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Language Futures from Uprooted Pasts: Emergent Language Activism in the Mayan  
Diaspora of the United States

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Anthropology

by

Sonya Rao

2015



## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

### Language Futures from Uprooted Pasts: Emergent Language Activism in the Mayan Diaspora of the United States

by

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Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Paul V. Kroskrity, Committee Chair

The thesis observes the role of life experiences with language in the production of new political orientations among diaspora of Mayans from the Highlands of Guatemala. This is accomplished through the analysis of life histories of Mayan interpreters that focus on how experiences of language have directed their life courses and careers. Interpreters' narratives of these life paths reveal moments of insight in which they transform their identities, political orientations, and methods of advancing their communities. Such resonant moments draw attention to the personal in the formation of a more general indigenous diasporic political horizon.

The thesis of Sonya Rao is approved.

Jessica R. Cattelino

Norma Mendoza-Denton

Paul V. Kroskrity, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

The thesis is dedicated to the participants in this project. The interpreters whose stories are described were greatly generous with their stories of their lives with language, which continued to make me laugh, smile, and feel truly changed by in the time working on this project.

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## I. Introduction

The term “language activists” circulates to describe those working in language documentation and revitalization of lesser spoken languages in indigenous and minority communities.<sup>1</sup> This issue, though globally important, is not the only avenue one can take to better people’s lives with language. The category of “language activist” might be expanded to include the many individuals building the legal and professional infrastructure for language rights and access at all levels of citizen interface with State structures: police-civilian interactions, community health centers, schools, and courtrooms. From lawyers working to set a legal precedent for protection against language discrimination, to bilingual teachers and education advocates, to policy makers working for legal language rights, a number of high profile professionals look to make political and social institutions account for the needs of speakers of minority languages and language varieties. The thesis treats the work of interpreters of indigenous minority languages as forms of language activism. Though it is professional work, ultimately it part of a larger project of providing access to resources kept exclusive by monolingual state policies and structures. Framing such work as a form of activism gives analysts of minority language politics, and indigenous politics more generally, a new point of access for understanding indigenous forms of self-determined politics.

This research describes the lives of six individuals who are or have been interpreters of Mayan languages in these interfaces in the United States. Interviewees are professionals who have gained social mobility as a byproduct of offering language services to their communities. Most were associated with governments at county, state, and federal levels as official court interpreters, and a similar number were important leaders in non-government and community organizations that work

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<sup>1</sup> The well-known Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages uses the phrase “language activists” to describe the indigenous language revivalists they sponsor. Such use of the phrase both epitomizes its popular understanding and has popularized its use.

toward language access for the Mayan community. Their simultaneous ties to the State as official court interpreters and activist objectives to create structures where the State has provided little assistance complicates the boundary between “language professional” and “language activist.”

The blurring and rearticulating of these categories foreshadows how these interpreters’ life work comes to structure an emergent politics; their constant negotiation of seemingly contrasting experiences anticipates the production of new political structures and solutions. In this way the initial objective of the project to understand the motivation behind these forms of advocacy and activism by exploring the lives of interpreters. The motivations behind their missions were located around tensions between life experiences that, when taken together, are deeply disjointed or contrasting – tensions from experiences of “home” and “new home,” formal and informal work, aligning to nation-States and building indigenous identities. I show that negotiating these tensions has led these interpreters to produce new structures and political outlooks, and therefore aggregating these we find a new indigenous political horizon, or new understandings of what it means to “do” indigenous politics.

The interviews for this project spanned a six month period, during which I met interpreters across the greater Los Angeles area.<sup>2</sup> Most had migrated from Guatemala more than fifteen years ago, and one was raised as first generation American. All were enthusiastic to talk about their life experiences with language, their professional lives and dilemmas, and their language activism and community work. Together these combine into a language-focused biography, or a “lingual life history.”<sup>3</sup> As I was setting up for the first interview, the participant printed a two page write-up of his life featured in his workplace newsletter. It described his early exposure to political violence in

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<sup>2</sup> The exceptions to this pattern were one interpreter who had since moved out of Los Angeles but still lives and works in Southern California, and another who lives and works in South Florida.

<sup>3</sup> See Kroskrity 1993, 2009, 2011, Johnstone 1999.

Huehuetenango, Guatemala, migration to the United States, application for political asylum status and educational path to his present career. I got the sense that he expected our interview to take the form of this chronological account of life events, a story he had clearly told before. But the “lingual life history” interview, an oral-history style informal interview with a focus on experiences of language over the subject’s lifetime, led to a very different conversation. The language-focused questions enabled him to tell the story of his life in a new way. At the time, the value of lingual life history itself became apparent to me in the passion with which he spoke and the excitement showed to talk about his life experiences with language.

The experience of this first interview set the tone of my project collecting language-focused life histories of Mayan interpreters living in the United States. It made me aware that the form of the lingual life history itself had a story to tell, in the patterns it elicited and the meaning it seemed to have for the interviewees. Of course the individuals discussed in this thesis, while chosen for their similar cultural, linguistic and professional backgrounds, have had varying life experiences. Five were immigrants and asylees themselves, one was a first generation American. Though the majority lived in Los Angeles, CA, their paths of migration to and within the United States varied. Their approaches to community organizing, professional expertise and outlooks, and political actions took different forms. These differences make the patterns that do emerge across the group even more striking and significant; at the same time, the patterns identified here are not intended to represent all the participants.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The small research sample of this project is a direct result of the reality that there are very few Mayan professional interpreters in the United States, one of the reasons why their language activism is so necessary and timely. Participants ranged in age, and though the majority had children, their children were of a range of ages. Another demographic consideration is that five of the participants were men and one was a woman. The already small network of Mayan interpreters in the United States is dominated by men, and therefore to speak with a woman was very beneficial to the project. Nevertheless as a result, parts of her narrative as a woman represent quite a different experience from the other informants. This combined with the fact that she was one of the minority of participants who were raised in the United States, her story is consistent with many of the themes at hand, but not others. Her life history indicates that further

Across all six study participants one life story was repeatedly told, and was related as important to understanding their overall life experience. Each had communicated with family members in Guatemala by recording cassette tapes of themselves to report on their daily lives, in their native Mayan languages, and mailed these tapes back and forth for many years. Many discussed making and hearing these tapes as a practice that transformed of them and their linguistic identities. All seemed to recognize this practice as part of what constituted them as part of a diaspora “from” a very specific type of place.

