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Vulnerabilities, Challenges and Risks in Applied Linguistics

Edited by
Clare Cunningham and Christopher J. Hall

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Contents

Contributors vii

1 Introduction 1
Clare Cunningham and Christopher J. Hall

Part 1: Communities

2 Can Southern Epistemological and Indigenous Ontological Orientations to Applied Linguistics Challenge its Ethnocentrism? 15
Cristine Gorski Severo and Sinfree B. Makoni

3 Late Capitalism and New Challenges: Indigenous Communities Taking Risks in Defense of Vulnerable Languages and Territories in Guatemala and Colombia 31
Luz A. Murillo

4 The Bumpy Journey Towards the Irish Sign Language Act: Critical Considerations and Personal Reflections of a Deaf Activist–Scholar 48
John Bosco Conama

5 'Befriending' Risks, Vulnerabilities and Challenges: Researching Sexuality and Language in Educational Sites 63
Helen Sauntson

Part 2: Policy

6 Challenging Constitutional Bilingualism with 'What if ...': Counterfactual Histories and At-risk Minorities in Finland 81
Johanna Ennser-Kananen and Taina Saarinen

7 UK Language Policy Quo vadis? Language Learning in the UK post Brexit 97
Ursula Lanvers

8 Vulnerabilities, Challenges and Risks in Sign Language Recognition in Canada 111
Kristin Snoddon and Erin Wilkinson

Abdelhay, S. Makoni and C. Severo (eds) *Language Planning and Policy: Ideologies, Ethnicities and Semiotic Spaces of Power.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
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3 Late Capitalism and New Challenges: Indigenous Communities Taking Risks in Defense of Vulnerable Languages and Territories in Guatemala and Colombia

Luz A. Murillo

Introduction

In his classic work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (2006) helped researchers understand the role of linguistic imperialism in the conformation of nation states, where the erasure of Indigenous languages and dispossession of their territories constituted a central aspect of the process of European modernity. Five centuries after the 'Enlightenment' spread Eurocentric views of modernity through Christianization and schooling in Spanish (Mignolo, 2012), contemporary Indigenous communities in Latin America are facing new forms of social inequality and economic instability through the spread of 'new' corporations in their territories. To be Indigenous and to speak an Indigenous language in Latin America, as in much of the world, has historically meant facing personal and communal risks from ideologies and institutions of the dominant society, including those involved in state-sponsored violence, often on behalf of global economic interests. Indigenous children have been exposed to particular kinds of risk in Latin American schools (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

In this chapter, I draw on decolonizing methodologies (Severo & Makoni, Chapter 2; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013), to describe the ways applied linguists and speakers of Q'anjob'al in Guatemala take risks to comply with longstanding state mandates to educate children in their Mayan/Indigenous

languages and Spanish, and navigate contradictory globalizing, market-based mandates that redefine bilingualism as Spanish/English and render the Indigenous languages 'irrelevant' once again. The chapter also describes the challenges experienced by Indigenous communities and researchers in Colombia seeking to defend their languages and cultural practices in semi-autonomous territories of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Taking risks in the maintenance and study of Indigenous language practices in late capitalism helps us understand how inequalities in Latin America are constructed, challenged and sometimes disrupted through language (Heller & McElhinny, 2017). This chapter demonstrates how taking risks and fostering radical hope (Diaz, 2016) as epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) supports efforts by linguistically minoritized communities to survive aggressive and sophisticated forms of global capitalism.

Colonialism and Indigenous Communities in Latin America

In his classic work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (2006) describes the role of linguistic imposition and cultural homogenization in the conformation of nation states, where the erasure of Indigenous languages and dispossession of their territories constituted an organizing principle in the process of European modernization and the 'discovery' of the Americas. As Walter Mignolo makes clear in his analysis of the economic reformulation of the Americas through colonization, European powers approached the new (to them) world with the goal of incorporating it into the world economic system, and 'The image of a new continent discovered one happy day in October of 1492 is, indeed, an ideological construction presupposing that America was an already existing entity awaiting discovery' (Mignolo, 1992: 301–302). Thus, Latin American countries are the result of European thinking about nationalism and an ideology of national independence in which a creole mentality of European ideas and values, including beliefs about Indigenous peoples and their languages, was dominant (Anderson, 2006). What is important for applied linguists to understand is that the territory we know as Latin America was invaded and forcibly assimilated into a European-dominated world economic and political system with a long history of subjugating local populations and eliminating Indigenous ways of knowing the world, including languages and child socialization (Severo & Makoni, Chapter 2).

