Cultural hegemony, language, and the politics of forgetting: Interrogating Restrictive Language Policies

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Each time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore; the formation and enlargement of the managing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize cultural hegemony.

Antonio Gramsci (1971)

Language policies and educational practices are always situated in relation to wider issues of power, access, opportunity, inequality and, at times discrimination and disadvantage.

Stephen May and Nancy Hornberger (2008)

The politics of forgetting refers to a political-discursive process in which specific marginalised social groups are rendered invisible within the dominant national political culture. Such dynamics unfold through the spatial reconfiguration of class inequalities.

Leela Fernandes (2004)

There is an enduring legacy of cultural hegemony and racialized language policies associated with centuries of colonialism that has resulted in a long history of protracted language struggles around the world. Common practices of the nation-state to blatantly racialize language-minority populations within their own borders persist even today. This has, particularly, been the case when the ruling class of the dominant culture judges such practices to be in the interest of national security or the economic well-being of its citizens. More often than not, the move to obtain

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cultural and class dominion over a nation's residents has rendered language minority populations [1] problematic to the process of capitalist accumulation. In order to ensure that the "Other" is kept in line with the system of production, racialized institutional policies and practices historically have led to national efforts which have resulted in the push for assimilation, deportation, incarceration, and even the genocide of minority populations.

Michael Wood (2002), for example, estimates that during the period of colonial expansion in the sixteenth century "several tens of millions" of indigenous people in the Western hemisphere were victims of disease, warfare, and famine, at the hands of European conquistadors" (17). By the late 1500s, a mere century after the conquest began, scarcely two million natives remained in the entire hemisphere. An average of more than one million people perished annually for most of the sixteenth century, in what Gilbert Gonzalez (2000), writing about the impact of European imperialism, cites as "the greatest genocide in human history" (10).

In the twentieth century, millions of deaths worldwide linked to systematic policies of genocide, or what Samantha Powers (2002) terms "race murders," have been recorded. Beyond the most often remembered —the death of six million Jews at the hands of the Third Reich—there are the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh, the mass deaths of Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, the genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, *the ethnic cleansing*s of Bosnia and Kosovo, and the thousands killed, more recently, in the Darfur conflict. In the United States, as in other colonized territories, acts of genocide have often been legitimated in the name of God and nation. In similar (although some might argue benign) ways, policies that have supported linguistic genocide have been used frequently throughout the history of colonization and beyond to systematically eradicate languages, in an effort to assert the authority of a ruling power or assimilate ethnic minority populations, in the name of national unity.

Linguistic genocide

*That linguistic genocide may sooner or later be specifically identified as a crime against humanity is heartening, but considering the imminent extinction of so many of Indigenous languages …it may simply not matter in the case of most language*s.

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Andrea Bear Nicholas (2009)

The world's languages are indeed dying off at an alarming rate. Of the estimated six thousand languages in the world, more than half are expected to become extinct by the end of the century, with only 10 percent considered to have a secure future. In today's "global village," only one hundred languages are spoken by 90 percent of the world's population (Nettle and Romaine 2000). Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), a leading international biodiversity and linguistic-rights advocate, argues that the majority of language communities over the last hundred years have become victims of linguistic genocide—where the language is killed rather than the people. She associates this form of genocide with a desire to destroy potential competition for political and economic power, in order to eliminate claims to nation-state rights among indigenous and minority populations.

Currently, repressive political forces are at work in Spain, where Moroccan immigrants are routinely stopped and searched, while educators debate furiously regarding the drain that immigrant children are having on educational resources because of their lack of Spanish skills. Similar conditions exist for working-class immigrant populations in Germany, Switzerland, and England. The Kurds population still struggles for cultural and linguistic self-determination in Turkey and Roma immigrants, who have been racialized in every country they have tried to settle, battle daily to protect their cultural way of life.

Native-born bilingual populations rendered "Other" within their own lands have often experienced a fate similar to that of racialized immigrant groups. In Spain, the elite-language campaign *of armas y let*ras in the fifteenth century and the Church-inspi*red sangre p*ura ideology (Fredrickson 2002) still casts a shadow on the political imagination. To this date, social struggles tied to questions of cultural and linguistic determination persist. For example, conflicts are still common between the Madrileños, who represent the mainstream, and the Basques, Gallegos, and Catalans, who have often been relegated to the margins of Spain's political and economic life by way of restrictive educational policies.