Of course this also meant that telling stories into a recording device about how life has been and is going was not a new practice for these interpreters. They had extensive experience telling their life stories, honing their skills as narrators. First, this suggests one reason why my interviews with them generated such compelling narratives. Secondly But more importantly, it shows a side of peoples’ lives with language that linguistic anthropologists have yet to fully explore. People are experts on their own lives, and despite the fact that this may lead them to lose sight of some aspects of their experience while emphasizing others, many have long thought about how their experiences with language have changed them, their politics, and their aspirations for themselves and their communities. This may be particularly true of individuals whose linguistic practices are not normalized or naturalized in their social environments. It is especially the case for people, like those interviewed in the course of this project, who have experienced intense linguistic discrimination and tend to feel that contrast between their linguistic selves and those of the dominant community. Nonetheless, these retellings of lives with languages can lead analysts to important information not only about what language ideologies people hold, but how people themselves experience the effects of these, and operationalize them in their individual, social, and political lives.

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study on the specific experiences of indigenous women in the field of interpreting, if possible considering demographic constraints, is necessary, but unrealistic for this project given the distribution of informants accessed.

## II. Historical Forces

The Mayan individuals interviewed on this generally constructed Mayans as a whole as an ancient and modern, colonial and post-colonial, global and indigenous people. In my discussions with Mayan interpreters, they often invoked particular narrative effects by compressing, variously accessing, and criss-crossing these pasts, presents and futures-becoming-presents. Not one participant drew a clear time frame around their peoples' history, and though they should not be expected to, it makes choosing a "starting point" by which to discuss Mayan history, or any history of a colonized people, a political and risky choice. Many historical accounts of modern Mayan peoples begin with European conquest, constructing indexicalities between Mayan existence and their political oppression.<sup>5</sup> Such an index will not suffice here, as the participants in this project represent various linguistic, ethnic, and geographical roots, leading to differences within the colonial experience itself. One commonality amongst the participants is that they left their homes in Guatemala for the United States. For this reason, I will begin historical context with the constraints and conditions that initiated their migration out of Guatemala and/ or solidified their choices to stay in the United States.

The middle of the twentieth century saw a troubled political arena in Guatemala descend into a major conflict, and eventually genocide, of the century, targeting indigenous Mayans of remote highland villages. In the long history preceding the violent years of civil war, one moment stands out as that which might have tipped the first domino. Democratically elected president Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán's political priority of agrarian reform was carried out through Decreto (Decree) 900 in 1952, which resulted in significant land redistribution (Trefzger 2002). The reforms

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<sup>5</sup> A prime example is the classic *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540-1988*, ed. Smith and Moors (1990). Beginning native histories at colonization is a practice that social scientists are beginning to move away from, but the effects of this practice are still deeply felt.

benefitted much of the Mayan peasantry (Handy 1988, May 2001: 17) and targeted specific entities such as the United States' United Fruit Company (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982). In 1954 the CIA backed a coup to overthrow Árbenz and installed a puppet military regime, protecting the United States' economic interests in the name of eliminating a perceived communist threat (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982).

Economic restructuring and further agrarian reform followed, this time in a vein of proto-neo-liberalism, that had devastating impacts on the Mayan population. All redistribution of land under Decreto 900 was made ineffective in 1954 (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982: 221). The Guatemalan State, now acting in the imperial interests of the United States, began restructuring land tenure to increase agricultural production for export (Williams 1986, Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982: 139, May 2000: 24). The process of integration into global markets was furthered by the introduction of international aid deals oriented to development of agriculture for export (Loucky and Moors 2000:1). The restructuring of land tenure needed to carry out these drastic changes re-dispossessed Mayans of their land, making subsistence lifestyles impossible. For many Mayans the only way to survive the beginnings of the new economic order was to join the formal economy as manual labor on the very agricultural projects that had displaced their chances for self-sufficiency (Loucky and Moors 2000: 2). In the decades to come, the pressure of poverty on these and other peasant populations would contribute to the flow of migrants out of rural Guatemala into urban centers around Central America and as far as the United States.

The mid-century economic reforms were enforced through repression and political violence by the right wing military regime, accelerating political tensions and compounding into further violent unrest throughout the 1950s and 60s (May 2000). In the upcoming decades Guatemala was in a state of civil war, with leftist movements organizing against a series of corrupt military regimes.

Some indigenous Mayans joined the leftist forces, many did not (May 2000: 62). Nonetheless when Mayan communities began to organize separately from leftist forces for collective economic self-sufficiency in the 70s, Mayan community leaders were “killed outright or disappeared, their bodies were later found along the roadside” (Loucky and Moors 2000:3) by paramilitary forces. As Mayans began to speak out against this violence, leftist guerilla groups appropriated Mayan grievances into their rhetoric and ideology (May 2000).

The Guatemalan State’s perception that Mayans and leftist forces were allying met centuries old racist agendas against Mayan peoples, resulting in years of violent backlash against indigenous people. Despite the variability in Mayan outlooks toward majority politics, Mayans in general were uniformly targeted under the many military regimes that succeeded one another throughout the war (May 2000). Perhaps the worst atrocities committed against Mayan people were in the late 70s through the early 80s, under the military regimes of Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efraín Ríos Montt (Gerrard-Burnett 2010). The targeted nature of this violence, including direct orders to kill Mayans not for their politics but for their ethnicity, would later qualify the mass violence of these years as genocide. The United States backed and funded military regimes of this era were responsible for at least 150,000 Mayan deaths, along with torture and other war crimes (Gerrard-Burnett 2010, Loucky and Moors 2000: 3). The shocking nature of this violence led thousands upon thousands of survivors to flee and become refugees across Central America and North America (Burns 1993, Morrison and May 1994).

In the United States, Mayan refugee diasporas began to form around locations where the small number of poverty-driven migrants had settled in the 70s, areas of South Florida, Southern California, and Houston, Texas (Loucky and Moors 2000: 4, Loucky 2000: 214, Burns 2000: 152, Burns 1993). Throughout the 90s these diaspora would both settle in other parts of the country and

migrate with the seasons as agricultural laborers (Fischer 2009). The free trade agreements of the early 2000s that culminated in CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) resulted in further economic distress for rural Central Americans, encouraging even more migratory flow to the United States (Burrell 2013, Fischer 2009, Burrell and Moodie 2013, Jonas and Rodriguez 2013).

In the present moment, indigenous Mayan diasporas are well established in a number of urban and rural zones across the United States. Ethnographic inquiry into these populations provides insight into emergent Mayan economic, social and political experiences (Foxen 2007, Burns 1993, Loucky 2000, Fink and Dunn 2000, Barenboim 2013, etc.). Though they did not experience a complete mental break from the past of economic exclusion and political violence, indigenous Maya faced entirely new challenges in the United States, including living in urban poverty and in close quarters in gang-dominated neighborhoods in and the dangers of illegal status. Mayans living in the United States today are both constrained by the history of exclusion and violence they faced in Guatemala, tasked with creating a politics fitting their needs as diasporic and indigenous people.

