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

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<tr>
<th>Course</th>
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<td>SOWK 570</td>
<td>Historical Memory and Social Reconstruction</td>
<td>Pilar Riaño-Alcalá</td>
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<td>EDST 601A</td>
<td>Critical Social Theory</td>
<td>Claudia Ruitenberg</td>
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<td>First Nations and Educational Change</td>
<td>Michael Marker</td>
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<td>Young People and the Global Imaginary: History, Empire, and Identity Politics in Transnational Borderlands</td>
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<td>Handel Wright</td>
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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


SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

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


“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)


“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)