifies itself as ‘critical.’ Power dynamics in a social unit are embedded in relation to a social system, but are not deterministic. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) state:

Power is always a matter of both being positioned by proximal and distal social forces and responding to being positioned in unique and agentic ways...Institutions do indeed contribute to power asymmetries, but they do not determine them once and for all. (p. 111)

This understanding recognizes the multiple and relational ‘narratives of power’ occurring within multiple contexts. This study sought to understand how non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth were: 1) being positioned by proximal and distal forces; 2) responding to social forces and negotiating identity, agency, power; and 3) were not valuing or responding to relations of power that may have been assumed. In order to recognize and gather data within this

understanding, I employed qualitative analysis founded on underlying principles of critical ethnography.

To make sense of the data, I employed guidelines of critical ethnography recommended by Carspecken (1996). The five stages were not conducted in a sequence, but occurred in a recursive and cyclical way. The iterative process of reviewing literature, data collection, coding, memo writing, and journaling allowed me to pay attention to the layers of experiences and link what was happening within the broader new immigration context. Stage One and Stage Two involved the collection of observational data, as well as the transcription of audio segments from various contexts that related to the research questions that occurred in the fall of 2012 and winter of 2013. In addition, field notes and a self-reflexive journal were kept, along with artifacts and school documents. Informal dialogue was also considered part of this primary record. From this set of data, I identified patterns and codes. The criteria for this set of data having reached a point of completion was when the point of diminished-return was reached---that is, when the observed patterns were repeatedly affirmed. Reaching saturation of relevant data that emerged was important to affirm emerging themes from the data.

Stage Three involved triangulating data collection and analysis to strengthen the validity of the research as well as to produce a second set of data based on the verbal interaction with participants to gain participant perspectives (Carspecken, 1996). This data came from the semi-structured interviews and focus group which occurred in the winter and spring of 2013. These interviews examined questions on migration, language use, English, Spanish, the school, and experiences of language outside of the school. This set of data supported the initial set of data/analysis from Stage One and Stage Two. Saturation of data led to more trustworthiness as themes/stories continued to reappear in Stage Three.

In Stage Four, the theoretical framework that conceptualized language as a signifier of capital, race, identity, and culture along with Collins (2009) theory of matrix of domination was applied to the data. The purpose was to see the relationship between the empirical data set of what was happening in the lives and stories of the participants to issues of signification and domination, issues of power. This analysis also allowed for the exploration of participants' resistance/agency within various social contexts. Stage Five included the interpretation and explanation of the findings in relationship to the theoretical framework. The relationship of systems as it relates to issues of language and power occurred in this part of the qualitative analysis. The following diagram summarizes critical ethnography, data collected, and the analysis described:

	Stage 1 Fall 2012	Stage 2 Winter 2013	Stage 3 Spring 2013	Stage 4-5 2013-2015
Data Collected	Field notes Transcription Memos Journal	Field notes Transcription Memos Journal	Field notes Transcription Memos Journal	Synthesizing Data
Analysis	Primary Record of Patterns and Codes	Primary Record of Patterns and Codes	Secondary Record, Emerging Themes	Analysis applying critical theory framework

### **Themes and Stories**

Research memos were used as an analytic tool to sketch emerging themes, narrative detail, and voice of participants. I used Guest's (2012) definition of themes to identify them including looking for repetition, metaphor, similarities/differences between/across data sets/participants, and silence/missing data. What was emphasized in doing this work of ethnography was finding not only what emerged as themes from the data but also naming the stories that illuminated and provided examples of those findings.

In reporting back this critical ethnography, I prioritized the voices of the participants, crafting their voices in such a way as to tell the story that illuminated the important critical themes. In constructing the findings chapters, I employed the metaphor of a braid, an intentional weaving important aspects of sharing ethnography. The first strand was the voice of the participants that illuminated the theme/story being told. The second strand was the ethnographic detail to bring the reader in the space/lives of the participants. The third strand was incorporating examples that provided insight into the critical framework applied to the analysis. These three strands helped me organize the findings chapters and construct the writing of this critical ethnography. This was done by combing through hundreds of pages of transcription, analytic memoing, and journaling to construct and select quotes which not only brought the voices of the youth to the center, but also highlighted the relationship between the individual and wider analysis of systems relations, essential to critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996).

Validity. The issue of validity comes to bear in designing and carrying out qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln's (1985) criteria for establishing rigor and trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These claims are explained in relation to critical ethnography (Johnston, 2004).

Guba & Lincoln (1985)	Critical Ethnography (Johnston, 2004) Qualitative Analysis
Credibility: Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a "credible" conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data.	<p>What speakers say are valuable; true; justified; sincere.</p> <p>Member checking, peer debriefing, and layers of interview data can help create more credibility.</p> <p>What speakers say are embedded in power relations and not true. Researcher subjectivity, claims of truth, are not pure knowledge claims.</p>

Transferability: Transferability is the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project.	The production of knowledge comes from rigor of process. Research process includes documents of this process.
Dependability: Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation.	<p>Rigor of research comes from constant iterative record, analysis, member checking, and relationship to theory.</p> <p>The quality of the process is dependent on the subjective claims of researcher. Power is in constant motion and question. Again, knowledge claims come into question and need critical reflexivity and conversation with peer mentors.</p>
Confirmability: Confirmability is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected.	<p>Peer mentor interaction during data collection and analysis can be another form of member checking. In addition, multiple interviews and a focus group allow for layers of narrative to take form.</p> <p>However, again, there is limitation to knowledge construction and truth construction. Subjectivity and negotiation of power are part of this research process. Findings from data should not be interpreted as totalizing truth claims.</p>

In critical ethnography, issues of power, knowledge and truth are at the heart of considering issues of validity. This study and research process supports Lather's (1986) concept of cathartic validity. Carspecken (1996) explains, "Cathartic validity refers to the degree to which a researcher allows herself to change and grow through fieldwork, change and grow in ways that often challenge oppressive cultural norms" (p. 170). Critical ethnography supports the notion that in any give situation, equal power relations do not exist (Kamberlis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The question then, to be asked, is, can critical orientations towards validity be valid? As Lather (1986) supports, the binary and dichotomy between absolutism and relativism is not beneficial to critical work; knowledge cannot be fully known, but knowledge can be known.

Thus claims to validity in the research process must work with and through recognition of power dynamics, claims of truth, and a rigorous orientation towards researcher subjectivity.

### **Ethics and Limitations of Study**

Critical ethnography itself has come into question as a modernist project. One line of critique is that ethnographers do not take into account changing social conditions and particular forms of power that are used to control oppressed people. Also, critical ethnography has a history of controversy because of “its Eurocentrality and its oversimplified view of asymmetric power relations” (Noblit et al., 2004). The question must be asked, so what and for whom is ethnography? The doing of ethnography has been criticized as going from a colonizing project as ethnography to a modernist project through critical ethnography. Postcritical ethnography critiques the limitations of critical ethnography and emphasizes issues of positionality, representation, objectivity, and politics (Noblit et al., 2004). I considered these four issues with respect to this study on newcomer immigrant youth

Positionality. The descriptive knowledge that the researcher holds and the theory that is being constructed through that researcher narrative is essential to telling the stories of those researched. Murillo (2004) states,

Positionality involves being explicit about the groups and interests the postcritical ethnographer wishes to serve as well as his or her biography. One’s race, gender, class, ideas, and commitments are subject to exploration as part of the ethnography. (p. 21)

I share in Ghiso and Campano’s (2013) expression of motivation to conduct research with immigrant populations. This motivation includes reflecting on my border crossing experiences which include familial lineages from colonial peripheries. This also includes reflecting on my work as an advocate and educator for culturally and linguistically diverse students. My parents were born the same year India gained independence from England. Their childhood, life, and

education in India were framed through a post-colonial era that included a great deal of negotiation between culture, power, and language. They were fluent in three languages, Gujarati, Marathi, and Hindi, and had some proficiency in the English language when they arrived to the United States. Despite their multilingualism and cultural knowledge, my parents were consistently reminded of their lack of English skills. They struggled as newcomer immigrants experiencing outright racism as they navigated a path to economic self-sufficiency. Almost forty years later, when speaking to me about my dissertation topic, my parents still vividly recalled their challenges. They were the only members of their families to arrive from India and struggled to locate a community; much of this process was hinged on finding common linguistic connections. Even today, after having acquired various forms of capital, having lived in the United States more years than India, and building connections with similar immigrant families, they still experience racism, including being ostracized as Americans.

My parents' lifelong navigation of a postcolonial context extended into my upbringing. They brought this orientation towards language, culture, and survival into raising my brother and I in Chicago and Georgia from 1976 to 1996. My first language was Gujarati. Besides Sesame Street and neighborhood children, my first exposure to English was formal schooling. Being a product of a multilingual immigrant family created an important distinction for me between public and private life. When I was younger, I bifurcated my linguistic identities between school and home. As I got older, the dominance of English seeped into all aspects of my life; Gujarati was mostly left to visits to India to talk to my grandparents. The power of language and its impact on my experiences as an immigrant were integral to the direction I took as an educator.

My passion for language, literacy, and immigrant youth led me to take a position at a small charter school for my first teaching job in 2002. The focus of this school, located in urban



Chicago, was to serve the needs of immigrant families. It was a small school comprised of many multilingual students. The school served immigrant and refugee families with varying narratives of emigration. Many of the students spoke English, but for most, English was not their first language. My fourth and fifth graders faced a heavy load of academic language required by the state exams and struggled with issues of language, literacy, and identity. After moving to A Town in 2005, I was introduced to Immigrant High.

When I arrived to Immigrant High, I recognized similar yet different social and linguistic realities for these students; newcomers who had just arrived to the United States and had entered school had a particular set of challenges. After spending time with two Gujarati-speaking youth, my commitment towards this particular population grew. Their global, transnational, migrant stories differed from the immigrant narrative I had conceived. I had many cultural and linguistic connections to the two young women, but my privileged location, especially in terms of having accumulated various forms of economic, social, and cultural capital, differed from these students. My negotiation of capital and language today is much different. I belong to a prestigious university, and I'm identified as an academic. I recognize the privilege afforded to me by academic and economic capital. I live in a diverse Spanish language dominant community near the school, a community that is also the product of gentrification.

I am also situated within my history. I am a descendent of colonial subjects and these subjectivities still play out in my life. I am raced through language and national affiliation. In addition, the very opportunities afforded to me as an Indian woman in America are very different compared to my family in India; the remnants of colonialism continue to play out. The complex global/transnational/ national/state/local/individual language narratives that I live through each day, signified in numerous practices, is still part of my social reality. Today I live through

privilege, patterns of colonizing, and potential to connect to immigrant communities because of these narratives.

I am a descendent of colonial subjects. I am a Brown Indian woman. I speak another language, Gujarati. I speak fluent English. I do not speak Spanish. I'm from another place – immigrant. I am a teacher. I am a graduate student. I belong to a prestigious local university. I am a researcher – watch, take notes, follow, interact. The group of interest, non-Spanish speaking, is of interest because of lack of inquiry on the group, but also because of my own non-Spanish speaking immigrant subjectivity. I have political interests that include serving newcomer immigrant populations that are living amidst oppressive social policy. As much as I have these agendas, I am aware that my current second generation immigrant narrative is privileged and full of capital available to the dominant majoritarian groups in society.

The preceding narrative of positionality carries “its own situatedness, multiplicity, history, and awkward forms of privilege different from other European Americans” (Murillo, 2004, p. 156). This positionality cannot be ignored. In fact, I argue, like Fine (1994), that these are intentional methodological and ethical considerations for research, with the intention of not being part of an “othering” process common to ethnography.

Representation. How can I know if I have re-presented this group of newcomer immigrant youth? What are my ethics towards this representation? Murrillo's (2004) work makes clear and evident that matters of representation become a colonial project when the ethnographer assumes expert authority, does not question positions of privilege, enables objectification of participants, and uses self-serving strategies for representation. In doing this work, I constantly asked the following question in designing, implementing, sharing, and working with these students - who said so? I had to strip myself of self-serving strategies by

remaining constantly open to finding what was not sought. Villenas (1996) states of her own work that she is “colonizer/colonized” and that she “is walking a contradiction in both worlds-in the dominant privilege institutions and in the marginalized communities” (p. 714).

Objectivity. Ethnography can never be innocent or neutral. The role of values is always inherent in qualitative research (Guzenhauser, 2008). Two issues came to mind when considering objectivity and ethics of doing critical ethnography. First, how does seeing a participant as object colonize? Second, how does objectivity colonize? At the heart of this issue is consideration of perception. Here, I define the issue of perceiving the research participants as a “colonizing object” where participants’ intricate narratives, power relations, and truths are kept in a vacuum. A researcher arrives, collects necessary data, analyzes data, and reports data. In contrast, participants become humanized participants when their lives, concerns, and navigation of power are considered in constant motion, not bounded by the defined study. In addition to issues of perception, the development of relationships can also mitigate the colonizing of research participants as objects. In these relationships, the messier but necessary process of critical ethnography takes place (Ngo, 2008). Controlling the natural process of engagement and relationship in the pursuit of objectivity, would in fact, reify opportunistic goals.

Politics. Is the goal of this work to give voice to others who are marginalized? What are the politics of working with and for a newcomer immigrant population? How does this research even matter to politics that impact their daily lives? What are my own politics around language and how they are playing out in the United States matter? Johnston (2004), in his discussion of how critical ethnography can be extended further through an understanding postcritical ethnography, emphasized the necessity for the ethnographer to actually take leadership in the reinventing of possibility. Taking this into account, the ethical consideration for this research is

to not simply observe the navigation of language and power for this cultural community, but to also work with the participants to re-make, re-invent, or create alternative possibilities. These are not bounded by the content of the research topic, but rather by the creation of their own agendas towards acquiring what they need. This orientation towards political change, even at the local level of one group, is not a process of “giving voice,” but rather giving space for their own political process. This process does not necessarily happen during the time frame of the research study, but rather through the continual committed relationship with the participants and community.

**Limitations of Study.** The first limitation of this study is time. Although proposed time within this school community and students is longer term, it is still limited by my ability to understand what could be understood with additional time and immersion into their lives. The second limitation of this study is language. All participants were non-Spanish speaking, and I am also non-Spanish speaking. This linguistic orientation did give me insight into this group, but I lacked insight into the majority population at the school, Spanish speaking students. In addition, I do not speak any of the first languages of the participants. This is also a linguistic limitation. They knew this and tended towards speaking in English; I offered a translator to translate any dialogue they wished to express in their first language, but they chose to speak to me in English. Because both of these limitations could lead to critical limitations of positionality, representation, and objectivity previously discussed, I maintained a constant awareness of these limitations in making knowledge claims. The following three chapters discuss the findings of this critical ethnography.

## Chapter V

### **PORTRAITS OF MIGRATION**

Recently arrived immigrant youth who enter schooling in the United States at the secondary level have distinct transnational narratives. The decision to leave one's community, school, and country are complex, and include navigating multiple issues of language and power (Oikonomidou, 2011). Collins (2009) comments that navigating issues of oppression begin with the level of the personal biography; one's journey and story matter a great deal to how multiple intersecting issues of power manifest themselves in spaces. The level of personal biography sets the foundation for examining the relationship between forces that extend from the individual level to the distal level, also recognizing moments of agency and resistance.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the six participants through six portraits of their migration as recently arrived immigrant youth. Each portrait has been crafted to summarize details of their migration to the United States, while also threading together important aspects related to critical ethnography. Adopting the metaphor of a braid, three distinct aspects of data/analysis were weaved together in constructing this chapter. First, the direct voice of the participants regarding their migration narratives; second, ethnographic details to bring the reader into the space shared with the participants; and third, the use of critical examples to highlight key findings. The details included also illuminate the participants' relationship to the research process. In addition, the reader is brought into the lives and voices of the six participants, including their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This chapter, in particular, brings to surface the theme of survival, and how it relates to language. At the end of the chapter, the relationship between their migration narratives to the theoretical framework is discussed, initially, to set a foundation for further theorizing and discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation.

### Survival Run – Meet Mekseb

As I entered Mekseb's home, an apartment not far from Immigrant High, I was immediately offered a cup of tea by her aunt. Mekseb's Uncle and Aunt, curious of my own immigrant background, inquired into where I had come from and where I lived in A Town. Mekseb's uncle wanted me to know his Eritrean pride; he spoke about the importance of his country's struggle. Mekseb ended the conversation by speaking to her uncle in Tigrean. As we left the kitchen, she smiled, translating, "I told him we had to start otherwise he would go on forever about the politics in my country."

Before we could even settle into beginning an interview, Mekseb's first words were "Are you ready for this?" For the next two hours Mekseb shared her experiences, the most common and salient theme being survival. Eritrea's complicated history with colonization, wars for independence, and influence of dictatorship shaped Mekseb's choice to migrate. She began by sharing the background of her father's involvement in politics:

My father was a soldier before I was born, and when I was 12 years old my father got in trouble with the government for speaking out, was taken away, and put into jail. He was kidnapped. We did not know where he was for so many years...it was just my Mom and my younger brother and sister.

Later, Mekseb shared the impact the current dictatorship had on her decision to leave Eritrea:

So I was studying and doing well in school and so the government started looking at me ... They wanted me to join the military. This is dictatorship government where you have no rights to do or say anything and you can be tortured for not listening. There were and are no rights. When I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was doing well in school. The government sought me out for questioning. They thought I was involved with some of my friends escaping to Ethiopia and they also felt my father was a traitor. So they came and found me and it was just so crazy. I was brought into a room for questioning and so many questions about my father. I was now being watched, like there were police at my school when I went to class. And well by the time I was entering 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I was going to be taken away and forced into military school. These schools are awful where you forced to learn to use a gun, not learn what you want to. You do not get enough to eat, there is sickness, and there is no freedom. I wanted to be a pharmacist and I also wanted

freedom. And so by this time my family in America and my Uncle in Sweden were sending money...

Mekseb then continued to relay the risk of leaving, accepting that in leaving you could end up anywhere, never return home, or worse, not live at all. Prior to sharing what became a catalyst for her own escape, and relaying how she was lucky she was not killed, she asked for a break. We paused the interview.

With intense memories written all over her face, her petite frame upright, and her eyes wide open, Mekseb continued sharing how she left:

Well I had gone to a party, and at that party there was a fight. We were all arrested, and I was taken away to a prison in the capital city. But there I got sick and was taken to a hospital. From that hospital I decided to escape. I first escaped to my Uncle's home in another city, and it was awful. I knew I had to leave this country, my country! I walked for ten days with the help of smugglers hired by my Uncle living in Sweden, and I made it to Sudan.

At this point in the interview Mekseb's quieter voice increased in volume. She asked if I knew of the game Temple Run? I shook my head no. She went on to tell me that this is a video game that involved controlling an explorer who is being chased. There were coins that could be collected to gain power. Mekseb relayed that her escape was a "Survival Run" through many countries. Her objective was to live, and she needed to gain power along the way.

Mekseb's journey from Eritrea to the United States involved crossing through a total of twelve countries over the course of fifteen months. She spent one year in Sudan, four days in Dubai, one day in Russia, one day in Cuba, two weeks in Ecuador, three days in Columbia, three days in Panama, one day in Costa Rica, three days in Nicaragua, one day in El Salvador, one day in Guatemala, twenty-five days in Mexico City, and then five weeks detained in Arizona, after being moved from California and Texas. From Arizona, she was given permission to go to A Town where she had family and subsequently applied for political asylum status.

Mekseb commented that Eritreans embarked on such escape routes on a daily basis, but that she went on her journey alone, making friends along the way. During this treacherous journey, she faced multiple struggles including the fear of deportation, being robbed, being assaulted, not knowing how to communicate, not knowing whom she could depend on, and simply staying alive. In Sudan, she lived at a refugee camp where she was forced to wear clothes covering her entire face/body. In Cuba, her paperwork was questioned and she was almost deported. In crossing the border at Columbia, she walked through the middle of the night arriving to a forest where she was asked to hide. In Panama, the entire group she was traveling with was robbed of everything except the rolls of money she had hidden in her hair. In making it to Nicaragua there were fences she crossed that made her hands bleed. In getting to Guatemala, she almost fell off the boat injuring her back. In Mexico, she crossed a river swinging on a rope and fell into the water. An Eritrean ‘brother’ saved her life. In Mexico, where they stayed in a border house, she slept on the cold floor. And when finally being transported from one detention center to another, she was tied up, handcuffed, still wondering if she would make it out.

Mekseb spoke openly of the importance of language in her survival, also commenting how Spanish was introduced to her at the border. She relayed the impact Tigrinya had on her experience with respect to a feeling of safety and community:

Yeah, I had no one of my own. No one from my family. It’s like I just met the group I was traveling with but we spoke the same language. That was our connection. I was amongst many other Eritreans making these crazy journeys, and I always knew that no matter what country we were crossing or how many kilometers we had to walk, I was walking with people who I could speak to...I was the only girl in my smaller group which made me scared at times and it was so important that I had a couple of ‘brothers’ who spoke my language that I could count on to not take advantage of me and protect me. These friends of mine are now are spread over the world, but without them and my language I could not have survived.