In even more intense ways, this phenomenon persists in the lives of indigenous populations of Africa, Australia, New Zealand, India, Latin America, and the United States. For example, in Australia and New Zealand, both Aboriginal and Maori communities persist in their long fought struggles to retain their cultural and language rights. In the U. S., the geopolitics of native Hawaiians and other

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indigenous populations encompass ardent efforts to retain their language and protect their culture from extinction. But these are examples of language communities that have managed to survive. Sadly, most have not.

Similarly, we can recognize linguistic genocide in the plight of African Americans, unmercifully brought to this country against their will, separated from their families, and forced into slave labor; American Indians who were stripped of much of their land and had their children arbitrarily removed and subjected to the cruel assimilation tactics of English-speaking boarding schools; and Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Chinese workers who were exploited for cheap labor and subjected to substandard housing and repressive educational practices that silenced the use of their mother tongue.

Given the pressure and strain to survive such conditions, many lost their linguistic connection to their ancestral culture. Again, key to this discussion is the manner in which racism, manifested through processes of linguistic racialization, is intricately linked to political-economic power, control of natural resources, and the subordination of those inferiorized as the "Other." Moreover, the notion of inferiorization, which defines modern conditions of racism in which labor rights are denied and immigrant workers are forced into menial jobs and low-level positions Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991), is very useful in framing discussions of language racialization and the restrictive policies that ensue. Étienne Balibar's (2003) writings on the notion of "election/selection" are helpful to understanding the ideological justifications of empire building that have often accompanied cultural and linguistic suppression of populations. He suggests that the historical notion of "election" to rule is used to substantiate the right to govern over lesser beings and "select" (or dispose), in the name of the nation-state, those populations considered a potential threat to the state's welfare. Underpinning much of this discourse are unexamined assumptions of the "Other." Many of these assumptions can be closely linked to religious influences such as the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, in which linguistic differences were ideologized as the result of God's punishment of humanity (Nettle and Romaine 2000).

Such an ideology could easily be used to justify early "scientific" beliefs among anthropologists who predicted that the language of "savages" would surely amalgamate, until one day there would exist but one superior language spoken by all on the planet. Indeed, resonating here is Darwin's central the*sis of the survival of the* fittest. According to Balibar (2003), these attitudes are also inscribed in the belief that human civilization is expected to strive for transcendence—aspire to a

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“divine” humanity over a “hellish animalism.” Hence, it is not surprising that restrictive policies “othering” cultures and languages outside the mainstream have consistently burdened minority-language populations with proving themselves to be “decent human beings,” worthy of entrance into the inner sanctum of nation-state citizenship, by way of abandoning the primary cultural and linguistic allegiance of their communities for the “official” language and identity of the nation-state.

In exclusionary public-policy discourses, it is not unusual to find derogatory animalistic reference made to the intellectual, linguistic, phenotypic, sexual, or criminal tendencies of subordinate gro*ups. In Documents of American P*rejudice, Joshi (1999) compiled a series of official historical documents that testify to the validity of this claim. One such example is found in the document by John Box, a minister and longtime U.S. representative from Texas, who addressed Congress on February 9, 1928, to support the need for strong restrictive immigration laws (Congressional Record 69, No. 3). He argued passionately that [the] purpose of the immigration law is the protection of American racial stock from further degradation or change *through mongrelization*.

The Mexican… is a mixture of Mediterranean-blooded Spanish peasant with low-grade Indians who did not fight to extinction but submitted, and multiplied as serfs. This blend of low-grade Spaniard, peonized Indian, and Negro slave mixes with Negroes, mu*lat*oes [sic], and other mongrels, and some sorry whites, already here. The prevention of such mongrelization and the degradation it causes is one of the purposes of our laws which the admission of these people will tend to defeat. Every incoming race causes blood mixture, but if this were not true, a mixture of blocs of peoples of different races has a bad effect upon citizenship, creating more race conflicts and weakening national character.

(cited in Joshi 1999, 481–82)

Unfortunately, current media debates on the problem of immigration, bilingual education, or ethnic studies are no less racializing; despite twenty-first-century political speak that, wittingly or unwittingly, serves to obfuscate racialized class sentiments. Newspaper, television, and film portrayals of immigrants fulfill their hegemonic role of racialization by presenting immigrant populations as uncivilized, ignorant, or dangerous. Such distortions are fueled by moral panic and act upon consumers of media in a multitude of ways, but principally they call into question

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the legitimacy of culturally democratic policies in U.S. society. Deep hostilities toward immigrant populations expressed by nativists and neoliberal conservatives raise serious concerns regarding the future of language rights and the restrictive language policies such attitudes reinforce in the public arena.