### **III. Theoretical Contextualization**

In many ways the indigenous experience is conditioned by a number of contradictory political logics. The politics of recognition to which most indigenous groups are subject globally provides the epitomizing example: an indigenous peoples' existence as a distinct group is reliant on the political processes of a parent nation-state, whose claims to sovereignty depend on delegitimizing native sovereignties. Increasingly, as the fields of cultural studies and anthropology attempt to treat the indigenous experience, they note and discuss the ironies of native culture, identity and nation-building. In defense of this framing of indigenous politics, Richland (2007) writes,



... in light of the heaping ironies in the research of cultural difference, I suggest that scholars should admit the irreducible paradoxes that reside at the heart of the politics of native culture. I contend that they constitute sites of productive and generative tension by and through which indigenous political and legal action is accomplished. They are pragmatic paradoxes that instantiate the betwixt and between diagnosis that Biolsi (2001) and Pommershiem (1995a, 1995b) offer of tribal law and politics more generally.

He carries out this theoretical program through metapragmatic analysis of Hopi courtroom talk, showing how the emergent Hopi political horizon is instantiated through and despite these contradictions.

The “research on cultural difference” to which Richland refers is not limited to indigenous studies. Scholarship in the area of diaspora studies has similarly pointed out the experiential ironies in the diasporic condition. In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Brah weaves throughout his theoretical proposal of “diasporic space” the contradictory political and life experiences that have come to characterize and surround the diasporic condition. He writes,

At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey. Yet not every journey can be understood as diaspora. Diasporas are clearly not the same as casual travel. Nor do they normatively refer to temporary sojourns. Paradoxically, diasporic journeys are essentially about settling down, about putting roots ‘elsewhere’ (1996: 179).

In this way, literature and theory on diaspora is contextualized by the contradictory nature of experiences of migration, displacement, and mobility.

In addition to the work of Avtar Brah, similar logics surface in articulation theory of Stuart Hall, another forbearer to the theory of diaspora.<sup>6</sup> Clifford (2001) recognizes that Stuart Hall’s politics of articulation is situated in the “productive tensions” of the post-colonial, mobile condition:

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<sup>6</sup> In the logic of articulation theory, emergent cultural politics in diasporic spaces result from a coming together of political, cultural and ideological elements, often even elements that seem discordant or misalign with one another. These assemblages can break down and become adjoined to other elements to adapt to the demands of history, suggesting no teleology or original form, no natural requirement for a set of elements to function (Hall 1986). Using this

The contrast between colonial fixity and postcolonial mobility, between indigenous roots and diasporic routes, can't be allowed to harden into an opposition or a before-after scenario in which cosmopolitan equals modern. When reckoning with traveling natives... this sort of categorization breaks down. We are left with a spectrum of attachments to land and place—articulated, old and new traditions of indigenous dwelling and traveling.

By allowing the “contrast” to remain dynamic and drawing attention to the experiences it produces, Clifford shows how articulation theory can come to reflect the way in which the previously mentioned scholars think of contradiction, ironies, and paradox as “generative.” He was perhaps among the first to attempt to reconcile the apparent paradox of the notion of “indigenous diaspora,” partially by denaturalizing the fixed relationship between indigeneity and place that nation-State politics have imposed on native populations globally. Clifford recognizes that the paradox operates, and like Richland, shows it is a productive space for constituting new understandings of indigeneity and indigenous political horizons that account for many of the mobile realities of indigenous lives. Further invoking Hall’s articulation theory in order to replace the well-seeded idea that indigenous people have always been in the same place, he attempts to

make space for contradiction and excess across a broad spectrum of indigenous experiences today by loosening the common opposition of “indigenous” and “diasporic” forms of life. The goal is a richer and more contingent realism, a fuller sense of what has happened, is happening, and may be emerging (2007:3).

Instead of discussing indigenous diasporas in terms of their reactions to dominant societies<sup>7</sup> this work embraces logical inconsistencies of the notion of the “traveling native” as a source of insight into emergent political reconfigurations of indigeneity itself.

Barenboim (2013) puts this notion into ethnographic practice with the Yucatec Maya population living in Northern California. She explores the paradoxes in Yucatec Mayans’ experience

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framework allows the notion of indigeneity to reassemble to fit the historical necessity of migration; indigenous people can remain indigenous as migrants but must do the ideological and political work to reconfigure the elements of indigeneity itself.

<sup>7</sup> Such an orientation to this ethnographic situation seems to position diaspora as marginal to a true indigenous “core,” a practice this research deliberately attempts to avoid.

of geographic mobility to and within United States as way to gain insight into emergent meanings of indigeneity. Specifically she investigates “the contradictions between visibility and invisibility that shape migrant life, while [they attempt] to make meaning of the social condition of being at once ‘illegal’ and indigenous” (2013: 2). For example, to show how Maya negotiate this paradox of needing to creating belonging where non-belonging (being illegal) is the primary conditioning factor for daily life, she concludes that the practice of decorating with “tourist kitsch” is a way of “claiming the material objects of tourism and re-signifying them as markers of contemporary indigenous authenticity is thus an innovative form of place--making” (Barenboim 2013: 214).

Working through these texts shows there is something theoretically and ethnographically salient about the notions of paradox, irony, and contradiction in the present historical moment, particularly as a contextualizing factor for the indigenous and diasporic experience. These categories, while discrete in meaning, are often likened to one another or used in tandem. My intention is not to critique theorists for this practice or draw specific semantic boundaries between these phenomena. Rather I would like to focus attention on a larger commonality across them- that when social actors navigate the tensions of their inherent oppositions, they produce new political dispositions and ideological orientations.<sup>8</sup>

In the thesis I will describe individuals who have gone through this process of working through misaligned and contradictory life experiences, and come out the other side with new political, “critical positions.” A variety of ethnographic methods and channels may uncover indigenous experiences that lead to the emergent politics described here. In the following section I discuss how this research project used language-focused life history interviews to explore how

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<sup>8</sup> In this project, negotiating deeply contrasting, misaligned, and disparate experiences through narratives produced an ambivalence that helped give form and power to these ideologies (this is just to reserve a place for a thought I need to get back to).

Mayan interpreters were able to put political “roots” down in the United States through a new language activism that was promulgated by life experiences of contradiction and irony.