The period of colonization of Amerindians was successful for European economic powers and colonial elites, not only at the level of materiality, but also through the colonization of language. Through missionaries the colonial powers Spain and Portugal sought to reorganize 'Amerindian speech by writing grammars, Amerindian writing systems by introducing the Latin Alphabet, and Amerindian memories by implanting Renaissance discursive genres conceived in the experience of alphabetic writing' (Mignolo, 1992: 304). In this way, the histories and memories of

Indigenous groups in Latin America were told by missionaries and 'men of letters' who assumed that only through alphabetic writing could these histories be shared. This was the most effective way to silence Indigenous stories, intersecting with and arguably even more lasting than the spread of smallpox and other devastating European diseases, enslaved labor and genocide (Bell & Delacroix, 2019).

As a result of colonization, Amerindian writings all but disappeared, as books (codices), murals and other forms of writing were burned and otherwise destroyed, banned and driven underground (Chacón, 2018). Despite the loss of these autochthonous forms of literacy, millions of people in Latin America still speak Amerindian languages and try to live according to the worldviews of their pre-Columbian ancestors. As we will see, they include Indigenous peoples from Guatemala, where Mayan writing systems were among the most sophisticated forms of writing in the world at the time of the Conquest.

This chapter is grounded in the resilience of Indigenous communities and the radical hopes that sustain users and defenders of Indigenous languages. I document challenges that Indigenous groups, applied linguists and linguistic anthropologists face in the resurgence of Indigenous movements in communities in Guatemala and Colombia and in the context of military repression threatening to silence Indigenous and subaltern voices. One goal of the chapter is to link Indigenous movements, documented in las Americas since at least 1781 (Rivera-Cusicanqui, 2010), with contemporary cases of the risks faced by Indigenous groups and applied linguists working in Indigenous communities (Snoddon & Wilkinson, Chapter 8). The chapter is organized as follows: first, I present a brief analysis of the 'new' ways late capitalism is seeking to take over Indigenous territories and natural resources. I next describe the theoretical framework and research methods I used to understand how Indigenous peoples in two communities are responding to territorial and existential threats from globalized forms of capital. Findings point to the appropriation of Indigenous schools to heal colonial wounds, re-appropriate lands and defend natural resources. I offer implications for research and practice, as well as recommendations for applied linguists wishing to support Indigenous movements.

Theoretical Orientations

In this section I outline a historically grounded theoretical framework for our analysis of late capitalism and the new risks it creates for Indigenous communities and languages. Historically, Latin America has been a source of raw materials, first to feed Europe and later to supply markets in the US. According to Eduardo Galeano, 'the ultimate goal of the Latin American colonial economy from its inception ... was to serve the development of capitalism somewhere else' (Galeano, 1997: 45). As noted above, the development of the industrialized West was accomplished through the

displacement of Indigenous populations from their territories in an attempt to not only appropriate their labor and land, but also replace their cultural practices and languages with Spanish and other colonial languages. Central to this process of linguistic and cultural erasure (Chacón, 2018) was the colonial project of civilizing Indigenous 'barbarians' through religion, language homogenization and alphabetical literacy.

Five centuries after the 'Enlightenment' spread Eurocentric views of modernity through Christianization and schooling in Latin, Spanish and Portuguese, contemporary Indigenous communities in Latin America are facing new forms of social inequality and economic instability owing to the spread of new extracting corporations in their territories. In different forms and at different times, Indigenous peoples in Latin America have responded to the coloniality of power. Despite ongoing efforts to portray Indigenous and other non-dominant knowledges as inferior and deficient by placing 'hegemonic forms of knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern' (Mignolo, 2012: 12), Indigenous resistance movements have emerged in response to the reconfigurations of late capitalism and the ongoing coloniality of power 'enacting concrete processes, struggles, and practices of resurgent and insurgent action and thought, including in the spheres of knowledge, territory-land, state, and life itself' (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018: 9).

Throughout Latin America, Indigenous movements continue to organize around the maintenance and recovery of ancestral territories. In this endeavor, language, education and the natural world are central aspects of Indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination. Furthermore, the importance of place in the *cosmovisiones* (worldviews) of Indigenous peoples is becoming more widely understood (Severo & Makoni, Chapter 2), as is the fact that Indigenous communities in Latin America have often rooted their political struggles in the sacredness of their lands (Murillo, 2009) and the understanding that important forms of wisdom about taking care of the Earth are encoded primarily in Indigenous languages (Gorenflo *et al.*, 2012). These emerging Indigenous movements in Latin America demonstrate that 'non-Western Knowledges and praxis of living-knowing were not killed in the Americas' (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018: 207). Around 700 Indigenous languages are still alive in Latin America (UNICEF, 2009), one of the world's most resilient regions in terms of linguistic diversity. Indigenous peoples in Latin America are engaging in processes of cultural and linguistic revitalization inspired by movements in Canada, Hawaii and New Zealand, and many individuals and groups are reclaiming their indigeneity, including some who no longer speak the Indigenous language (Murillo, 2009; Snoddon & Wilkinson, Chapter 8).