Restrictive language policies

The cultural imperialism of the last century relegated the language of the colonized to a peripheral role by excluding it from institutions such as the education system—at issue are the role and status of language and its people.

Paul Spooley (1993)

When I was a child growing up in East Los Angeles, I was prohibited from speaking Spanish in school. Teachers would often wash our mouths out with soap or isolate us in a dark cloak room or sit us in the hallway, as punishment for violating the unwritten “English-only” rule in school. To discourage our parents from speaking to us in our native tongue, they were told that speaking Spanish was a bad thing; that it would interfere with our learning and surely be the cause of our academic failure in the coming years. *And so, la questione dell*a lingua or question of language, as articulated by Antonio Gramsci (1971), has been a very real part of my everyday life since birth, given my status as a colonized subject of the United States.

My experience as a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican child reflects the debilitating phenomenon of linguistic racialization, still faced by many language minority children today. These are children still subjected daily to colonizing linguistic practices here and abroad, where the ideology of cultural hegemony persists. In the process, language minority children are unmercifully ushe*red into a culture of f*orgetting—pedagogical spaces of banking education (Freire 1971) where students are expected to reject their native tongue and uncritically adopt the hegemonic language and cultural system imposed upon them by the dominant culture.

These zones of cultural forgetting violently resist the encroaching memories of belonging, comfort, security, and well-being associated with the primary cultural communities of disenfranchised students of color. The politics of cultural forgetting supports the erosion of community ties and gradually strips away from young students their intimate cultural bonds and lived histories, leaving them defenseless,

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without the very cultural anchor that neurologically links them to those genetic predispositions (Darder 2012) that can best assist students to participate in becoming critically literate, while evolving as empowered subjects of history (Freire and Macedo 1987).

Assimilative mainstream policies and practices steer language minority students toward reproducing individualistic identities as consumer-citizens, both dependent and in service to the political economy of the nation-state. Nowhere in this formulation is there the intention of transforming conditions of inequality experienced by language minority populations beyond aspiration to individual material success, as the most important measure of personal value. Accordingly, victim blaming notions persist, pushing language minority students, overtly or covertly, to lose the voice of their primary culture, language, and community, in exchange for a domesticated and homogenized voice, reproduced in the image of the dominant culture/class.

As would be expected, bilingual students can begin to internalize negative projections and, thus, strive to disassociate from their primary language and culture. As a consequence, many experience shame toward their cultural identity and language community. In some instances, children may even begin to refuse to speak their primary language in the family, insisting on answering and speaking to their parents in English—what they already begin to perceive in their young minds as the legitimate language of power. So powerful is the hegemony of English in the United States and abroad that it is not unusual to hear the laments of Latino, Hawaiian, Native American, or immigrant parents who fear their cultural relationships with their children are eroding, as they are primed by subtractive schooling practices (Valenzuela 1999) to pursue English-only dreams.

Hence, restrictive language policies in schools and society have effectively functioned in the service of language racialization and linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Moreover, these policies have not only been convenient pedagogical vehicles for control over language as a communicative process but, more importantly, as ideological mechanisms of political socialization and cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971). The language of instruction, labor, and popular culture, then, must be recognized as a powerful terrain of struggle for language minority populations around the globe—for central to their history of colonization and slavery has been the use of restrictive language policies to guarantee the economic exploitation, domination, and political exclusion from full democratic participation within the body politic of the nation-state.

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The post–civil rights era was founded upon a perverse neoliberal agenda, in which both surveillance and privatizing excesses are welcomed and normalized, while genuine efforts toward community self-determination are openly scorned and maligned. The tragedy of September 11 and the “war on terrorism” have also been used in the last decade to legitimate vociferous anti-immigrant attacks. Yet, the political rhetoric that contributed to the passage of restrictive language policies during the last two decades had long been underway. In the mid-eighties, for example, Ernest L. Boyer, president for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, appealed to American public opinion to rethink its stance on allowing “non-English-speaking foreigners” to immigrate into the United States. He noted that the national community’s social tensions were now signified by bilingual education—a code word that he argued had turned schools into “the battle ground” of the nation (Oboler 1995, 29).