At the border between Mexico and the United States, in Tijuana, Mekseb described a line longer than she had ever seen before. It was here that Spanish began to signify fear. At the Mexican border she was no longer with her Tigrinya speaking survival mates. She found herself alone and surrounded by a language she did not understand:

Oh my God, a lot of people at the border. Such a long line, so crazy. These people were all the same color, all spoke the same language, I did not understand. There was a soldier speaking in Spanish making sure no one cut the line. The person that checked my papers, was Spanish speaking. The person that checked my body, my bag was Spanish. I was so scared. Then they put me in a small house, I slept on the ground, did not understand anything... Later when I was in the Arizona detention center, I was in a room and it was just me and five other Spanish speaking women. The only chance I had to speak anything was to talk in Tigrinya during the interview, even though I knew enough English. But in my room it was like I was the only one. I was now separated from any of the friends I had traveled with. But finally one Spanish speaking woman came and tried to talk to me. We figured out a way to talk, she was kind because I was crying all the time.

Mekseb's interview at the Arizona detention center, as well as paperwork supporting her status for being granted political asylum, led to the last leg of her survival run, her new home in A Town. Her entry into Immigrant High was not as important to her as her status of being alive. She commented that her political activism for Eritrea would never end, and that her courage to fight for her education would not end either.

### **Serbian Seeking Stability – Meet Likica:**

It was an early weekend morning when I headed into South A Town to Likica's home. Likica had already identified that she had an interest in becoming an educator. As we walked up the two flights of stairs to her family's apartment, she inquired into how I became a teacher. As I entered the apartment, an unfamiliar fragrance wafted through the air. Likica commented that her mother, before going to work that morning, had woken up to make Serbian food. Likica's younger brother was sitting in the room playing a game. Likica spoke to him in Serbian and then translated into English; the English was also directed towards him. She wanted him to

understand that she was doing a project for school and that he needed to stay quiet. She then turned to me to explain that she watched her brother while her parents were both at work. As the interview began, Likica explained that she was like a second mom to her little brother who was speaking more English than Serbian as a result of only having attended school in the United States.

Likica was eager to talk about her experiences. Before talking about her migration to the United States she started by explaining what made her different. With a pressed tone she stated:

Okay so you are learning about how we came to this country and how we are also not part of the main immigrant group, Spanish, but let me tell you I'm also so different from this because, well, look at me, I'm immigrant but White. I open my mouth and you know that I'm not from here, but when I walk around people in A Town don't see me as immigrant. You must see because of my skin I'm like one of the very few people in my school that is like this. Look at me! At school I stick out because barely no one looks like me. In my country everyone looked like me, talked like me, and it was just so different.

Likica was eager for me to know this aspect of her experience, how she felt she was different from the other women in the study, many who were her close friends. She wanted me to understand that being Serbian, in the context of A Town and her school, was about linguistic and racial difference. She made a point to emphasize this aspect of herself a number of times.

As we shifted backwards in time to the point of departure from Serbia, Likica shared why her family left. She stated that this was the first time she was could talk about leaving without crying. Her father's sister had already been living in A Town for twenty years. Her aunt had filled out the paperwork for sponsorship for her father years before, and when the paperwork came through, her family decided to leave. Likica emphasized, however, that the main reason for leaving was the economic situation of Serbia, not the sponsorship. She explained:

We lived in a village about one hour away from the capital city, and I was commuting each day to the capital city for secondary school. Sometimes I had to wait for the bus for one hour. The economic situation in Serbia was getting really bad. It was so hard

because so many people lost their jobs...at one point my Mom was working but they could not afford to pay her that month. They would then have to wait to pay her the next month. And well I don't know if you know much about the politics of my country but there were lot of issues, lot happening. I don't know much about all of this. I do think that the government did not care about what was happening to my country. I mean there was like all this conflict with Kosovo but that made me so angry because how was that conflict helping to feed the people of Serbia? What about the people in my country worried about keeping their jobs? This is why I don't trust the government to take care of my people.

Likica emphasized that it was only when her father visited his sister in A Town that he decided to have the family leave Serbia. He felt that the economic situation and opportunity for education would still be better in America.

The decision to leave Serbia included her family leaving behind their village, their home, and the numerous family members that lived nearby as a community. Likica emphasized that even today, their connection to Serbia was through this family that they communicated with on a weekly basis:

So many relatives and family in my village and my Mom and Dad connect to my family in my country through Skype for so many hours! I mean it's like our whole Sunday because of time difference. They share everything in Serbian because most of family don't know much English, even my parents know little English. And then all the holidays it's also Skype. We are so lonely here because no Serbians. So talking to my family back in Serbia is our connection and that is also why I miss being there.

The emphasis of loneliness, isolation, and difference Likica felt as an immigrant in A Town was expressed again:

There are Bosnians here, there is a Polish grocery store where I find few things like my favorite biscuits, but there are so few Serbians. I do not think people understand how depressing that is. I mean I'm here but there is no community of my people. I heard that in cities like Chicago there is a whole Serbian community. I do not have that and then people look at me and they do not even get where I am from. I have to say I'm Serbian. So I just know I'm alone here, and it is very depressing.

Although she felt better, Likica stated that adjusting was very difficult. She described going through a depression after arriving including not being able to eat and not wanting to speak. She

emphasized that despite having an aunt who had lived here for years, and an older sister who had gotten married to a Nigerian, and had a baby here, she had a harder time feeling connection to people here, even today.

In contrast to her feelings of isolation after migrating, Likica emphasized the benefits of economic stability. She shared that she went back to Serbia for a visit with her mother and noticed the extent to which her country was poor. Her father's work with heating systems and her mother's work cooking in a kitchen at a restaurant was dependable income. Although her older sister had made the decision to not go to college, Likica commented that she felt the education was something that could not be taken away. Although she had already finished secondary school in Serbia and had to enter back into high school as an older student, she felt the sacrifice her family made was largely for education. Education could give her economic stability in the future:

So when I was in Serbia I really was not interested in school. I went to school but I was not a good student because I did not care about it. And well English was a struggle for me when I came here, but I decided to just wipe my tears and focus on school. And I think that this is, what you call it?...stable life. Where you can get jobs and get education. So you just give something to get something. And what I get is maybe some future. So I work work work in school...

When describing her entry point at Immigrant High her resistance and thoughts about Spanish surfaced:

So when I was in Serbia I was interested in Spanish as a European language. I thought it was a language I wanted to learn, and I saw it as a language and a country of Spain. But then I came here and it was like the minute I stepped out on the airport Spanish everywhere, even on signs. And then in my neighborhood and then in my school, all these people who were like always talking to each other, and I did not know this, and I did not understand, and well I was not like them. That was when I met my friends who were like me, well sort of like me. But they were not like me either. I mean they were not Spanish speaking but they were not white European looking like me...

Likica began and ended her conversation on migration with a reminder that her European Serbian immigrant status was not one that she felt had benefited her. She ended, however, commenting that in many ways, it did not matter because immigrant life was about making sure things got better, and they had.

### **Lost, Found, and Learning English – Meet Lulu**

To make it to Lulu's home for the interview, I first met Lulu in the hallway after school. She was standing next to her brother, not speaking to him, headphones in her ear, her head down. As I approached her, she looked up and pulled her headphones out and wrapped them around her phone carefully. I inquired into what she was listening to and she told me about the Vietnamese pop band she liked. Lulu expressed no interest in lingering at school. As we walked to the bus, she made a point to say that her brother was going to go to work, that her mother and step- father were at work, and that it was good I was not meeting her parents because they would not have anything to say. During the commute to her home: one bus, one train, and a ten minute walk, Lulu apologized more than once for the mess in the house and that she was sorry she did not have any cooked food to offer when we got there. She also mentioned that her Mom had been sick and she was busy these days taking her to the doctor. As we headed up the few flights of stairs to the apartment, and I took my shoes off at the entrance of her home, she nodded. She commented that it was their custom too to not wear shoes in the home. We settled into a tiny room she called her own and sat cross-legged on the floor. Lulu took one deep breath, closed her eyes, put her hands on her face, and then uncovered them. "Okay, I'm ready," she said quietly.

Lulu first shared what had been a tragedy in her life, the death of her father from cancer when she was ten years old. Tears welled up in her eyes, as she relayed the relationship of cause and effect, and why she left Vietnam. Becoming a widow lead her mother to struggle financially

in Vietnam. Desperate to find a way out of hardship, her mother decided to remarry. Lulu explained that her mother's decision to marry a Chinese man living in the United States was so troubling that she ran away from home to live with her grandmother. Lulu described this sad and angry time in her life:

This was all just ridiculous for me. I could not accept it all during this time. Papa was everything to me and nobody could replace his position and worth. I got upset, really upset! I ran away from my house to live with my grandmother in Sai Gon City. I did not care about school anymore. I started drinking beers and wines and walking the streets. Luckily I got a job at Hoe La restaurant as a waitress. But that job did not work out. I was too quiet. I was scared of all the noise! Scared of all that was troubling me. I just wanted to go away to the world where my Papa was staying, not this world. So I went back to streets just walking around for like months. I was feeling so hopeless until I decided to go home. My Mom had turned sick with worry. When I saw her it was like she had starved herself. I cried and I could not even speak...but I did return and then we came to America.

Lulu's period of personal struggle as a teenager was also described in relationship to her struggles at school. She lived in a part of Vietnam that was neither a village nor the major city, and she described the one public school that her family could afford as a place that left her in a constant state of fear. She was paralyzed by the fear of corporal punishment, the dozen subjects she felt she had to master, the pressure of multiple examinations, the school competition that lead to bullying, and the lack of social support. She described one particular incident as being Vietnam:

So in here in America you cannot just hit a student, right? But in my country you have a stick, like a ruler. Yes and when the student don't listen to teacher they just hit...And not because they do not have a family too because they do. But that is just how it is. One day my teacher hit me because I got a bad grade in literature class. And she was like hitting me and the stick went to the window like flying. She broke the window. But the teacher lied and told them it was my fault...and well I cannot pay for the window, I cannot. My Mom was working so hard but there is no extra money. So then I could not go to school for 3 days. And I could not come back until I worked after school cleaning the school. They did not believe me even though it was not me because that is how power is in Vietnam. Sick power.

This incident that happened in 8<sup>th</sup> grade was at a time in her life when the larger decision to leave her family in Vietnam was at the forefront. This decision was also difficult for Lulu because Vietnam provided her with the connection to herself that was most associated through language and family. Lulu described the important familial relationships and communication in Vietnamese as the only antidote to the social isolation she experienced. After her father passed away, the homes of her relatives became safe spaces for her to cope, and she described herself as never really wanting to make friends at school.

Lulu felt misunderstood. She saw her personal struggles with language as flaws, largely created by what she described as her inability to communicate. She took great strides to learn English, and she judged the ability of her family to acculturate to immigrant life based on their ability to communicate in English. She described how her stepfather had lived in the United States for years but who did not speak English well. She added that his work managing the food distribution for a few grocery stores was mostly done in Chinese. She described her Mom's ability to teach mathematics in Vietnam being based on her expertise in the subject and the language. Lulu emphasized that because her mother did not know or learn English so she could not teach in America. Instead she found work in a nail salon. Lulu described her own brother as also not having had success with English. They were not the same age, but they were in the same grade, because English was more difficult for him. She described her brother's failure with English as one of her family's disappointments. She said this made her brother feel depressed.

Lulu emphasized that it was not simply acquiring the words of English, but it was also the Vietnamese accent that was a barrier. She described the physical struggle of her tongue to master the English sounds:

In my country the sounds are so different, so less, how you say it...um, complicated. In my country you only say one sound to represent what it is, here it is like multiple sounds.

You have a lot of sounds in English. It's not a, b, c at all because between a and b well you have so many other sounds. That's why my mouth cannot make it sound same, or right. That's why I'm missing a lot, then I mess up everything. Oh and it's just too much to study in English.

Lulu said she found herself mostly wanting to just spend time alone and online. The online world was her closest ally. She read Vietnamese comic books online, listened to music, or watched movies online. All these places allowed her to escape into a world where she felt understood.

Lulu described her initial arrival to A Town as one that was based on the fear of not knowing if she could communicate. When she entered Immigrant High, she and her brother spent their first year with a group of other Vietnamese newcomers. However, all those students left. Lulu came into awareness that the Spanish speakers had a lot of power. Lulu said:

It's not Spanish that bother me, they spoke over me and anyone else. It was just really really noisy. It's like when you are just trying to get the words out and you are not so loud and they talk over you... You cannot say anything. I hated that. That's why I felt angry at Spanish when I came here. Because you see I have some Spanish friends now. I just don't like how they take over and talk over. That's why I never ate in the cafeteria. So noisy in Spanish too much. So I started eating by myself in auditorium. I listen to my Vietnamese music and eat by myself. I like that quiet.

Lulu expressed that she was still worried that she was not going to be good enough of a speaker and that is what made her so quiet. She insisted that she had a lot to say and that this was why she was glad to meet me, so she could keep talking.

### **Alive and In School, So It's Okay – Meet Naila**

Naila sent me an email with detailed instructions on how to drive to her home in East A Town. She had commented that it was better to come on a weekend when she was awake, because by the time she got home after school it was always late and she was very tired. Naila shared that in order to get to Immigrant High she had to wake up at five each morning. After walking ten minutes, catching two trains, and one bus, she would arrive to school. The commute



took one hour, one way, but as she finished saying this, she made a point to say she did not mind because she was so happy to be in school. Naila's home was not far from the A Town airport. Naila stated that living in this area was a daily reminder that she had arrived to America at this airport. As I entered the apartment, Naila commented that it was good the family was out for food shopping. She thought it would be too noisy if they all were there, especially since her brother would be watching his weekend American cartoons. Naila walked me around the apartment and explained how she, her three siblings, and her parents shared four rooms together. When we got to the dining table Naila laughed, sharing that this table was the place where everything happened for the family.

Minutes after sitting down Naila's tone went from light to serious. Her first words were a poignant reminder of the impact of war:

I am from Rwanda. I was born during genocide. You know there was a fight between the Hutus and the Tutsis. My father was a Tutsi. They wanted to kill him, my family. I am lucky to be alive. We lived, but my father's two brothers were killed. So many people were killed. Rwanda went through a lot.

Naila continued to share that while she was aware of the atrocious impact of genocide, she did not grow up knowing the details. She knew growing up that her family was safe and alive.

Naila described the impact Rwandan politics had on her life and her father's work. Her father had a job with the French embassy. Naila stated that her father's college degree in French literature lead to this good post. As a result of issues after the genocide, the French embassy closed. Her father lost his job. Left without options, he sought out support from a niece who had already moved to the United States. She recommended he emigrate so that he could find work and send back money to Rwanda. Naila described how much this move impacted her life as a young teen:

I was only 13 years old when my father left. We did not see him for the next four years. My mother was pregnant with my little brother. We did not have enough money. My mother got a job working in salon. Someone needed to take care of so many things at home. I couldn't go to school anymore because my mom had to take care of everything. There was not enough money for us all and in my country you have to pay for school. They don't have a free school. So my parents thought like maybe I could stop school and then my dad maybe would get a job in America and he can start sending money for school. So I stopped going to school because I am oldest so can help. My sisters went to school. I just stayed home, doing everything that I have to do for the house...clean up, cook, take care of my baby brother. I was like the Mom in the house.

Naila continued to describe how the experience of not attending school, which ended up being disjointed schooling for close to three years as a teenager, impacted her desire to leave Rwanda.

While she missed her community in Rwanda, she did not miss the domestic duties. Naila emphasized that when they arrived to the United States, she was so relieved to no longer be missing school. Naila made a point to say that even if school was challenging, it was not the kind of hardship she faced in Rwanda playing the role of caregiver and sacrificing education.

Naila spoke with pride of her multilingual upbringing. She stated that that the only English she knew prior to arriving was from a little television. Her family lived in the capital city of Rwanda, Kigali, where she learned to speak the local dialect Kinyarwanda, Swahili, and French. Her mother and father had not learned much English, even though her father had already lived in America for a few years. Naila commented that her father did not need much English doing the manual jobs he was doing here, and he chose to mostly speak in French. Her mother did not know English, and after arriving to the United States, obtained a cooking certificate. Her work in the restaurant kitchen did not involve using much English.

Being the eldest, Naila's role of responsibility shifted from domestic duties in Rwanda to becoming the primary language broker after moving the United States. She described this duty with some exasperation:

Yeah, I'm like oh my God why do I have to do it? This job of taking care of things. Like I always got angry in Rwanda because I knew I was responsible for like everything. I have to take care of my siblings, I have to take care of the house, everything. My mom was working. And then I was like OK I came here. I'm going to rest. I'm not going to be responsible for anything. Just going to take care of myself and go to school. But then when I got here I have to do all that again because well now I have to make sure I know English fast so we can take care of things, important things. It's really a responsibility to learn English. But my Mom is learning some now and my little brother is speaking so much English too now, but it's not same. I learned that this was my job when I came here.

Naila's entry point into Immigrant High came at a time when she was keenly aware that she was unlike many of her peers. Because of her missed schooling, she had missed academic content and time to develop language as well. Despite these challenges, she described her desire to work at school, especially to learn English. Naila shared her opinions around language and government control:

Yes there are no other Rwandans at my school and well at first I was ... how you say it? ... overwhelmed. I was overwhelmed because I had lot to learn. I don't feel lonely or depressed because school is just important. I mean it's not like in America the government is coming to my house and to my table and telling my family how to speak. I don't think they control my language in my home, and I get to speak enough of my languages when I want to. In school I prefer that I am just learning a lot of English even though at first it was so hard and I did not understanding anything. That's why Spanish was just a lot because it was taking in a lot for my brain. I think it's okay if others want to speak Spanish, as long as I get to speak English. So even with friends I make we know English connects us so then we just use English ...and well I think this is a bonus for me because I get more time with English which I cannot actually get at home. What I am saying is that I'm okay with lots of English. It's okay because I'm learning a lot and making up time I loss.

As Naila's interview finishes, she hears the chatter of her family coming up the stairs. She mentions that there is one part of her story that is also sad for her family. She reminds me that her father's brothers were killed in the genocide and they had two children. At first they stayed with her grandparents all these years. Since her grandparents died, however, her father has been trying to adopt them. It has not worked, so he sends money for them. Naila comments that they

are just like her and yet there life is so different. She said she prays for them, and that she is so grateful for chance to learn.

As Naila's family comes through the door, she turns to her parents and introduces me, in her home language, and without hesitation, after her parents respond, she turns back to me and translates what they have said. Naila expresses that she is grateful to have this interview and invites me to stay for lunch, commenting that of course she will translate at the table.

### **Haunted By Leaving – Meet Augusta**

Augusta and I had planned to visit her home after school. But on the day of the interview, she asked if we could meet in the auditorium at Immigrant High instead. Augusta had already mentioned that going home was sad because it was a place where she would often get upset. She lived with her mother, her sister, and her nephew. She commented that she was often the babysitter for her nephew. Augusta described her family as close but struggling. She felt that her family did not understand what school was like. Lately, everything had become a struggle for Augusta, and as we settled on the stage in the auditorium, stretching our legs on the floor, Augusta asked if she could take a moment before the interview. She cursed about an incident at school that day where she had failed a test. As she wiped her tears, I asked if she'd like to do the interview another day. She commented that she had been looking forward to this all day because she wanted to express herself. Before inquiring into her migration, Augusta said:

It's all a lie you know? This thing about America. People in my country thinking this place is full of gold and diamonds or something. Oh my god! Well, it's not. America is a big lie and no dreams come true. Doesn't matter who try to be...the things you do, the things you choose, the way you see yourself. And then oh my god friends back home they're like oh we wish we were there. And I'm like no, I wish I was there, back there, and I would do everything so different. Because here I am going to school and working just to get basic stuff. There my job is to go to school. Here my job is so many jobs, too many jobs.

As Augusta finished making this initial statement about the United States, and I inquired into her life in Cape Verde, she moved and shifted her body stating that she wanted to first get relaxed and comfortable. She reminded me that she might cry again because she was going to talk about her people, her country.

Augusta shared about her childhood, a childhood that was largely wrapped around being brought up by her grandparents. She said there was one memory that was important to share. She was a child and attending a school where so many children did not have shoes to wear on their feet. One day she decided that she needed to be the same way. So she left her shoes at home and went barefoot to school. When her grandmother found out, Augusta said she explained to her that although this was the poverty for Cape Verde, Augusta had shoes and was lucky to also have a home. Augusta said this was just a story for me to understand that poverty was a very real thing, something she felt had a lot of power.

Augusta emphasized the relationship between language and status. In Cape Verde, the level of Portuguese that she acquired in school gave her status, because this was the language of schooling. Everywhere else you might speak in Cape Verdean Creole, but in school, the subjects were taught through Portuguese. Upon entering secondary school, she became more aware of the status of English. Augusta had a chance to choose French or English as a subject, and she wanted to choose French. Her mother, however, made her choose English because she felt this was a better language for her future. Augusta said she was angry about this reality. Describing this more recent memory of choosing English over French lead to her to relate the disappointment of leaving. Augusta shared:

My mother was already here, in America. So was my sister. They were already here and everyone thought you know this is the way to go. First you learn English in America and so that's money right there. English is money. But let me know tell you America is three things: stress, no money, no friends. They did not tell me that. Learn English and you

got what? That's all a lie. You can learn nothing, have no job, have no money, and feel so lonely.

Augusta went on to explain her decision to leave Cape Verde as a bad decision, one that she regretted. She then recalled another memory from her childhood. She said it was her job to go and get clean water each day. She recalled the memory with tears in her eyes and went on to explain that even though she could get clean water from the faucet in her apartment, she'd rather have the life again where she had to walk to get water.