In the context of these historic and persistent inequalities, I am interested in the challenges faced by speakers of Indigenous languages and applied linguists whose work focuses on protecting Indigenous languages and territories. Epistemic disobedience, as a theoretical guide, is an intentional de-linking of knowledge from the 'magic' of Anderson's 'imagined communities' promised in Western ideas of modernity through coloniality. Epistemic disobedience means questioning and rethinking ways of knowing and ways of valuing knowledge to include Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies. To practice epistemic obedience in applied linguistics we need to research and use methods that reflect a belief that ways of knowing did not begin with European colonization of the Americas. Because Western imperial knowledge is hegemonic and epistemically non-democratic (Mignolo, 2012), the assertion of alternative worldviews and epistemologies that have been developed by Indigenous peoples can be unsettling to authority. To be perceived as rejecting or threatening dominant interests carries potential risks for Indigenous activists. Despite discourses of educational and linguistic justice by the Guatemalan and Colombian governments, these risks can extend to researchers and educators who participate in projects that challenge the primacy of epistemologies inherited from European traditions and which aim to 'decolonize' knowledges (Severo & Makoni, Chapter 2).

I also want to connect the notion of taking risks in defense of vulnerable Indigenous languages and cultures with Jonathan Lear's (2006) theory of radical hope, which can be summarized as envisioning and working toward a more just society, one that we have never experienced. Lear (2006: 104) writes

> What makes this hope radical is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it. What would it be for such hope to be justified.

Lear suggests that radical hope is 'intimately bound to the question of how to live' (2006: 105) in times and situations that seem otherwise hopeless. I am proposing that those who work to promote and protect Indigenous cultures may approach their activities with something very much like radical hope. Given the abject history of schooling for Indigenous children in national education systems around the world, for example, those who envision a different type of treatment, one where Indigenous languages are honored and taught, are working towards a goal of which there are few examples and which may be, therefore, difficult to conceive (Ennser-Kananen & Saarinen, Chapter 6). To begin to imagine the outlines of a better future for speakers of Indigenous languages despite aggressive incursions of global capitalism expanding in the region, our starting point is a different understanding of Latin America's past.

Methods

This study of challenges faced by Indigenous communities and by applied linguists who work with them is based on my research with

schools and families in Q'anjob'al communities in northwestern Guatemala and in an Arhuaco community in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains in northern Colombia. The Colombian data come from my dissertation research and subsequent fieldwork in Simunurwa between 2008 and 2014; the Guatemalan data were gathered in 2016 as part of a professional development project for teachers working with Indigenous immigrant children and families in the US Midwest. Each study took place in Indigenous communities with long histories of experiencing state-sponsored violence, Western capitalist structures and laws that threaten their way of life and cultural existence.

I gathered the data presented in this chapter using a combination of ethnographic approaches and techniques with historical research methods. Because I mean to portray speakers of Q'anjob'al and Ika as agents engaged in shaping their own educational trajectories and not merely subjects of government policies and victims of global capitalism (Conama, Chapter 4), I have been interested in learning from Indigenous scholars and always working to avoid imposing my Eurocentric views on language practices in bilingual Indigenous communities. Both projects sought to practice what Linda Tuhiwai-Smith describes as 'decolonizing methodologies' aimed at dismantling the perpetuation of 'imperialism through the ways in which knowledge about Indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways to the West, and then through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013: 1–2).

In this sense, the research contexts were very different. In Guatemala, I was immersed in a transnational community, strongly influenced by residents' international migration experiences and the *remesas* (remittances) received from family members in the US. In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, I was immersed in a highly spiritual and intensely political situation in which a consistent discourse of 'we, the Indigenous people' imbued every interaction I had with the Arhuacos. In both places, I was fortunate that permissions to spend time in schools were granted by local rather than national authorities. In Guatemala, authorization came from the local education coordinator. I was granted permission to live and study in Simunurwa by the *mamo*, a religious leader and the highest authority in the region.