Although the process of contact and exchange has obviously altered expressions of racism in U.S. society thirty years later, Boyer’s words still echo old notions that deem cultural and linguistic differences a fundamental threat to the very stability and unity of the nation. Iris Zavala (1992) suggests that the reason for this perception of threat is the central role that language and culture play in the conservation of the nation-state: language and culture are used within the dominant society to create an illusion of cohesion or the appearance of stability in a world always in flux. Efforts to fortify this illusion of stability are heavily intensified during historical periods of political economic crisis and military expansionism. Both these conditions steadily increased in the last two decades, with massive layoffs of workers across the country and increasing military intervention overseas.

In 1996, for example, in the midst of increasing immigration from Mexico and other parts of Latin America, Congress ratified a bill to designate English the federal government’s official language of business. This was the first time in U.S. history that any form of official federal language policy had been instituted. Coincidentally, it was in the same year that the campaign for Proposition 227, *English for the Children*, was initiated to usher in the gradual but steady demise of bilingual education in California. Since the 1974 Lau v. Nichols decision, bilingual education in California had enjoyed some legal legitimacy and attention within the public arena. However, in 1998, the new repressive language policy systematically stripped away the legal right of language minority children to learn in their mother tongue. As a consequence, limited English-speaking students found themselves immersed in English-only classrooms.

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A decade later in Arizona, rising anti-immigrant fervor in the state fueled contentious calls for restrictive language and immigrant policies, in an effort to curtail the movement of immigrant residents, eliminate the use of Spanish in the workplace, and shut-down ethnic studies programs. In 2010, Arizona finally passed SB1070 which resulted in “the homogenization of all Mexicans in Arizona as undocumented immigrants and narcoterrorists” (Aguirre 2012, 385). The ballot initiative process was driven by “the public’s enhanced perception that Latino immigrants are a threat to the social and cultural fabric of US society” (385). Again, it is significant to note that restrictive policy initiatives in Arizona intensified not only in the midst of a major economic recession and intensification of military intervention overseas, but also at the very moment that demographic data began to reveal the state’s white population had lost its majority edge.

Given Zavala’s reference above to the “perception of threat,” the response in Arizona should not be particularly surprising. Historically, as job opportunities decline, the policing of the barrios, anti-immigrant sentiments, and English-only efforts have always intensified. This has results in tightening the very controls that were systematically loosened previously when the nation-state required quick, cheap, unskilled labor. The intensification of restrictive language policies is also fueled by arguments of conservative political gatekeepers, as in Arizona, who allege that undocumented immigrants take away jobs from U.S. citizens, lower property values, threaten law and order, consume education and welfare resources, and now constitute a national security risk. Many of these disingenuous public debates center on the need for tighter patrol of the U.S.-Mexico border; yet, seldom mentioned is the U.S.-Canada border that is far more porous and, thus, more accessible to those wishing to cross illegally.

Hence, current anti-immigrant sentiments and policy efforts to thwart minority language use in schools and communities are every bit as politically contentious as they were in the early decades of the twentieth century—fueled, then, by similar political alliances and by the xenophobic nativist rhetoric of conservative policy makers and big business. Parallel conditions of these historical eras include increasing immigration, burgeoning student enrollment in urban centers, economic decline, and high military spending overseas. Hence, restrictive policies developed in the early 1900s resurface amidst the hidden barriers that stall the implementation of contemporary educational language reform. Nevertheless, differences in the impact of these policies across various immigrant groups may be best explained as a disparity in the racialization process experienced by European

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versus non-European immigrants. So despite the initial experiences of racialization suffered by Irish, Italian, Polish, and Russian immigrants, it was always presumed that these European immigrants could be absorbed into the cultural definition of the American nation-state. No such presumption was ever made of non-European populations. Joseph Check (2002) describes the crux of the difference:

Racial “indigestion” caused by European immigrants arriving faster than they could be absorbed may have been unpleasant, but at least it presumed that in time, through schooling, they could be absorbed and the dilution on “our national stock” reversed. This presumption rested, in turn, on an implied kinship between all Europeans, whether “noble” Anglo-Saxons or “degenerate” Irish, Italians, Poles, or Russians. No such kinship was presumed to exist with non-European groups: Native Americans, Asians, Puerto Ricans, and African-Americans. There was no argument for assimilation-through-education, and so widespread exclusion from mainstream activities (including education) or relegation to second-class status was a common practice for these groups (50).

Important to the analysis offered by Check is his introduction of kinship and its relationship to linguistic preservation. The use of a shared language (or dialect) is one way that a sense of kinship is constituted and participation in communal life guaranteed. Kinship here includes all those cultural processes that make social relations meaningful, including forms of address, modes of reckoning, and storytelling (Amariglio, Resnick, and Wolff 1988). Through linguistic practices, kin subjects are produced or incorporated as members of a collective subjectivity, while providing them with a sense of cultural group identity and sense of belonging.