Being poor in the United States was far worse than Cape Verde for Augusta. Here she was angry because people looked at her differently and spoke to her differently. Despite her anger for being here the one option that she had started to look into was actually joining the United States military. She described the opportunity as a possible place to find respect and gain status. According to Augusta, this was also a place where she could find work that was defined by her strength, and not her ability to speak English.

The issue of placement in schooling based on her knowledge of language was a large cause of her disappointment. Augusta relayed what happened when she arrived to Immigrant High:

They made me start all over when I got here! I'm older than everyone and they put me behind because I only came with little bit of English. I was really mad. I was really disappointed. And now today there are so many Cape Verdean students. Not when I came. I did not know how to make a sentence and I have like this huge accent. Well I would still have an accent no matter what because that is what makes me Cape Verdean! That make me immigrant and I'm proud of that. And well I started all over, 10<sup>th</sup>, now 11<sup>th</sup>, and I feel so old, and I feel so behind. I have no, how you say it ... confidence. I have no goal now. Like I have no dream to go to college now, and I do not know what to do. I do not know what I'm going to focus on and my GPA is not good enough to choose college.

Augusta went on to explain that her level of schooling in Cape Verde seemed good enough when she was there, but not when she arrived to the United States. She felt that her skills and abilities

were not appreciated, and she described the focus of learning English as simply impossible. She stated that the system of testing was one that did not also allow her to feel successful. She said that the one area of improvement that she saw, that was supported, was in the area of Mathematics, and yet, this was not at all what she was going to end up doing with her life.

Augusta felt it was the English language that exerted most control in her life. She felt limited by her extent of knowing English. Her goal was to get more freedom by learning English, as so, when she arrived the languages of her peers did not bother her:

What did it matter to me? I mean they had Spanish and lots of Spanish was everywhere, and so I just picked up Spanish, you know, to make friends. But that's not what counts. Their Spanish was not the language I needed. If they chose to work more on Spanish and not on English, none of my business. I did not care. I just try to learn English. When more Cape Verdeans came to this school I was like, okay, now I have more people to talk to. But that's just more friends, how you say it, for...social fun. It's not like I was learning more English then because now more Cape Verdeans. No, and, well, I told you the money is in the English.

Augusta shares that in many ways she feels that her Cape Verdean status today is better at school because there is more of them, but she cannot depend on friends because everyone is dealing with their own struggles. Augusta stretches her entire body on the floor of the stage floor and lets out a long sigh, as we finish. She starts singing. She lets me know that she is trying to say in her language that Cape Verde now haunts her; this is what the song means. She ends by stating that America is her reality now, but she's not living a dream.

### **Coming Home Through Language and School – Meet Cassou**

Cassou, unlike any other participant, had made it clear from the beginning that we would not be visiting her home. She commuted from a suburb next to A town for close to two hours to arrive to Immigrant High. She had started Immigrant High when she lived in the city and decided to stay with the school after they moved. She felt that coming to her home was not a good idea. She stated with pride that her life was centered on Immigrant High. This included

before, during, and after school. She made a point to say that even on Saturdays she came to Immigrant High to help the academic director with Saturday school. On the day of sitting for this interview, Cassou asked if we could first go to Dance Club, where she loved to dance with her friends. After watching and learning the steps of the Pasada, we walked down the hallway to get water. Cassou commented that she absolutely loved her after school clubs. She reiterated that she would stay at the school as long as possible each and everyday, and then inquired into what I wanted to know about her life. When we sat down to talk about her migration, Cassou started by relaying the impact of the earthquake in Haiti in 2010:

Okay first let me tell you that I'm like a different kind of newcomer because you see I had already been here. My mother's sister was living in Florida and then later in A Town. So I would actually visit her some summers, and then I would return to Haiti. But this was just for fun mostly, not like I was going to think of moving here. But then the earthquake happened, and well, it was devastating. You don't know Miss, I saw Haitian people literally on the streets screaming Jesus! and there were people lying dead on the streets. So terrible. There were people that had lost an arm or a leg just screaming. And well my grandmother and I had to find a safe place. I slept on a terrace for three days, without anything, but we were safe. The whole thing was really a nightmare and like really worse than even what they showed on the TV. But that was it for my mother. She decided I had to move to Haiti. I was so sad, leaving my grandmother. She took care of me.

Cassou shared more details about the earthquake, but she did not want to dwell on the details; she said it was just too much to explain with words. The earthquake took away her ability to stay in Haiti and enjoy the life she had there.

Cassou described growing up in Haiti as a life that was simple, but full of joy. Her mother worked for the government and was busy, and she said that the person who really raised her was her grandmother. Cassou said the relationship between her biological father and her mother was strained and she went on to describe how her mother's decision to have her as a baby was a conflict. Her father was out of their lives when she was young, and although she was still in contact with him, he was not really a part of her life the way she wanted. Cassou went on to



describe the relationship between her mother and her stepfather here in the United States. She was not happy with this relationship, and she said that she and her mother had a really hard time with each other because of this relationship. Cassou said this was not something she wished to speak more about and changed the subject back to Haiti.

As she recalled her childhood in Haiti, what stood out to Cassou was how much she loved learning, reading, and writing. She attended an all girls school in where there was a strict uniform code, strict teachers, and many subjects. She was captain of her basketball team, and she was doing well in school. She learned English in Haiti because they taught the basics, but she also described herself as self-taught. As an only child, raised by grandparents, Cassou said there was a lot of time for her to figure things out, and she sought out books whenever possible.

Cassou emphasized multilingual, multicultural context of Haiti:

Oh Haiti is such a beautiful place of language! I grew up knowing French, Haitian Creole, and then I learned some English, and I also wanted to learn Spanish. And this is like the place where it's like we are a poor island of hot people but it is soooo beautiful! On the streets you can just feel the culture and language everywhere... you really need to visit to understand. Even when we are sad we are talking and singing and dancing. Having Carnival is one example. Haiti is really example of where languages play together.

As Cassou shared more about her linguistic heritage she revealed an important part of her background that also made her want to learn Spanish. She said one story was an important one for her to share. Her grandfather was from the Dominican Republic and he had come to Haiti as a young man. After marrying her grandmother, a Haitian, they found themselves struggling financially. As a result he took a job working as a comedian where he wore large wooden yellow shoes. When Cassou was young her grandfather, now old and no longer working, gave her the shoes to teach her to work hard. Cassou recalled the sad memory of stuffing the shoes under her bed, and that later in life she came to recognize the struggle those shoes represented.

During the earthquake, however, she lost those shoes. She stated that she wanted to share this as an example of what she felt was important.

Cassou said that having some Dominican in her blood was not something her mother wanted anyone to know. Cassou expressed frustration for the Haitian people not being more open to what she saw as an opportunity, the racism towards Dominicans:

My mother said she does not mind the Dominican culture but she hates the people. I disagree. And I also think that the fights that people have been having for long time now are kind of weak. We are supposed to be global citizens and I cannot think of a better way than to want to know everything about everyone! So like me I want to know Spanish fluently because first of all I love this language like I love other languages but also because then I can be happier talking to more people in this world. I don't know but I am proud to tell this story of my grandfather and that is why I am going to publish this story for the book we are writing this year.

Cassou reiterated multiple times that she was so lucky to have found Immigrant High; her migration was really to this school. Cassou's feeling of safety after the earthquake was gained by her relationships to people in her new school. She described the principal and academic director of the school as her parents. Since the academic director had been to Haiti she often talked to him. Cassou emphasized her life at the school was her life from the beginning:

I'm addicted to this school from day one...seriously. From the first moment I arrived and that is why even when I moved from M town, which is like a neighborhood where so many Haitians live, to a suburb, and it was so far away I begged my Mom to not switch schools. We fought about it but I think she knew I could not live without this place. I am just so busy with school like from 5 am to 5 pm everyday.

Cassou went on to share more about the school, focusing on this rather than on her migration. She wanted me to know that she was part of student government, that she was taking leadership in the Haitian Club, and that she was going to be singing in that year's school musical. She said that she showed up before school, stayed after school, and came on Saturday to volunteer for programs as well.

As we left the school that afternoon, Cassou wanted me to see what was in her bag. On the footsteps of the school, she showed me all the books that she carried with her, so that she always had something to read, especially on the long commutes to and from school to home. She said that most books were in English and that one of the books she was starting to read was in Spanish. She wanted me to know that even though she was embarrassed to speak in Spanish when she first came to America, she was now getting good enough to translate between languages. As she put her headphones in her ear and walked to the bus, she turned around and smiled.

### **Synthesis**

One of the most salient expressions from beginning to end of this study was Mekseb, Naila, Lulu, Likica, Augusta, and Cassou's prefaces to explaining their experiences; they began beginning with the phrase, "In my country..." Although they had all lived in America, and attended Immigrant High for two years at the onset of this critical ethnography, their lives were located within a transnational context and understanding. At the level of personal biography, the transnational migration narratives of all six participants included multiple connections to living amidst systems of oppression, histories of colonization, and a critical recognition of the power of acquiring language in the midst of surviving these extant structures. Prior to arriving to the United States, all six participants had already been living within social contexts governed by modes of social control, including post war conflicts, unstable governments, and the subsequent impact on the their communities and families. These forces of conquest and domination occurred long before arriving the United States. This was an important finding with regards to understanding motivation to leave's one home country, and also with regards to how the signifying practices of language impacte0d these modes of survival. Although these young

people were dependent on their families' they were not typical teenagers. In many ways their circumstances and experiences plunged them into adulthood far earlier than the way we construct notions of adolescence and identity in the United States.

Their circumstances of emigration led to all six participants finding ways to cope and created particular perspectives on their situation in the United States. Mekseb and Naila, who both considered schooling as a vital space of escaping issues of survival from war, carried this attitude into their perspective at Immigrant High. Cassou, who had always found schooling to be very interesting and important, carried this attitude into disposition at Immigrant High. Likica and Lulu who had both questioned the role of the government in schooling, as well as had some negative experiences in their home country, carried perspectives of distrust when arriving to the United States. Augusta, who had questioned the purpose of her education in Cape Verde, continued to do so at Immigrant High.

The theme of poverty and instability as a result of issues in their home countries extended into the lives of all six participants. These economic struggles governed much of the decision to leave their home country. Mekseb's "survival run" from Eritrea to the United States was largely based upon the decision of escaping forced entry into military school governed by the ruling dictatorship in Eritrea. Her family was also doing everything possible to make ends meet. Naila's family survived the Rwandan genocide and her father's loss of employment with the French Embassy lead him to look for work in the United States. Likica's family suffered through economic struggles in Serbia, and she critically commented the role the government played in her country's struggles. Lulu's family sought to escape the economic conditions of Vietnam, as well as family hardship. Augusta commented on the lineage of struggles in Cape Verde with regards to issues of poverty, and the subsequent motivation of her family to pursue a

better life in the United States. Cassou commented on the impact the Haitian earthquake had on her country, which was already struggling economically. The larger social structure of the economy and the impact on issues of survival was a powerful set of experiences that set the backdrop through which education was both experienced and accessed.

Schooling in their home countries meant different things for different participants. The schools functioned as both havens of stability as well as vehicles to administer messages of the larger polity. Modes of surveillance and the culture of disciplinary power occurred through the site of schooling. Mekseb's academic success at her school in Eritrea, including her success with English, lead to surveillance of her being a potential chosen candidate required to go to military school. Lulu's school in Vietnam applied corporal punishment, a mode of disciplinary power, in a way that lead to her associated school and silence. Likica's family made adjustments to send her to a more stable school environment in Serbia. This school, however, served to promote and send messages around the current agenda of the government with regards to issues with Kosovo. Naila's interruption in schooling signified loss after the Rwandan genocide. Structural instability at various institutions forced many families, including her own, to scramble for work, forcing children to leave school. Naila's role was to leave school and labor at home taking care of her younger siblings and doing housework in order for her family to survive. Augusta recognized the politics of learning languages through school in Cape Verde as a powerful exertion of her family, in particular, wanting her to access languages of power in order to survive structural domains of power. Cassou came to understand school as a haven of learning in Haiti but this stability was quickly unsettled after the earthquake in Haiti. All of the students navigated issues of structural power as it related to the schooling institution prior to arriving to the United States. This created a framework through which they would take up or resist practices of at Immigrant

High. From this finding emerged one aspect of the important theme of survival; they already had a schema to what survival of disciplinary ruling meant and the power this would continue to play in their lives.

With regards to Spanish all the participants expressed varying experiences with the language prior to entering the United States. Spanish first signified fear for Mekseb at the border between Mexico City and the United States. Her first sense of isolation and power around the language existed within the context of a detention center, a strong example of the interpersonal domain of power manifesting itself within the disciplinary domain. Likica, on the other hand, first saw Spanish as a European language she wanted to study in Serbia as an elective. Upon arrival to the United States, she began to resent the power of Spanish in the context of her school/community. Naila and Lulu, in different ways, were overwhelmed with the demands of English. Thus, the role of Spanish in their lives simply did not hold as much weight, beyond recognition of its power in their neighborhoods upon arrival. For Cassou, Spanish existed as part of her personal biography stemming from her own roots as being part Dominican. This Dominican background, however, was almost a secret as a Haitian, as a result of familial struggles and racism around Dominicans in Haiti. For Augusta, the greatest challenge was the power English was playing in her life, and while she related to Spanish speaking peers, she did not emphasize learning the language.

For all the participants, English entered their biography from the standpoint of survival; the language became essential and necessary to seek both economic and social capital as they migrated to the United States. The role of Immigrant High in their lives was essential, though troublesome. The following chapter explores the experiences of language, power, and messages of meritocracy at Immigrant High.

## Chapter VI

### **IMMIGRANT HIGH**

Immigrant High is an example of a newcomer program that was designed to support language development along with acculturation into immigrant life. A common theme found in the mission statement of newcomer schools is “A passport to a new beginning!” (Short & Boyton, 2012). Immigrant High adopted a similar mission statement in constructing a program based on the notion of providing a better life for immigrant students who were recent arrivals to the United States. Immigrant High was also an institution of schooling operating through particular ideologies around language, immigration, and education.

The purpose of this chapter is to share the experiences of language and power at the site of Immigrant High. The sections of this chapter have been crafted to represent salient findings from the data while also continuing to present the voices of the participants. Continuing the metaphor of a braid, three distinct aspects of critical ethnography were weaved together in constructing this chapter: (1) the direct voice of the participants regarding their experiences at the school, (2) ethnographic details to bring the reader into the being with the participants at the school, and (3) the use of critical examples to highlight key findings. Key themes emphasized in this chapter are meritocracy, assimilation, and invisibility. The details included also illuminate the participants’ relationship to institution in terms of resistance/agency. At the end of the chapter, the application of the theoretical framework is discussed in relationship to Immigrant High to set a foundation for further theorizing and discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation.

### **Entering Immigrant High**

The front lobby of Immigrant High was like a tunnel, decorated to showcase the American dream. The bulletin boards were crafted with pictures of smiling immigrant youth, facial expressions full of hope and struggle. Under each picture was a short narrative of how and why students came to the United States. A web of distinct connections between students was highlighted; the students were connected by the sentiment of making dreams come true. The message at the front hallway of Immigrant High was clear: Students' hard work and education promised a future. Likica and Naila were featured on this bulletin board.

At the end of this hallway stood another set of doors leading into the main hallway of the school. The bulletin boards were signifiers of the criteria for success at Immigrant High. One bulletin board showcased students who had been "FLEPed." FLEP stood for Formerly Limited English Proficient. This board listed which students had tested proficient or advanced on the English Language Proficiency Assessment. Having FLEP status was important as it implied that students could perform coursework in English. Another bulletin in this main hallway displayed the names of students who had received admission into the various colleges in the area, including community colleges and larger universities.

The walk through Immigrant High was typical of a school smaller than most secondary public schools. Immigrant High consisted of three floors including a small cafeteria in the basement floor and an auditorium/gym on the first floor. The hallways were made up of classrooms, student lockers, and additional bulletin boards. Images and words on these boards signified themes around the purpose of schooling. Some boards showcased the work occurring in the classroom, focusing either on academic language and/or producing work in preparation for the AP (Advanced Placement) exams. Interspersed throughout the school were also boards



highlighting student clubs such as the Haitian Club, the after school dance club, or the academic book club. As signifiers to the culture of the school, the content of these boards highlighted important themes that emerged at Immigrant High. The following chapter focuses on these experiences.

### **Messages of Meritocracy at Immigrant High**

It was spring term and Likica was well into what was her senior year at Immigrant High. Likica had informed me that she had been asked to prepare questions, on behalf of the students, for an important visitor. Her tone was pressed as she let me know the following over the phone: “Arne Duncan is coming to visit the school! Ms. B asked that I speak. What will I say? I don’t think he will like what I have to say about this country.” Mr. Arne Duncan, the United States Secretary of Education, along with the Mayor and Superintendent of schools were slated to visit Immigrant High and attend a student town hall event. This event was focused on immigration reform and access to college. In coordination with this town hall, the school was also hosting a special meeting for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. This event came at the precise time that Immigrant High was not only getting attention in A Town, but at a time when such programs for newly arrived immigrants were being highlighted at a national level. The visit by Arne Duncan was also during a time when the Dream Act, a piece of legislation that would allow for undocumented young people to gain legal status, was being debated. Although the visit was canceled at the last minute, the preparation for it, nonetheless spoke of the culture at the school.

At the school level, the principal had adopted the language of “hard work equals success” as the school motto. This message was spread throughout each school assembly and large school event. Likica often spoke about her disappointment in the administration at multiple levels. She

felt there had been many empty promises made by the United States government in support of immigrant families. She also felt there had been promises that Immigrant High had made that failed to materialize. For her senior research project, which required studying a topic related to education, Likica decided to study the pressures of schooling. In her presentation of this project she commented: “The school is not realistic about what we can achieve and so many students are drowning. Even with support from my family to study and support from good teachers I felt I was drowning, just so much pressure.” Likica was acutely aware that the administration of the school wanted her to prepare questions that would impress the political visitors. This was in contrast to the powerful moments of struggle, disappointment, fear, and exhaustion. Likica had, after all, achieved the dream, including gaining admission to college. She was asked to represent this fulfillment of the promise of schooling. She was focused on preparing what was a proper set of questions to ask at the Town Hall, and so she did as she was told.

Preparation for Arne Duncan’s visit triggered critique from Augusta who was struggling with many aspects of language and schooling. The town hall was stated to be a gathering of a community to discuss important issues and voice concerns. But Augusta felt this was by far the truth. She stated:

Arne Duncan who? I’m gonna dunk him! Why they have Obama’s people coming to our school to just look good? They are using us to make some new poster on how they are taking care of us poor colored immigrant people who do not know English. Well, I’m not doing it. I’m not going to this assembly where also Ms. B wants to look good. Ms. B is like politician too. This is all so messed up because look at all the people who are failing at our school and not doing good like me. Are we going to talk about this? No!

Augusta’s anger was representative of many of the youth who were not only failing at school academically, but were also struggling to comply with school policies. These students were not asked to prepare questions for the Town Hall meeting.

Cassou's demeanor and approach afforded her the unofficial job of being an assistant to the administration. She was not only an ambassador to the school, but she was also a volunteer at Saturday school, and a tour guide to visiting guests. Cassou literally wore the American dream, showing off red, white, and blue on her backpack while alongside carrying a satchel, made from a fabric from her home country, filled with non school related books. Cassou showed incredible enthusiasm preparing for the visit. She enjoyed being a student ambassador. In addition she had adopted the strategy of "playing the game":

If you work hard, you don't complain, and you put your head down, but keep your head up, you are going to do well. This is the game you play. You are rewarded for your hard work and making good grades is not easy but it's important to show everyone what you know and how you worked hard to achieve the next goal for your dream.

Cassou was very straightforward about the power associated with being both proud and confident, while also being obedient and polite. To her, this was the way in which you could gain access to opportunity and advancement, including the chance to leave home and pursue higher education.

Mekseb, in many ways, agreed with Cassou around the efforts that each immigrant youth could make at the individual level (e.g. studying hard, learning English), but disagreed with regards to the politics of power associated with the relationships amongst staff and students:

Well I really think that if you want to come to this country then you should use the school to get what you need and if you work hard then you are going to get your dreams. I came to this country and almost died to get here so I'm not going to mess around. But it's not easy when teachers are unfair. When I first come to this school I was so lonely because it was like some teachers just did not pay much attention to people like me who were not speaking Spanish or who are not loudly asking for help. Even today I think that some people in my school are getting more opportunity to get things for college because they are like, how you say it, the favorites.

Lulu agreed with Mekseb on the issues of who is liked more or less within the school, in particular when it came to issues around appropriate use of English. To Lulu, the main message of opportunity and success was associated with the willingness to learn “correct English”:

Good English, you winner. Bad English, you loser. And you have to speak not be quiet like me. But getting good English is not like you just sit here in this school and get it. You have to make so much effort all the time and it all depends on your life how much time you have to do all that extra work. This is what people do not get! If you have a lot of, how you say that, things going on in your life, then it's hard to get extra time to work on everything. So all depends on the time and some days I just don't have the time, I need to get the right answers. I work and work but it's lot of stress. I wish the school had place for us to get help for this because then maybe I get better English. Like I am knowing lot of English when going to talk to doctors for my Mom but then this English is not the English that is needed at school to get the good grades on the test.

Lulu's comments came soon after she felt she had failed in getting the best possible options for college admission. She was also dealing with the added responsibilities associated with her mother's illness and doctor appointments. Lulu was constantly doing the work of language brokering, and had been quite successful at supporting her family in this way, but this was not the success that counted in “winning at school.”