As Tuhiwai-Smith (2013) notes, for many Indigenous groups oracy, including debate, formal speech making, structured silence and other conventions that shape oral tradition, remains an important means of developing trust and sharing information, strategies, advice, contacts and ideas. Speakers of Q'anjob'al and Ika traditionally have lived an oral culture (alphabetic writing and reading of their languages were first imposed by religious and national government authorities), and face-to-face conversations and interviews were my most powerful research tools. At both sites, I visited schools, engaged in non-participant observation, interviewed teachers and families, and spoke with children. Classroom

observations focused on bilingual instruction in reading, writing and mathematics, in Q'anjob'al/Spanish in Guatemala and in Ika/Spanish in Colombia. Home visits led to audiotaped recorded interviews in which parents and elders spoke of their own language and literacy experiences in and out of school. Most conversations and formal interviews were conducted in Spanish and most people I had the opportunity to talk with were bilingual to some degree. Eulalia Gonzalez in Guatemala and Antolino Torres in Colombia translated during the conversations with dominant speakers of Q'anjobal and Ika. The risks associated with reliance on interpreters during multilingual research interviews (Norlund Shaswar, Chapter 11) were mitigated by the fact that both interpreters were local Indigenous educators and were familiar with the epistemological and theoretical bases of the study.

Peligros (dangers) and Taking Risks in Guatemala

I begin my account of taking risks in Indigenous communities in Guatemala by locating them geographically, politically and linguistically in Mesoamerica, the culturally distinct region encompassing central Mexico and Guatemala and extending into Honduras. At the arrival of the Spaniards, the Mesoamerican population was around 6 million Indigenous people (Rosenblat, 1967). The Indigenous population in Guatemala has been politically and economically marginalized since the Spanish conquest and over five centuries of colonial and post-colonial domination, a bloody civil war from 1960–1996 and ongoing state-sponsored genocide against Indigenous peoples. Across rural Guatemala, Mayan communities have struggled to remain on their lands. For much of the last century, the US government has intervened on the wrong side of those struggles, contributing to the violent displacement of Indigenous Guatemalans that continues to this day (Grandin & Oglesby, 2019).

The most commonly spoken Indigenous languages in Guatemala are the Mayan languages: Q'eqchi', Kiche', Mam and Kaqchikel, each with at least 500,000 speakers. The overall national poverty rate for the Indigenous population is 79%, far higher than for their mestizo/ladino counterparts. Longstanding economic disparities continue to exist for Indigenous groups in Guatemala (Flood *et al.*, 2019), which helps explain why many Indigenous Guatemalans seek refuge in the US and other nations.

At the beginning of the 1900s, the Q'eqchi'-Maya lived mainly in Guatemala's northern highlands but were pushed out as coffee planters, members of Guatemala's military elite and European and North American investors took their lands 'through legal chicanery and violence' (Grandin & Klein, 2011). The civil war in Guatemala was driven by the US government's desire to control raw materials and labor and to gain political control in the name of anti-communism and democracy. The San Francisco massacre on 17 June 1982 near the town of Yalambojoch in Santa Eulalia,

Huehuetenango was one of the most violent in Guatemala's history as government soldiers killed more than 350 people in a single day (Sepputat, 2000). Thousands of residents fled the region, many being captured and killed by the Guatemalan army. Others reached the Mexican border and settled in refugee camps or in Mexico's southern states, or risked the long, dangerous journey to the US, 'beginning the great movement of Indigenous Guatemalans to *El Norte*' (Grandin & Oglesby, 2019). Most Indigenous migrant Guatemalans living in the midwestern US are from this region.

Ironically, migration seems to be the only reparation Indigenous peoples in Guatemala have ever had. The primary destination for Guatemalan migrants is the US, where government officials characterize immigrants and their children as 'illegals', families with children seeking asylum are separated at the US border with Mexico, and state legislatures have passed overtly racist anti-immigration and ant-immigrant laws. Currently there are proposals to tax or prohibit the sending of remittances by Guatemalans to their families in Guatemala, and the US federal government has recently pressured the Guatemalan government to detain asylum seekers from El Salvador and Honduras in Guatemala (PBS Newshour, 2019).

In the context of territorial incursions and forced dislocation, speakers of Q'anjob'al and other Indigenous languages in Guatemala now face continuous encroachment by corporations in what Povinelli (2011: 18) calls 'accumulation by dispossession' (2011: 18) that is 'not a historical event but an ongoing process' (2011: 35). As Grandin and Oglesby state:

> Instead of pursuing a people-centered rural development, the Guatemalan government's postwar strategy, backed by international development loans, has been to open large swaths of the country for foreign investment in megaprojects like mining and hydroelectric dams .... There is not a single Maya name among the list of investors in these projects, where the profits go to international conglomerates in association with elite family networks in Guatemala. (Grandin & Oglesby, 2019: 20–21)

The immense sums of money involved in such projects, along with desire for the raw materials and natural resources held within Indigenous territories, make it risky for anyone be perceived as resisting 'progress' and 'development'.

