The Ambiguity of (non)Belonging: Latinx Teachers Negotiate Critical Social Studies in the U.S. South

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Abstract

This comparative case study examines the experiences of two Latinx teachers in the Southeastern United States who navigate critical social studies without substantive support in their schools. Their school spaces and experiences are myriad and overlapping, but generally the teachers describe being outside the traditional social studies curriculum, the color evasive, progressive project of U.S. schooling, and the dominant racial-ethnic categories of the U.S. South. Similar to Colomer's (2019) articulation of the double-bind experienced more generally by Latinx teachers in the South, we found the two teachers navigated contexts that were made more meaningful and more hostile because of their presence and praxis. We name this type of double bind unique to Latinx Social Studies teachers in the South as the ambiguity of (non)belonging. We aim to center the efforts of these two teachers and highlight the ambiguities of (non)belonging that simultaneously fuel and flatten their drive to continue as critical social studies teachers in the U.S South.

Keywords: *Teacher Representatio;, Teacher Identity; Critical Social Studies; New Latinx South; Belonging*

Introduction

Using a comparative case study approach, this paper examines the personal and professional lives of two Latinx[1] high school social studies teachers in the United States Southeast (SE) who share a commitment to a socially-just, anti-racist praxis. We examine how the two teachers navigate a more critical approach to the social studies within broadly unsupportive spaces. These spaces are myriad and overlapping, but generally the teachers describe being outside the traditional social studies curriculum, the color evasive, progressive project of U.S. schooling, and the dominant racial-ethnic categories of the U.S. South. We aim to center the efforts of these two teachers who struggle for a reimagined social studies across understudied positional geographies (Latinx SS

1. We use Latinx as an inclusive term that represents a spectrum of gender identity rather than the masculine/feminine binary of Latina/o. The term "Hispanic" is an official identification category promoted by the U.S. government for people from Spanish speaking countries. Hispanic is still a norm for government statistics, therefore, when referencing government, and other statistical, data we keep reference terminology as it often corresponds to survey methodology (i.e. Latinx is not a U.S. Census category).

teacher in the SE), and highlight the ambiguities of (non)belonging that simultaneously fuel and flatten their drive to continue as critical social studies teachers in the SE. This ambiguity of (non)belonging speaks to the necessities, limitations, and complexities of viewing teaching, and to a degree, themselves through a framework of resistance. Such an understanding is crucial in honoring the political, emotional, and pedagogical labor of resistance, while also highlighting (and not romanticizing) the same political, emotional, and pedagogical toll such work takes. This carries importance for both the quality and teaching of social studies and also the retention of (critical) teachers of color. Furthermore, this investigation is significant not only as it speaks to three burgeoning lines of academic inquiry—*teacher representation* (Boser, 2014; Childs, 2019; Villegas & Irvine, 2010;), *critical social studies* (Brown & Brown, 2015; Mills, 1997; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2021; Patel, 2017; Sabzalian, 2019; VanSledright, 2008), and El Sur Latinx (Monreal & Tirado, 2022, Guerrero, 2017; Jones, 2019)—but also because there is a dearth of research about the intersection of this triad.

The article proceeds in the following manner. First, we briefly situate the two teachers' contexts by drawing from the academic literature in the above-mentioned triad. This literature gives us a starting point to think through what these teachers do when they look around and find themselves largely alone as teachers of color, as critical teachers, and as Latinx in the SE. Next, we share the theoretical frame of the double-bind that speaks to the challenges of being in relative positions of power within culturally subtractive and racializing contexts. We then outline our development and methodology of the comparative case study before sharing the findings that center one major theme – the ambiguity of (non)belonging – and three sub-themes. Finally, we close the article with a brief discussion and conclusion centered around teaching critical social studies in El Sur Latinx.

Literature Review

We draw upon three strands of literature to situate the context of our study. First, we draw upon extant literature on teacher representation both nationally and in the U.S. South to evidence the necessity and numerical paucity of Latinx teachers. Second, we outline the contours of (education in) El Sur Latinx to communicate how Latinx teachers intertwine with the sociopolitical shifts that result from changing demographics. Third, we share literature on critical social studies writ large to show how Latinx teachers fit (themselves) into such teaching. The idea is that the three strands entangle, intersect, and overlap with one another to create the microgeographies of teacher experiences that we aim to sketch in this paper.

Teacher Representation

Policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders agree that there is severe underrepresentation of teachers of color in the teacher workforce and that such underrepresentation hinders that academic success of students (Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Childs, 2019; Tosolt, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). The general belief is that an increase in teachers of color will help provide role models for students, facilitate culturally relevant instruction, create links between home and school, and decrease racially unjust outcomes tied to things like suspension rates and tracking (Grissom et al., 2017; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). However, while approximately 27% of public school students identify as Hispanic,

only 9% of public school teachers identify as Hispanic (de Brey et al., 2019; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021).