Naila took a more passive and less vocal stance regarding visiting politicians, the politics of favoritism in the school, and the role of school to create opportunity. For Naila, it was about individual struggle. She was very focused on how this played the essential role in her success, rather than the system of school at play. For Naila, the “American Dream” was realized by pursuing schooling, and just having a school to go to was the starting point of stability. Very early on, when we first met, Naila described her interpretation of achieving goals:

Okay, it's like at least there are steps and I know I can get from here to there. Step one get to USA. Step two get to an okay school. Step three work hard. Step four get college admission. Step five get a good job. As long as I stay focused on those steps I'm not going to fail. And so that's what I do. Nothing much else bothers me.

The principal had nudged Naila to take additional Advanced Placement courses in her senior year, largely as a result of her success in her junior year. Her disposition of deference to authority figures at the school also led to this decision. But Naila soon found out that this added burden of advanced content knowledge was not what she was prepared to take on. Within a few months of this coursework, Naila was struggling. Her grades had gone down; she was burnt out. Her ethic of hard work did not meet her on the path of success. One of her teachers commented that Naila's struggle in school was a great example of the administration pushing students too hard to achieve something at the expense of their own health.

Naila expressed her disappointment in a moment of rare tears at the end of a school assembly. At Immigrant High, the resounding sound of "hard work equals success" was felt through powerful school assemblies. As if the achievement of grades and test scores were equivalent to the pursuit of academic sports, the school auditorium during such school assemblies felt like an American football field. Students were taught to roar with excitement for the students who had achieved success. Students who had met criteria for success received medals and gifts with school insignia. Teachers and administrators were expected to be the academic cheerleaders during these assemblies and students were not only required to attend but to applaud. And while many failing students slouched in their seats, passively participating, they also stayed silent; this was not a community based time to assert the need for help.

How well you did academically was the most important marker of not only success but also popularity at Immigrant High. Young people were popular for being smart, for knowing 'good English,' and for being able to secure various forms of social capital that were connected to gaining academic capital. The most popular and successful seniors were the students who were gaining interviews at the most prestigious universities in the area. These were the youth

celebrated in the school. These were the youth showcased through bulletin boards. These were the youth asked to make speeches for the visiting United States Secretary of Education; from the viewpoint of the school, these were the youth achieving the American Dream.

### **Academic English: The Golden Passport**

One of the most resounding themes and tensions experienced by all six participants was around the power of acquiring academic language in their varying classes. Content knowledge, and the ability to pass assessments, was hinged on acquiring academic English. Naila described this ‘school English’:

School English is like having a special passport in my back pocket and no one can take it away from me. It’s more than money because you spend money and it’s gone. With this school English I will be able to get into a college. It’s why my family came to this country ...

The general school culture was driven by this need to acquire ‘school English’ and this was in contrast to speaking English socially. Learning school-based English was an experience that could both afford or deny access to further education.

Likica, Naila, Mekseb, and Lulu all attended the same AP level Biology class together. The class was taught by one of the most respected and knowledgeable teachers in the school, who during this study, was nominated by students at the school and won a teacher of the year award at the school district. The classroom was split up in varying linguistic groups; there was one larger group of Spanish speakers, one smaller group of Haitian speakers, and the “international crew” as their teacher called it, made up of Likica, Mekseb, Naila, and Lulu. The groups were encouraged to work together and move between languages in order to gain access to the content. The “international crew,” however, only had English at their disposal. Consequently, the girls sat and talked through ideas in English, and then tried to access the dense academic language, scientific concepts, also in English. In addition they had to produce answers,

oral and written, through academic English. This experience mirrored the majority of their experiences at the school. Even though their science class was the most supportive for gaining academic English, it was still challenging. Likica commented:

You see Miss, this is where it gets so exhausting and this is our favorite class, but still... I swear I'm learning so many languages because in each class I have to learn the new words and comprehend too many ideas but still this is through English. And so we are English English English all the time but my brain is fried. I mean did you understand a single idea in our class today? And you are not new to this country. But that's the thing it's not really the English ... we have to memorize all these new ideas and we are not getting to go into our brain and use the language we already know to explain better what we need to know.

The hard work of learning English came in conjunction with the hard work of learning dense concepts through this school English. Despite the supportive academic environment in AP Bio, the “international crew” still struggled.

AP Geography, a class Cassou attended as a junior with Likica, Lulu, and Naila, all seniors, functioned differently. The teacher expected students to access the academic language of geography by listening to lectures spoken by him through academic English. And although the bulletin board behind his desk listed all the languages spoken by the students at the school, there weren't any linguistic groups set up by first language in the classroom. The instructor seemed quite removed from the students' lives. One such poignant moment was when he asked the students if they had ever flown in an airplane? The response was a great deal of muffled laughter, one student commenting how did he think they came to this country? The students sat in rows with AP preparatory textbooks opened. Each class was conducted by going over exam materials and he often referenced the goal of getting a good score on the AP examination. Students were so quiet that I had multiple observations in which neither Cassou, Likica, Lulu, or Naila ever spoke. Cassou, who was cautiously critical of the school, commented on the nature of this class and acquiring of academic English:

Oh my goodness isn't it just crazy that we are learning the geography of the world and we are the geography of the world in this class! Like really! and yet we don't ever say a word. He believes we need to just sit here and just take it all in and then we will just know. But really it's just too much of his English.

Cassou's reference to "his English" signified the power of this academic English language.

There was indeed a separation between Englishes, where "his English" was different from provided access for important matters of schooling. And it was indeed "his English" that many students knew was the key reason for speaking in the first place. Lulu critically questioned the need to participate in class, referring to capacity and energy it takes to learn language:

So many people think I'm in a bad mood and too quiet all the time, but I guess I'm not understanding what they want from me. How does speaking more going to get me a good score for college exam? In my country you have to memorize the material and then show that you have memorized on written exam. So here what is the point of discussing your opinion...The classes are so much new vocabulary you have to learn on your own. Just all this memory power is so much that it's actually very hard. So I stay quiet because why spend my English energy on speaking in class.

Mekseb, on the other hand, felt otherwise. She had assessed, that in the context of the United States, there was a necessity to learn to speak more advanced English. Her assessment was that gaining a more sophisticated way of speaking in English was different than speaking socially.

Mekseb commented:

I am so tired of getting points taken off in my Capstone class for not speaking up about our topics. I have a lot to say about this topic and a lot to share about my experience coming here but my tongue gets tied. That does not mean I am shy! I'm like really trying hard to get the words out and well it matters lot because not only is it my grade but in America you have to actually sound smart in English. You know for interviews, for jobs, and even just on the street. Here you have to sound smart. I think the school needs to work on teaching us this because it helps a lot. There should be a class on sounding smart in English.

Augusta stated that the failure of the school was not grasping that they needed English of varying forms and function, for both survival and initiation into this new country. Augusta commented:

I really don't want to come to this school anymore because it's way too much about college, not about life. Here many of us come to this country trying to figure out so much



in our life including keeping food on the table and working. This is truth and this school not supporting this. I wish the teachers understood that we want this survival English. English that helps us ... you know ... with life. So much of what we are doing here is a waste of time that I think I should instead be working at a job, at least there I would make money.

In conversation with each other during the focus group, the participants shared that the tension they felt around the use of Spanish in the school was also based on its relative use in gaining academic content. Mekseb juxtaposed the use of Spanish in her AP Biology class vs. the use of Spanish in her Humanities class during the focus group:

Okay, well you know how they all speak Spanish in AP Bio and then sometimes Ms. A will also speak back in Spanish with them because that helps them get what we are learning. I mean that makes sense, even though I don't get to do that. But then when we are all working on Capstone project and the Spanish students are all just talking in Spanish to each other to just you know waste time I think that is like not smart because they are not speaking English and so we also cannot understand.

Cassou immediately challenged this response based on her knowledge of Spanish:

Well, I agree that we should be focused but Mekseb how do you know what they are all saying in Spanish when you don't know Spanish? I know Spanish and that's just their style...I mean maybe sometimes they are messing around but a lot of times they are talking about the ideas in class, and it's like a mixture and that is how they roll.

To Cassou, acquiring school English was important as an entry point, but it did not need to end there. She was motivated to gain both social and academic Spanish at her school. Cassou described how Spanish functioned as linguistic capital outside of school:

How you get Spanish is up to you but it is everywhere in my school and in America so why not get it? I'm not losing anything here! So I'm not only learning Spanish but the principal wants me to try to take the AP exam in Spanish at the end of the school year.

Augusta discovered a connection in picking up Spanish for social connection to peers, but did not choose to learn Spanish in the same way as Cassou. Naila, Mekseb, Lulu, and Likica did not choose to learn Spanish through the school, with the exception of saying a few social words like

“Hola,” meaning hello, to their peers in the hallway. English, more specifically “school English,” or “his English,” was the “golden passport” of Immigrant High.

### **Language Police(y) at Immigrant High**

The participants’ expression of the importance of gaining academic English echoed language policies at Immigrant High. Driven by the larger policies of English-only legislation, as well as the tension and pressure of standardized testing, Immigrant High’s landscape was changing. The school, which had begun a decade before under different administration, was going through many changes during the time of this study, including language policy within the school. In the fall of 2006, I was a participant observer for a research project at Immigrant High. During this time, the school’s policy was to allow students to speak their first language in hallways, including social spaces such as the lunchroom, before, and after school. Many classrooms also encouraged students to access their first language to understand content. Although the non-Spanish speaking students did not have many peers to speak to during this time, the use of one’s first language was not a violation of school rules. For example, the two Gujarati speaking immigrant youth that I researched with at that time were in constant conversation with each other as sisters, for matters that were both social and academic.

During the time of this study, seven years later, the school had changed in many ways. The language policy of the school was largely framed around monitoring. A set of rules of when and where students could speak their first language was deemed appropriate by the administration. There were times, such as lunchtime, when it was okay for students to speak in their first language, but the general school culture mirrored an ‘English Only’ rhetoric. This was based on the rationalization that such monitoring by the adults in authority equated greater time

for students to practice English. The key form of discipline was shutting down the use of language.

On a number of occasions, I observed and noted students, mostly Spanish speakers, being called out in the hallway for not speaking in English. On one occasion, one of the participants in this study was reprimanded, representative of the language policing happening at Immigrant High. Lulu was speaking to her brother in Vietnamese in the hallway between classes. In that moment, the principal walked by and stopped. She stated with both body language and a firm tone that they needed to speak in English and get to class. After this incident Lulu entered her English class and put her head on her desk. Her friends asked her what was wrong but she refused to talk about what happened. Her teacher let her keep her head on her desk for the beginning of class; Lulu said she had a headache. Later on at lunchtime, when it was just the two of us, she shared her feelings of injustice in tears:

First I do not properly pass the stupid English exam and it's just so unfair that now the principal is making me in trouble because I'm not speaking English in hallway. So much pressure! And really this is so unfair. Everyday we are so alone in this school barely speaking anything and then just one time she is like waiting to point out mistake. She did not even ask what I'm talking about and I was just telling my brother where to meet me after school

The observation of Lulu being reprimanded in the hallway was one example of the school culture, where language policy, also included language policing.

Teachers, however, implemented language rules in differing ways, altering the classroom experiences of participants. In some classes like their AP Bio class, linguistic groups for the purpose of learning content were encouraged, whereas in other classes, academic English was demanded and the social use of one's first language was monitored heavily.

The English/Capstone class that Mekseb, Lulu, Likica, and Naila attended was learning about the education system during the course of this study. On one particular week, the students

were asked to read short articles and have a discussion on English-only language policy in the school system at large. On this particular day, there was contention in the classroom in relationship to what was happening at the school. Students were encouraged to debate. Mekseb commented:

Listen, if there are not laws and rules then people might not listen. So I think we need more teachers who are going to really focus on English in the classes because that is what we need. If teachers do not stop students from wasting time just talking about what party they went to that weekend or something then they are not really good teacher. So then I think it's okay to have rules about language, but I don't like that it is called English only law because it's not English only when you are an immigrant. It's English priority, not English only.

Mekseb focused on the issue of social use of language and the need for control, equating any loss of school time to less opportunity to know English. Likica, during this same class debate, related the issue of language control to new school rules around the school uniform. Likica, who felt she was an adult at the school, being older, commented:

I think it's how you say it? Um, lame. Yes, lame to think that we are little kids who need to be watched over like this. Okay, so for example we are right now being forced to wear the school shirt and well we are not children! First of all so many of us cannot afford to buy all these school shirts. Why are we asked to look same and talk the same when we are an international high school? And I think this kind of rules do not respect us as adults. We are adults as immigrant youth. Many of us are older and have so much life experiences. So I just think that the fact that we are not trusted is very disrespectful. And I think this kind of rules of clothes and language is like treating me like a kid.

Policy changes had indeed created a climate of policing at Immigrant High, and the issues of control were felt from signifiers on the body, clothing, as well as the tongue, language.

In reaction to these school policies, participants also engaged in modes of resistance, finding spaces and ways to ignore rules, especially around language. Augusta and Cassou, as juniors during this study, both had a study hall period within their schedule. Although the time was supposed to be for quiet attention paid to doing assignments, most students within this space used it to speak to each other in their first language. A member of the school support staff who

was a native Spanish speaker monitored study hall. She reminded students to focus on their work but did not police language use and social interactions. Both Augusta and Cassou, as the Haitian and Cape Verdean participants in the study, who also knew varying degrees of Spanish, always had peers to speak to during this time. The majority of this time, in fact, was spent, not speaking in English. On occasion, when a teacher or authority figure would walk into the room, the student assessed the person's position of power and reacted/changed their language use accordingly.

Augusta shared a great deal of her thoughts about the school, in general, during this study hall time. It was this space of school where she was most at ease. Augusta often kept one ear bud in her ear with Cape Verdean music playing, while she kept the other ear open to listen to what people at her table were saying. She described this space of resistance defined by her choice to disengage as one of healing:

Well, I know this is where I'm supposed to get my work done, but this is kind of place where I can, you know, breathe. So I just breathe, listen to my music. Sometimes we share what we are really feeling, you know, hard things about being here... And I need to be able to say that in my way with my language... This is the room where I can you know show that I got something to say and no one is standing over me like a policeman watching my every move.

Cassou also often played non-English music during this time, and she went back and forth between her computer/notebook. Cassou's most consistent mode during study hall was to work on non-academic related matters that often employed Haitian language/culture. Cassou showcased some of this work one afternoon stating: "See this is a poem I'm working on for Haitian club about who we are. I'm trying to figure out how to not use English to talk about our struggle you know so you can really feel it."

Both Augusta and Cassou relayed that study hall was not for study. The power of both language policy within the school, as well as the pressure to learn academic English, positioned them to seek out spaces, like this one, for resistance. Despite the powerful language policies at play at the school, as well as the varying means by which language was both expected and controlled, the youth in the study continued to both appease and react. These located sites of both expression and resistance occurred in unofficial school hours as well.

### **“Clubbing” at Immigrant High: Cultural Hybridity & Resistance**

Immigrant High, like most secondary schools, sponsored and created spaces for young people before and after school. Although bound by the institutional structure of schooling, these activities expressed a different side of the young people. Vibrations of the dominant school culture appeared in instances. For example, the school wide musical that Cassou participated in largely consisted of songs that were about the American Dream, and the clothing on the day of the musical featured red, white, and blue. But for most of the participants, the action of “clubbing” after school was around creating agency and locating a hybrid space between languages.

Cassou’s participation in the afterschool Haitian Club was an example of a group that had sprung up based on students organizing around their national origin. The club’s agenda was to honor their country’s struggle, and particular attention was paid to the earthquake that had impacted so much of the Haitian community. The students in the club were interested in bringing Haitian pride to the meetings, and to the whole school. Cassou invited me to attend one of the meetings during which we watched a low budget Haitian film whose theme was around surviving economic crisis. The film was also comedic in nature, and the students all enjoyed sharing pizza, laughing, and nodding their heads up and down, as a young couple did all things

necessary to make it to America. The Haitian Club connected Haitian students at the school during such meetings as well as presented their Haitian language, songs, and clothing at selected school events. The principal commented that the Haitian club was a great example of being a proud immigrant.

Augusta's creation of agency through "clubbing" was largely located around music and dance. Her invitation for me to attend dance club with her was one of our first interactions. The bell had rung only a few minutes earlier that afternoon. I immediately saw how the classroom space was transformed to create a dance floor. Desks were all pushed to the side to create a large rectangular space. One youth's phone was attached to a small speaker; music that was a hybrid combination of the latest hits in English, with Spanish as well, played loudly. There were about twenty young people dancing in the open space. The sponsoring teacher stayed at her desk in the back working on grading papers. The dance that was being danced/performed by the students was called the Pachanga, a dance of the Latin world that was likened to the Salsa but with its own distinct rhythm and steps. I recognized the dance since Immigrant High had now included learning the Pachanga as part of its curriculum; I had walked by a teacher teaching it as part of a movement class to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. At first, Augusta stayed near the speakers and just bopped her head up and down, but after a few minutes she was ready to dance, laughing and smiling. She also ushered me to the dance floor and commented on music and language: "Let your hair down Miss. This is where it is at. I know the steps but you don't need to know them. Just move to the music, it does not matter that you don't understand the words." About halfway through the club "meeting," Cassou entered the classroom announcing to everyone she just had too many club meetings that day. She asserted her dance moves by entering the dance floor and then shortly thereafter, commented she had another meeting, and danced out of the room.

Both dance and music functioned as powerful sources of expression for Augusta and Cassou at the school including Cassou's participation in that year's musical, as well Augusta's role in assisting with dance choreography for two different assemblies, all featuring music in this genre. Augusta's Cape Verdean and Cassou's Haitian background were also the larger dominant language groups in the school, next to the Spanish speakers. Essentially, at this point in the school history, many Spanish, Cape Verdean, and Haitian students were involved in creating spaces together as the larger more dominant groups in the school.

Likica, Naila, Mekseb, and Lulu, representative of the non-dominant groups in the school, never attended dance club or participated in any of the school musical programs. In fact, as a group, they decided to boycott all school dances and their senior prom. Prom became an important place of contention/resistance. The students spoke up about this during the focus group. Cassou asserted that they needed to attend prom, and Likica responded:

Okay, listen when I first came to this school I went to a school dance. And I am not kidding you there was not a single song that was not in Spanish. And well then how everyone acts, like they own the music. You are either part of this or you are not. I stood at the corner of the gym and did not dance once. At least if there had been some English music we might have had some place to dance. But no this was just all their music, their dances, and so I stopped going. Prom is not going to be any different. Why would I spend hundreds of dollars when I'm not going to enjoy this? Prom is for some students at this school, not for all of us.

Cassou responded by stating that they should all bring their music and ask everyone to listen to their music. In response to this, Lulu rolled her eyes, sighed, hit her hand on the desk to get everyone's attention and said:

Yeah, right. If I play some Vietnamese beats everyone will leave the dance floor. Because it's also that we just don't party like that. We have fun but not that way. I'm not going to prom because I agree it's just a waste of time and money.

Naila, Mekseb, Lulu, and Likica maintained their position of not attending prom; they referred to it as a boycott, a form of protest. Solidarity was formed around this issue. At the same time they



sought out the construction of a new social space for students like themselves. They wanted to start their own after school club and Mekseb referred to this club to exist “for all the other students in the school...” The “other” students in the school were representative of the non-Spanish, non-Cape Verdean, non-Haitian students in the study.

Naila, who rarely stayed after school, noting the long commute, homework, and responsibilities of taking care of her siblings, showed interest in this new club commenting that she wished it had existed a long time ago. She took lead at the first organizational meeting:

Okay, so we can be like the international club like Ms. A calls us the international crew in class. I think this should be a time when we can just hang out and share, you know share music, share stories, or even just vent... And yeah I think because we all can speak to each other in English then English is the language of our club but that does not mean we can be who we want to be just that we will likely be speaking in English, you know.

Seven students attended two meetings of the International Club. During those two meetings, Naila’s original charge of it being an open space for exploration of sharing, music, and hanging out, existed, mostly through English. Likica commented on this as she shared some of the songs on her phone: “It’s so nice to share the music I often listen to and listened to back in my country. Yes they are English songs but they are important to me.” For varying reasons, including the participants’ after school jobs and my own inability as a researcher to serve as an adult liaison to this club that spring, the club never took off beyond two meetings. However, what was striking to note was the way in which this group of four, who had shown resistance to a community event like prom based on issues around language/music, also created their own space around language/music. Here, in this hybrid space, English became a language of unity.

### **Synthesis**

Messages of meritocracy and the hegemonic domain of power are built around the belief that one of the great equalizers of society is in fact the institution of schooling. Immigrant High,

a school designed to support the education of immigrant youth, was built upon this promise. This promise relied heavily on encouraging and waving the “hard work equals success” banner. Immigrant High was in fact an unequal playing field, and the struggles, and access to opportunity, by all the participants were dependent on issues of social and linguistic capital. In addition, the larger debates on immigration, educational policy, and language policy around English, vibrated through the powerful politics and visiting politicians at the school. The young people in this study took up many of these messages, while also resisting them. In some instances, these young people were able to exert agency, and in other instances, they expressed defeat, in particular when it came to academic success. Methods of surveillance, a mode of the disciplinary domain of power, proved to also be a key issue at Immigrant High.