#### IV. Methodology

Oral history is a method most closely associated with the discipline of history, particularly for creating archives, documentarian purposes, or the progressive movements of public history. In anthropology oral histories have made an impact as well, but in the present moment index a deep past of the discipline, the antique material foundations of the discipline that largely are fading into obscurity, their analyses falling under suspicion for the colonial ambitions behind their collection. Anthropologists have ceased to take individual narratives as general accounts of a bounded culture; contemporary ethnographic use of and inquiry into narratives have focuses on the techniques individuals use to recall and retell their stories. Through this work psychological and linguistic anthropologists have shown that the stories people tell are an important part of how individuals move through the social and political institutions, reorient themselves after experiencing political and personal violence, and negotiate illness and other life experiences.<sup>9</sup>

The space between the documenting, generalizing impulse of early twentieth century interpretations of oral history and the contemporary attention to the individual life-world goes somewhat unexplored. I propose that *life history* data can provide insight into larger cultural and political processes while maintaining the importance to the individual experience. Life histories are elicited through an oral history style conversational interview, but focus on the entire life of an individual rather than their experiences of a particular event or time (Watson and Watson-Franke

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<sup>9</sup> For further work on these topics, see the work of Mattingly (1994), Mattingly and Garro (2000) Ochs & Capps (2001, 1996), Das (2007).

1985: 3). A life history is elicited by analyst other than the individual, who provides the time frame for the subject to work within (Langness and Frank 1981, Langness 1965). For the purposes of this project I focused the direction of questions and conversation on experiences with and about language. I focused on these issues in order to better understand the beliefs, attitudes and experiences that motivate and sustain language activism and the interpreting profession.

I found the research participants through internet searches; many provide their contact information willingly on personal websites and others are on official court rosters of interpreters. I met and interviewed most participants in their offices and places of work; two who reside out of the Los Angeles area I interviewed over the phone. All interviews were conducted in English, given that all of them directly interpreted into English. My aim in these one to two hour interviews was to sketch the life experiences of the interviewee using language as a type of thematic anchor by which to narrow the focus and organize the flow of questions and answers. By this logic, discussion about childhood experiences centered around language learning in schools and language socialization and beliefs in the home. Much of the conversation about their adult lives involved describing language activism and reflections on and beliefs about the role of language in political representation.

Kroskrity has referred to this type of interview as “lingual life histories” (1993, 2009), a “humanistic alternative to sociolinguistic analysis” (1993: 142). By examining lingual life histories of “exceptional individuals” he hoped to show that personal life experiences of those who deviate from the cultural patterning provide insight into sociolinguistic variation as well as understandings of their communities (Kroskrity 1993). Kroskrity furthers this project with his extensive work on the life of late Western Mono Elder Rosalie Bethel, whose unusual and sometimes contentious multi-lingual, multi-cultural upbringing led to her particularly charged beliefs and language and identity, personal language-activist objectives, and community actions around language. Similarly the interpreters

described in this thesis are “exceptional individuals” who have overcome many obstacles to become multilingual, upwardly mobile leaders of their communities, the majority of which suffer linguistic exclusion and poverty. Indeed, understanding what personal life experiences have pushed these successes forward may provide insight into the emergent cultural politics necessary to protect language rights in a multicultural democracy.

Finally, a “lingual life history” can track changes in an individual’s beliefs about language over time. Indeed throughout these interpreters’ lives, they shifted attitudes toward their native languages and the languages of the states they were confronted with. In this thesis I will discuss some of these changes that transformed identities and prompted the larger political ideologies the interpreters presently advocate and enact through their work. The aim of these conversations was to treat the Mayan diasporic condition in a way that is sensitive to its unfolding over time. This was accomplished by using beliefs about language that underlie language activism as a reflection of a larger emergent experience and politics.

## **V. Formation of Identities: Contradictory Life Historical Experiences around Discrimination and Invisibility**

In an attempt to locate the individual agent in the midst of constraining structures but account for the persistence of identities, Dirks describes identities as a sort of emergent political disposition. I would like to emphasize this view, especially in the notion that identities are

attempts to create and maintain coherence out of inconsistent cultural stuff and inconsistent life experience, but every actor always carries around enough disparate and contradictory strands of knowledge and passion so as always to be in a potentially critical position (Dirks et al 1994: 18).

Indeed to construct their linguistic identities, the interpreters in this study had to work with and through “contradictory strands of knowledge and passion” and “disparate” life experiences to form

a coherent identity to rely on in difficult times. In this section of the thesis, I will discuss the emergence of linguistic identities from discordant life experiences, and the use of linguistic practices to strengthen these identities.

Many of the interpreters interviewed mentioned that Mayan youth growing up in the United States have the option of hiding their indigeneity, attempting to approximate what has been referred to in the racial history of the United States as “passing.” In the perception of the interviewees, many first generation American Mayan youth want to be seen and thought of as Hispanic. Given that interviewees faced tremendous prejudice and reported sometimes feeling shame in their identities as Mayans and speakers of Mayan languages, it is important to understand why they are not interested in “passing” as Hispanic where they have the opportunity to do so. Indeed, the generational divide over this identity practice often came up in the context of stories of once wanting to hide their Mayan culture, and the experiences that pulled them out of this shame in their indigenous roots. Often these narratives of self-renewal emerged while discussing language experiences. Particularly I found a contrast between the experiences of dominant racist language ideologies in Guatemala and here in the United States, one that is specific to the generation of Mayans who migrated themselves.

Those interviewees who spent their childhoods in Guatemala reported constant discrimination throughout their early lives, on overlapping racial, cultural, and linguistic grounds. Pedro points out that Mayans have “lived under 500 years of discrimination in Guatemala,” to contextualize teachers’ “bullying” of indigenous children, which he saw as the reason many of them did not complete school. Diego describes the cycle of shame and prejudice in school years:

There was phenomenon when I grew up, when I grew up and started going to high school most of the young people didn’t want to speak their language anymore... because of the discrimination that indigenous people suffer... You don’t want to be discriminated [against] so you don’t want to speak, you don’t want to show that you’re indigenous.

For Felipe, the shame of having an indigenous identity became most salient after moving to Huehuetenango City as a teenager, where the discrimination he experienced made him hyper-conscious of his lack of proficiency in Spanish:

When I moved into the city that's when I realized that a lot of people were kind of saying, 'what are you doing here if you can't speak this language correctly? This is the official language of Guatemala so you better speak it well or you're not going to get nowhere'... That's when I realized I needed to improve my Spanish. But again, that was the attitude in the city but not in the little village."

He goes on to describe the "struggle" of bettering his Spanish in his attempt to assimilate into the ladino social fabric. He felt that hiding his indigeneity was an important step in the process of successfully assimilating into the dominant culture.

However when these individuals arrived in the United States in the 80s and early 90s, they experienced the opposite of this targeted discrimination. Because they were assigned to a generic "Hispanic" category fitting to the racial hierarchy operating in the United States, Mayans in Los Angeles were an "invisible" population. Pablo recounted that upon first arriving to the United States without a network, it was difficult to find the Mayan community, because people wanted to hide their identities. However interviewees report that over the next ten to fifteen years in the United States, they noticed a move toward more open expression of linguistic and cultural identities, both in themselves as well as other migrants in their community.