The teacher workforce in the U.S. South is similarly not representative of the growing Latinx population of the region as most states in the U.S. South have a Hispanic teaching force of between 1-4%. Although the number of Latinx teachers continues to grow nationwide, this may not necessarily be the case for some Southern states. For example, from 2001 to 2013, the percentage of Black or Latinx teachers in North Carolina declined slightly from 15.61% to 14.95%, while the share of Black or Latinx students rose from 33.63% to 39.35% (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Similarly, in South Carolina, Hispanic teachers consistently hover at around 1-2% of the state's teachers.

Looking at social studies teachers more specifically, the above trends appear to be more widespread. Research suggests that secondary social studies teachers are the least diverse group of the four traditional single subjects (social studies, English language arts, math, natural sciences; Busey & Waters, 2016; Hansen et al., 2018). According to Hansen et al. (2018) social studies teachers are 84% white and are the only group that is majority male (58%). Although we were unable to find state level data for social studies teachers in the U.S. South, Monreal and McCorkle (2021) cite National Center for Education Statistic data that shows 8.3% of Social Studies teachers across the South identify as Latinx. As this statistic includes states with larger Latinx populations (Texas and Florida), our own anecdotal data and experiences as teacher practitioners and teacher educators in North and South Carolina reveal a much smaller percentage in individual Southern states. For example, in South Carolina a large share of "Hispanic" teachers are "international teachers" that face visa restrictions and limited length of stay (Reed, 2017; Self & Dulaney, 2018). Monreal (2020) estimates that on the lowest end about 20% of all Latinx teachers in South Carolina are or were formally international teachers recruited through private companies, specialized programs, and cultural exchange (J-1) visas.[2] The vast majority are hired to teach Spanish followed by Math (Self & Dulaney, 2018). As a result, Latinx teachers in the South are funneled into certain subject areas through explicit policy mechanisms (international teacher hiring) as well as the implicit, racializing consequences of such, like how all Latinx teachers are assumed to be international and/or Spanish teachers (see Monreal, 2020). In short, Latinx teachers are underrepresented across the United States and within the social studies teacher profession. We now turn to how the issue of teacher representation intersects with the context of El Sur Latinx.

El Sur Latinx

In this section, we outline how the changing demographics of the U.S. South, what scholars call El Sur Latinx (Monreal & Tirado, 2022), entangles with social studies teachers and classrooms. El Sur Latinx is a shorthand descriptor for the complex sociopolitical, cultural, and spatial impacts resulting from the rapid growth of Latinx communities across places in the "Deep South" that have traditionally viewed race/racialization within a Black/white binary. More conceptually, Monreal and Tirado (2022), describe using El Sur Latinx to make space for the analysis of relatively sudden demographic shifts paired with a corresponding reality that such growth is not entirely "new" (see Guerrero, 2017; Weise, 2015). It is necessary to acknowledge the burgeoning

2. Strikingly, almost 7% of all teachers in South Carolina are hired as international teachers from abroad. In some districts more than a quarter of all teachers come from another country (Self & Dulaney, 2018).

Latinx population of the South,[3] while also steadfastly asserting that the U.S. South is not peripheral to Latinx studies; after all Georgia and North Carolina both count over a million Latinx residents (U.S. Census, 2021). Yet, racialized rhetoric of Latinx criminality, newness, threat, and foreignness (Arriaga, 2017; Rodriguez & Monreal, 2017) intersects with and (re)produces local anti-Latinx policies across the South that limit access to higher education, transportation, housing, employment, and public services (Arriaga & Rodriguez, 2021; McCorkle & Cian, 2018; Odem, 2009; Rodriguez, 2020).[4] For example, in South Carolina, House Bill 4400, signed into law June 4, 2008, bars undocumented students from public higher education in addition to receiving state-based merit scholarships and financial aid.

Such policy discourse impacts how teachers think (and teach) about Latinx communities and students. Nascent research shows that even well meaning (social studies) teachers may reproduce, in insidious ways, the erroneous views about Latinx students and communities that drive such policies (Rodriguez et al., 2020; McCorkle et al., 2018; Rodriguez & McCorkle, 2020). For example, teachers receive limited instruction of immigration policy in pre-service programs and thus may have little knowledge to challenge false narratives regarding the (im)possibilities of obtaining citizenship, legal entry, or government benefits (Rodriguez & McCorkle, 2020). Social studies curricular materials in southern states do little to problematize false immigration narratives and can act to bolster these narratives when curricular materials use open controversy to equivocate "both sides" of issues like immigrants/immigration policy, the unassimilable nature of certain groups, and an isomorphic Latino problem (Monreal & McCorkle, 2020; see also Hess, 2018). Even as social studies constitutes an ideal opportunity and space (Monreal, 2019b) to engage critical discussion of global contemporary events such as Latinx migration, there is little to suggest Latinx students see themselves represented in the curriculum or the teachers teaching it (Busey & Russell III, 2016). In fact, Conner (2021) describes a climate of social studies curricular exclusion for Latinx in the U.S. South. While a Latinx teacher in itself cannot and will not change this, more research is necessary to understand how being placed alone in the center of such a nexus impacts educator experience. We rely on critical social studies literature more generally to provide additional context on such praxis.