It is this collective subjectivity of kinship that is most vulnerable within a culture of forgetting described earlier. Related to this practice of cultural and linguistic subordination in the classroom, contact with school power and authority is used to erode cultural values and practices, resulting in generational alteration in the practices and collective life of the group. One of the tactics employed by the dominant society in transforming and administering diverse communities of working-class language minority populations is to restrict their movement within society and access to opportunities, as we have recently experienced in Arizona. The key here is to create conditions, by which communal surplus labor (or participation) can be redistributed, and to outlaw or obstruct participation away from communally shared traditions, rituals, and practices designed to reinforce and reproduce the original kinship structures or cultural affirmation of the language community (Amariglio, Resnick, and Wolff 1988)—redirecting identity, participation,

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and loyalty to the dominant culture and language of the nation-state.

Institutional policies to restrict minority-language development and its uses, as well as efforts to curtail rituals or cultural practices of a people, function in the interest of cultural invasion and the erosion of the primary language (Freire & Macedo 1989). Over time, culturally hegemonic policies, tied to the restriction of both education and the labor market, function to normalize the loss of primary culture and language among immigrant and indigenous populations. With this in mind, Nettle and Romaine (2000) remind us that “The radical restructuring of human societies, which has led to the dominance of English and a few other world languages, is not a case of “survival of the fittest,” not the outcome of competition, or free choice among equals in an idealized market place. It is instead the result of unequal social change resulting in striking disparities in resources” (18).

Language and material interests

Ultimately language politics are determined by material interests—that is, struggles for social and economic supremacy, which normally lurk beneath the surface of the public debate.

James Crawford (2000)

The ideology of racism that informs linguistic racialization and restrictive language policies constitutes an inherently political strategy of exclusion, domination, and exploitation that cannot be extricated from its economic imperative, whether discussing questions of academic achievement or larger concerns tied to language rights or a living wage. Segregation, for example, as an outcome of racialization and class reproduction is firmly entrenched within the wider systemic necessity of a capitalist mode of production that fuels restrictive policies and practices within schools and the labor market, in an effort to sustain the interests of capital and simultaneously veil the economic consequences these policies produce.

As such, economic inequalities resulting from restrictive language policies generally operate in sync with structures that perpetuate school segregation. Studies conducted in the last decade by the Civil Rights Project (Orfield, 1999, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2007) found that although “progress toward school desegregation peaked in the late 1980s, as the court concluded that *the goals of Brown v Board* of Education

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had been largely achieved, 15 years later the trend moved in the opposite direction" (Orfield, 1999). Questions of segregation, therefore, still remain salient concerns, particularly for working class Latino populations—now dubbed "the new face of segregation"—given that Latino language minority students find themselves even more segregated today than their African American counterparts.

This increase in Latino segregation has been particularly marked in Western states, where more than 80 percent of Latino students attend segregated schools, compared with 42% in 1968 (Dobbs, 2004). In the Northeast, 78 percent of Latino students attend schools with over 50 percent minority student population, and 46 percent attend schools with over 90 percent minority student population. Similar patterns are quickly emerging in the South, where Latino population increases have been reported to exceed 300 percent in North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia and Tennessee during the last decade. Thus, it should not be surprising to learn that 90 percent of neighborhood schools where English-language learners and children of color—most who are, in fact, citizens—attend are all located in areas of concentrated poverty. Moreover, language minority students are 11 times more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty, than students of all ethnicities who attend predominantly "white" schools.

It is also significant to note that socioeconomic conditions, which are clear producers of gross racialized inequalities—such as lack of job security, insufficient income(s) to care for one's family, dwindling youth employment, the demise of "middle class" union jobs, lack of health care, expanding poverty, and increasing incarceration of working class men and women of color —are seldom raised as key factors in discussions of restrictive language policies and schooling. Yet, such conditions of political and economic disenfranchisement insure greater incidence of residential segregation, as well, which has been found to be a significant factor in the English language development of children from language minority communities because they generally attend the poorest schools. Language minority children taught exclusively within English-only classrooms are also more likely to struggle with a process of home-school linguistic transition that expects them to isolate and compartmentalize their language usage in ways that have been found to disrupt not only English language development, but academic achievement patterns (Genesee, 2006; Cummins 2000; Crawford, 2000, Valenzuela, 1999).