Felipe discussed coming into his indigenous linguistic identity while in the United States as a "healing process." Until this point, he had described believing an important part of showing competency in the dominant language was to hide one's native language. He related, "Believe it or not, this is really where I started speaking my language openly." In seven years of his adolescent life in Guatemala City, he visited his parents at home twice a year, keeping in touch with them this way. But when he moved to the United States, settling in Los Angeles, he had to find a new way to



communicate with his parents, who did not have a telephone. Like all the other informants on this project, he mailed cassette tapes back and forth with his family. “I would speak for one hour in the tape recorder, but in my native language. And that’s when my true self came out... I heard myself speaking my language, like ‘wow.’” He goes on to describe how this process of hearing himself speak Kanjobal lead him to seek out other Mayans in the community, spend more time with them, and speak in his native language with them. Though this type of identity building happened over a timespan of years, it marked a profound change in his outlook and goals.

The pattern of slowly adjusting to the United States as a place where one can outwardly express elements of one culture emerges in self-reflections as well as descriptions of the Mayan community at large. Diego reflected:

When I grew up I didn’t really also know a lot about the Mayan culture because we were Christianized so mentally we were being changed. Even if you were Mayan. So until when I come here and left Guatemala I figure out about my culture and about my spirituality as a Mayan.

Pablo described how slowly and over time the Mayan community in Southern California began to feel more secure about their safety and identities in the United States.

Many people from my village or from other villages... they don’t [didn’t] want to say I’m Kanjobal or I speak this language or I’m from Guatemala... they don’t [didn’t] want to say nothing about where they’re from. Possibly they’re thinking with the racism here, maybe its why. But now, no. Now everybody says, I’m from Guatemala, I’m from San Pedro Saloma, I’m from San Miguel, from San Rafael, from any place.

To illustrate this, he also uses the example of people playing the marimba, an instrument deeply associated with “Guatemalanness” and Mayan highland culture, at social gatherings.

He claimed that around the time that he had just arrived to the United States in the early 90s, Mayans did not want to play or even be seen listening to music with the marimba, out of a residual fear of racism. But he goes on to claim that “now they celebrate big parties,

weddings, quinceaneras, with the marimba.” When I asked why he thinks this change has occurred, he appealed to the notion that Mayans do not need to feel afraid in this country, contrary to their experiences of persecution in Guatemala, and that they can openly express and share their culture with Americans.<sup>10</sup>

These stories contradict the academic and political association of the heart of indigeneity in a landed, place-based identity. Because of the discrimination that Felipe experienced in the place traditionally associated with their indigenous identities, an alternative place became more deeply associated with a positive indigenous identity.

I’m glad that I came to this country, I’m glad that being away from home made me get homesick, and made appreciate speaking with mom and dad in my language, and all of sudden now I just flow naturally in my native language and I don’t have that fear factor of speaking that language, I don’t have that fear of being rejected just because I speak a native language.

Added to the discordance of the fact that many of these individuals began to feel comfortable in their Mayan identities once removed from the native homeland is their own ironic attitude toward these experiences. For example, throughout the interview Felipe describes how painful it was for him to not know the dominant languages of the places he has lived, to struggle to learn these languages, “the pain of not knowing the language” and not being able to express himself to people. But toward the end of the interview he stresses how grateful he is for this “pain”:

That’s where the healing comes from. That pain, it’s a sweet pain.... I must celebrate this. It doesn’t matter how many times I get knocked down by these languages... I’m glad that I went through this, I am glad I was born this way, I’m glad that I’m a Maya. My pain is unique. My experience is unique. My language is unique... I celebrate my pain.

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<sup>10</sup> Despite feeling extremely grateful for the refuge the United States has given many of his people, Pablo remains conflicted about the United States’ role in the State violence against Mayans in Guatemala, which will be discussed in depth in the next section of the thesis.

The “pain” here is directly likened to pride in a Mayan identity, indicating that these positive feelings might not have come about without being away and feeling negatively about his Mayan roots in the first place. Here we see that disparate life experiences lead to disparate reflections on them; he is grateful for the wounds for having been able to heal from them. This recalls Dirks’ description of identities as “attempts to create and maintain coherence out of inconsistent cultural stuff and inconsistent life experience” (Dirks et al 1994: 18). Exactly in the tensions between Felipe’s misaligning experiences with language is where stuff of identity emerges. His experiences also reflect the others’ observations of the Mayan community slowly coming to visibly celebrate elements of their culture and speak their languages in the United States after having experienced discrimination and persecution for so long.

## **VI. Formation of Political Orientations through Socio-politically Situated Ironies: Alignments and Misalignments with States**

Diego remembered that after he moved to the United States he began to realize all the ways in which the Guatemalan “system” was organized “to abolish all the Mayan culture.” To illustrate this, he noted that Catholic churches were always built on Mayan sacred grounds. He described how they were taught in schools to believe that practicing Mayan spirituality was “something satanic.” He described his reconnection with Mayan spirituality upon arriving in the U.S.:

When I came here I learned a lot of things, for example the spirituality- we had been taught in Guatemala that being Mayan or praying or doing ceremony in your cultural way is something satanic, something evil. That’s what we thought there... When I came here I started to see other realities, other ways – for a couple of years I just limited myself from going to churches- going to Christian churches... I figured out how all these things happened, reading, historically how they came and how they operate in Guatemala trying to abolish all the Mayan culture.

In this way, Diego is keenly aware that State targeting of Mayan peoples did not begin or end with political persecution in the civil war. He sees the Guatemalan State as part of a larger history of a

more permanent agenda than killing individuals- the goal was to eradicate a culture and way of life. To explain this to me, he invoked his own first and last name- both derived from Spanish- to show how deep the infiltration runs: “They wanted to take from you directly your identity as a people.” His disassociation from the Guatemalan state was prompted by moving from its very oppressive environment- which he likened to a kind of jail- to the United States, where Mayans were not known enough by dominant society to be as intensely discriminated against for their being Mayan. It is a pattern similar to that observed with emergence linguistic identities. The shift from experiencing targeted, ethnicity-based discrimination to the invisibility of migrant life in the United States opened a space to explore and construct an identity out of, and despite these contradictory experiences.

Interviewees often distanced themselves from the nation-states whose policies they had to live with. Sometimes, establishing these detachments meant comparing conditions in one place to another, creating deeply ambivalent dispositions. Pablo had similar sets of alternatively aligning and misaligning feelings toward the United States. After discussing how Mayans in the United States gradually became vocal about where they are from, he reflected

We need to tell this country where we’re from. We don’t need to be scared here. Because this is another country. This country for me, is a blessing [of a] country that helped not only me, but many people from different parts of the world.