Critical Social Studies and the Latinx Experience

Social studies, as an organizing principle gathering civic, social, economic, and history education together, is bound to the state. Teachers who question and critique dominant understandings of these forces don't just take on the discipline, they take on an array of institutions and beliefs tied to narrow visions of American progress and national belonging (DeLeon, 2010; Epstein, 2009; Loewen, 2007). Critical social studies (broadly defined) counters and aims to disrupt the traditional assimilative, nationalist, and white supremacist foundations of both the discipline and the nation-state (Alridge, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2015; Mills, 1997; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2021; Patel, 2017; Sabzalian, 2019; VanSledright, 2008).

Because social studies is (often) coupled to the exclusive project of U.S. statecraft, we assert that countering that project necessitates leaning on critical approaches from within the field

3. As another example, from 2000-2010 South Carolina had a 148% increase in its Latinx population (Ennis et al, 2011) and from 2010-2020 it increased another 49.7% (U.S. Census, 2021).

4 As one county commissioner in North Carolina stated of local policy, the goal is to "make Beaufort County the toughest place in the country for illegal immigrants" (Collins, 2008).

of social studies, but also from theorists in the fields that inform social studies. These critiques reflect critical theory that deconstructs normative concepts of nationhood, citizenship, and belonging. For example, DeLeon's (2010) call from within social studies for "epistemological sabotage" to reject "liberal notions of multiculturalism and civic engagement" (p.2) mirrors Mignolo's (1992) de-colonizing rejection of Western hubris through "epistemological disobedience" (p.3). Ngai (2004), a historian, writes of how the very idea of the "illegal alien" shapes-shifts to fit the will of the American state, consequently throwing the concept of citizenship into dispute. In doing so, she sets a course for how citizenship may be interrogated:

> [The] goal is to detach sovereignty from its master, then nation-state, from claims of transcendence to critique them as products of history." (Ngai, 2004, p.57)

Similar critiques are then applied to critical social studies research and practice that interrogates both the objects that construct knowledge as well as the objects constructed by such knowledge. For example, Shear et al.'s (2015) comprehensive review of state standards revealed a negation of Indigenous lives through the erasure of their place in 20th and 21st century U.S. history. In Civics education, Sabzalian (2019) exposes how restrictive conceptions of nationhood and citizenship deny Indigenous sovereignty. Critical social studies researchers have deconstructed the evasions of master narrative in U.S. History to expose how a sanitized, progressive, white-centered ideal is reproduced through standards and texts (Alridge, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2015; King & Swartz, 2014; Woodson, 2016; Woodson, 2017). Additionally, these narratives minimize or erase the experiences of ethno-racial communities whose stories complicate a national racial project centered in whiteness.

Deconstructing and confronting the problems of taken-for-granted social studies is particularly salient for exploring how the discipline fails to fully account for the Latinx experience. This confrontation is bolstered by work from the field's constituent subjects as well as from social studies researchers. Almaguer (1994), a sociologist, chronicled a history of California that locates territorial, economic, and social incursion at whiteness, opposing conventional history that positions Mexican, and subsequently Mexican Americans, as foreigners. From within social studies, Santiago (2020) also takes on the Mexican American experience in the same region to expose how dominant frames force Latinx identity into a national progress narrative. Santiago's (2020) research demonstrates how the Supreme Court Case *Mendez v. Westminster*, a landmark case challenging the segregation of Mexican American students, homogenizes Latinx identity and folds the case into a broad narrative of state-sponsored integration rather than exploring the unique relationship of Mexican Americans to U.S. racism.

Alongside the reality of teacher representation and the complexities of El Sur Latinx, what emerges is that social studies as predominantly conceived is fundamentally ill-equipped to account for the complexity of the Latinx experience because of the enduring, exclusive project of nation-building. Therefore, teachers navigating their Latinx identity within the context of schooling and the South too often face a curriculum that reflects their lived reality: minimization, simplification, erasure, and exclusion (Monreal, 2017, 2019a).