Accordingly, recent reports belie claims that sheltered English instruction radically improves student performance. In fact, follow-up studies indicate no considerable improvement in rates of English acquisition (Thomas & Collier, 2002). In addition,

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what cannot be overlooked here is the loss of bilingual programs, which once afforded language minority children the opportunity to study academic content in their primary language, while learning English (Genesee (2006); Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Portes, 2001; Tollefson, 2004; Cummins, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). With the loss of bilingual education, language minority students are, more often than not, exposed to debilitating assimilative practices in the process of their education. English-only approaches legitimated under the guise of “evidence based” instructional practices focus solely on the development of English skills and a teaching-to-the-test curriculum, at the expense of primary cultural and linguistic knowledge (Darder 2012, 2011).

Unfortunately, in the neoliberal age, public welfare concerns have been redefined primarily along economic interests in ways that abdicate the nation-state of its responsibility to adequately educate all children attending U.S. schools, including language minority children. Instead, a sink-or-swim philosophy tied to the ethos of free market enterprise has effectively killed linguistic rights debates within the arena of educational language policy. As such, one-year English immersion programs have become the preferred mainstream intervention, despite overwhelming evidence collected over the last four decades that challenges the folly of expedited English-only approaches and exposes the negative academic consequences to the academic formation of language minority students—save for the few who succeed and are promptly separated from their cultural peers, most who are perceived as too intellectually deficient to contend with the expectations of mainstream schooling (Darder 2012, 2011; Darder & Torres 2004).

Even more disconcerting is the lack of adequate training and preparation that mainstream educators and school psychologists receive, in both the area of appropriate teaching strategies and language assessment protocols for language minority children. This, unfortunately, perpetuates false beliefs—again, despite research to the contrary—that teachers and allied personnel do not require any additional preparation to teach or assess English-language learners, given that all innately “intelligent” children will surely excel no matter what type of educational program is offered them. Such fallacious arguments allow school districts, if they choose, to relinquish responsibility to provide professional development to mainstream educators, who are inexperienced in teaching or assessing English language learners. One of the most striking consequences of this lack of knowledge is the statistically significant number of language minority students, compared to their English proficient counterparts, who are referred to Special Education

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programs for questionable intelligence, communicative disorders, and developmental delays (Darder & Uriarte 2011). Of course, given restrictive language policies implemented in most school districts and the lack of preparation in teacher education programs, classroom teachers alone cannot be held responsible for this unfortunate institutional deficiency.

It is striking to note that in the last two decades—as well-paying jobs in the U.S. began to disappear, in the wake of the globalizing agenda of neoliberal interests and its shock doctrine economics—exclusionary restrictive language policies, along with mean-spirited anti-immigrant debates surged. As a consequence, deep racialized resentments were generated by job scarcity and subsequent competition between working class and immigrant populations. Moreover, this misdirected resentment has not only been capitalized on by conservative forces to garner support from English-speaking working class populations for English-only policies, but also to confuse parents of language minority students into believing that English-only instruction is in the best interest of their children. Even more disturbing is the manner in which victim-blaming rhetoric, aimed at students from racialized communities who fail to succeed in public schools, has been repeatedly used to obscure the deepening structures of economic inequality, inherent in U.S. capitalist relations.

Contradictory class-based attitudes are widespread, with respect to language rights in the U.S. For example, while elite private schools place an increasing emphasis on the development of bilingual language skills for “global citizenship” and wealthy transnational corporations send high ranking employees to Latin America, China or other countries to learn a second language so they can compete more readily within the global market place, English language learners in U.S. public schools—who most readily could develop bilingual skills—are forced into English-only programs. Similarly, affluent public schools offer gifted language programs in Spanish, French, Japanese, or Chinese, while these opportunities are almost non-existent in low-income schools, where most language minority students attend and where little effort is placed on developing their primary language. Hence, access to genuine bilingual development and the cultural and global advantages it affords are only a prerogative of students from affluent classes. For working class children from subordinate language communities, racism and class inequalities converge to entrap them within a culture of forgetting, castrating their abilities to develop as empowered bicultural and bilingual subjects of history, in a world where such knowledge is vital to the struggle for self-determination and the exercise of cultural

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democracy (Darder 2012).

Language, ideology, and schooling

*The need to recognize the significance of ideology in education is crucial, particularly now that anti-immigrant fervor is once again at an all-time high and several states have passed laws forbidding the use of languages other than English in schools and other sta*te institutions.