The six participants rationalized, in varying degrees, the belief that the purpose of schooling was in fact to gain access to the most powerful form of capital, the English language. The system of Immigrant High, including policies and rules, were also rationalized as ones to appease to, despite disagreement. Cassou’s reference to “put your head down but keep your head up” and “playing the game” were, to some extent, the mode through which all participants operated. Yet, their ability to be successful at “the game” varied greatly. Naila and Lulu, who were the most inclined to see school as a set of steps, a checklist of marks and success, both expressed a sense of bewildered failure during the time of this study. Likica, who researched the pressures of schooling, along with Lulu, openly spoke about the tension felt between accessing the academic language in multiple content areas through English, while simultaneously learning English. Mekseb and Naila focused a great deal of their reaction to failure/success based on individual effort, or “hard work.” Both agreed, however, that the relative degree to which effort created results was based on multiple factors, including teachers’ pedagogical styles, classroom

climates supporting the access of academic English, and general favorability towards some students. Although all four seniors in the study gained access to college admission at the end of the school year, the overall sense of exhaustion and dislike for the school was largely attributed to a sense of failure around learning the English language. Augusta, a rising senior at end of this study, was in fact almost held behind an additional year; she considered quitting school all together. While they were told college would have its own challenges the smaller sized community at Immigrant High had created a culture in which more was also expected in terms of a feeling of belonging and connection.

The sense of belonging to Immigrant High was also a key factor in the students' experiences and this was in relationship to the interpersonal domain of power (Collins, 2009) and a strong example of social capital as a signifier of language. Cassou's relative ease in accessing both language and success at the school was in relationship to her ability to also garner a great deal of social capital with the administration; for Cassou, the school was a haven of safety and a place she wanted to spend most of her time. Juxtaposed to this sense of belonging at the school was Augusta's experience. While Augusta agreed that the school played an important role in teaching English for immigrants, she was very critical of the school's inability to look beyond academic goals. From her viewpoint, the school's sole focus of accessing higher education as the America dream was a myopic look at the lives and challenges of immigrant youth like herself. In this sense, the powerful school environment created not only criteria for success, but also criteria for belonging. The social capital garnered by each student impacted their overall experience.

The relative degree to which the dominant school languages were either taken up or rejected by participants also impacted the sense of belonging to Immigrant High. Called the

“international crew” by teachers and themselves alike, Likica, Lulu, Mekseb, and Naila’s linguistic backgrounds did not represent those in which a community of speakers existed. Consequently, whether they were in their classrooms, learning academic content, or trying to create their own club after school, English was the only option for language connection amongst each other. And while this proved to show that English was a language of unity, in their case, there was also a paucity of linguistic connection to their home languages/cultures provided by the school. In the rare instance that one of their home languages was spoken, like Lulu in the hallway speaking to her brother, she was reprimanded for not speaking in English. Despite their connection through English, they continued to feel othered as the “other students” at the school. Such reaction and resistance came out in moments such as protesting the prom vocally, or the opposite, becoming more silent at the school.

Juxtaposed to the “international crew” were Cassou and Augusta’s relative interest in mingling and creating hybrid space; these two students were members of linguistic groups at the high school that held more status. Immigrant High’s Cape Verdean and Haitian population were large enough for the opportunity for linguistic/cultural connection to be experienced both inside and outside of the classroom. The dance club, Haitian cultural club, and other school-sponsored events, including school curriculum and school assemblies, featured signifiers of this population. Despite language policy promoting English only, these students found agency in speaking with peers of their linguistic background or expressing their language in sites of resistance, like study hall. In addition, their relationship to Spanish, as a language spoken more widely both inside and outside of school was not contentious. They were both on the inside and outside of this dominant culture.

Immigrant High's greatest promise was for students to achieve the dream of gaining access to higher education. All four seniors in the study did "achieve this dream," but at the expense of what they described to be a schooling experience that was often filled with struggle rather than hope, and isolation rather than inclusion. Considering Immigrant High's focus and mission were based upon supporting newcomer immigrant young people, the messages of meritocracy reflected the hegemony of the larger society, rather than the understanding of these young people as transnational nondominant young people living out migration narratives. While this is a structural aspect of American schooling, in general, reflecting the power of the role of institution and power, many newcomer programs such as Immigrant High are originally envisioned underneath a different platform, one in which such meritocracy is challenged. Unfortunately, during this particular school year the messages of meritocracy, common to secondary education were greatly felt at the site of school questioning again what the purpose was of segregating this newcomer program. Spending time with the young people outside of school walls, in places such as home, church, and places of work allowed for additional exploration. This is the topic of the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### **OUTSIDE OF IMMIGRANT HIGH**

Research has shown that newcomer immigrant youth negotiate a number of roles outside of school including holding official jobs outside of the home, supporting families through unofficial labor inside of the home, and seeking out resources to access higher education, all of which involve the negotiation of language. Newcomer youth are also members of institutions such as churches and community organizations that connect them to language and religion. In addition, outside of school, immigrant youth navigate a land of language through digital literacy practices connecting them to their transnational identities (Lam, 2009; Oikonomidou, 2015).

The purpose of this chapter is to share the experiences of language and power in contexts outside of Immigrant High. The sections of this chapter have been crafted to represent salient findings from the data while also continuing to present the voices of the participants. Continuing the metaphor of a braid, three distinct aspects of critical ethnography were weaved together in constructing this chapter: (1) the direct voice of the participants regarding their experiences in varying places including work/church/home, (2) ethnographic details to bring the reader into the being with the participants within these contexts, and (3) the use of critical examples to highlight key findings. The details within this chapter also illuminate the participants' relationship to moments of resistance/agency as key themes. At the end of the chapter, the relationship between these experiences to the theoretical framework is discussed to set a foundation for further theorizing and discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation.

#### **The Film Spanglish**

It was autumn. The “international crew,” the four seniors in the study, decided to get together at a home during a day off from school. They wanted to relax by hanging out and

watching a film together. Between all of their schedules, jobs, and commitments to family, and the varying neighborhoods in which they lived, it was rare for such a gathering to happen. On that cold afternoon, after ordering a pizza, they all sat down and commented that they wished they had more time in their lives to connect in this way outside of school.

They chose to watch Spanglish that day, a film that began and ended with a strong female teen character, narrating her life story through the words of her college admission essay. Her college essay and the film highlighted how she experienced issues of language and power as an immigrant teen. At first, Lulu was hesitant to watch because of the title signifying Spanish; she commented that she would not relate. However, ten minutes into the film, she was laughing, and settling into an experience that stimulated a lot of discussion afterwards. Naila, who usually stayed quieter in school, had a lot to say. She spoke about the role the teenage daughter played as a language broker:

Oh my gosh that part of the movie when the girl has to like go back and forth and back and forth between the guy and her mother! That is something that I think becomes like the biggest job. I'm always translating for my family for so many things. Just last week I was translating for someone at our church. And just like that girl sometimes I don't know if I'm going to translate like each and every word directly. Sometimes I cannot, but yeah it is a lot of work.

Lulu, Mekseb, and Likica agreed, nodding their heads, shared the ways in which they all played some role of being a language broker in varying spaces outside of school.

The four girls also openly talked about issues of language and power through the film. Mekseb and Likica narrated the juxtaposition of the two mothers in the film, one who was the housekeeper for the other:

The parts that made me angry was the white Mom because she just thinks that the way they are is just so better. She thinks her money makes her so smart! So she wants to push her own way of doing things to make the Spanish daughter like her. She thinks somehow the Spanish daughter is like poor but the Spanish Mom is like uh uh no way this is not how you are going to think about yourself, you are going to have pride!

To this Lulu responded:

Yeah but that is how it is here. Everywhere we go we have to worry about making sure the American people are going to be okay with how we serve them. Like when I was working in a Vietnamese restaurant this was part of our training. Then also we have to be good because we cannot get into trouble. I love the part of the movie when the Spanish Mom speaks up and then the American Mom cannot say anything. Just quiet. Ha! She could not talk anymore! because the Spanish Mom was like no way you do not own my family.

The act of watching Spanglish together highlighted the ease through which the participants were able to express aspects of their lives outside of school that were not possible within the walls of the school. This chapter continues to follow Augusta, Cassou, Likica, Lulu, Mekseb, and Naila, through experiences outside of school, including jobs, churches, social gatherings, and college visits, exploring issues of language and power, including the way in which they located my role as researcher outside of school walls.

### **Working Outside of School**

All of the participants considered themselves to have multiple jobs outside of school. Some of these jobs included unofficial roles such as translators for their families or helping with domestic responsibilities. Official positions included working in the food service industry, selling concessions for a baseball stadium, and assisting with the Saturday program at Immigrant High. The participants had varied experiences with these forms of labor, bringing up issues around language and power.

Augusta worked in the food industry, assisting with food preparation/food orders at a popular sandwich establishment housed within one of the large train stations in A Town. She took two forms of public transportation and worked every possible hour she could manage to earn extra money for her family. She described the way in which she felt she was evaluated in terms of language, on a train ride that we shared one day:



Okay so the people come up to me and I give them a big smile and say how I can help you? You know. And well, then they make their order. So I'm listening you know, but sometimes they talk in English so fast and with different accent. So sometimes I have to say can you say that again? And well, then it's like who knows what happens next. A lot of times they look at me so annoyed. Like I'm wasting their time. And well I just keep smiling but on the inside I'm burning up. I speak good English, but oh God! just give me a second okay? But I have to be careful because my boss is watching and I have to keep smiling.

Watching Augusta at her site of work juxtaposed the way I had seen her within the context of school. At her job, she asserted a scripted type of English to patrons. She considered her use of language, including her body language, a type of survival for the role. As her co-workers moved between English and Spanish at work, Augusta found herself feeling more left out than at school. At Immigrant High, Augusta did not experience the same racial/linguistic tension. Unlike her job, she was at ease with the Spanish speaking population. At work, however, as the solo Cape Verdean speaker, she felt excluded. During the focus group, she related this experience at her job back to Likica, Lulu, Naila, and Mekseb:

I'm the only Cape Verdean at my job and I see why you are saying that you feel left out here at school. Like if everyone speaking was speaking in Spanish you don't know what they are saying. And well I never knew how much Spanish counted until I started working.

Augusta was eventually let go from this job. When I inquired into what happened she expressed tensions between race and language:

Okay, so it was so messed up. And well one day I was just like I cannot take this anymore. These people I work with were talking in Spanish behind my back and then leaving me with the dirty work. They also told lies about me to my boss who is always giving me a hard time because of my accent. They are Dominican, I'm Cape Verdean but we are sweatin' the same things! So I just decided I cannot take it anymore. They can have it. I need this money but I cannot be leaving work crying everyday. And well I lost it on my boss. I took off my apron, called him a racist, and then he told me to not come back.

Augusta's recognition of the role Spanish played in terms of exclusion was based on the context of her job. In addition, she was also recognizing that survival at the sight of work was dependent on playing to the particular need to speak politely, act correctly, and do so in English.

The importance of context and the role of Spanish, were also experienced by Likica, Mekseb, and Naila in their jobs working concession stands at the large baseball stadium in the city. Many students from Immigrant High were hired to work here during the spring/summer season. Likica, Mekseb, and Naila were part of a community of students from Immigrant High that worked at the same job. In interacting with their peers outside of school in this way, Mekseb found that the social time helped her gain both connection and respect, including with her Spanish speaking peers:

I think the best part of this job is the way we are becoming friends. And I guess I'm figuring out that we are a lot alike. We are going through the same struggles. We are taking care of each other. We don't only sell food for people who come to the games, we also help each other. My friend really appreciates how much we can talk in English together because she said her English is improving by sharing concession stand with me.

At the baseball stadium, Mekseb began to appreciate how the multilingual context through which they were working was an asset. Likica also agreed that this job allowed her to see Spanish differently. At the beginning of the study, both Mekseb and Likica had commented on their sense of isolation around Spanish speakers. At school, they both agreed with such decisions like boycotting prom based on their evaluation of dominant culture. Through their jobs working the concession stands with other immigrant youth, they started to see Spanish count differently.

Likica said:

So this stadium we work at brings like thousands and thousands of people! And so many of them know Spanish. When they recognize that one of us speaks Spanish they talk in Spanish with us. I don't think I realized how much Spanish is part of living here in America. I think it might be a good idea to learn Spanish, and I'm thinking of doing a minor in Spanish in college maybe. I want to be a teacher and I think knowing the language will be good for job.

The linguistic capital associated with Spanish shifted for Likica, and was more accepted by Mekseb through the site of work. Naila, in addition, agreed that knowing Spanish was helpful to living in the United States context. She commented:

What I saw at the baseball stadium is what I saw at the airport when arriving to America. English is the first language of America. Spanish is the second. Even when I take care of phone calls for my family, the operator will say press one for English, press two for Spanish. But I also know that Spanish is not for me right now because my brain does not have space for more language. Someday, maybe, but not now. It's cool though to work here because I'm seeing more of what is America than at school.

The politics of exclusion, for Augusta, and a sense of inclusion, for Mekseb, Likica, and Naila, within the context, altered the way Spanish was signified as language of power, or a language that made one feel powerless.

Cassou's entire life revolved around Immigrant High; the school was the place where she experienced the kind of stability she did not find outside of school. Although Cassou commuted the farthest to get to school, Cassou was one of the first to show up and one of the last to leave. She also insisted on coming to school on Saturday as well. Cassou was given unofficial and official jobs to support the administration and the Saturday school program. Cassou considered her jobs seriously, and in essence, her life revolved around both learning and working at Immigrant High. Cassou gained a great deal of knowledge regarding how to manage people and situations. Cassou described her jobs to me one day:

Okay so it's my job to make sure I take care of myself because well I'm the only one who really can. And this school takes care of me so I take care of this school. Give me a broom, I will sweep the floor! Last Saturday I worked on bulletin boards after I assisted with the Saturday school. And I'm also learning a lot about managing people and organizing things. And everything I do I am practicing how to speak so that I can be more successful.

Cassou maximized on her linguistic abilities. Her life outside of school did not have the kind of stability she needed and working was stress relief. Cassou summarized:

I'm more than happy to work. Work at school. Work on learning. Work on language. Give me something to do, and I'll do that. I'll read more books, and I'll do more jobs. As long as I can just keep my mind with something, and I'm working at a job of doing something, I'm going to be okay. I have to do this because it's how I get through other tough things.

Lulu's description of work involved the unofficial work of home. On visiting Lulu's home, she opened up to me about the varying unofficial jobs she had in her family that year:

My main job is to be a good daughter so that things are taken care of. And well being a good daughter means that I have to make sure my Mom has someone who can help her. I especially make sure that she has someone to help her with English for her appointments. And then I also help with things in the house. My Mom does cooking but I help with cleaning and taking care of the house. I mean I also spend time relaxing online watching stuff in Vietnamese and listening to music in my room, but I am mostly doing lots of jobs.

The context of work with familial duties, however, proved to be upsetting as well to Lulu, especially as the stress of school increased. She described feeling down, especially when she could not take a job at the stadium with her peers at Immigrant High. There simply was not enough time for her to do this with her added responsibilities. To offset some of her loneliness outside of school, Lulu joined a group of people who would just meet up at a local park and talk, and she said one of the foci was learning to be more social. Issues around isolation and disappointment at school had made Lulu less willing to speak, no matter which language. She commented that this time in the park was also like a job for her:

This is not a job I'm getting paid for, but I feel like it's a job to do. I need to learn to be more open but I guess I'm not so good at being open. And then I think is it my English? Maybe, but I think it's mostly that I don't know I'm different. I'd rather just be listening to my kind of music and all that. So I work on being helpful to my Mom and I work on joining this group, and I learn more English. But I'd rather just not work at all.

All six participants navigated various contexts of labor and experienced those contexts through issues around language, power, voice, and silence. Issues around language impacted everything from keeping employment, for Augusta, to not taking on formal employment, for Lulu, so that

she could labor in the unofficial role of being a language broker for her Mom at her medical appointments. The role of labor, language, and home, impacted Likica and Naila as well in particular in their role of providing English support to their younger siblings.

### **Transnational Connection, Tension, and Restoration**

Students experienced transnational connections through community centers, churches, or through digital spaces online, outside of school. These contexts provided agency for participants to actively speak in their first language while also negotiating their use of English. The status of being an official institution, such as a church, impacted the level to which English played a role as a language of power. Unofficial contexts such as Skyping with family from the site of home or meeting with speakers of the same language created the most agency for experiencing transnational communication.

Mekseb's transnational connection to her home country of Eritrea was largely with and through the Eritrean Community Center, an organization that was started in order to provide a space for immigrants from Eritrea to gather socially, politically, and to promote youth leadership. In addition, many in the Eritrean community, including Mekseb's family, were affiliated with and through their gathering at a large orthodox church, a church that shared space with members of the Ethiopian community as well. Naila's family was also closely affiliated to their church; each Sunday, they joined community members from the African immigrant diaspora, including some Haitians, who listened to sermons in French. Both Mekseb and Naila relayed the complex issues of language, survival, and transnational identity in these out of school spaces.

Upon arrival to Mekseb's church, she immediately switched to her Tigrean tongue, a language she spoke from the beginning to the end of the church service. Mekseb described to me later the essence of why church was such an important part of her community:

I cannot think of one person at my church who has not had to survive something. The situation in Eritrea is bad and we have to stick together. And because we have each other here it helps because we are stronger here. We can face it together. But of course that does not mean there are not issues even. Like we have tension with Ethiopia back home, and we also can have that tension here at the church. But for me I come here for peace. I close my eyes and hear the words I know so well, and I ask for peace.

Naila also relayed the way her family related to church and survival after we listened to a sermon entirely in French:

We go to church to be grateful. Grateful for surviving because guess what? I bet you each and every person can tell you of someone who died. So then it's like okay God why I made it here? So yeah we go to church and say thank you and well honestly I sometimes don't really listen to the sermon. Yeah it's in French but the person preaching is often talking about God fearing things, and I don't think he remembers that we survived. We don't need more fear. So yes I don't like sometimes what they are saying but it does not matter. We come here together and maybe even to cry about what we lost.

Mekseb and Naila both relayed the importance church played in having a sense of connection to transnational identity, honoring suffering and connection to what they both called spirit.

English as a signifying language for survival as immigrants became a contentious issue in both church sites. From the perspective of some in leadership at both churches, there were not enough spaces that supported/promoted the acquisition of English in the community. In addition, the status given to the English language was in relationship to the survival of families, in particular jobs that allowed for economic self-sufficiency. For many in the community, their space to gain language was the community center and church. Consequently there was a tension as to how much English vs. mother tongue should be the priority. Mekseb commented:

At the church & cultural center I feel relief. I am in middle of the language that brings me home, but I also know that without more English, many people cannot get the jobs they want to get. And this is where we all gather. So it's like what do you do? And then there are the people like my cousins where English is their first language because they were born here. And well I don't think there is a right answer. We have different things we need and yet this is the place where we can come together.

Naila relayed her opinion on language, family, and church in the same way that she relayed her belief that English connected people at school. According to Naila, there was a reason why language served particular purposes in any given context, including the reason of unity at her church:

Okay so people actually come to this church because it is in French. So as you know there are many African communities that speak French because we were taken over and then this was our language. So someone like my family from Rwanda who also speaks French can be in same church as someone else who also speaks French. So then French is bringing us together at church and if the point is to understand each other at church, then I think French is important. I'm not saying we should not speak English at church. But I'm not sure it would work to push English at church. Maybe it's better to leave that outside since we are not there to learn language, just listen to sermons.

Mekseb's involvement with the Eritrean Cultural Center was situated with and through her family's belief that it was their responsibility to stay politically active with what was happening in Eritrea. Here, too, the issue of language played both an important role, and was also a place of tension. Mekseb commented on a trip she was about to take with her family and members of the Eritrean Cultural Center to Washington D.C., situating English as the language of political power:

We are all going to Washington D.C. to be part of the protest for what is happening in Eritrea. There is going to be a lot of time for us to be together. Many of the elders want us to keep speaking to each in Tigrinya and to fight with our language. I think it is so important for us to speak about what is happening in English. We need to make people aware! And so I think again it really depends, and I don't think there is a right answer. Sometimes you need to speak about powerful things with ... you know powerful words!

Although Naila was not involved in political activism in relationship to issues still happening in Rwanda, she did agree that it was because of the connection of language at her church that allowed people to connect on important matters, including around immigration and paperwork. To share information about this was a form of activism to Naila. She commented that it was

important for people to have church and connect on these matters because this is how community helped each other:

I think what happens after the sermon is just as important. And there is a lot of advice you can get that might be really important. For example, like immigration paperwork. And well, if you need to talk about these private things I think you really need to be able to do it with private language. So I think there is another reason for there to be a time and place for having your language to feel safe with.

Connection to transnational identity and language, and even political activism, were important considerations for attending church and community centers. These were not possible for all the participants. Likica reflected on this loss of community and its relationship to transnational connection and language:

The worse part about living here is not having a connection to being Serbian. I mean there is like maybe some biscuits from my country at one store, and I know we can Skype and call family back home, but that is really it. I never missed idea of having church or something back home in Serbia but here I think maybe that kind of place would be so helpful for my family. There are a lot of issues still happening in Serbia and we also have so many challenges! But we are kind of alone. Serbia is inside my house, but that's it.

Augusta shared that her family did not attend church, but she commented that the Cape Verdean community that she was a part of connected in more informal spaces. She used the metaphor of church to describe the nail salon:

Yeah you see people think it's about getting nails done, like why you spending money on that and judge me, but for me it's where I go to connect. It's like a church for me! But no one is like preaching. We ... you know ... talk. Like really talk. We get our nails done and speak and just get it all out. Because we all come from same situation, and then when we talk about it all and just relax for a minute.