Theoretical Frame: Of Double Binds

Both teachers in our study work within school communities, departments, and faculties dominated by white colleagues whose gaze is upheld by conventional standards, textbooks, norms, and larger policy contexts. Even as Latinx teachers and their students have forged communities of support, knowledge, and political advocacy (Casanova & Camarota, 2019) to resist such dynamics,

alienation and isolation are still common (Monreal, 2021, 2022; Okraski & Madison, 2020). In fact, Latinx teachers in the South must sustain these long struggles largely alone vis-a-vis a white-centric public school system (Guerra & Rodriguez, 2022). Colomer (2019), who is one of the few academic researchers to write about Latinx teachers in the U.S. South, describes the work of such educators as that of a double bind. Colomer (2014, 2019) explains this double bind as a Latinx teacher's commitment to their Latinx community through translation/interpretation, advocacy, support, and social capital, while also being employed in a culturally subtractive context that simultaneously expects, but does not acknowledge, these efforts. Another way of articulating this double bind comes from Monreal and Floyd (2021) who state that Latinx teachers in the South are expected to be a type of "cultural ambassador" for their white colleagues. This means that Latinx teachers are expected to perform a certain type of multicultural identity that emphasizes dress, food, and country of origin without discussion of race, politics, or anti-Latinx sentiment. Thus, teachers navigate the need to "inform" others about, and counter popular misperception about Latinx, within spaces that are not intent on "challenging underlying systems that produce racialized (educational) injustice" (Monreal & Floyd, 2021, p. 414).

The above double bind of Latinx teachers in the South is complementary to one seen in social studies. The creation and development of social studies as an assimilative, nationalist project coincides with the same broader project in US schools and the nation overall (Alridge, 2006; DeLeon, 2010; Mills, 1997; Sabzalian, 2019). Both the historical and social science components of the social studies explicitly traffic in nation-building by way of training in white historical and civic traditions (Nelson, 2001; Ross & Vinson, 2011). These assumptions then impact the daily work of minoritized teachers who navigate "white social studies" (Chandler & Branscombe, 2017) as a set of norms that extends beyond standards and textbooks into school/department-level structures (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Rodríguez, 2018; Vickery, 2017). Social studies educators whose identities, experiences, and self-image fall outside of a white, territorial image of belonging face another double bind: they seek to change a narrow, nationalist curriculum that fails to account for their experience while navigating broader professional norms and systems that ask them to suppress their whole selves as Latinx (Busey, 2017; Díaz & Deroo, 2020).

In this article we center the teaching and life experiences of two Latinx teachers through this double-bind: a coinciding struggle against white social studies, white school spaces, and the reductive boundaries of Latinx racial construction in the South with positing a different vision of education generally and Social Studies more specifically. The teachers in this study are tested by the tenuous and evolving place of Latinx educators, an identity position not fully accommodated by this country's strict boundaries of racial construction and their status as critical social studies teachers in a white-normed discipline.

Method of Inquiry

Like much qualitative research, this project *emerged* both organically and systematically (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Glesne, 2016; Lincoln et al., 2011). As we (Tim and Christoph) found ourselves continually in conversation with each other's research findings and ideas at several conferences, we believed that our previous projects, although different in design, spoke to central themes we both wrestled with. We share more about these previous projects below, but Christoph's case study research with history teachers and Tim's qualitative interview research with Latinx teachers in South Carolina spoke to a shared phenomenon of interest, how Latinx teachers in the Southeastern United States navigate critical social studies within broadly unsupportive spaces. In

line with the aforementioned three strands of literature, this phenomenon of interest was not confined to one context, but rather involved myriad sites and scales interacting with the daily praxis of such teachers. Thus, rather than bounding each of our studies as *a priori*, individual cases, we turned to a comparative case study approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) that expanded the idea of the case to encompass and blend both of our "sites." Considering a comparative case study (CCS) approach as an iterative heuristic to follow process and phenomenon, our CCS sought to better understand critical Latinx social studies teachers in the South; it traces the words and actions "of relevant actors—both human and non-human—to explore the historical and contemporary processes that have produced a *sense* of shared place, purpose, or identity with regard to the central phenomenon" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 10, emphasis original). Hence, CCS is not "a formal recipe or set or rules," but a method for highlighting the power of comparison when participants' social lives are in conversation with each other because they encounter similar, yet distinct (social) geographies. Professionally, we both come to this work as former social studies teachers, grappling with our past experiences and our new position as outsiders to classroom and school spaces responding to evolving social, cultural, and political conditions. Additionally, Christoph, a white male, came to this work as an outsider to the Latinx experience, but intent on continuing to inspect and analyze the white-centered, nationalist systems under which Latinx teachers and students operate.

We went about constructing our comparative case study approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) by first selecting one focus participant from each of our studies that best spoke to and/or about the articulated phenomena of interest. Our selection criteria focused on participants whose stories and relationship to teaching from within social studies was ill-defined by the white progressive project of U.S. schooling, normative social studies teaching, and restrictive ethno-racial boundary making. More than quantity or sampling procedure, we went about selecting two participants informed by the idea that *this* case – this comparison with each other, with and within their sites, and across and through their myriad scales – would open up a meaningful entry point into the dynamic processes that remake and reproduce the phenomena at hand. Because the restrictive projects of social studies and the nation naturally work in tandem to exclude and reduce, we believe it is imperative to take up the stories of teachers who navigate both challenges from their racialized positions as U.S. resident and teacher. We take up this challenge with teachers who themselves are navigating a personally complex story of ethnic, racial, and cultural belonging in their own communities, lives that are not reflected within the master narratives of the United States (social studies). We now outline the blurry boundaries of this CCS by sharing our projects, the participants, and the shared data in greater detail.