Lilia I. Bartolome (2006)

In light of a colonial history of language imposition, it is important to understand the cultural hegemonic implications of language erosion beyond individual choice or the practical inducement of English for academic and labor gains. Views of language as "purely mechanical devices" (Nieto 2007) or solely as signifiers of national allegiance must be decentered, as educators engage with the powerful reality that language, political power, and economics are all inextricably tied to the ideological formations of the nation-state and, as such, language functions as a fundamental human resource for the construction of meaning and the establishment of relationships within both the private and public sphere. "In fact, the human being cannot exist without communicating; eliminating the possibility of communication from the human spirit entails removing its humanity" (Nieto 2007).

This is precisely the experience of many children from linguistically racialized populations, when they enter a classroom where the supremacy of English functions not only against their academic well-being, but their democratic participation as well. Upon entering the English-only classroom, language minority students are rendered voiceless in a foreign sound system and cultural milieu that does not afford them a place for self-expression or self-determination. And often, even when these students learn English, stereotypical perceptions of deficiency persist, denying them meaningful opportunities to participate in ways that English-proficient students readily enjoy in the process of their academic formation. Without these opportunities, the ability of English-language learners to succeed in school is overwhelmingly compromised, as they struggle not only to learn the grade-level content, but also grapple with traversing limited language comprehension, in a context that affords them little, if any, language support (Bartolome 2006; Darder & Uriarte 2011; Darder 2002; Freire and Macedo 1987; Valenzuela 1999).

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As suggested earlier, it is no wonder that language constitutes such a deeply contested terrain of struggle. Instructional language is implicated in significant ways, when considering the future possibilities and limitations students will experience not only in the classroom, but also out in the world. Similarly, community conditions that infuse life, meaning, and belonging into individual and collective life are also important factors in their academic achievement, given that linguistic rights, education, and democratic participation are absolutely key to language minority community empowerment. Hence, when important human conditions shaped by a long-standing history of oppression and marginalization are ignored, disregarded, or maligned within schools, the political empowerment and well-being of language minority students and their families are also negatively affected (Olivos 2004; Darder 2011, 2002, 1991). This process can, unfortunately, leave linguistically racialized communities at the mercy of a deeply engrained hegemonic process that prevents them from naming their world and, hence, from participating in significant educational language-policy debates and decisions that will impact the destiny of their children.

As a consequence, language minority students who enter the classroom with a primary language other than English are also often (mis)assessed too quickly as intellectually deficient or developmentally delayed, as a consequence of assessment measures that do not take into account the cultural and linguistic dissonance experienced by otherwise intellectually capable children entering into an unfamiliar language environment. Unfortunately, the linguistic forms of racialization at work in the schooling of English-language learners, or what Angela Valenzuela (1999) terms “subtractive schooling,” disrupts the ability of both educators and policy makers to see beyond their shrouded projections of inferiority—a phenomenon that stifles the ability to recognize, assess, and employ the strengths and capacities these language minority students already possess.

Unexamined racialized perceptions of language minority populations often render teachers blind to those cognitive resources that would normally provide the logical foundation for new linguistic experiences related to learning English. Accordingly, the inability of mainstream teachers to engage the knowledge and skills that these students bring to the classroom is a key barrier to academic success; as is the absence of the primary language as the medium of instruction. The institutionalized ideology of exclusion at work here discourages not only the use of minority languages in the United States, but also disrupts the successful academic formation of linguistically racialized students, while it renders them vulnerable to cultural

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hegemony.

In many ways, we can understand the task at hand to be one that requires us to decolonize our minds from debilitating ideologies that persistently racialize students of color who do not speak English, judging them in need of remediation, yet unworthy of the expenditure of additional resources. In the logic of Race to the Top (RTT) and its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the goal of education is to create the global competitive edge that can ensure domination of the world's political economy—at the expense of children from the most vulnerable populations. As such, expenditures of educational resources are liberally being directed toward science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)—including in the early years—in the government's frenzy to meet its overarching goal. In the world of high-stakes accountability, STEM initiatives are pronounced the panacea for global supremacy, while questions of culturally democratic life have been eclipsed by preoccupations with the (hidden) curriculum of class formation and the citizen as unbridled consumer.

In accordance, linguistic racialization is implicated as part of a larger and more complex system of economic and political subordination that positions language minority students and their families as disposable, second-class citizens (Darder and Torres 2004). This encompasses an ideology that often distorts the ability to see working-class language minority communities in the United States as worthy of full educational rights. The consequence is the perpetuation of a culture of failure and educational neglect that relegates these communities to a position of invisibility—aided by the politics of the labor market, ill-representations in media, and the increasing incarceration of poor working-class men and women of color (Gilmore 2006).

