How is colonialism understood as persisting in the absence of formal colonial rule? How does this question become rooted in notions of language, race, and personhood? This talk considers questions of postcoloniality that connect across two decades of ethnographic research conducted with Asian communities in the U.S. and the Philippines: from Southeast Asian refugee youth in Philadelphia, to Korean American fifth graders in New York City, to Filipino college students in Manila. I center on the “figure”—a Goffmanian concept much elaborated upon in linguistic anthropology. Exploring how my earlier conceptualizations of “stereotype” connect to more recent theorizations of “figure,” I highlight a methodological approach to studying how the formation and circulation of linguistic and social types function to reconstitute colonial hierarchies.

Angela Reyes is a Professor and Chair of the English Department at Hunter College and Doctoral Faculty in the Anthropology Program at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Reyes combines ethnographic fieldwork and semiotic analysis to examine questions of racialization and postcoloniality in the U.S. and the Philippines. Her publications include: Discourse Analysis Beyond the Speech Event (2015), Beyond Yellow English: Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America (2009), and Language, Identity, and Stereotype Among Southeast Asian American Youth: The Other Asian (2007).