

ABSTRACT

My study explores how indigenous Q'eqchi' Mayas in Guatemala draw political cohesion from their cultural relationships with their ancestral territories when responding to violent dispossession by extractive mining corporations and mono-crop agriculture. Drawing upon participant observation and thirty-nine interviews conducted in the municipalities of Panzós and El Estor, my research considers Q'eqchi's' defense of territory (*defensa del territorio*) as a salient, culturally specific collective action that draws continuity from centuries of conflicts over control of land and natural resources in Guatemala. Throughout Spanish colonization, independence, entry into the world capitalist market, and 20th century political upheavals, conflicts over land have featured consistently. In more recent history, the thirty-six-year internal armed conflict (1960-1996) was a focal point of Q'eqchi' research contributors' testimony on their longstanding suffering for their lands.

As a result of favorable conditions for international investors since the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, the Guatemalan government has opened up the country, and indigenous lands in particular, to large-scale investment and "development" projects. Based on my findings, and building on Liza Grandia's (2012) framing of three conquests of Q'eqchi' lands, my study offers the theoretical contribution of a fourth conquest (Knowlton, 2016), a conquest by corporation, to explain the unique conjuncture Q'eqchi's face today when defending their lands. Their current tactical focus on land titling and juridical certainty is a response to the renewed invasion of extractive corporations into their ancestral territories.

Through applying informal and social movement learning theories, this study considers Q'eqchi's' political encounters in defense of land as moments of learning which shape them as political actors and subjects. For Q'eqchi's, land represents the confluence of cultural and spiritual bonds, material sustenance, and struggles to end political marginalization. A study of the labors involved in defense of territory provides valuable insights into the culturally specific learning processes that both structure and result from myriad political interventions in community, municipal, national, and international politics. Q'eqchi's strategically form short and long-term alliances, and adopt identity claims based on indigenous rights, human rights, Guatemalan citizenship, and cultural ties to their ancestral territory.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Place of Birth: Willoughby, Ohio, USA

Academic Studies: M.A., George Washington University, 2010
M.A., University of Washington, 2005
B.A., University of Washington, 2003

GRADUATE STUDIES

Field of Study: Social Movement Learning; Indigenous Studies; Latin American Studies

Selected Courses

		Instructors
SOWK 570	Historical Memory and Social Reconstruction	Pilar Riaño-Alcalá
EDST 601A	Critical Social Theory	Claudia Ruitenberg
EDST 505	First Nations and Educational Change	Michael Marker
EDST 565	Young People and the Global Imaginary: History, Empire, and Identity Politics in Transnational Borderlands	Jo-Anne Dillabough
EDST 578	Multiculturalism, Race Relations and Education	Handel Wright

AWARDS

2015	Student Travel Fund Grant, Latin American Studies Association
2014	Faculty of Education Graduate Student Research Grant
2013	Liu Institute Bottom Billion Research Fund
2013	Graduate Student International Research Mobility Award
2012-2016	PhD Scholar, Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC
2010-2014	Four-Year Doctoral Fellowship
2010	Fellow, National Endowment for the Humanities, USA

PUBLICATIONS

Ruitenberg, C., Knowlton, A. & Li, G. (2016). The productive difficulty of untranslatables in qualitative research. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 16(4), 610-626.

Knowlton, A. (2016). Q'eqchi' Mayas and the myth of "postconflict" Guatemala. *Latin American Perspectives*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0094582X16650179

Knowlton, A. (2014). "Aun seguimos sufriendo, tal vez en otras estrategias": un desafío al mito de la época pos-conflicto en comunidades q'eqchi's. *Espacios políticos*, 7(11), 29-42.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

“Angélica Choc is not alone: A conversation on Canadian corporate violence in Guatemala.” Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC (2016)

“Indigenous knowledge and paradigmatic conflicts over land: Q’eqchi’ Mayas’ claims to cultural precedence in Guatemala.” Comparative and International Education Society, Vancouver, BC (2016)

“Q’eqchi’ Mayas challenge and expose the limits of democracy in ‘post-conflict’ Guatemala.” Latin American Studies Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2015)

“Looking towards the future while honoring the past: Q’eqchi’ Mayas’ visions of political change in ‘post-conflict’ Guatemala.” Human Rights and Memory Conference, University of Lund, Sweden (2014)

“How Q’eqchi’ Mayas learn the limits of political change in ‘post-conflict’ Guatemala.” Comparative and International Education Society (Western Regional Conference), Los Angeles, California (2013)

“The ‘horizon of possibility’ for Q’eqchi’ political participation in El Oriente de Guatemala. Guatemala Scholars Network, Antigua, Guatemala (2013)

“Vinculando la metodología, la memoria y la descolonización: Una colaboración con comunidades q’eqchi’s.” Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universidad Rafael Landívar, Guatemala City, Guatemala (2013)



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Tuesday, November 22, 2016, 4:00 pm

Room 200, Graduate Student Centre

Latecomers will not be admitted

“Q’eqchi’ Mayas and Defense of Territory: Learning through the Contentious Politics of Land in ‘Post-Conflict’ Guatemala”

EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair:

Dr. Larry Walker (Psychology)

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Claudia Ruitenberg, Research Supervisor (Educational Studies)

Dr. Juanita Sundberg (Geography)

Dr. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá (Social Work)

University Examiners:

Dr. Cash Ahenakew (Educational Studies)

Dr. Erin Baines (Public Policy and Global Affairs)

External Examiners:

Dr. Catherine Nolin

Department of Geography

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, British Columbia

Dr. Lynette Shultz

Educational Policy Studies

University of Alberta

Edmonton, Alberta