Tim's initial project was a social-spatial qualitative study of 25 K-12 Latinx teachers in South Carolina that used photovoice interviews, semi-structured interviews, school (social) media postings, and analytic memos to better understand teacher subjectivity (see Monreal 2020, 2021, 2022). Belinda, the focus participant from this project, was a high school history and geography teacher that identifies as Afro-Latina. Using semi-structured interviews, focus group conversations, classroom observations, and the collection and analysis of classroom artifacts, Christoph's initial project was a comparative case study of three high school social studies teachers at two different schools that explored their classroom approaches to white supremacy and racism within the unique context of their schools. Enrique, the other focus participant, was a high school US history and sociology teacher still working through his identity process. He expressed both a belonging in the Latinx community and the reading of him as white within that community as the son of Cuban immigrants. To construct our own case, we relied heavily on the two participants'

interview data while also supplementing it with Tim's analytic memos, Christoph's focus group conversations and classroom observations, and both our previous' publications (Monreal, 2020; Stutts, 2020)

After combining the data to make the case, we engaged in individual analysis that consisted of reading and rereading the data. After multiple individual reads, we created our own sets of individual analytic memos to identify emergent and salient themes regarding the double-binds of critical Latinx social studies teachers in the U.S. South. We then used those individual analytics memos to be the starting point of two collaborative conversations via Zoom online meetings. As a result of these two conversations, one major theme – the ambiguity of (non)belonging – and three sub-themes (listed below) emerged as salient findings. The theme and subthemes, present to varying degrees in each "site," also connected across "sites," creating both vertical and horizontal scale. With the (sub)themes in mind, we then returned to our individual cases to focus on where and how the (sub)themes emerged in the teacher's voices. Therefore, what follows is a synthesis of prior analysis separately bolstered by the insight that the other's case provided. We now move to share our findings in conversation with our conception of double-bind(s).

Findings: Ambiguity and the Double-Bind of (Non)Belonging

Our shared analysis of interview data along with our personal interactions with the two participants led to one major finding with three subthemes. Similar to Colomer's (2019) articulation of the double-bind experienced more generally by Latinx teachers in the South, we found the two teachers navigated contexts that were simultaneously made more meaningful *and* more hostile because of their presence and praxis. We name this type of double bind unique to Latinx Social Studies teachers in the South as the ambiguity of (non)belonging. We also nuance and challenge a strict binary view of the double bind because our participants expressed feelings of belonging *and* non-belonging and a praxis of compliance *and* resistance at the same time. In other words, their daily teaching lives were one of a hyper liminality that reinforced their purpose and passion while also making them question if teaching (social studies in the South) was a career they could maintain. The following three sub themes articulate the complexity of this double bind across and within different sites.

Being Latinx in The U.S. South: Rejection and Care

One of the ways our participants articulated their ambivalence of (non)belonging was through a direct naming of the problems and possibilities of being in and from the U.S. South. The constraints of teaching and living in the South were absolutely real, but also led to a daily commitment to test these limitations. In other words, the educators navigate the complexities of home; a context of hope and hostility that manifests in a constant entanglement between (non)belonging and in/exclusion. For Belinda and Enrique, the South in a larger sense, and their schools in a smaller sense, are sites of resistance layered within particular socio-geographic locations (Monreal, 2021). While they articulate that the necessity of resistance serves as personal motivation for their critical teaching, they simultaneously express a frustration in their relative "success." For example, Enrique shared:

> I've lived in the South my whole life outside of a year in Venezuela…I have a personal, political commitment to the South. I feel like oftentimes when people in the South become

> politicized they escape, and they go to all the usual suspect cities. They go to fucking New York, they go to San Francisco...you name it. I have critiques of certain aspects of the South, but I have a responsibility to stay and intervene.

Enrique's explicit use of "commitment," speaks to the sense of responsibility that both teachers acknowledged was part and parcel of their position as critical individuals who are from, and chose to remain in, the South. These two teachers directly faced what it means to be from a place, to claim it, while also rejecting many of the social and cultural legacies that mark the region to outsiders. They also recognize that their decision to stay is not easy, that their work may be better received and more efficacious elsewhere. Belinda too spoke of the ability to see her teaching in the South as part of long-term investment in the region:

> I was born downtown, and then I went to schools just outside Charleston...I've come across so many people who worked in other states...and I think it is really different because the South is very set in their ways and very traditional, and also very proud of their past so they constantly like push that Southern pride and heritage onto their kids. And sometimes it's great stuff that can be talked about and other times it's not...And I think that the South is very anti-immigration, anti-anything different... And that's why I'm trying to do my Master's in advocacy and social justice, so when my students grow up, they have already been exposed to differences and that they can be better because I don't know how reachable the old people are. I really don't know if they will ever change. So I think it starts with like these kids and as they grow up, hopefully the changes will be made.