Speakers of Mayan languages in Guatemala have taken risks to keep their languages at the center of their cultural practices, as have applied linguists working with Indigenous communities to maintain and revitalize their languages. For example, research by applied linguists at the Universidad Rafael Saldivar is used to produce materials for mother tongue literacy with support from the *Fondo de Desarrollo Indígena Guatemalteco* (FODIGUA). In addition, the work of Garzón *et al.* (1998) on linguistic revitalization, and the tireless Peruvian applied linguist, Luis Enrique López Hurtado, defending Indigenous languages in Guatemala and across Latin America, are examples of applied linguists taking physical and academic risks in order to support the maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous languages. These risks include being detained and questioned by government authorities. Scholars may also be denied the right to travel to certain regions or discouraged from pursuing research critical of national language and education policies.

To illustrate these risks, I share findings from fieldwork with Q'anjob'al speakers in and around Santa Eulalia, a small city close to the site of the San Francisco massacre. Q'anjob'al is a Mayan language spoken by approximately 150,000 people (Eberhard *et al.*, 2019), primarily in Huehuetenango, immigrant communities in southern Mexico and the midwestern US. I was introduced to these communities through my work with educators in a school district in central Illinois where the number of Indigenous Guatemalan families was growing rapidly. As a professor of biliteracy education at the local university, I was invited to help develop professional development workshops for teachers working with Indigenous students. The teachers felt that the district's Spanish/English transitional bilingual and dual language immersion programmes were not working because, in their view, the Indigenous children spoke little Spanish. When schools are unprepared to work with children who speak minoritized languages at home, a concern arises that teachers will come to regard children as 'uneducable'. The challenges are compounded by assumptions about the connection between language and race (Rosa, 2019), as users of different languages are racialized into stratified social categories. Generally, Indigenous Guatemalans in Illinois were looked down upon by White and African American speakers of English, as well as by Mexican immigrants who identified as white or mestizo (Farr, 2006).

To learn about the Q'anjob'al-speaking immigrant community in Illinois, I visited schools in sending communities around Santa Eulalia to talk with teachers and document the educational experiences of speakers of Q'anjob'al. My university supervisors initially opposed the trip because Guatemala was considered a dangerous country by the US State Department. Eventually, the project was sponsored by the university's Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and I spent a month in spring 2016 in Huehuetenango. I also visited the national offices of the Ministry of Education's *Dirección General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* in Guatemala City.

In the process of studying language, education and transnational migration in Santa Eulalia, I learned about the challenges and potential risks facing Indigenous people. These are bilingual communities where almost everyone speaks Q'anjob'al and Spanish. Except for early Sunday mass in the Catholic Church conducted only in Spanish, I heard Q'anjob'al and Spanish used together nearly everywhere I went. For example, on public transportation I heard Christian radio stations broadcast programmes in Q'anjob'al and commercials and public service announcements in Spanish. Despite widespread bilingualism, people, including

teachers and education officials, did not present themselves as Indigenous, but rather as mestizos who speak a Mayan language and Spanish. This apparent separation of ethnicity and linguistic identity may reflect a desire to depoliticize language in response to state violence against Indigenous people. Rather than 'risks' (*amenazas*), the Guatemalans I met spoke of *peligros* (dangers), including political repression and the murders of Indigenous activists. This stance – presenting oneself as bilingual but not Indigenous – may reflect the high levels of risk associated with being Indian in Guatemala.

Another example of risk relates to the language(s) of classroom instruction. Although the Guatemalan national curriculum requires primary school teachers in the *Programa Intercultural Bilingüe* to teach in both the Indigenous language and Spanish, most materials I observed were aimed at the acquisition of Spanish. In the villages, for example, teachers used Q'anjob'al during informal interactions with children and colleagues, while instruction was delivered mostly in Spanish. In urban schools, Spanish appeared to be even more dominant, although I heard many students speaking Q'anjob'al amongst themselves. Additional research can help us better understand this particular diglossic situation. However, as is the case for some Indigenous languages (Romaine, 2007), it seems plausible that bilinguals in Huehuetenango regard Q'anjob'al as a language of orality and are not necessarily convinced of the relevance of writing it.