As we moved through his life story, he frequently said he “thanks God for this country,” often to preface the struggles he faced and was able to overcome because of the opportunities he was afforded in the U.S. Later in the life history, he began to discuss more of the discomforts he had with the United States’ involvement in the political violence against Mayans in Guatemala. While discussing the way that his “first vision is to help his community,” he recalled one of his great political moments in life:

One time when Bill Clinton doing his campaign here in Beverly Hills, I confront with him, ‘Mr. Clinton, if you are the next president of United States, the only thing I

want from you, please don't support the war in Guatemala. Because Ronald Regan is one of the presidents who sent millions of millions of dollars, the airplanes, the helicopters, everything to Guatemala to exterminate peoples like me, Mayan community in Guatemala. My question is what the Mayan community did to this country... Why? That's why, Mr. Clinton, if you're the next president, please don't do that.' ...And I remember when he was the president, he went to Guatemala and he asked... don't do another error like they did at that time. You're only one person, but if you say something, you never know if your word is going to do something big.

Shortly thereafter, he discusses his desire to return to Guatemala, permanently. But he quickly returned to critiquing the U.S. for its support of political violence. He claimed, "Supporting war in other countries is not good idea. Many innocent child[sic], many people, innocent, die, are still dying every day." When he mentioned those that are still dying today, he is likening the history of U.S. involvement in Guatemala to the present-day U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, indicating a continued discomfort with the foreign policies of the United States, a country he often felt deeply grateful for. Taking into account the number of disparate experiences he has had in Guatemala and the U.S., it is difficult to think how he could be anything but deeply ambivalent to their governing bodies. Both have contributed to his identity but threatened his life, both have driven him from his home but both have been his home.

I found that Pedro expressed a similar ambivalence to the United States and Guatemala throughout his life history. Pedro notes that part of his work in the Mayan community in Los Angeles is to help Mayans "who are shy to be who they are" to maintain their cultural values so that they do not "abandon themselves."<sup>11</sup> He does this by helping people get in touch with Mayan spiritual guides. Though he does not directly state whether it is easier or more difficult to do this community work in the United States versus Guatemala, he does discuss the political conditions of Maya in Guatemala as lagging behind conditions in the United States. He tells a story about a

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<sup>11</sup> We discussed this idea bit further, and it seemed to refer to situations from falling out of touch with their culture to becoming addicted to substances.

Guatemalan politician who complimented him on his community outreach work in the United States; he responded by noting that in the United States Mayans have the right to interpreters in the judicial system and in Guatemala they do not.<sup>12</sup> In this way he points out that structural conditions in the United States are, in some respects, less oppressive to the political rights of Mayans and to their goals of cultural preservation and advancement.

However Pedro is not one to glorify indigenous life in the United States. He also discussed at length different types of discrimination that Mayans undergo in Los Angeles and in U.S. legal bureaucracy. Even though he suggested it has historically been easier for Mayans to get an interpreter in the U.S. than Guatemala, later he discussed the ways that judicial systems in the U.S. still violate peoples' rights to an interpreter. He gave me an example of the dangers of neoliberal policies around court interpreters, claiming that interpreting companies have requested he only interpret portions of court proceedings, sometimes only a defendant's sentence.<sup>13</sup> He told a story of Mayans participating in ceremony with fire on a public beach who were asked to discontinue in a confrontation with the local fire marshal. He emphasized that their being disallowed to continue the ceremony was discrimination by elaborating another story, in which an American white man allowed his Mayan friends to perform a similar ceremony on his property, and when similarly confronted with the fire department were allowed to continue with a mere warning.

Like many of the stories Pedro and the others told me, this was meant to illustrate a larger position.<sup>14</sup> In my estimation, Pedro wanted to show me through this chain of narratives that for Mayans, discrimination is not over, anywhere. He felt he must challenge this from afar for Mayans in

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<sup>12</sup> Since this occurrence, policies around rights to interpreters in Guatemala have improved.

<sup>13</sup> In these cases he refused to violate defendants' rights in this way, but is unsure if the interpreting company he contracted for simply found someone else to follow through on this request.

<sup>14</sup> After listening to the life histories many times, I came to really admire this sometimes indirect way of getting to a point through a series of stories. Mainly this would be prompted by one of my questions, and an interviewee would launch into a chain of stories that at first appear to be unrelated, but when taken together illustrate the entire situation they find themselves in. Often this gave a better picture than any direct answer to the question might have, and increased the revealing quality of the interviews as a whole.

the old host state of Guatemala as well as in the new host state of the United States. Here a new politics of indigeneity emerges, positioned from the “nowhere” in between the two very specific places and states it targets.

The cumulative effect of the discrimination and persecution Mayans experienced in Guatemala, contrasted with the sense of safety in the United States, opens a new field of possibility for indigenous identity and identity politics. The space unfolding here is akin to the situation described by Clifford, an “uneven continuum of ideational, embodied, structural and material practices that needs to be understood as both complexly rooted and diasporic” (Clifford 2007: 10). These individuals came to express a place-based, “rooted” identity and spirituality but only by virtue of leaving that place for another, a diasporic trajectory. Mayans find themselves in a political “nowhere”- misaligned to and discomforted by the nation-states they are subject to, but motivated to manage and change these conditions through alternative politics and activism. In the final section of this thesis, I describe these political dispositions and activisms in action, and the oppositions interpreters must negotiate in order to advance and protect their communities.

## **VII. Formation of Language Activisms: Tensions between Formal and Informal Work**

All but one of the interpreters interviewed on this project were deeply involved with community based and non-government organizations. Most had founded their own projects or were heads of non-profit organizations. Their projects’ goals and methods varied, but language remained at center of their missions, both ideologically and in praxis. Diego had run a Mayan language talk-radio station for a number of years. Pedro was the founder of a Mayan community based cultural advancement project. Felipe was an organizer of a national network of Mayan interpreters and a founder of project that educates hospital and school personnel on the linguistic and cultural needs

of Mayans. Just as he settled in the United States, Pablo started a community garden center, and now runs an organization that trains Mayan interpreters. Maria is a community educator on a Mayan cultural heritage project that networks Mayans across the United States. Most have taught first-generation American-Mayan youth their respective languages in revitalization efforts; the others have plans or desires for such projects.

Undoubtedly these individuals are at the forefront of activism and advancement of their communities. Specifically, they are language activists: they advance the linguistic rights and access of their communities, valorize the indigenous linguistic practice and identities, and educate their communities to advance language maintenance. The most superficial assessment will show that these forms of language activism simply respond to the needs of the community. However when taken with the lingual life histories recorded in this research, a more complicated story with larger implications for the politics of indigenous diaspora emerges.