Like Enrique, Belinda sees the South as a site of intervention, a changing space marked with possibility and hope, but marred in the white supremacist tradition of Southern heritage and the persistent racism of that heritage. Such a view is inherently tied to their lived experience as Latinx individuals growing up in the U.S. South. On a personal level, the participants had to make sense of their understanding of the U.S. South, a shifting place of Latinx identity and community, which often feels like an unchanging placeholder for the country's white supremacist legacies and logics. In response to such a double bind, Belinda sees a tremendous amount of hope over these impending battles about the future of the "South" even as many Southerners are "unreachable." As such, both of our participants display a conviction to stay in work that might not yield immediate results. Very much like their navigation of being Latinx in the South, the participants' ability to hold measured hope along with daily disappointment was a precondition to simply showing up every day. Next, we see how their approach to the South mirrors their approach to (teaching) social studies in their schools.

Accepting and Resisting the Social Studies Curriculum

These teachers hold a precarious place in the face of racist curriculum structures and "common-sense" social studies knowledge and their desire to center critical social studies. A central marker of their (non)belonging was an articulation of being forced to continually negotiate their ideological positions, teaching expectations, and Latinx identity against the day-to-day labor of pushing against normative white supremacist social studies. Our two participants articulated conflicted views of their personal efforts as social studies teachers to enact social justice pedagogies. They acknowledged the importance of teachers like them, while also hedging the effectiveness.

They also struggled with the idea that their work was both individually necessary, but that it should only be one part of more collective action. Enrique describes such thinking when reflecting on how effective conceptions of critical social studies may be in the U.S. South:

> At the end of the day I'm not trying to impose my ideology on either my students or my colleagues. I don't think that's particularly effective, number one. And two, ultimately it's more about, like active agents and critical thinkers and a more, kind of, collective subjectivity- than, you know, the deep seated, individualism that exists both amongst students and teachers...part of that for me was, kind of a recognition of the limitations of education...I'm not under any illusions that I'm waving a magic wand over these kids or I'm like, I'm changing lives on a daily basis or I'm changing the world through my classroom. I don't believe that…I think that there are some kids that maybe walk away with a more critical tools for understanding the world around them and themselves and, you know, ideally, I guess that's happening. I think it's a smaller fraction would like to admit but I'm okay with that.

Enrique's above quote points to a certain realism that some could read as overly pessimistic – an explicit understanding that his efforts make little headway within the intractability of a U.S. South continually (re)built on white supremacy. His belief that he is *not* "changing lives on a daily basis," runs counter to normative ideas of teachers as "difference makers" and "change agents" (Lukacs & Galluzo, 2014). One might even say that Enrique's quote negates the broader hope of using critical social studies to build a more just, inclusive, and antiracist democratic project. However, he simultaneously offers that some kids "maybe walk away with more critical tools for understanding the world around them;" a pragmatic view that situates the fight for social justice as slow, grassroots, and ultimately worthwhile work. Rather than interpreting Enrique's words as defeatist or negative, we see Enrique's perspective on teaching as a strategy to persist through the double bind of doing necessary work in places and curricular spaces (Monreal, 2019b) that do not necessarily welcome it. Such a stance is a way to sustain a type of critical hope that acknowledges struggle can be productive and does not necessarily equal despair. Belinda expressed a similar, pragmatic strategy of making short-term pedagogical concessions for the hope of small successes:

> For my [master's] capstone right now, I'm doing my controversial topics in the social studies classroom, and what I found in my research is that teachers are literally scared that they're going to get fired...but I do it, I do it anyways. But I do it in a way that is not offensive and that's not pushy on the kid, but in a way so that I can provoke their thinking instead of pushing my opinion on them. Then I can ask them though how and why to question something, like, you need to dig deeper. So I do it in that way, and I make them hear both sides of every issue so that they can form a valid opinion versus an opinion that's just based on mommy and daddy said this. Um, so that has kind of pushed me to be a teacher, but all the barriers of place on teachers has made me want to just do a little bit more than that...

Belinda walks a path between provocation and equanimity as it concerns social studies instruction. She claims a willingness to risk her professional position, even using the prospect as motivation to "want to just do a little bit more." Alongside that more radical stance, she centers normative aspects of a classroom ("both sides of every issue"... "you need to dig deeper") that hedges outright

criticality. In fact, there is a risk of legitimizing and validating false and unjust narratives by granting them equal space in classroom discourse (Hess, 2018; Monreal & McCorkle, 2021). In this way, she pairs criticality with a belief in contemporary conceptions of social studies as preparation for both civil democratic engagement and as apprenticeship in the disciplinary processes within professional social studies fields (Crocco and Livingston, 2017; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). As with Enrique, that is a pragmatic process of professional negotiation we honor as outsiders, particularly when the field of social studies itself continues to wrestle with the place of ethical and critical commitments for (classroom) processes of discussion and inquiry (Crowley & King, 2018; Krutka & Hlavacik, 2021). Moreover, broader socio-political conditions support a conception of what is appropriate or controversial based on a white-centered (local) establishment. This minimizes, among other things, Latinx experiences and knowledge and casts ideological and ethical commitments rooted in life experience as partisan laments (Busey & Dowie-Chin, 2021; Mirra & D.L.L., 2020; Serwer, 2019).