Q'anjob'al migration to the US is more complex than the Illinois teachers were aware of. Behind the obvious 'desire for a better life', a migration trope that many teachers can articulate, are the historic and current threats of violence experienced by Indigenous communities from the state and private interests acting in collaboration with or with approval from the state. At the same time they are pushed to leave Guatemala, Indigenous Guatemalans are also being recruited to work in the US Midwest by international corporations, because, as Mexican workers become more organized, Guatemalans are regarded as a more compliant source of labor. Guatemalan teachers with family members living in the US told me that when recruiters arrive seeking to hire workers for jobs in US agriculture and poultry plants young people often jump at the chance. As a result of these political and economic threats, residents of Sta. Eulalia have developed transnational social networks (Duff, 2015) spanning several generations and normalizing migration to the US and dependence on the remittances that migrants send home.

The Guatemalan Ministry of Education's use of Indigenous languages as languages of instruction, primarily through publishing and distributing textbooks and educational materials in Q'anjob'al, has not brought about a more justice-oriented education. Using the Indigenous language to convey the national curriculum or to sing the national anthem can reinforce the coloniality of power historically imposed on Indigenous

education in Latin America (Walsh, 2017). To truly nurture and preserve linguistic diversity, simply inserting Indigenous languages into the present structures of the national curriculum is insufficient. Until the forms of structural racism that position Indigenous communities and their languages as obstacles to the ideals of nation state, modernity and progress are challenged and replaced, the school, by itself, holds limited power to change dominant perceptions of Indigenous learners.

Applied linguists and anthropologists working with Indigenous schools and communities seek to generate knowledge they hope will positively impact policy and practice. Back in Illinois, I shared my findings through professional development workshops for ESL and bilingual teachers. I wanted to humanize the idea of Q'anjob'al migrant children and families for teachers who felt unprepared and understandably anxious about teaching them. In addition to providing information about Q'anjob'al speakers' bilingualism and mestizo identity, the predominance of Spanish in instruction and the safety, economic, and political motivations behind decisions to migrate, I wanted teachers to gain a sense of what classrooms in Sta. Eulalia looked and sounded like. I hoped to challenge misconceptions teachers might hold about Indigenous people, about education in Latin America and, by extension, the educability of Indigenous children. I was struck by teachers' positive reactions to images and descriptions of Guatemalan classrooms, sparsely furnished but beautifully decorated with teacher-made posters and examples of student work in Q'anjob'al and Spanish. They were surprised to learn that becoming an elementary school teacher in Guatemala requires a pre-university year and then three years of full-time university study to learn to teach young children. Some teachers remarked that the formation of teachers in Guatemala is probably more rigorous than teacher preparation in the US, where preservice teachers often receive only two years of education courses.

Between la Guerilla, Narcotraficantes and Paramilitares: Taking Risks in Colombia

Because I am a native of Colombia and conducted dissertation research in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, my history with the Arhuaco community is a long one. Indigenous peoples in Colombia comprise barely 3% of the country's total inhabitants (Ng'weno, 2007), compared with numerically and proportionally larger Indigenous populations in Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. Within Colombia, the Arhuaco, or Ika as they also call themselves, are a relatively small group of 18,000, approximately one-third of the populations of the Nasa and Wayu, the largest Indigenous groups in the country.

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, home of the Arhuaco people and central element of their cosmology and political discourse, presents a remarkably diverse biolinguistic ecology. This snow-capped mountain

range rises dramatically from the Caribbean coastal plain and supports unique species of flora and fauna. The region's natural resources have attracted non-Indigenous farmers, *guerrillas* (anti-government soldiers), *narcotraficantes* (drug dealers) and *paras* (paramilitary forces). In response to the presence of these last three groups, and to protect the radio and television towers that connect the coastal states of Cesar and Magdalena with the interior of the country, Colombian army troops have been a regular presence in the Sierra Nevada since the 1960s. Those entering the *resguardo*, the land reserve granted by the Colombian government located within the states of Cesar, Magdalena and Guajira (Frank, 1990), must pass a military check point. Anyone bringing in food supplies must justify the amount to satisfy the government's policy of controlling food and preventing access by the guerrillas.

Currently, four Indigenous peoples live in the Sierra Nevada: the Kogui, the Wiwa, the Kankuamo and the Arhuacos. With the introduction of Catholic mission schools in 1740, these groups moved away from Spanish settlements on the coast and the lowland plains to secluded higher elevations (Trillos, 1996). The relative isolation of the Sierra Nevada continues to be an important factor in the continued vitality of Arhuaco culture (Elsass, 1995), with most settlements on the southeastern flanks of the mountain, from the lower, temperate zones to the highest, coldest elevations.