Conceivably, language activism could move forward with an assimilationist agenda- for example, providing Spanish or English classes or training to the community. For these individuals this did not emerge as a priority. They are first concerned with protecting their community members from falling through the cracks: allowing them safe passage through the fraught process of immigration, asylum and refugee status hearings, ensuring they are not refused health care in clinics and hospitals or access to schools. In this way these activism intervene at the point of state or institutional interface with individuals. Because of their work in formal State and public service settings, the interpreters themselves have considerable institutional ties and experience.

Many of the interpreters in this study got started in their careers by coincidentally coming into contact with these institutions, where they were quickly picked up for their multilingual skills. Felipe and Pedro were noted community organizers who were trained by Non-Government



Organizations for court interpreting. Pablo was in some senses “discovered” by a lawyer who found his community garden and learned he was informally interpreting for friends and members of his community; the lawyer helped to write a grant proposal for him to start a formal interpreters’ training organization. Maria’s formal interpreting career began when she ended up in court one day informally interpreting for her mothers’ friend<sup>15</sup> :

Everybody knew that I was an interpreter... They would give me twenty bucks for a whole day interpreting. And I didn’t... I mean I - I liked it. I didn’t even want to take their money because I would say ‘I know you need it, I know you need it a lot.’ But they would be like, ‘no no no- take it, take it.’ This lady told my mom, could your daughter drive me to [court] and interpret for me in court. And I was like, oh my gosh, I’ve never been in court to interpret. And I said, well I’ll drive her, but I don’t know how that works, I don’t know how that is, but I’m willing to do it to help her. Because she really needed help. She didn’t speak nothing, in Spanish, she didn’t speak no English, she only spoke our language, Akateko.<sup>16</sup> So I drove her down ... and we went into court, and they were asking her a lot of questions in Spanish and she would just turn around and look at me. So then the judge noticed that she was turning around and looking at me all the time. So then he said ‘ma’am who’s that person sitting in the back?’ And she said ‘she’s here to help me.’ And then the judge says ‘okay well ma’am stand up’ and ‘what are you here to help her with?’ So I said, ‘Well I just gave her a ride and she said she needed an interpreter.’ And he says, ‘do you speak the language that she speaks?’ And I said, ‘yeah I do.’ And he says, ‘**Oh my god, where have you been?** We bring interpreters all the way from Los Angeles to come interpret here. You live here?’ And I says, ‘yeah I live about two hours away from here.’ And he says ‘no way. You HAVE to call this person. I’m going to give you a phone number’ and he wrote it on the back of a business card, and he said ‘call this person and tell them the language that you speak. And tell them that this judge said that they need to see whatever they can see so that you can get to work with us.’

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<sup>15</sup> Like all of the participants on this project, Maria had been informally interpreting since she learned English. She interpreted for her mother, then her mothers’ friends, then at all her jobs as various medical and dental assistants. However she had never been paid directly for her interpreting skills; rather she was an attractive job candidate for other positions for her multilingual skills. As she reflected on the jobs she had throughout her young life, she suggested she been hired mostly for her interpreting skills, but this was always an implicit understanding. She remembered, “Every time we had a Spanish speaking patient, even though Spanish was not my first language, they would stick me in a room with them and I would be their interpreter!” This situation indicates a phenomenon worthy of further research- that many individuals do interpreting work at their jobs and are not formally paid for or accounted for as interpreters.

<sup>16</sup> Akateko is often classified in academic linguistics as equivalent to Jacalateco, however the choice to call this language by the name Akateko can be a strategic choice to index a particular group, ethnicity or place, as seen in other work language differentiation in Mayan Highland Guatemala (see Romero 2012).

The serendipity of Maria's start in paid interpreting epitomizes the way in which interpreters in this study were "picked up" and trained, partially by chance but largely because they were visible, involved, and active members of their communities.

Government and non-government agencies, charities and universities valued this multilingual talent, and recognized these particular individuals for it because they were visible leaders in their communities. They were trained, and train others, through legal advocacy projects that work for legal access for individuals moving through the immigration review process, university community-based education projects, and government agencies. The institutional connections the interpreters have gained from these professionalizing trainings have not removed them from their communities, but it has created a tension between institutional and informal work. Pablo illustrated the internal difficulties that emerge from this polarity when he discussed at length that he was not interested in the considerable payment court interpreting offers, but rather helping his community.

My vision when I started this was to help. I never think if I'm gonna make money... my early vision, the first time [I was] not thinking of money. I was just thinking to **help** our people because its many, many problems here in the school, in the hospital, jobs- many different areas.

He often stressed that he felt he makes "too much money" for the work he does. In order give back, he hopes to advance the community<sup>17</sup> by both interpreting and training more interpreters free of charge.

In addition to economic opportunities and mobility, interpreters have been afforded greater social connections and high regard in their communities through these very same institutional connections and associations. Such connections come with their own set of problems- Pedro

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<sup>17</sup> Pablo also noted that it was both possible and necessary to help even those who are outside of one's community, when one can. He told of a success story of helping a woman and her child from India gain legal status in the United States, despite the extreme gulf of language differences.

described trying to explain to community members, who assume he has access to exclusive knowledge, that he cannot dispense legal advice. Situations such as these push him to try to maintain a separation between professional interpreting and community work, and while this proves to be difficult, he has found ways to ensure his pro bono work still has parameters and takes place in institutionalized settings. Despite this he oscillates back to assuring me that informal, unpaid work is extremely important to him, claiming “it’s my social responsibility.”

The interviewees had all partnered with or been employed by universities, non-government organizations, and Federal and State institutions. Nonetheless most do not trace their careers to professional training. They make sure to point out that their beginnings were in informal, unpaid interpreting. The two interpreters who had been mostly raised in the United States, Maria and Manuel, had been interpreting for family and family friends since they were young children. Others felt interpreting for free was simply their obligation to their communities given their skills in English. This sense of community obligation still drives much of their work, even in institutional settings. In this way, instead of becoming incorporated entirely into state bureaucracies, the interpreters have found ways to redirect institutional resources to community based projects: training more interpreters, creating brochure materials to educate doctors and teachers about the cultural and linguistic needs and diversity of Mayans, helping Mayans move through legal bureaucracies by orienting them to court procedures, and so on.