Linguistic racialization within schools is further exacerbated by what Phillipson (2002) argues are the deleterious socioeconomic and cultural effects of the colonial language and the failure of elected leaders to implement a consistently democratic language policy. Indifference to the negative consequences of English-only instruction is particularly debilitating for working-class students who enter school as predominantly Spanish speakers. Unfortunately, as already discussed earlier, the failure of schools to engage the material conditions that these students and their families navigate daily circumvents accurate assessment and the development of language policies and educational practices to support their intellectual formation.

And despite, for example, the fact that Latino students comprise 50–90 percent of

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the total student population in many districts, there has been a stubborn unwillingness to critically engage the manner in which the language needs of these children may differ. This is often reflected in the manner in which educators are trained to understand and thus, contend, if at all, with the needs of Spanish-speaking children as only individuals, rather than within a larger collective history of colonization, *often* taking place within their own lands. This is particularly the case for Puerto Ricans in the Northeast and Chicanos in the Southwest, both groups whose racialized histories are indelibly fused with the African diaspora and indigenous populations, through processes often referred to as "*miscegen*ation" and "mestizaje" (Anzaldua 1987; Rodriguez 2000; Valle and Torres 2000).

Central to this history is an ethnic population that overwhelmingly comprises the largest minority group in the United States. Los Angeles, for example, is second only to Mexico City as the city with the largest number of Spanish speakers. Other large Spanish-speaking populations are found in cities like New York, Miami, and Chicago, with Boston's Latino population having grown swiftly in the last two decades. This is to argue that the educational needs and politics of language conservation in these instances warrant greater collective reconsideration and community participation, given that "Spanish speakers represent 75 percent of the nation's English learners" (Collier and Thomas 2010), and in Boston, a full 25 percent of the student population is now considered English-language learners (Uriarte et. al. 2010).

Yet, whenever there are efforts to engage more substantively with the significance of this language rights in the education of Spanish speaking students, policy makers and district officials quickly retort that there are over 100 languages spoken in many of these districts, and how can teachers be expected to realistically meet the language needs of all these children. Rather than simply devolve into classically individualistic views of English learners or essentialize all English learners into one neat population, it is imperative that the larger communal questions tied to language conservation and dual-language issues be recognized as quite a different affair, when considering the language needs of children who reside within very large language minority communities, which existed in North America long before the official establishment of the United States as a nation-state.

Beyond the culture of forgetting

[There is a] need to transcend our disciplinary, and very American, culture of forgetting and false memory; to reconnect to and recontextualize our own histories;

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to embrace openly, as scholars and as citizens, the critical analysis of the histories and present-day realities of power and powerlessness.

Micaela Di Leonardo (2003)

Theories and assessment of language needs, as well as educational policy considerations tied to language of instruction must contend with significant linguistic histories, along with their pedagogical meaning in cultivating community empowerment and democratic participation—both processes that are still at odds with powerful nativist interests in the United States today. As a consequence, mean-spirited public debates often ensue, resulting in the last two decades of initiatives and referendums that have simultaneously served to strip away the language rights of some of the most vulnerable children in the nation. In the process, conservative and neoliberal education policy debates have brazenly abandoned t*he national eth*ics of justice for all, making the United States of America a treacherous model of cultural hegemony in the 21st century. As such, the politics of forgetting has been elevated to a virtue within contemporary nation-state formation of a new (formerly subaltern) “middle class” (Di Leonardo, 2003).

Hence, if we are to genuinely move beyond a culture of forgetting, this will require that we courageously acknowledge and fully challenge the political economy of cultural hegemonic forces that undergird restrictive language policies in the U.S. and abroad. To do this effectively means that we will struggle to “transcend our disciplinary, and very American, culture of forgetting and false memory, [in order to] reconnect to and recontextualize our own histories; to embrace openly, as scholars and as citizens, the critical analysis of the histories and present-day realities of power and powerlessness (Di Leonardo 2003). This is to say, without a systematic engagement of the political economic motivations and ideological intentions of cultural hegemony and its destructive impact on language rights everywhere, our efforts toward linguistic and pedagogical emancipation will be consistently derailed by a politics of forgetting—placing the power and social agency of our cultural and linguistic differences on the chopping block of history.

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Notes

[1] Language minority populations (or language minority students) refers to those who have a language other than English as their primary or home language and may not speak English proficiently. At times the term English language learners may also be used.

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