According to Arhuaco tradition, the Indigenous groups in the Sierra Nevada were created to protect *Ka' gimmiri nivisaku ni* (the mountain; or Mother Earth). For them, the mountain is a sacred place, the center of the world, where nature is understood as the embodiment of a living force that maintains and sustains the universe, the Arhuaco people and the Ika language. Like the Maori, whose survival as a people 'has come from our knowledge of our contexts, our environment, not from some active beneficence of our Earth Mother' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013: 12–13), the Arhuaco regard their knowledge of and relationship with the Sierra Nevada as central to cultural and linguistic survival and the basis of political struggle. Antolino Torres, a teacher at the bilingual school in the village of Simunurwa, described this relationship:

> Our language and Arhuaco culture couldn't exist without the land. Our language is endangered as long as our ancestral lands are threatened. Otherwise, it's not in trouble. We have conversations with the land, of course we do; that's what the spiritual *trabajos* and the *pagamentos* (tasks and offerings) are for. Our language is strong because we live in the Sierra, that's why. [Personal communication, February 2000]

Interdependencies between biological and linguistic diversity and implications for political resistance have begun to receive attention from applied linguists and other scientists (Harmon, 1996). The Arhuacos understand these inter-connections very well. Torres's point that Ika remains vital 'because we live in the Sierra, that's why' emphasizes this view, reminding

us that, in the case of the Arhuaco, language and culture cannot be understood separately from territory.

Ethnolinguistic maintenance among the Arhuaco is also rooted in strong feelings of pride in being Indian and in speaking Ika (Trillos, 1986). Spanish is the national language of Colombia and a language of power and prestige in the Sierra Nevada, but it has not replaced Ika, which continues to be the home and community language for most Arhuacos. Ika is also the language that keeps Simunurwa residents 'safe' from the risks of violence surrounding their territory. For example, when I asked Antolino Torres, my colleague and translator, about starting my language classes in Ika, his response was revealing: 'I am going to teach you just the basics because a language is learned in the *vivencia*, the lived experience, but the truth is that we don't want the *bunachis* (lit., the whites) to understand our language very well ... if they did, how would we keep our movement safe?' Before beginning my research at the school, I was encouraged to participate in a spiritual 'trabajo' [task], and followed the instruction of the *mamo* (spiritual leader) while Antolino patiently translated for me. Once the *limpieza* (spiritual cleansing) was finished, Antolino explained the reasons for that particular task and what we had accomplished, prefacing his explanation with the comment 'I will tell you only what as a *bunachi* (white person) you are allowed to know'. These examples suggest the power of Ika to protect forms of knowledge available only to the Arhuaco. In this view, language is a form of wealth closely guarded by the wise. When Ika's power is diminished, through generational language loss or through sharing too much of it with *bunachi*, the community becomes more vulnerable.

Despite previous research experience in non-Indigenous communities in the Caribbean region of Colombia, I found challenging the spiritual tasks I was required to perform to gain permission to live and conduct research in Simunurwa. Tuhiwai-Smith describes such tasks as 'part of a larger set of judgments on criteria that a researcher cannot prepare for, such as: Is her spirit clear? Does she have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they actually do anything?' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013: 10). After meeting these conditions and agreeing to share my findings with community leaders before making them publicly available, I was permitted to undertake a study of schooling and the maintenance of Arhuaco culture and language (Murillo, 2009). I lived in Simunurwa for 14 months in 2000 and 2001 and visited yearly between 2002 and 2014.

The bilingual primary school was my point of entry to other domains. At the Arhuacos' request, I taught classes in Spanish and advised a youth group learning local traditions. I studied Ika at the school and learned to greet and share basic conversation with elders and young children. My work at the school led me to form close friendships with several Indigenous teachers who became cultural informants and valued critics of my interpretations of Arhuaco efforts to decolonize schooling.

An event I experienced in 2000, a paramilitary attack near to the Arhuaco *resguardo* suggests the risks facing Indigenous peoples in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. In March, 2000 I was in Simunurwa when a paramilitary group attacked the nearby town of Pueblo Bello and assassinated several people as punishment for (allegedly) supporting the guerrillas. Later that day, the community nurse came to the house where I was staying to deliver a message from the health center: as the only *bunachis* in the village, the nurse and I must remain in hiding until the danger had passed. Because the paramilitary forces had taken over Pueblo Bello, the health center staff there feared that they would come to Simunurwa next in search of guerrilla collaborators.

On the night of the attack, Vicencio, a member of the youth group I was advising, shared the story of how he had been detained, interrogated and eventually released by the paramilitary. Pueblo Bello had suddenly become full of vehicles transporting strongly armed men and women, and Vicencio was detained with several other people. He described how two men and a woman pointed their guns at them and demanded that each person show identification. While everybody was showing their *cédula de ciudadanía* (citizenship card), one of the armed men was checking a list to see if any of their names matched. When it was Vicencio's turn to be questioned by the paramilitary officers, he said that, as an Arhuaco, he did not carry a citizenship card. The man requesting his identification told him he could go, but to leave his supply of coca leaves behind. After this, he made it back to Simunurwa without incident. Another community member, Efrain Ramos (personal communication) said that, owing to increased international attention being given to Indigenous peoples, armed groups must now 'think twice before they disappear an Arhuaco'. After reflecting on Vicencio and Efrain's descriptions of the attack, I understood that the Arhuaco also display their cultural resistance, including child language socialization and schooling in Ika, as a means of protecting their young people from attacks by external forces and from recruitment into the Colombian military, guerilla and paramilitary forces.

Armed violence has receded somewhat since 2014, but Indigenous groups in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta face new threats to their territories from extractive corporations mining for gold, gems and materials for construction. Despite accords signed between the Colombian government and the four Indigenous groups living in the region in 1973 and 1995 (Murillo, 2009), mining has become an imminent environmental threat. Currently, there are 132 projects approved by the Colombian Agencia Nacional Minera (National Mining Agency) and nearly twice that number of proposals by international agencies are pending approval (Cote, 2017).

Colombia's Commissioner for Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Leonor Zalabata described the environmental threats: 'The Sierra holds mineral wealth that dates back to the creation of the world, and these natural treasures, (...) now form a threat to us because environmental

permits are being granted for mineral and hydrocarbon exploitation' (Center for World Indigenous Studies, 2018). Arhuaco leaders have led protests against legal and illegal gold mining that is poisoning rivers with mercury and blocking access to sacred sites where spiritual practices are observed. As the number of mining permits increases, Indigenous leaders insist that corporations do not obtain, or even seek, approval before beginning extraction activities. They accuse the Colombian government of siding with the corporations and presenting Indigenous people as 'anti-development' and anti-Colombian (Cote, 2017). In response, the Arhuaco are organizing to protect their territory from mining interests. In February 2019, hundreds of Arhuaco gathered around a big bonfire to play and dance to traditional music (Valerio Ramos, personal communication) in protest against renewed attacks on their livelihood. Currently, Arhuaco lawyers aided by non-Indigenous lawyers are petitioning courts to stop mining corporations from encroaching on Indigenous territory.

Discussion

What can we learn about taking risks from these two cases of Indigenous education? Broadly, studying the risks involved in defending Indigenous languages and territories helps us understand how inequalities in Latin America are constructed, challenged and potentially disrupted through language (Heller & McElhinny, 2017). In Santa Eulalia and Simunurwa we see clear evidence for claims that the ultimate purpose of the Latin American economy has been, during and post-colonialism, to sustain global capitalism (Galeano, 1997; Mignolo, 2012). Although it is difficult to compare risk and vulnerabilities across geographies and temporalities, Indigenous groups to may find it even more difficult to defend their languages and territories today because national elites in Guatemala and Colombia are increasingly sponsored by powerful foreign investors.

Such threats have not prevented Indigenous communities from confronting new and invasive forms of global capitalism. Expressions of Indigenous knowledge give voice to epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), enacting and symbolizing resistance to attempts to dispossess them of their lands and languages. Indigenous people live these risks and activists, including educators, respond to them with what I have characterized as radical hope for a more just, sustainable and as yet unknown future (Diaz, 2016). We have seen how Q'anjob'al speakers in Guatemala and Illinois have responded to decades of state violence through forced and induced migration, downplaying their Indigenous identity, emphasizing Spanish (in school) and mestizo origins, and developing transnational migration networks in the US. In Colombia, Arhuaco leaders use Ika to preserve and protect specialized forms of knowledge, and promote use of their language in school as emblem of the Indigenous cultural identity that affords some protection against the (para) militarization of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

The defense of territory, biodiversity and language in Indigenous communities in Guatemala, Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America is sometimes accompanied by applied linguists and anthropologists. To contribute to this work, researchers must embrace new research paradigms, from a posture of studying about Indigenous languages to one of understanding language use within broader struggles for territorial and economic autonomy. Moving toward adopting new research methodologies and approaches is one way that researchers can practice radical hope. Adopting new approaches can also expose researchers to unforeseen vulnerabilities and challenges. I hope that this chapter provides useful guidance in this endeavor.

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