For Augusta, Mekseb, and Naila, an actual physical space of church, cultural center, and nail salon brought them a sense of transnational connection outside of school. For Likica, the lack of this physical space was a part of her sense of isolation; she only counted on her family for this connection. Cassou and Lulu, on the other hand, described and spent a great deal of their out of



school time connecting online. Texting, Skyping, and Facebook were all examples of this online communication and most of the time, they communicated in English. While all participants did this, for them, this was the most important place for them to locate both a sense of restoration and connection to transnational identity, language, and community. For Lulu and Cassou, their home lives positioned them to seek out and locate a way to find connection away from some of the instability in their home life. Lulu commented:

I don't go to a church outside of school and yeah there are Vietnamese people here but my family does not have a lot of time for this because even on weekends there is work. But I'm always connected to what I find online. I go and chat with people who are listening to same music and watching same films and that is actually what I do to relax. I am always connected through my computer and my favorite thing to do is to be in my room and doing this.

Cassou, who spent a great deal of time independently, including a great deal of time on public transportation transported herself to books, varying online spaces, and commented that it was here that she belonged:

You know it's like I put my headphones in and the noise disappears. All that noise in my house or just the noise from life. And I so I can be in the middle of watching something in Haitian Creole but also be watching something in Spanish. And then I can also be listening to some music playing that is just great in English. And I can do this anywhere, all the time. Outside of school I spend a lot of time going from here to there or in my room connecting. Here it is like, okay.

Varying contexts outside of school allowed participants to use languages that connected them back to their home countries. Hand in hand, formal institutional spaces, the churches and community center Mekseb and Naila navigated, also signified certain issues around English and power. For Augusta, Lulu, and Cassou, unofficial spaces of transnational connection proved to be beneficial for restoration, and were largely navigated through their own choices around language. For Likica, both a lack of Serbian community and active presence of finding other

Serbian like herself lead her to feel isolated, even questioning whether this was the right city to have come to.

### **My Story Is For Sale?: Out of School Activities and Selling Diversity**

For five of the six participants, the primary purpose of immigration and schooling was the pursuit of higher education. Even Augusta, who was unsure of this path, believed society evaluated her progress against this goal. Four of the participants were in their senior year at Immigrant High, and the other two were in their junior year. Consequently, out of school time included the work of applying for college, as well as navigating opportunities for college entrance. Issues of language and power mingled between what newcomer immigrant ELL status signified. Participants realized that their own identities as newcomer immigrant youth were narratives that, in moments, held capital. This included a growing awareness that their story, not necessarily their struggle, was being sought out in the name of diversity.

It was a blistering cold day and the participants had come downtown to get advice and resources around filling out FAFSA forms for college. The organization providing this service was committed to getting more young people into college. They were particularly interested in promoting diversity and achievement. In the pristine lobby of a very corporate building, Immigrant High youth had gathered that late morning. They were chatting about the stress of the cost of college. A few youth commented on the stress of having proper paperwork. Naila stood there quietly, with her head down to ground. She had forgotten her ID at home and the rules stipulated you had to have an ID to check in. Naila was upset she would not get go upstairs for the consultation session and she knew very well of the importance of identification and paperwork. She commented:

We have to get help where we can for all this college business. There is absolutely no way to figure out all these forms, especially when I'm having to figure them out. My

parents cannot help here. There is so much information that I cannot make sense of it ... oh well I guess I'll just have to get the information from my friends since they will not let me go upstairs without my dumb ID.

In a different conversation around accessing information for college, Likica also commented on the stressful college admission process, and the labor of this work outside of school:

I never could have been prepared for how demanding this was all going to feel. Even with knowing English the forms and paperwork are overwhelming. I do not know how we are going to figure out the cost, and I think I'm going to need to stay at the college but that is also very hard decision because it is very expensive. I need any help that I can get.

Likica, Naila, Mekseb, and Lulu all applied to multiple programs during the school year. It was a stressful process and they all sought out support. They also began noticing and experiencing a phenomenon around their immigrant status within the context of filling out forms and writing essays. The details of their immigrant lives could be seen as important or powerful based on minority/diversity status. Lulu critically commented:

I really do not think mostly people care about me being Vietnamese. Even simple like when I am on the bus like with all other people they don't really care. But then I think about college and I think that people won't care. Then I am now Asian. Now I am not only Vietnamese but Asian. Then I also am immigrant like new to America and also struggle to learn English. And so then like when I visit the college campus they think I might want to be there to make them learn about people like me. It's actually so how you say it, annoying. But then I also realize that being different might help me get the admission. I am minority. They need some minorities.

Mekseb came to understand this as well, and while she found it very disturbing at first, by the end of the school year, she saw that her narrative held its own capital. When describing her decision to write about her near death experience of survival and escape from Eritrea earlier in the year, Mekseb stated:

I want them to understand that it's a really big deal for me to be in place to apply for college. Of course I cannot do this without support of my aunt and uncle but still I'm not sure people understand how hard it really was to get here. And I think that no one can really understand but maybe to get admission to college they can try to see that it's a big deal. I know people just like me who did not escape, who did not make it. I want for them to know that I'm not just any other person going to college and becoming a nurse.

Later in the year, Mekseb and I went on a college visit together. She was hoping to get into a particular section of a program that would allow her to gain support with both issues of language and adjustment during her first year of college. Mekseb critically commented:

It's crazy. I'm going to go to this like huge college and there will be groups of people like me but honestly it just matters if I tell them you know what kind of person I am. Like my story. So that is what I'm learning. There might be extra chance for support if they hear my story. I know it's like crazy but it seems that in some places if you share what kind of immigrant you are then that can be extra support. They might care more. Okay maybe not care about me but then they can feel like they helped us immigrant that do not know English and that makes them look good. So I guess it's okay then I'll just keep telling them because I can get extra support. Sometimes I do feel weird, kind of gross, but I guess it's okay.

For her senior Capstone project, Mekseb had been invited to interview a leader at the Superintendent's office to interview a school official especially interested in increasing diversity amongst teachers. Here again, she found she was being sought out, spoken to in a particular way for particular reasons. The purpose of this interview was for Mekseb to gain information on her research project inquiring into teachers being prepared to teach English. She found that the person she interviewed was also very interested in her story and encouraged her to enter the education field by the end of the interview. Mekseb commented afterwards at lunch:

I kept telling her that I want to become a nurse but she thinks I should become a teacher. She was so interested in my story! You heard her. She thinks that because I am this kind of immigrant and learning English in this country that I will understand better what ELLs are going through. And I agree but that does not mean I want to become a diversity teacher. And well she was so into me and I'm beginning to see that people like my color and my language when they see something they want but it's sort of strange too because I like wonder when I'm being used for my story.

The nature of sharing a story, and having a story to tell amongst this newcomer immigrant group was also a big part of an out of school activity that Cassou participated in during this year.

Along with a dozen other students at Immigrant High, Cassou was part of an editorial board that was in charge of pulling together an anthology of writing by juniors at Immigrant High that

focused on snapshots of their immigrant narratives told through objects. Cassou's story was about the object of a pair of wooden shoes given to her by her grandfather when she was ten, and left behind on the day of the tragic earthquake in Haiti in 2010. In her story, she touched on the theme of having a grandfather with Dominican roots, on seeing the death and toil of many Haitians during the earthquake, and on her own resolution to never forget the poverty and sacrifice through which her family survived many things.

Cassou was invited to share her piece of work outside of school at the annual fundraiser for this non for profit organization. The event, a fundraiser, was called "The Night of 1000 Stories" and Cassou was a representative of Immigrant High. This night was not only about sharing her story but also about building connections for college applications the following year. After the event, she commented:

Oh I put on my best and biggest smile tonight. These people are not only here to support what they do but they are also here to meet people like me that they feel are the future, you know. And I also need to figure out a way to apply for some scholarships next year and there are a lot of people here with connection and information. I hope they like my story and they like me. I never get nervous about these kinds of things but today I was like a little nervous. I just hope they want to hear more because I really have more stories like this one I can share.

Augusta's story, told through this project, was about the topic of her diary, including her relationship to her grandparents in Cape Verde that raised her. Her piece, like Cassou's, also explored issues of poverty and sacrifice. Interestingly, however, it painted the picture of coming to the United States as a dream realized, whereas, on multiple occasions, Augusta had commented that she questioned why she came to the United States and also thought about going back to Cape Verde. After a school celebration on the anthology, Augusta shrugged her shoulders and then shared:

Well, I'm not saying it was not my dream to come here because I mean you know we were trying to survive but I don't know about that today because here too it's a struggle.

But I also put America stuff in my story because you know that is what we are supposed to say too. It is kind of like what they want us to say, you know, like tell the story that makes it just seem okay.

### **She's A Sister Researcher, Expanding My Roles**

A significant experience outside of school was the blurring of my role as a researcher. Within the context of Immigrant High, my role was to mostly observe and take field notes. Outside of school, however, my ways of being expanded into varying different roles including listener, advocate, and cultural/academic language broker. The dynamic of power outside of the institution of Immigrant High shifted and there was less silence from the participants outside of school. This shift in dynamic proved to be important for the overall willingness of the participants to open up on matters related to, and not related, to school. In addition, this created a context where the participants were not simply being researched, but where they could locate/assert a bi-directional relationship, changing dynamics of power. Many of these conversations happened during our commute together on public transportation, in the car, and at restaurants sharing meals together. There was a growing recognition that a contribution of this study was my role as “our immigrant sister” stated by Mekseb:

You are spending time with us and we get to share what is on our minds. You can also help us. And it's like you are like an immigrant sister. I can trust you and I can count on you to, you know, figure out things, and even if you cannot figure it out, then at least you can listen.

Augusta and Lulu both inquired and asked about the possibility to share meals at restaurants in the neighborhood they lived in. Augusta preferred this option to visiting at home, commenting that this was more relaxing. She was excited about showing me the street that included many establishments that served the Cape Verdean community. Immediately after we sat down at the table, she started by sharing more about the restaurant, the food on the menu, and then she paused mid-sentence, laughing:

Oh wait! I don't need to explain this all to you do I? You are not Cape Verdean but I don't need to like you know talk to you like oh this and oh that like you are interviewing me about Cape Verde because I mean you get it. This is just a place to eat where my people come because well the food is good and we connect. And well if you have questions then just ask me. But it's nice that I don't need to take you on tour of Cape Verde because we are at Cape Verdean restaurant.

After nodding my head and smiling, Augusta continued to share about her family life and then proceeded to talk about how she was going to try to graduate from Immigrant High but was really not sure about afterwards. She then proceeded to order food, speaking to the waiter in her language, and not worrying about translating. She then sat back in her seat and said:

Here I could just talk to you in my language. Even if you don't you know understand a word I say it won't matter. Just be able to have you sit there and listen and that's sometimes what I need because so many people don't understand and well I just hope we can sit here and relax and that you love the food because it really is so good.

Lulu, like Augusta, inquired into hanging out at a Vietnamese restaurant together one day after school, emphasizing that home was a reminder at that time of too much stress. Upon entering the restaurant Lulu shared how she had worked at this restaurant, but she did not work here anymore. She commented that she was just so hungry because as usual she had not eaten much all day and that it was just lot of pressure lately so she had also lost her appetite. When we sat down to eat, she inquired into what I knew about Vietnamese food and then said:

Oh my gosh it's so annoying because like you get it but other people do not get it. I mean Indian food is not just one kind of food and yeah Vietnamese food is also not Chinese food. I'm not saying they are not similar but they are not same! Isn't it annoying? Oh and especially when people think we all Asians are like the same. You get it so I guess I don't have to explain. I just want to sit here and not explain anything, is that okay? I'm so tired, my brain actually hurts!

Lulu then proceeded to ask if it was okay to just be quiet together. Our time at the restaurant mostly consisted of just sitting together, and after we left, Lulu asked if we could go to the park across the street. Here, under a tree, we sat in more silence. Eventually Lulu decided to talk

about her decisions about college and before leaving, tears welling up in her eyes. She brushed them aside and commented: “I’m glad we met. I know you had very different experience than me. I know English is not new. But I’m glad that you can be with me and not expect, like you know there is no pressure.” For both Augusta and Lulu, the role of mindfulness in their lives, of holding space in the midst of what were struggles and disappointments, proved to be an important role. Although they could not locate this space within their first language in terms of speaking, they both shared that what mattered was a sense of safety and location to feeling less stressed, even if the communication was in fact silence.

For Cassou, Likica, and Naila, my role outside of school was more about being a resource. All three of them evaluated my abilities regarding language, knowledge about varying matters related to education, and in relationship to academic language. Cassou, for reasons of her home life, was not eager to spend time outside of school that did not relate to school, but was still eager to meet and talk. Likica tapped into what she felt was an opportunity to know more about the field of education since it was a career she was considering. Naila tapped into the idea that an important role I could play in her life was simply looking at her writing, advising on academic language, and answering questions about matters related to applying for college. All three made an important distinction between the more personal nature of sharing about life and the more depersonalized nature of seeing me as a resource to access during out of school time.

One day after school, Cassou and I sat on a bench waiting for the bus that she took to get home. She inquired into a few matters, typical of out of school time:

Do you have any books that I can borrow on like learning more about language? I want to know more about like how to just keep up with languages. Oh and I’m also looking for internships this summer. Because I want to just stay really busy and maybe I want to do internship in medical field. Do you know where I can look? And I was going to ask maybe I can like use you as reference on the form if that is okay



Naila, who like Cassou, also shared a lengthy commute back and forth to Immigrant High, sought out additional support on matters related to academic language and schoolwork. On one occasion, while sharing a train ride, Naila pulled out a draft of a paper from her bookbag:

It's like I have a lot of work to still do on my Capstone paper. And I got all these marks and I think the main issue is of course around grammar. Because it's not like I can figure out all that English and make it perfect. Can you look at this with me?

Likica also found that verbalizing questions around academic language and English with me was also helpful, pointing out that having a conversation around her work and interests was useful:

It helps for me to just talk with you out loud some of the ideas I have. And then I can like think out loud what I want to say and then you can maybe just ask me some questions? That is actually helpful. And we don't get lot of time for this in school because teachers are very busy helping so many students and I don't know I also don't like doing this in school because it is sometimes annoying. I need peace to think and it's just too much noise sometimes.

In addition, Likica also found it helpful to talk about her growing interest and thoughts about wanting to become a teacher, and she found it helpful to ask questions around majoring in education, including expressing her concerns:

Can you tell me more about taking classes in education? I don't know I'm not sure and little nervous. Mainly because of English. And my accent. But you can tell me more about how it all works because I know little bit about the schools here from my little brother going to school but I want to know more so I thought you can maybe help me.

Mekseb sought multiple entry points, navigating spaces where my role as researcher included time spent with her family, discussions on being an activist, as well as having presence as she navigated issues of paperwork and immigration status. Mekseb had been granted political asylum status, but she was still waiting on important paperwork that directly impacted college entrance and financial matters. In addition, she had to be cautious about talking about her family back in Eritrea, and she sought me out to “translate” for officials outside of school – this was not a translation into English, but rather brokering language to people in positions of power. On one

afternoon, Mekseb asked if I could accompany her to the immigration office to check in on her status and prior to entering the building she said:

Okay, so these people like don't get what I'm looking for. So can you just you know stand there and answer their questions with me? Sometimes I just think it helps like maybe your English is more clear or something. I really need to find out my status!

On the occasion when she joined other students from Immigrant High at the office explaining the FAFSA, Mekseb asked if I could accompany her for the one on one interview. She was trying to explain to the person why her parents could not be contacted back in Eritrea, trying to explain village life, when she turned to me and said: "Can you please explain for me? I'm not sure he understands what I mean about village life and why I cannot get him this information." The role of advocacy, here, as well as the roles of listener, conversant, and language broker in other instances, proved to be an important aspect of out of school experiences with the participants. Adopting a critical stance of not pushing any particular agenda, and allowing each participant to find their own place of safety within this relationship was important and integral to this study.

### **Synthesis**

Outside of Immigrant High, there were multiple contexts where multilingual identities were expressed. The key issue of finding jobs and work was part of the economic struggles of these immigrant youth, but also created spaces in which to work through language and see language in different ways. Within the interpersonal domain of power, some participants found that the site of work allowed for more access to understanding language, while other participants felt the site of work reflected a kind of linguisticism, not restricted to English, leading to more isolation. Sharing the context of work with other students from Immigrant High proved to shift the assessment of how multilingualism was an asset, both in terms of social capital and economic capital. Juxtaposed to this, however, were the contexts of work regarded as racist or isolating,

through issues of language and power. The relationship between the participants and the people they were working reflected the interpersonal domain of power. The collective community of Immigrant High students working at the baseball stadium proved to create a more open space of language connection than even at school.

Transnational location to home countries existed more outside of school, revealing more space to also have connection to transnational identity. Digital spaces proved to connect Lulu to her “Vietnamese beat,” while the nail salon filled Augusta with “the spirit of Cape Verde.” Naila and Mekseb found both language and place of dialogue and restoration in the religious location of church, as well as in considering or participating in political activism that had to do with issues back home. Likica’s family spent a great deal of time communicating over Skype outside of school with family in Serbia, but she commented on her loneliness as well as a Serbian without many Serbians in her community. Cassou found that her greatest place of restoration was to stay as focused on books, school, and the further pursuit of her dreams, commenting on the importance of having a connection to Immigrant High at all times.

Both English and Spanish proved to be languages of power within the context of official jobs. However, outside of school, the varying degree to which linguisticism was felt regarding Spanish, or their own mother tongues, depended on the change in context. At home, the participants felt insulated from xenophobia because there was a sense of privacy. However, they all commented on how their accents and dispositions as newcomer immigrant youth were always in question in various public spaces. They especially felt this doing routine things like taking public transportation, getting groceries, or running errands in their communities.

The global capital associated with English, seen in particular through the context of church/cultural community, proved to be a tension governed by varying viewpoints between

elders and youth. The tension existed between the language that could reach the community and the language they perceived the members needed from the outside world. This consideration of language manifested itself within the structural domain of power, as the official institution of church was also subject to negotiation of policies around use of language. Cultural and linguistic association to language being part of identity, and connection to where participants had migrated from, were juxtaposed to beliefs around teaching more English. The rationale of using English was situated around what languages were best for social activism or building economic self-sufficiency, based on the assessment that English was the language of survival. An important finding was how participants asserted that accessing power through language was not necessarily an easy decision. It was important for them to assert that the decision depended on an evaluation of what type of language would be needed for either political or economic gain. The rationale to teach more English outside of school was one based on the pressure of immigrant success as well as adopting the common sense appraisal and thinking of what was part of the language of immigrants achieving the American Dream in the United States. The hegemonic domain of power in moments thus extended itself into the discussion amongst both elders and the youth outside of school.

A critical finding across participants was in relationship to their own embodiment of wearing immigrant status. They navigated signifiers of language and power, expressing narratives that could be deemed as potentially useful to gain capital. In addition, they took on the language of narratives that they perceived would be the ones that people in power wanted to hear in order to match their stories to the American dream immigrant status story. In the pursuit of higher education, it was assessed that their particular brand of immigrant status, as newcomer English language learners, could possibly create possibility to gain capital. This was in contrast

to the numerous occasions in which they critically reflected on the linguisticism they continued to experience, including outside of school. But, again, survival was the key issue. Consequently, in the name of diversity initiatives, or in the name of being part of initiatives that seemed charitable, participants navigated the boundaries between discomfort and reality. Their stories were for sale, resources mattered, and the conscious awareness of performing the hegemonic messages was part of their negotiation of language and power.

The out of school contexts widened and stretched to include not just multiple contexts, but also multiple ways to dislocate from the formal process of research. This proved to be integral to not only the overall sense of safety and trust critical to a study focused with this population; it also pointed out the importance of creating such a space for these young people to navigate and assert their needs. Collins (2009) identified as the power of dialogue in safe spaces of interpersonal domains of power where relationships provide agency. This was an example of this. This approach as researcher contrasted to projecting a sense of charity, pity, or promise of solutions that could not be met. In addition, the participants proved to access the research process outside of school as a way to also gain resources, not just conversation. When it came to issues of their complex migration narratives, the experiences outside of school vibrated and echoed with both the pressure of gaining capital, while also growing into and from their sense of self. The critical nature of belonging to this research, despite limitations of the research process, brought to light shades of important meaning on issues of language

## Chapter VIII

### DISCUSSION

This dissertation study was conducted to better understand the experiences of newcomer immigrant youth, in particular around issues of language and power. This dissertation focused on the language experiences of six non-Spanish newcomer immigrant youth who had migrated from differing countries and had various linguistic backgrounds. Principles of critical ethnography were employed to answer the following question: How do non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth (attending a newcomer high school focused on English instruction with over sixty-five percent of Spanish speakers and living within a larger new immigration context) negotiate their language practices?

Sub questions included:

- How do students experience language in various school contexts (e.g. inside classroom, outside of classroom, and afterschool activities)?
- How do students experience language in various out of school contexts? (e.g. home and work)?
- How do students relate these language practices to issues of power?

Augusta, Cassou, Likica, Lulu, Mekseb, and Naila left Cape Verde, Haiti, Serbia, Vietnam, Eritrea, and Rwanda, respectively, out of survival. Their migration narratives and lives as newcomer immigrant youth included navigating multiple terrains. Their voices bring to light the complex experiences of language and power in the new immigration context. Spending time with these six young women inside and outside of Immigrant High generated a tapestry of multiple “braids,” stories that combined important themes and issues generated through this critical ethnography. The matrix of domination conceptualized by Collins (2009) was a useful

framework to highlight issues of language signifying capital, identity, race, and culture at the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and intrapersonal levels.