Both Belinda and Enrique act from and through the oscillating dissonance between their personal stances about social studies and their place in the collective social studies project. When laid alongside their statements about identity, life experience, and their place in the South, it is a dissonance that appears to demand a qualitatively different personal praxis than white peers whose identities and experiences are more congruent with the normative conditions of both the South and schooling. However, we also acknowledge that their identity and their position of (non)belonging jeopardizes them and their commitments in a fundamentally different way than these same colleagues. Their place as both within and outside of their professional communities, and both outside of and from the South, puts them beyond the full protections that would buffer them from racist backlash or intentionally support any effort to lean further into justice commitments in their classrooms. Although this appears to make their work more personally meaningful, it begs to question its sustainability (see also Grooms et al., 2021).

Finding Strength from Isolation: Turning School's and Colleague's Racism on its Head

Although we implicitly state the relative isolation of our participants with the previous subthemes, we look at it more explicitly in this section. In particular, we highlight how our participants found strength, motivation, and purpose from their racialized isolation in regional, school, and curricular spaces. The teachers turned their (non)belonging into a space of provocation, a strategy of resistance to refuse and disrupt unjust relations. That is, they saw exclusion as a path to force new, and different, avenues of inclusion. Belinda explained this when discussing how she is not afraid to "pull the race card":

> I'm really not scared at all...if I got fired for saying something about racism at school, like I feel like I would become famous. I'm like, please do it...I will sue this whole school. I think they're kind of scared...they allow so much like racism at the school, and I think they are a little scared that we could, and for lack of better words, that we could quote pull the race card at any time because so much kind of messed up stuff that goes on…And I try and look at it as a strength. I try and turn it around and say like, "yeah, there's not many of us [teachers of color] here, so you need to listen to what I'm saying."

Belinda speaks clearly to an isolation based on both numerical quantity ("not many of us") and qualitative experience ("they allow so much like racism at the school"). Interestingly, this isolation, her position working in culturally subtractive and overtly racist school settings (i.e. the double bind), serves as a source of inspiration and empowerment. Navigating, and being witness to racist practices at the school enabled her to claim a strategic high ground when she was in direct conflict with the (white) institution. Enrique too leveraged his racialized subjectivity to express skepticism about the co-optation of racial and economic justice into a careerist, capitalist framework:

> I think a part of it was through seeing social justice and these things as a career option...You're being parachuted into other people's struggles, which is not to say that there's not room for solidarity…There is, and there's a need for that. But, part of my choice coming in here was like, I'm gonna organize as a worker in a workplace within education, and there's a lot of potential for struggle here.

Enrique's use of "struggle" is instructive and telling in that it points to work, or at least a stance toward work, that is neither popular nor easy. His idea of viewing teaching as also labor organizing places him outside of a neoliberal frame that views teachers as neutral, race-evasive technicians (Hara & Sherbine, 2018; Popkewitz, 1991). It also places him in direct confrontation with a white-centered power system that views emerging discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion as apolitical multicultural efforts rather than critical work aimed at social transformation and liberation. Similar to Belinda, Enrique's view of teaching was one of necessary conflict - from reimagined power positions drawn out of isolation, rather than constant collegiality.

On the other hand, this means of survival has troubling implications for Enrique, Belinda and other teachers (of color) who center their work in critical praxis. These strategies of coping and motivation have consequences; they undertake much of their resistance work alone, navigating curricular and instructional challenges apart from a prescribed community that would offer both emotional and material (e.g. worker protections) support. Furthermore, this implies that both the labor and the risk associated with confronting racist curriculum (as well as white schooling norms) are carried by teachers of color *alone*. Solitary undertakings alongside a justified ambivalence about progressive schooling projects makes resistance from within the classroom contingent, precarious, and risky.

Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

In tying together the three subthemes to articulate an overarching concept we call the ambiguity of (non)belonging for Latinx Social Studies teachers in the South, we evidence that these teachers navigate their relationship to/with place, knowledge, social studies, social justice, and belonging without a substantive number of colleagues in the same racialized position. They navigate their relationship to the curriculum, to administrators, to master narratives, to systems of evaluation, in a constant liminal space. We offer that there is value in sitting with the complexity of these positions rather than compelling teachers and teacher educators to resolve them neatly in service of consensus about transforming schools. To conclude, and to extend both the practical and theoretical reach of double binds, we offer a number of our own provocations that tie back to *teacher representation, critical social studies*, and El Sur Latinx.