The sense of community obligation- from interpersonal assistance to the need to serve the Mayan community across linguistic groups- got these participants started on their career tracks. Though they achieved social and economic mobility through the institutions that recognized and monetized their skills, interpreters look to use this access to high-prestige and government institutions to increase language access for their communities. In other words, the social mobility

gained by recent valuing of interpreting work has not stratified or removed them from their communities.<sup>18</sup> In fact it has had the opposite effect- it has encouraged participants to start their own organizations and formal projects to advance the Mayan community. Further it has engendered an ideology that with a rare multilingual skillset, access to elite institutions, and relatively higher salaries, one must give back to the community.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

When taken together, the struggles and success of these interpreters are truly remarkable. For those who migrated to the United States in their young adulthood, they moved from Guatemala where their people were discriminated against for the languages they spoke and persecuted for their indigeneity, to the United States where the majority population is unaware that their language and culture existed at all in the present. However the disparity between these experiences was an opportunity and a motivating force to learn English, connect to parts of the Mayan culture they had been kept from for much of their early lives, and advocate for the rights of their communities.

The interpreters interviewed on this project also expressed their conflicts with the States they have been subject to as indigenous people. Again we find salient disparities in experience resulting from the difference between Guatemalan and United States' responses to the presence of Mayan people. In Guatemala Mayans were met with persecution and genocidal programs, in the United States they constituted a nearly invisible population that government found difficult to account for. Further the United States' own hypocrisy in accepting Mayan asylees and refugees, after having fueled the Guatemalan genocide against Mayans, led participants to feel a deep sense of irony

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<sup>18</sup> Despite their involvement and leadership in community-based organizations, further research is needed to explore whether these leaders are seen by whom as accounting for the problems of the community or if there are gaps between community desires and leader actions.

and a painful ambivalence between feeling allegiance to the United States and feeling critical of its ambitions.

Finally, the oscillation between informal and professional interpreting work throughout the lives of these interpreters is another motivating force behind their language activism. Practicing informal interpretation, either for free or for a small personally metered sum, was indeed the way that many of these interpreters got started and the reason that they were recognized by the institutions that trained them to interpret professionally. However this only prompted them to do more community based, informal interpreting and training free of charge, setting the tone for the emergent language activism of the Mayan diaspora in the United States. Indeed the characteristic agenda of the politics of Mayan language activism in the U.S. is directing the resources of well-endowed institutions- including Mayan community organizations themselves- to the people who need services most.

At the heart of these experiences is the type of irony and disparity described in the initial theoretical program. The situations that these individuals have found themselves in were unexpected, misaligning, and contradictory, but transformed them, set them up to create new activisms and re-orient themselves politically. The result of these negotiations is a new political horizon, as Richland (2007) suggests. Allowing these contradictions to hold, as Clifford (2001) suggests, given that both ends of their oppositions were simultaneously experienced and remembered in the interviews, reveals where these politics emerge. At the junctures of the contradiction in experience were moments of negotiation in their narratives, the emergence of new political orientations: the reassertion of linguistic identities, the disassociation from states, and finally the pursuit of alternative routes to access.

This Mayan diasporic political edge has implications for the politics of indigeneity across borders. Despite being pulled away from their traditional lands and landscapes, the interviewees know they are still indigenous through language. They have come to renew their identity claims to indigeneity through language, and move forward advocating for their communities through language based activism. Therefore these stories reaffirm the importance of language to the ever-changing politics of self-determination. Finally the lingual life histories in this thesis reveal the utility of working through life histories as a method for understanding emergent political stances and praxis. While linguistic anthropology offers metapragmatic analysis in order to unveil political conditions, such as the “paradoxes as the heart of indigenous politics,” life histories provide a more personalizing account of how this manifests across lives, actions and re-actions. Locating the motivations for political dispositions in events in lives, and their responses and negotiations thereof, will be a direction for anthropological inquiry into indigenous political directions, both to understand and emphasize the experiences that these come from as well.

## **APPENDIX**

University of California, Los Angeles

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

*Life Histories of Mayan Interpreters: Memory and the Labor of Language*

Sonya Rao, from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your expertise as a translator or interpreter of Mayan languages to English and/ or Spanish. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

This study is being done to better understand the experiences of Mayan interpreters, and how they have organized to assist their communities overcome language barriers.

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Answer a series of questions at length, in the style of telling your life history in a conversation. Your answers will be recorded in either audio or video.
- Conduct the interview in the home or private space of your choosing.

#### **How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of about one to two hours, or as much time as you would like to take.

#### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

You may experience difficulty talking about different parts of your life. If this is the case, and you would not like to continue, you may ask to move on to the next question or ask to end the interview.

#### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

You may benefit from the study in being part of creating an archive of oral histories of interpreters of Mayan languages, if you wish to have your interview become part of such a collection. This archive can be accessed by community members interested in finding better ways to connect and assist speakers of Mayan languages.

The results of the research may result in publications about elements of community organization, beliefs and memories about language found in the recollections in the interviews.

#### **Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will

be maintained by means of password protected digital files, backed up on a hard drive that will remain in a locked area. The data may be shown to other researchers in formal presentations, unless the participant indicates they would like their interview kept entirely confidential.

Initial next to your recording and confidentiality preference:

\_\_\_ I would like to be video recorded; this video can be shared with researchers or other professionals.

\_\_\_ I would like to be video recorded; I would prefer this video be kept private between me and the researcher.

\_\_\_ I would like to be audio recorded; this audio recording can be shared with researchers or other professionals.

\_\_\_ I would like to be audio recorded; I would prefer this audio recording be kept private between me and the researcher.

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\_\_\_ I would like to be referred to by pseudonym in any publications that result from this research.

\_\_\_ The researcher may share my video or audio recording with other researchers or professionals for the development of any publications that result from this research.

\_\_\_ If the researcher shares my video or audio recording with other researchers for the development of any publications that result from this research, I prefer that no information about my name, home town, occupation, or other identifying information, be included.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I would not like my video or audio recording to be shared with other researchers or professionals for the development of any publications that result from this research.

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\_\_\_ If the researcher creates an archive of Mayan Interpreters' oral histories, I would like my video or audio recording to be included.

\_\_\_ If the researcher creates an archive of Mayan Interpreters' oral histories, I would like my video or audio recording to be included, but I would prefer that no information about my name, home town, occupation, or other identifying information, be included.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ If the researcher creates an archive of Mayan Interpreters' oral histories, I would **not** like my video or audio recording to be including.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**



- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

- **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

<p>Sonya Rao</p> <p><a href="mailto:sonyarao@ucla.edu">sonyarao@ucla.edu</a></p> <p>267.664.1264</p> <p>7046 Matilija Ave</p> <p>Van Nuys CA 91405</p>	<p>Paul Kroskrity</p> <p><a href="mailto:paulvk@ucla.edu">paulvk@ucla.edu</a></p> <p>310.825.6237</p> <p>UCLA Department of Anthropology</p> <p>341 Haines Hall - Box 951553</p> <p>Los Angeles, CA 90095-1553</p>
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- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program

11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694

Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT**

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Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

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Date

**SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT**

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Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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Contact Number

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Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

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Date

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