In the following discussion, I argue that the site of Immigrant High mirrored experiences of colonizing. This force of oppression included messages of meritocracy negating much of the transnational, multilingual lives of these young women. This also included a school culture that promoted assimilation, rather than multilingualism. In addition, I argue that while contexts outside of school provided more agency for expression of language and cultural hybridity, the key issue of gaining language for capital manifested itself in powerful ways. Following this discussion, I propose two additions to the theoretical framework based on the findings from this study. Here, I argue how language as a signifier of property is an important understanding to working/researching with newcomer immigrant youth. In addition, I argue that an added layer to Collins (2009) matrix of domination framework can bring more nuanced understanding of studying with/for newcomer immigrant youth – I call this additional layer the inner domain of power. Finally, I extend this discussion to implications and limitations of this research study.

### **Discussion of the Research Questions**

This study focused on critically analyzing the signifying practices of language in multiple contexts. These sites of inquiry included a school created to support English language learners and contexts outside of school including places of work, homes, churches, community organizations, restaurants, and other informal places of engagement. Through a framework that accounted for how transnational migration narratives and colonial histories impact contemporary educational contexts, I found that key findings at the school revealed messages of meritocracy, a school built on assimilation, the problem of invisibility, and the issue of reductive views of immigrant culture. The original vision for Immigrant High has been to decenter powerful issues

of immigration and how it impacted the lives of its students. Immigrant High was constructed to be a haven away from the dominant culture of American schooling, and yet, in the end, the newcomer school itself was reflective of issues that plague the way in which youth are controlled through the structure of schooling. These findings were consistent with critical structural analysis of power and institution. The site of schooling is one in which disciplinary control is at the heart of education. The architecture of the classroom, gaze of the teacher, and the strategies to normalize a set population of students all become central to this project of education (Foucault, 1977).

Outside of school, participants revealed agency through multilingualism, while simultaneously working their “diversity status” as a means to gain capital. Outside of school also included the negotiation of language through both formal and informal jobs exposing issues of language connection and isolation. Finally, outside of school revealed the importance of having transnational restorative spaces where participants’ languages flowed. The following discussion highlights these key findings supporting the argument of Immigrant High mirroring a colonizing force in the new immigrant context as well the key issue of language as capital inside and outside of school.

Forces of conquest and domination in Eritrea, Rwanda, Serbia, Vietnam, Cape Verde, and Haiti, impacted the lives of these youth long before arriving to the United States. All six of the participants grew up in social contexts where colonization and oppression governed the systems, institutions, and communities where they learned to navigate a global context of migration. Consistent with what we know from research studying newcomer immigrant youth, the impact of post-war conflicts, poverty, and interrupted schooling were revealed as important to migration (Patel, 2013; Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2008). Survival was important to understanding



motivation to leave their home country. The signifying practices of language were impacted by these modes of survival. These young women were often making necessary sacrifices, an inner force, defined by managing both the acquisition of capital and experience of suffering. While the assumption is often made that immigrants come to America willingly, the participants' migration processes represented what the research has shown many newcomer immigrant youth and families experience, decisions full of sadness and doubt (Roxas & Roy, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Had survival not been an issue, the pursuit of migration might have been altogether different, or null.

Similar to the findings of (Hersi, 2011; Oikonomidoy, 2007), this study also revealed that the remnants of colonizing including a sense of displacement and instability continued into their lives as newcomer immigrants. This study illustrated that while students were being sold the "American Dream" at Immigrant High, the school, in many ways, dismissed what had been immigrant nightmares. In addition, their struggles underscored the rationalization to not only leave their home country, but also situated the importance placed on learning English. Beyond the need to gain basic necessities for survival, the participants constantly referred to the ability that linguistic and educational acquisition could provide stability in their families' lives. Through statements about their education being a 'passport in their pocket' and 'paperwork that could not be taken away,' their education signified "material life conditions that must take into account colonialist, economic, political, and social factors that cauterize the promise of educational achievement" (Stevens, 2011, p.3). Their work and sacrifices as students were part of the stability their families sought, a finding consistent with the research discussing the pressures and stress associated with being newcomer immigrant youth (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Research evaluating education for newcomer immigrant youth suggests that a rationale for newcomer programs is that traditional ESL programs and bilingual education at the secondary level do not take into account the complex lives of these young people (Short, 2002). Prior to entering the United States, all six participants had experienced school and the role of institutional power. Schools served as vehicles to administer messages of the larger polity. Modes of surveillance and the culture of disciplinary power were common. This study also illustrates this significant point - understanding newcomer immigrant youths' histories to colonizing requires recognizing their experiences prior to arrival. The culture of authoritative language practices experienced in their home countries' schools was a backdrop to their educational experiences prior to arriving to Immigrant High. Although these experiences were not brought into their learning/sharing at Immigrant High, they were nonetheless important. The youth were socialized to consider appeasing to figures of authority, signifying the theme of survival and domination. Consistent with what we know is a reality for immigrant families, the institution of schooling was a key aspect of appeasing this authority (Ghiso & Campano, 2013).

The participants' experiences around language through structural and disciplinary domains of power shifted as newcomers in America. Their immigrant tongues were now signifiers of racialized identities. Living within a dominant white English speaking context, which included the presence of Spanish as the second dominant language in their communities and school, proved to be a factor to all the participants supporting research that confirmed the intermingling of issues of language, race, and ethnicity with regards to English and Spanish (Paris, 2010). The politics of language were experienced around many issues related to survival, including acquiring paperwork to stay in the country, their families finding work, gaining access to schooling, and even finding safe housing. The participants related to the oppressive systems

that were part of their past and present, while simultaneously confirming they were creating new paths as newcomers. This largely hinged upon gaining academic capital at Immigrant High.

A striking finding then was how their knowledge of struggle and life, as well as their transnational identification within the global context of migration, were not considered as important aspects of their identity and learning at Immigrant High, a school designed to support newcomer immigrant youth. While research studies on newcomer immigrant youth revealed the vital theme of newcomer immigrant youth being global, transnational, migrants and expressing this through language practices (Davila, 2015; Lam, 2004), this was not emphasized in the school culture. The structure of Immigrant High had originally been envisioned to put at the center supporting the students' language backgrounds. As time passed, however, the structure shifted to put at center a curriculum steeped in second language acquisition rather than a broader perspective on language practices which would include bringing in out of school language practices into the school curriculum. These experiences were also not seen as an asset of knowledge in other contexts such as places of work, or in conversations around what knowledge they brought to their pursuit of higher education. All six participants had a rich conscious understanding of how the world worked within systems of oppression they had experienced. They had navigated multiple domains of power at such a young age. This knowledge base was silenced in newcomer United States, reflecting a larger societal force of annexing their funds of knowledge. Ghiso and Campano's (2013) study on coloniality, education and the discourses of immigration confirms that one of the major sources of cultural deficit within the U.S. context is the invisibility of immigrant students' transnational identities.

Despite Immigrant High students' self-perceptions as transnationals, the context of a school was set on a foundation of assimilation rather than bi/multilingualism, signifying the

contested issues of bilingual education in U.S. history (Brisk, 2006). The problem of policies and schools “generated from such a focus on assimilation maintain the status quo, ignore White privilege, and set of agenda to disadvantage racialized groups even further” (Romero, 2008, p. 25). Consequently, the issue of the newcomer school mirroring practices and policies that segregate and isolate students as ‘other’ occurs despite the vision to do otherwise.

Immigrant High, a school envisioned to serve the needs for newcomer immigrant youth, began when English only language policy had just passed. As an institution of public schooling impacted by this law governing language policy, as well as a growing public school culture driven by a strong testing culture, Immigrant High represented the growing pressures for newcomer schools and programs to simultaneously respond to the “adolescent ELL problem,” as well as provide resources for the social adjustment of newcomer immigrant families (Boyson & Short, 2012). Over the years, Immigrant High had taken up particular values and ideologies to consider how best to support the linguistic, cultural, and social needs of newcomer immigrant youth while also responding to these pressures from the outside. A dominant message was that it was through the promotion of English language that students would achieve success and acquire the necessary capital to achieve one version of the immigrant ‘American Dream’; the school operated around this narrative of assimilation (Mitchell, 2013). Emphasis placed upon English was reasoned as the language of opportunity and higher education. Acquiring and learning English for the purpose of higher test scores, higher grades, and entrance into college, was the dominant culture of Immigrant High; this school culture supported the discourse of meritocracy hinged to the discourse of standardization and deficit ideology towards immigrant students (Ghiso & Campano, 2013).

A major finding that emerged from this study was how messages of meritocracy were rationalized in the name of acquiring academic English. These messages were largely associated with a particular version of the American Dream in which the signifier of English was represented as the language of civility, citizenship, and economic self-sufficiency. Mitchell (2013) states, “though seemingly innocent, especially from the position of white privilege, the majoritarian story about the position and value of the English language deeply affects the opportunities and quality of education available to multilingual learners” (p. 354). The mode of performing English was largely driven by surviving the extant structure of the school, a system of education at play, while simultaneously acquiring the language of capital. This process of being “othered by English” at Immigrant High thus reflected the power of hegemony. Authority functions because people believe in it and the power of English was at the heart of this force of authority. Language signifying capital was the driving force for the messages of meritocracy associated with the acquiring of academic English at Immigrant High. This occurred at many levels of the school culture including the very images and language that promoted the school’s success, to the school curriculum, to the rationalization for such practices such as surveillance of students’ language practices in order to have “more time to learn English.” Principals and teachers at the school monitored language use, some more heavily than others. Essentially, at the site of Immigrant High, the tongue (languages spoken) became the property of those in power, also signifying a colonizing force. At the heart of the project of schooling, according to Foucault (1977) is how the institutional space produces power through practices of surveillance, punishment, and discipline. Through these practices a kind of “normalizing,” of what is deemed as appropriate culture occurs through both the hegemonic and disciplinary domains of power

(Collins, 2009). An unfortunate finding then, of Immigrant High, was how a school so rich in linguistic and cultural knowledge was being forced to “normalize” to the dominant culture.

The practices of social control through language mirrored participants’ prior experiences to their time at Immigrant High. Despite recognizing their need for learning English and gaining education for survival, the participants related how their experiences at Immigrant High were examples of language control. An outer source of authority required them to annex their transnational located identities through language at the site of school. Appeasing to figures of authority was a required negotiation of surviving this structure of schooling. In contrast to the students learning academic English, an essential instrument to achieving this dream, were how the students reacted to the pressure and enforcement of language policy within the school. This policy included the enforcing of English use inside and outside of the classrooms. All of the students accepted the importance of English to their lives and survival, including Augusta, who was more unsure about her future with higher education. But none of the students bought into the idea that the school functioned in a way that promoted equity through language practices, either. They felt the inequity from the moment they arrived at Immigrant High and were essentially told that their first languages, which were not English or Spanish, did not count for much at the school. In certain spaces, like study hall, where there was less monitoring, students at the school reacted by choosing to not follow the rules, an example of resistance. In the creation of an “international club,” the non-Spanish speakers represented in this study gathered together, another form of resistance. Here, English was a language signifying connection, but not without critical commentary of their reactions to issues of language and power.

The role of Spanish at the site of school proved that its linguistic and cultural value were limited to being a social language after school, rather an asset of academic language during

school, also signifying a key issue. Research on newcomer youth has emphasized the vital need for the Spanish language to be recognized as essential to learning and identities of newcomer youth, despite issues of dominance as an immigrant language (Gutierrez, 2014; Oikonomidou, 2015; Paris, 2013). Immigrant High had historically had a dominant population of Spanish speakers. The demographics shifted slightly at the time of this study (2012-2013), signifying increased numbers of Cape Verdean and Haitian students, represented by Augusta and Cassou in this study. Spanish was still a significant language both at the site of school and outside of school. But its value as a language of communication and a language of learning were limited to those students who, like Cassou, might show promise in scoring high on the AP exam, emphasizing the testing driven school culture. Students within the school, however, including Cassou, questioned why the language was not more available as an official language of the school. As a move to recognize some aspects of Latin culture, the school decided to include Latin music in a class during school hours, music during dance club after school, and music played at the prom. While these spaces were appreciated by some of the participants (Augusta and Cassou), they also showed the contradiction between what counted as a cultural asset vs. deficit, signifying a reductive view towards the culture of immigrant youth. Music as a signifier of Spanish counted, a type of tokenized nod to being multicultural at the school, while the use of language as a newcomer youth in the hallway or in the classroom, functioning for communication and learning was being disciplined. This also confirmed what Ghiso and Campano (2013) described as discourses that prioritized standardization and assimilation, promoting a “singular/reductive narrative of transformation” (p. 257) at the site of the school as opposed to a framework of culture that afforded pluralism, hybridity, and ideology of linguistic assets.

Within this culture of meritocracy, assimilation, and invisibility, as non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth, all six participants navigated varying experiences of expressed agency and resistance at Immigrant High. Learning to “play the game” was a modality of employing the language of power in order to gain what the participants needed. This was a formation of both agency and resistance as participants willingly did what was needed to gain access to capital, but also with a tone of critique. The participants were invested in doing what one described as “put your head down but keep your head up,” navigating the world of language and cultural control within the school. Accessing both social and cultural capital at the sight of school was a conscious decision on the part of many of the participants, and this included the conscious decision on how their immigrant newcomer narratives were “for sale” in the interest of appeasing to dominant powers interested in their diversity status. The students came to learn through school that diversity status was something that held social capital. The participants leveraged this capital, knowing that their story had power, and that producing this version of the “American Dream” would allow them to appease to authority at the site of school. This was a key finding – although the viewpoint on culture was reductive at Immigrant High, and their language backgrounds were invisible, the young women, nonetheless made choices to appease and perform their newcomer narratives. The participants were aware of the charitable racism (Macedo, 2006) occurring through these diversity initiatives, but participated anyway. Choosing a mode of operating academic language through English, to position themselves, including their linguistic backgrounds, in a particular way, was a form of working the system, an expression of agency intended for gaining power. This extended outside of school as they tried to access resources for higher education. The youth discovered that by situating their particular narratives of immigration through the language being sought, in particular around diversity, they could



leverage everything from financial support for college to social support in gaining access to important services.

Outside of school, not bound by a powerful school institution that had mirrored a structural and disciplinary power, a kind of colonizing, Augusta, Cassou, Likica, Lulu, Mekseb, and Naila demonstrated a type of visibility and a different set of voices, all the while still describing the powerful signifier of language as capital within the new immigrant context. The participants in this study demonstrated important themes of agency through the navigation of the interpersonal domain of power. Relationships outside of school helped them find more voice, connection, and restoration. This was similar to the findings of Ghiso and Campano (2013) who identified hybridity, pluralism, vulnerability, resource orientation, advocacy, and political mobilization as key discourses of immigration demonstrated at a religious site serving immigrants outside of a school.

The signifying practices at Mekseb and Naila's immigrant centered churches and community centers, institutions supporting this diasporic community, reflected the tension between using language to reach community and the English language they perceived members needed for the outside world. Despite these tensions, the participants navigated these spaces with more voice and location to transnational connection. In turn, these out of school spaces also supported the experiences of belonging to an urban new immigrant diaspora. An expressed vulnerability around the use of language and emotion allowed for the creation of linguistic restoration; this study revealed the importance of such spiritual contexts for these participants. This space also included vocal activism through use of language. Here was also where community gathered to organize as activists, gain important information regarding paperwork

and jobs, navigate systems of the new immigration context, and engage with family members back home through digital language practices.

Outside of school Spanish was experienced as the dominant language of larger community spaces, only second to English. This, in particular, included the use of Spanish in Boston neighborhoods, on public transportation, and at the site of official jobs within the food service industry. Oikonomidou's (2015) study of underrepresented newcomer youth confirmed that the building of "intercultural capital," as well as a sense of exclusion can be felt with regards to issues of language for non-Spanish speaking newcomers. For Augusta, the experience of working at her job including Spanish functioning as a mode through which she felt excluded. She also felt racism regarding issues of language and eventually decided to leave her job. Rather than experiencing isolation around Spanish speakers, Likica, Mekseb, and Naila working together with other Immigrant High youth at the baseball stadium proved to be a positive experience. Rather than being the "international crew" at Immigrant High, in the stadium they banded together as the "immigrant crew." Notable was that the context of working outside of school including older adults and less discipline than school. Here, they created a hybrid space in which participants gained a greater appreciation for how Spanish could operate as a means to gain more capital. Being part of the newcomer immigrant collective, another example of cultural hybridity, at the baseball stadium, proved to be an important cultural asset. Unlike in the school, in this context Spanish wasn't a tool for domination but considered a useful tool for communication. Participants who had originally dismissed Spanish speaking peers now found both connection and location with these peers. This was a poignant example of theme of language as social and cultural capital; it was when young people saw the value of the Spanish language outside of school that Spanish grew in status. Likica's shift from resisting Spanish at

the onset of entering Immigrant High, out of feelings of isolation, to wanting to minor in Spanish in college by the end of the study, signified the shift in associating value to the language, the emphasis again being on capital.

Outside of school, unofficial forms of labor included the role of language use at the site of home and with regards to supporting family. Lulu, who was not able to take an official job due to the demands of serving as a language broker for her Mom, who was suffering with medical issues during the time of this study, spoke the most about the relationship between language and familial duty. Likica and Naila also related to the role of language brokering as well as the duties associated with assisting with homework in English with their siblings. Outside of the home Mekseb played the role of a language/cultural broker within the context of the church and community center where she translated not only words but ideas for the elders, in particular around if/how to employ English for political activist work they were involved with for Eritrea. Cassou and Augusta spoke less of the role of language brokering in their homes, mostly because they decided to escape life at home, including closing the door of their room at listening to music and being online to escape family struggle. An important finding in relationship to the informal labor of language outside of school was stress and pressure supporting family, what we know from research is a powerful consideration for understanding newcomer youth (Bang, 2011; Suarez & Orozco et. al, 2009).

Juxtaposed to moments of agency in relationship to language, were the important themes around language and isolation, and the power this had over the lives of the participants. One area of isolation was the apparent lack of linguistic connection at the site of school, in particular for Lulu, Likica, Mekseb, and Naila, who did not share status with the Haitian or Cape Verdean communities the way that Augusta and Cassou did. The theme of isolation and silence extended

outside of school, in particular, for the participants who were not connected to a linguistic community or institution in which their language/culture were experienced socially. For Likica and Lulu both, their Serbian and Vietnamese connections outside of school did not include much time with in person communication with other Serbian and Vietnamese immigrants. An important finding was thus to recognize the ways in which participants found agency to connect through transnational digital literacy spaces, in particular for accessing restorative spaces through language. While all participants used the online world to engage in language practices, Likica and Lulu, in particular connected online to escape from feelings of isolation. Chatting online and through text, talking through Skype, watching films produced in their home countries, and listening to music, all through digital spaces outside of school were examples of the use of these language practices situated in a global transnational context. The sophisticated ways in which the students expressed multiple hybrid forms of expression outside of school through these practices (Davila, 2015; Lam, 2004 & 2009), however was not brought into school, again showcasing how the walls built around language expression at Immigrant High were unfortunate.

“Transnational identity is cultural and historical. It arises out of human interaction influenced by relationships, institutions, cultural formations, and positions as they move into the already always moving present” (Bruna, 2007, p. 234). Despite their deeply rooted transnational identities, much of this was invisible at the site of Immigrant High proving its influence as a colonizing force in the new immigration context. Immigrant High participants managed the messages of meritocracy, push toward assimilation, invisibility of students’ language backgrounds, and reductive views of culture by “playing the game to gain academic capital.” Outside of Immigrant High, agency associated with transnational identity through language included acquiring language as capital through jobs, as well as expressing digital literacy

practices. Although constricted by larger forces of new immigration, contexts outside of Immigrant High included more of the participants' identities as global transnational migrants. These signifying practices emphasized multilingual cultural hybridity and were formed despite tensions of survival. Central to this study's findings then is not only to point out the colonizing practices at Immigrant High, but to encourage how the language practices observed outside of school be brought into our understanding of serving immigrant young people inside of school (Ghiso & Campano, 2013).

In summary, Immigrant High repressed their transnational identity in their quest to motivate students to learn English. But actually their motivation to learn English came from the students' own realization of the social capital that English represented. Students then kept alive their transnational identity outside of school. The school also failed to take advantage of the potential acquisition of Spanish as another source of capital in this society. The idea of non-Spanish speaking newcomer immigrant youth being "smothered" by Spanish was introduced as a question at the beginning of the study. The participants all described a greater source of power around Spanish when they first arrived, but as they became busier meeting the academic demands of English, and also working outside of school, they felt less "smothered" by Spanish and more interested in the role Spanish was playing in their social contexts. At the site of Immigrant High, however, it was important to note that as the study progressed more Spanish was being suppressed by the administration as an academic language. The social aspects of Spanish through cultural clubs and social events, on the other hand, continued to play an important role at the school. This exclusion did lead the participants to react, but even this reaction was not to the extent originally perceived at the onset of the study.