First, circling back to the persistent challenge of establishing a more diverse social studies teacher workforce in a traditionally white and conservative field of social studies (Busey & Waters,

2016), how do we as teacher educators support Latinx teachers who currently take up this process alone or with few by their side? How do we support and maintain a diverse social studies teacher workforce by thinking deeply about the various double binds they operate? For empty platitudes about belonging fail to recognize that our participants drew strength and motivation from their (non)belonging. At the same time such (non)belonging was a barrier to long term professional sustenance and expanded career opportunities (see also recent work by Grooms et al. 2021). How do we dignify the individual resistance while acknowledging the need for collective reform efforts?

Second, another major question for us as outsiders and teacher educators to classrooms like these is how we honor and learn from their pragmatic practitioner efforts to work for social justice and critical social studies *and* continue to push anti-oppressive, anti-racist, anti-colonial commitments? We are neither seeking models of martyrdom, nor do we ask teachers at the outset to concede aspects of the self, but we acknowledge that the lifelong means of coping in the face of a racist U.S. project extends into their lives as teachers. Therefore, a further research direction is to consider the pedagogical and curricular consequences of the strategies that result from Latinx teachers' navigation and challenging of both their belonging and exclusion with their colleagues, the U.S. (South's) racial project, and the social studies.

Third, and similarly, what does it mean to simultaneously hold a reverence for the work of organizers, a stated commitment to ongoing worker solidarity from within the teaching profession, and a gnawing pessimism about the possibility for transformative change in classrooms? We offer that the ideological, intellectual, and professional navigation undertaken by Enrique and Belinda might on the surface depict a series of contradictions requiring resolution. This is particularly salient for Latinx teachers, who are often asked to reduce multi-layered identities to fit the "U.S. cultural imaginary" (Alcoff, 2009, p. 113) in service of socio-political projects across the ideological spectrum. Resisting the urge to foreclose complex, even contradictory, positions is part of the process of hearing and seeing Latinx teachers. It does not, however, need to imply an erosion of collective resistance projects. As Alcoff (2009) writes, "The route to this expanded solidarity is neither transcendence nor false commonality, but accurate renditions of differences of experience (p.124)." What we refuse is the drafting of Latinx teachers into a white multicultural, diversification project while failing to acknowledge and understand the particular complexity of their position (Monreal & Floyd, 2021).

Fourth, we offer that teachers working from within the plural nature of Latinidad while facing down the narrow configurations of Latinidad as constructed in the US ethno-racial project have a particular experience confronting the potent mix of triumphalism, prescriptive multiculturalism, and racist exclusion that undergirds schooling myths. These are teachers who live daily not just with the persistent exclusion of Latinx stories and experiences from schooling. They press on with the understanding that the often-contradictory ethno-racial project of the institution is fundamentally unfit to acknowledge and see their particular experiences. Enrique and Belinda offer a lesson in what it is like to simultaneously hold the aims of collective resistance projects and the fundamental failings of institutions together at once, to wander back and forth between resistance and compliance. These speak to a larger question of what it means for Latinx teachers to belong in El Sur Latinx. Our participants stressed that while their (non)belonging was accentuated by their racialization in the specific spaces in the South, it is important to note the larger (ethno)racial scripts, including exclusive boundaries of Latinidad that structure race relations in the United States (Gamez & Monreal, 2021). Enrique explained this when he told Christoph that he no longer

identified as a person of color within Latinidad because of the "anti-indigenous, anti-Black implications of that" as well as his racial positioning as a white person of Cuban descent. As he put it, "in the United States, Latino becomes racialized, whether we like it or not."

It is clear from our ongoing conversations with teachers that a consistent pattern remains: teachers at the classroom level are still left to interpret conflicting institutional directives, inadequate budgets, and ever-increasing demands on their time to hold the school together with labor beyond the scope of their contracts. The COVID pandemic has only further revealed the tenuous position of classroom-level educators (Reich & Mehta. 2021). We know these pressures on teachers are by political design and that they will continue to feed a feeling of professional dissonance. Therefore, while we embrace a call for more Latinx teachers who will reflect the experiences of Latinx students and push against white-centered curriculum, instruction, and norms, we caution against any tendency to diversify the teacher workforce only to inequitably burden these teachers with the responsibility to resolve this dissonance (Flores, 2011; Kohli, 2018). That requires us as outsiders to see the historical and present ways that Latinx educators navigate the contradictory project of U.S. schooling as assets, but not opportunities to exploit their labor (Monreal & Floyd, 2021). We have presented the cases of two teachers who, prior to the pandemic, indicated a conviction to stay in the work paired with a pragmatic pessimism about the project of U.S. schooling. As teacher educators, we now find ourselves enmeshed in a system of teacher credentialing that likewise places our hopes for teachers and institutional demands in conflict. We are called to extend our conversation with prospective teachers beyond their hopes and dreams for their practice into a discussion of what will sustain them and the students in the absence of an idealist future. That is a project that calls us to attend to the lives of both prospective and practicing teachers, not in service of a demand that they stay, but to more honestly sit with all of the space between commitment and rejection.

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