### **Adding to Theoretical Framework, Expanding Understanding of Newcomer Youth**

The conceptual framework of this dissertation was designed to specifically center on issues of signification and domination with relationship to the study of newcomer immigrant youth. Language as a signifier of capital, race, identity/hybridity, and culture/diaspora were important intersecting areas of inquiry. In addition, the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interdisciplinary domains of power, were useful to consider systems analysis, an integral piece of doing the work of critical ethnography. This research study revealed how language as a signifier of property is an additional theoretical consideration for researching with/for this population. The key issue of property is in relationship to acquiring economic, social, and cultural capital. For these young women, gaining an education was also a symbolic act of claiming property; the structural domain of power in their home country had led to literal retrieval of land, home, and freedom. There was a great legacy of loss experienced through varying different aspects of oppression in their lives and this was the backdrop to their lives prior to arriving to the United States. To reclaim something that they could now have ownership over was an important distinction. To become independent through the processes of education as young women was also important. A powerful explanation was provided by Likica during our last formal interview for this study:

Okay, so it's like this. In the United States many immigrants we do not own our house. We rent and pay the landlord. And then if you do own house you might pay, what you call it ...a mortgage...but you say that is my house. So then you see it's like this when I get education, I'm going to own it. I might have to keep quiet at school or borrow money or do jobs to get that education but soon I will own that piece of paper that says I am independent. And no matter what I do, where I go, no one can take that away from me. As a Serbian woman living my life! I can have that and that's a big deal. And well I think what the people at your university need to know is that we immigrants who come here need to be understood for owning our education without being silenced for our language. It's a really big deal to give up so much, to suffer so much, and to come here.

People seriously here don't get it. And we also give a lot to this country so that too. How many jobs we do! So, okay, I want to own my language, own my education, and own my future and be independent and that's the last thing I want to say.

The key issue of language signifying survival is related to language signifying property. Delgado & Stefaniec (2012) describe the relationship between whiteness and property as “the notion that whiteness itself has value for its possessor and conveys a host of privileges and benefits” (p. 174). The relationship between this understanding from critical theory and language includes how English, and the property regarding the language signifies the acquiring of many benefits. With regards to this study, as discussed earlier, the “tongue became property,” at the sight of school. This referred to the disciplinary domain of power expressed at the site of Immigrant High. In this case, the decision to mitigate the multilingual transnational linguistic identities was rationalized through the push for English and academic language. On the other hand, the very acquiring of language and education, in particular academic English, and access to higher education, were signifiers of gaining property. This was an important distinction revealed through this study. The participants accepted the authority of the English language inscribed in many of moments inside and outside of school, a force of being “othered by English,” with conscious intentionality. To question their education implied an intellectual privilege they simply did not have time for, or as Naila commented, was not a priority. Although the students were conscious and critical of what was happening at the school, even resisting at times, they still felt it was important to do as they were told to achieve what was needed. This analysis describes what Fanon (1967) found was essential to recognizing the impact of colonizing on both the subconscious mind as well as the material aspects of surviving the postcolonial context. Lee (2005) concurred that such a viewpoint of acquiring property through language included the

notion of immigrant youth being both “up against whiteness,” while simultaneously managing tactics to acquire the benefits of education in the United States.

The theme of survival and property extended into the power associated to access to higher education. Tracing their migration narrative backwards from college acceptances celebrated at graduation day in June of 2013, to the day they arrived at Immigrant High, the four seniors in this study related to the issue of language, education, and, in particular, the acquiring of academic English, as a mode of survival. Cassou and Augusta, the juniors, though holding differing experiences around gaining language, both also agreed the weight that their education in the USA held with regards to this mode of survival. The demands placed upon education were in relationship to migration narratives that had to do with survival. Mekseb, for example, related her journey to the game “Temple Run,” in which her border crossing over multiple countries signified the journey of life and death. Although less intense from the perspective of the physical journey, her journey into higher education was nonetheless an intense process of accessing language from a mode of survival. This study revealed that the participants felt their narratives of migration, a big part of their lives, were misunderstood. They also expressed how this invisibility was representative of privilege, whiteness, and higher education. When receiving information for admission, participants critically commented on the invitation to receive a fine liberal education in which they would explore the world of ideas. On the one hand, their funds of knowledge as global migrants had been invisible in many ways at Immigrant High. On the other hand, the curriculum of their universities, similar to Immigrant High, were crafted through a dominant white privileged perspective in which the mode of assimilation was at the forefront. As this study revealed, the language of diversity was navigated as a means to an end, the end being participants working their newcomer immigrant narrative to essentially gain



capital, and thus, in the end claim & reclaim property through education. What in fact seems like a circular set of cause & effect circumstances reveals a poignant truth; newcomer immigrant youth are keenly aware of the game of language negotiation that leads to gaining property, and that is in effect, hinged to English.

Both issues of survival and property were in relationship to the important consideration of gender in this study. Although gender was not theorized at the onset of this study, as it related to the consideration of the signifying practices of newcomer youth, the study revealed that gender intersected with issues of language and property. Davila's (2015) study, which emphasized gender and newcomer immigrant youth, pointed out the different spaces men and women occupy in society and thus "gender is linked to language practices through the meditation of social systems, cultural values, ideologies, and power relations" (p. 642). Issues of gender were an important factor to the intersectionality of issues, emphasizing the reclaiming of power through education. The participants' experiences were laden with issues of gender specific roles, roles that began in their home country. This included Naila's description of leaving school to take care of her younger siblings after the Rwanda genocide, as well as the important role she still played as a language broker here in the United States. Both were described in relationship to her being second to her mother in the family structure. Likica also commented on her role of providing child care for her younger brother, as well as being a kind of second teacher of English and Serbian. Lulu's role as a language broker, and her unofficial work in the home, which did not allow her the time to take a job outside of school, had a different recognition of labor than her brother who had a more official job outside of school. Mekseb commented on how her escape from Eritrea was grounded on her desire to pursue a life different from her mother. Cassou was also motivated by the power of education in creating a space of freedom separate

from the oppression her mother endured in her life. Augusta commented more than once how she felt even more was expected of her with regards to gender roles; she was expected to do well at school, serve in various roles at home, and seek out work that could support the family. She commented that the men in the family did not have to perform so many roles and that this made the pressures of schooling and learning English even more demanding.

Language as a signifier of property situates in essence the key themes of survival, negotiation of language practices, and the context of transnational migration from contexts with histories of colonization. In addition, language as a signifier of property brings to the center the central issue of how what counts as property is defined through the dominant space of what is valued in society, where issues of privilege, whiteness, and language are brought together to reveal its power – both as a site of oppression (tongue as property at Immigrant High) and as a site of acquiring this white privilege (gaining property through academic language and higher education).

### **The Inner Domain of Power, Spaces of Safety, Spirituality, and Empowering Silence**

In Collins' (2009) "matrix of domination" framework, the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and intrapersonal domains of power are comprehensive; they explore and explain varying intersecting areas of oppression and agency. At the same time, however, the research processes with these participants revealed another domain of power extended from the intrapersonal domain of power, which I call the inner domain of power. This inner of domain of power recognizes how the network of relationships impact the way in which strength and resilience emerges amidst areas of oppression and suffering. This "inner domain of power," adds to our understanding of the interpersonal nature of relationships, by pointing to the modalities through which language, power, and identity are grounded, and re-centered during moments of

powerlessness. The “inner domain of power” in turn locates spaces in which this place of power is nurtured and includes the choice of silence as a powerful form of language practice.

Influenced by the work of critical theorist Anzaldúa (1999, 2002), I define the inner domain of power as a central place of knowledge not founded upon the Cartesian divide between mind and body, but rather on a deeper sense of power located through lived out oppression, survival, suffering, silence, and spirituality. Similar to Anzaldúa, I prioritize the “invoking of ancestral wisdom, lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and resilience in a process that allows for healing from the effects of oppression while simultaneously strategically navigating within and outside of hostile educational environments” (Huber & Cueva, 2010, p. 396). This wisdom draws upon the cultural knowledge of immigrant communities, a web of lived knowledge which they carried with them through the both processes of migration and colonization.

The “inner domain of power” stems from a location of spiritual regard for silence, resiliency, and motivation to create space with regards to language and living as a newcomer immigrant youth. From this perspective silence is understood as a kind of shield and recognized in the research as a space to locate power, rather than be without power. San Pedro’s (2015) study of Native American students, for example, redefines silence as modality of empowerment and praxis. The young people in the study rejected assimilation at the site of school and used silence as a means of agency, identity construction, and a form of engagement with community. Here, silence was intentional, powerful, and a form of praxis.

Although the purpose of this study was not focused on the area of psychology, post-traumatic stress, or resiliency amongst immigrant youth, the research revealed the importance of considering these issues as it relates to language (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Collins (2009) emphasized the importance of self-knowledge, empowerment, and resiliency despite intersecting

areas of oppression. A striking finding, for example, was the difference between chosen moments of silence outside of school in transnational community spaces as a means of empowerment and restoration, vs. the type of forced silencing of their languages amidst community at the site of Immigrant High. The inner domain of power was seen as an important battle that recognized the value of a network of social contexts, in particular outside of school, that allowed for the day to day tension and stress as newcomer youth to be mitigated.

For some of the participants, this occurred through finding linguistic connections back to their spaces of religion and faith, and for others, it occurred through the location of finding a safe space to either express a range of feelings around language, or just hold the space of “spiritual silence,” as Naila noted in her description of her daily train rides home after school. This inner domain of power included both a recognition of suffering, as well as location in choosing silence and modes of resiliency through language and cultural practices that were supported by this network of relationships. A powerful example of a relationship that manifested from this research was the choices the participants made in accessing me as an adult, interlocutor, and source of support. Through our time together they were able to access a network of resources, including support for academic language, access to college, and a space to express frustrations around adjusting to immigrant life and Immigrant High. They revealed their “inner domain of power,” with me largely because the power dynamic was different, and this allowed for a location of important support.

One poignant example in which the young women saw my own navigation embodied immigrant, language negotiation, and experiencing pain occurred in the spring of 2013. In the data collection period, my own mother tragically and suddenly passed away at a hospital not far from Immigrant High. The participants in the study came to know of this from one of their

teachers. They figured out a way to organize transportation, took time off from school, and made it to the funeral services. The services were largely held in my first language, Gujarati. The ceremony, or rite of passage symbolizing the transition from the physical to spiritual world, was done through Hindu religious practices and largely spoken in Sanskrit. These were lead by a Hindu family priest, flown in from Chicago, who also translated the services in English. The services were also available to family back in India through Skype and this set up was part of the services. My Mom's funeral became part of a collective set of observations by the participants that located an expression of the "inner domain of power," relating it back to their own experiences. A few weeks after the funeral procession, when I returned to Immigrant High for continuation of my work, Mekseb reflected on what they had experienced. Here she related their observations of this "inner domain of power," with respect to language, survival, and space:

We were so connected even though we did not recognize the language or religion. I mean it was your Mom! That kind of strength to speak about her with your powerful words, even in English, even in your mother language, and even in silent tears, well we just got it, like really! I just think that when you are suffering and you are with it like you don't ignore it but you are able to be with silence or whatever language gives you peace in that moment. Then you are like building strength even in pain. And then all of that you do is also for family because in that moment you are strong for them. And well all of us just felt it like we totally got you, sister. How it is to be like this as immigrants. It's like that day we just stood there with your Mom who was like us, just like us! But then we just knew we shared that silent power too because everyone was just so quiet but we got it, all of us got it. I just know that the reason I survived from Eritrea and like made it here is about finding that really quiet strong place too and I think we immigrant find power in that place. And well I think thank God that we have our community and language and each other to be like this. We suffer but we also find power in it.

All six participants spoke about how language, and choosing to not speak and share silence, as a form of agency, served their transition to immigrant life. Holding both their narratives of survival and shared moments of resiliency as important and integral to creating such opening included creating spaces of that exemplified their "inner domain of power." I argue that in

conducting and working with newcomer immigrant youth this site of negotiation of language is integral to understanding how they both manage the stress of their daily lives as well as conduct forward through methods of hope.

### **Envisioning a Different Immigrant High and Implications for Teacher Education**

Immigrant High's policy on language, which also led to their policing of language, was based on the notion that an English driven curriculum mirroring expectations of standardized testing was the best opportunity for students to achieve good grades, scores on tests, and also admission into higher education. In many ways, Immigrant High's curriculum and pedagogy prioritized a culture of assimilation. Even from the perspective of language as capital, I argue Immigrant High failed to identify and enjoy the great assets of global language capital that existed within the school. As Stevens (2011) states "we must know better our students and the world in which they live" (p. 139). The students at Immigrant High were not like students at other schools and this was precisely why the school was constructed in the first place. In addition, the school housed students with rich backgrounds of language and culture, whose lives and educational experiences made them incredible sources of knowledge, including language.

The school population was beautiful fertile ground given all its global capital (through the students' cultural assets). Why then treat it otherwise? Why adopt a myopic philosophy of teaching and learning language available to students at the larger high school down the street? Why not treat the school as a critical space open to gaining the code of the elite while simultaneously emphasizing a critical pedagogy? This approach could provide inclusion of speaking through the systems of oppression that the students were navigating and had so much knowledge of surviving. This was not to say that caring relationships did not exist at Immigrant High. Likewise, academic capital was achieved to some extent by all the participants at the

school. The invisibility, however, of their linguistic identities while promoting messages of meritocracy proved to show that Immigrant High was not immune to the larger context of new immigration in the United States.

This raises the critique of how much of education focused on immigrant communities and English learning are examples of the hegemonic domain of power, an agenda of larger policies to covertly operate a continual practice of racism and power over communities that are a threat to the dominant ruling class in America (Mitchell, 2013). This includes the stereotypical notion of assimilation where immigrants come to forget where they came from. Thus what happened at Immigrant High, ironically, a high school focused on supporting immigrant students, was a reflection of the xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments associated with the larger new immigration context. This critically brings up the same question brought up by research evaluating newcomer programs – is there a purpose to segregating these students, pointing out critical questions around separation of students and issues of equity (Strikus & Nguyen, 2010).

Imagining a different Immigrant High would not equal minimizing an importance placed on acquiring academic English. As the literature on newcomer immigrant youth and experiences of these participants have shown, gaining this code of language and the signifying practice associated with gaining capital/property was essential to what they considered their sense of survival and access to higher education. What was a key missing component, essential to considering issues of migration, legacies of colonization, and issues of power was the issue of social context. The social contexts and linguistic funds of knowledge were essentially negated from many layers of curriculum, pedagogy, and interaction at the site of school. The striking example of spending week after week in a geography class in which the participants sat in silence, not relating their learning of the world to their own migration journeys, was one

powerful example. Another powerful example was the constant celebration of scores and grades at the school level, messages of hard work and meritocracy, rather than critical social all school gatherings on the various issues being experienced by the newcomer immigrant youth. This could have included celebrating narratives of resiliency and providing spaces of agency to locate the “inner domain of power” at the sight of school. We know from the research on newcomer immigrant youth examples of this kind of school culture include pedagogies of critical language awareness, intercultural group exchanges, support services for issues of post traumatic stress, and explicit dialogue on issues of racism in the newcomer immigration context (Gutierrez, 2014; Oikonomidou, 2015; Paris, 2010).

Shifting this pedagogy at Immigrant High would require recentering the “white innocence” (Gutierrez, 2006), the dominant ideology of “his English,” that the curriculum at the school focused on. This model places right upfront the issues of white privilege, dominant ideologies of teaching English, and the absolute necessity to consider context at every level of lesson planning and implementation with newcomer immigrant youth. With regards to each lesson associated with this population of students, the question of context is brought into relationship of issues of power. At minimum, such a framework for teacher education forces us to not project the frame of dominant White middle class methods of language acquisition upon the lives of newcomer immigrant youth. In doing so, a different kind of pedagogy could be constructed and this one would include a school based on a foundation of transnational identity, multilingual orientation towards learning academic English, and developing key interpersonal domains of power through relationships that allow for the gain of social, cultural, and academic capital. Research supporting the effective cultivation of such support for newcomer immigrant youth pointed out the importance of teachers’ abilities to “leverage students’ nondominant



cultural capital through bilingual instruction, and, in doing so, using culturally relevant pedagogy to foster relationships with students” (Hopkins et al., 2013, p. 292). To add to this existing body of research, this study highlighted the importance of bringing the repertoire of language practices occurring outside of school, as well as the knowledge base prior to arriving to the school, into the pedagogy of teaching; this is supported by what we know are important vital practices for this population of students (Ghiso & Campano, Lam, 2004; Oikonomidou, 2015).

### **Adding to the Research and Educational Policy on Newcomer Immigrant Youth**

This dissertation was a critical ethnography on issues of language and power with one group of newcomer youth specifically addressing the language phenomenon of being non-Spanish speaking as a newcomer immigrant youth. This study added to the call for more research literature that takes into account issues of signification and domination with respect to this population of students. The findings of this research support the small but growing body of scholarship that has identified the crucial need to understand adolescent English language learners from the perspective of issues other than the acquiring of language skills, inclusive of issues of social context, migration narrative, and transnational location. Similar to research on newcomer immigrant youth (Patel, 2013; Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2008) this study also found that although these young people are identified as teenagers attending high school, they are also functioning as adults whose struggles and responsibilities are different than our typical notions of adolescent. This mode of functioning includes prioritizing survival of structures rather than self-actualization focused on individual identity, common to the focus on identity & adolescent development (Lesko, 2001). This mode of functioning also includes developing a critical awareness of being in the role of caregiver, including support economic support for their families in which the survival of the family unit is dependent on their work and access to capital

(Jefferies, 2014).<sup>1</sup> A sense of adult responsibility includes various roles such as language brokering that position themselves in a modality of duty towards family, for example (Mehta, 2011).

In addition, the methodology of this research study adds to the growing body of scholarship that emphasizes the application of contemporary critical theory to the problems and inquiries of new and important intersecting sites of oppression, including issues of immigrant and language. Collins' (2009) framework of the "matrix of domination," in fact does not emphasize the domain of language, and this dissertation adds to this framework as well. Finally, this research study explores a topic of language phenomenon that has limited discussion in the field of education, in particular how the signifying practices of English and Spanish, in this case, construct a type of double language power phenomenon, and consequently impact the way in which resulting signifying practices around language are either taken up or rejected within social systems.

### **Limitations**

While I researched with/for the students in this dissertation from a perspective of critical ethnography and am committed to doing the critically conscious work in education, the limitation of this research was the extent to which time allowed for supporting these young people in a way that included their participation in processes of education for liberation. This included finding better ways to support their academic pressures at school, helping them locate better jobs outside of school, as well as having more time to participate in their lives. This is supported by a paradigm that argues for the essential need for researchers to participate with their research subjects in ways that allow the research process itself to push against issues of oppression. The style of writing their voices in this critical ethnography was one way in which I

attended to the basic issues of being answerable to methodology. In addition, the inclusion of time, in particular, spent outside of school, proved to be essential to creating safe spaces for dialogue, understanding, and being a resource to these young women.

Holding a more participatory and action oriented stance, over an even longer period of time, however, could have provided an even more nuanced perspective of the ways in which actionable changes could inspire the participants to alter their social realities. Therein lies the tension of doing the work of critical ethnography, one in which you intend not to simply view the research subjects as a cultural tourist, but rather emphasize that the role of your work is to be an advocate, a cultural broker, and a partner in the restructuring of a social reality. While I did this work in many ways in this dissertation, spending many more hours than even proposed for this study, my own academic processes of learning as a young scholar in the making included locating a priority to collect necessary data to “complete the study.” Therein lies another key limitation that I think is important to mention. Dissertations are first and foremost conducted as academic exercises, bounded by limitations of time, support, and the priority, at times, of the researcher’s progress vs. the participants’ process. Part of this limitation and scope of this research then also included seeing the study and research questions from the perspective of one group of young people at Immigrant High. This study did not focus on the lens of administrators, teachers, and other staff. Doing so would have added to the perspective of issues of language, including the inherent tension and pressure of public education felt by those doing the work trying to meet the needs of this population. Therein the limitation of this study is that while being critical of institution, it does not disregard that all perspectives at the site of institution were taken up in this study. This is an important limitation, as the review of literature pointed out the importance of relationships at the school and outside of school, including support

services, being an integral part of the newcomer immigrants' lives. This study did not take into account these perspectives. Doing so would naturally have lead to a broader understanding of how the interpersonal domain of power and its relationship to language were impacted by these relationships.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation's title, *Othered By English. Smothered By Spanish?*, asked the question of the relationship between language, power, as it related to various social contexts experienced by one group of newcomer immigrant youth. The theoretical framework explored issues related to the promotion of the English language from a critical perspective. In addition, this study theorized and explored the phenomenon of Spanish as it was operating within the new immigration context. What was so critical about this critical ethnography was to include the issues of power that were so integral to the issues of language. These issues of power, theorized as essential to expanding our understanding of the education of immigrant young people, were essential to recognizing how the various domains of oppression, intersecting sites of signification and domination, in turn, impacted each layer of each participants' story. Their stories were indeed, in the end "data with a soul," (Brown, 2010). Their lives as newcomer immigrant youth, and as young women, reflected the very nature of language, power, suffering, and promise.

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## APPENDIX

### **Appendix A: Migration Interview**

What was your life like in (insert relevant country) prior to arriving to the United States?

What was your journey like to the United States?

What was your experience when you first arrived to the United States?

What was your experience when you first arrived to Immigrant High?

Is there anything else you would like to add about your migration?

**Appendix B: End of Study Interview**

What has been your experience as you finish school (or enter senior year) at Immigrant High?

What do you plan to do next (this Summer, next year)?

Is there anything you would like to add around your experiences and this research study?



**Appendix C: Focus Group Guiding Questions**

What role did English play as you entered Immigrant High?

What role did Spanish play as you entered Immigrant High?

How has the school changed?

How does English and Spanish impact you outside of school?

Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences?