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Business as Usual?
Crises and the Futures for Indigenous Language Work in the Age of COVID

Erin Debenport

In late 2019, when my colleague Georgia Ennis asked me (and several other contributors to this volume) to participate in a panel organized around the theme of "unexpected" practices with Indigenous languages, I had no idea just how much more unexpected things were about to get. Like every other aspect of our lives during the pandemic, projects aimed at documenting, teaching, and expanding the use of Indigenous languages have gone from using online platforms and tools to supporting in-person interactions to relying much more heavily on digital technologies. This was mirrored by radical shifts in how some anthropologists and others practiced ethnography, the methodology that is often presented as the feature unifying the different subfields of the discipline. Indeed, it is ethnographic fieldwork that linguistic anthropologists usually point to when explaining differences between our field and increasingly formal or corpus-based approaches within linguistics departments.

My plan to talk about crises of fluency and imagined futures for Indigenous language materials during that panel also turned out to be depressingly timely during a pandemic, although efforts to "revitalize" a language *always* involve a crisis (colonialism, invasion, genocide, forced assimilation) and a hoped-for future where heritage languages (and the communities to which they belong) are safe and flourishing. As such, the pandemic amplified concerns that are always front and center in community language programs: how do speakers, learners, tribal members, linguists, and others involved in language documentation and teaching respond to crises of fluency, and imagine the futures for the Indigenous language materials that they help analyze, compile, and create? In what ways are these imagined futures reflected in the varied—and sometimes unexpected—uses of digital technologies?

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This paper gathers together examples of digital engagement with Indigenous language materials that touch on issues of language reclamation, crisis, and imagined futures that I encountered during the three earliest years of the pandemic. Some are culled from my ongoing work as part of language reclamation projects with three Pueblo communities in New Mexico and Texas, while others recount interactions with students, colleagues, and staff members across institutions that concern the use of new technologies to teach, document, archive, and access Indigenous languages and language materials. Each of the examples in some way engages in the use of digital technologies in language reclamation projects, considering what these mean practically for anthropologists, archivists, and community members as well as the visions of crisis and futurity that were heightened due to the tremendous changes wrought by the pandemic.

I begin by detailing the recent history of using digital language technologies at each of the three Pueblos, comparing these histories in the following section to the ways that tribal members have incorporated new media practices since the onset of the pandemic. In some cases, this points to shifting Pueblo language ideologies, and in others, it indicates a reaffirmation of long-standing attitudes about the proper ways of using language. I then turn to a very different example of how digital tools can be used to store, analyze, and grant access to Indigenous and other nondominant languages by comparing the approaches to digital language archiving used by the website Ethnologue and by users of the Mukurtu Content Management System. I conclude by discussing what these new media practices tell us about differing visions of crisis and the imagined futures for Indigenous languages and their speakers. I also argue that the kinds of ethnolinguistic research that was described by the authors in this issue's companion volume in many ways anticipated the ways that ethnographic and archival research in linguistic anthropology and community language activism was to change in postpandemic contexts, when scholars turned to "patchwork ethnography" and other non-dominant ethnographic methods as a matter of necessity.[1,2]

Surveying Analog and Digital Technologies in Keiwa Language Activism

The nineteen Pueblo nations scattered throughout the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico, along with two related tribes in Arizona and Texas, share an ongoing history of Spanish and Anglo colonization accompanied by a shift from speaking Indigenous languages to first Spanish and now English. Since 2003, I have conducted ethnolinguistic fieldwork and contributed to tribal language revitalization efforts at three different "Keiwa"-speaking Pueblos, first at "San Ramón Pueblo," as I detail in my book followed by ongoing projects at "San Pedro" and "San Miguel" Pueblos, located near the cities of El Paso, Texas, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, respectively.[3] I use pseudonyms for the names of these communities and the Indigenous language spoken there not to perfectly obscure their identities but to echo the importance placed in Pueblo communities on limiting access to cultural information. As I and others—most notably Paul Kroskrity—have written about, many Pueblo people avoid writing and other technologies that make Indigenous languages permanent and thus

potentially mobile.[4] Arguably, such language ideologies that privilege the tight control of Indigenous language texts are more pronounced in the New Mexico Pueblos, but people at San Pedro also adhere to practices of regulation and control while espousing more positive views of Spanish, multilingualism, and digital teaching tools. Despite these differences, I obscure all tokens of the Keiwa language in this paper and continue to use pseudonyms to try to allow for future community positions about what should be shown or kept out of circulation.

Over the years, these three communities have taken numerous approaches to language reclamation. All three Pueblos have developed unique Keiwa alphabets, producing and carefully distributing written materials in translation. Language activists in each community have worked to build bureaucratic infrastructures for their respective tribes to house language programs, and have found ways to infuse Keiwa language learning into the schools, especially in the tribal Head Start programs. The early days of the San Ramón project focused on creating a printed Keiwa-English dictionary (an effort later set aside after Indigenous language literacy was outlawed by a prior tribal administration), and is now focused on an all-ages summer language program that concentrates on conversation.

While my knowledge of language activism at San Miguel Pueblo is limited by my comparatively recent collaboration with the tribe (I began work at San Ramón in early 2003, San Pedro in 2011, and San Miguel in 2016), friends and colleagues there have given me a sense of how the tribe has approached language documentation, teaching, and learning. Like many tribes, San Miguel has a language program with a director charged with overseeing efforts to encourage the use of Keiwa. At different times in its history, this program has been housed within a department of education or has existed as an independent department. Recently, language work has also been infused into the behavioral health program for children and adolescents, too, aligning Keiwa language abilities with having effective social skills and a positive sense of self. I came to work at San Miguel at the request of the cultural committee that had just successfully completed a years-long land-claim project. As part of gathering materials for their case, this group of cultural experts had compiled some examples of the Keiwa language they wanted to convert to a standard Keiwa alphabet. Creating this orthography was the first collaborative project we worked on, and over the years we have used this writing system to create lists of local places, personal names, animals, and plants. We also—at the spur of the moment, on a cellphone, no less—recorded an hourlong conversation and storytelling session along the banks of the Rio Grande, which I later edited and made into a DVD for members of the group.

The most diverse responses to language shift have come from San Pedro Pueblo. Residing so close to the US-Mexico border and being in the State of Texas makes for a completely different set of policies that govern the New Mexico tribes as well as a markedly different sociolinguistic context. The language program was created in 2011—coincidentally, the same year that the person tribal members identify as the "last fluent speaker of Keiwa" living at the Pueblo had died. The language coordinator took over the new position with little knowledge of Keiwa, but has since progressed to being an advanced speaker and writer. Under his direction, and in partnership with

cultural center employees, San Pedro has accomplished a great deal, including creating a standard Keiwa orthography; working with fluent speakers from San Ramón and San Miguel on conversational Keiwa and elicitation; setting up and populating a language database using Miromaa, a word list platform designed for Aboriginal and Indigenous languages; creating a supplement to the state-certified Head Start curriculum that included Keiwa vocabulary; teaching adult language classes; and producing a small Keiwa-English dictionary, among other approaches. We are currently working on a trilingual, verb-based curriculum, indicating the positive view of Spanish as a teaching tool and local language worth preserving in its own right. The tribe recently received a Mellon grant that will support these efforts, hire new members of the language staff, and set up a digital archive using the Mukurtu Content Management System, a technology I discuss further on.

In sum, in the last twenty years these three Keiwa-speaking tribes have centered their language reclamation efforts on activities that, by and large, reflect extant Pueblo linguistic ideologies that privilege oral transmission over writing; the tight control of language materials and cultural knowledge; and the avoidance of using European language loan words, sounds, or grammatical constructions (although San Pedro's positive view of multilingualism is a counterexample). Most have favored more analog technologies, such as writing, although word-processing software is used by all three groups in the creation of written language materials. As I have previously described, writing and other technologies are used to "hold cultural knowledge still for a long enough time that community members can work on it together and circulate it among appropriate people and in precise contexts."[5] I now turn to how these language reclamation practices as well as language and media ideologies have fared in the face of a global pandemic, one that disproportionately affected tribal communities in the United States and changed the way that academics and others collaborate as part of tribal language documentation and learning efforts.[6] If these older approaches have mostly focused on perfecting and controlling language examples, new technologies center instead on group sociality, organizing and storing language data, and responsibly sharing language knowledge.

Language Work in the Age of COVID

In this section I survey the unexpected uses of technology that arose (in some cases) in response to the pandemic and what these responses tell us about crisis and futurity. I also examine how these pursuits can be seen as emblematic of emergent methods in linguistic anthropology, drawing on examples from both San Pedro and San Miguel Pueblos. At San Pedro, my collaborators and I have long relied on Skype (and more recently, Zoom) to supplement our intermittent in-person visits that we cram in during summers and holidays. Still, I think it's safe to say we were all looking forward to setting aside these technologies in favor of being able to work together during our first long-term, in-person period of language work, originally planned for spring and summer 2020. A fluent Keiwa speaker from New Mexico was going to join us for short elicitation trips to El Paso, and we were going to refine and add to the language

database, conduct a community language survey, and help the kids in the summer program make their own videos in " " (literally, "Indian speech"). When I called my friend Santiago, the cultural center director, to lament the state of our plans, I was quickly (but kindly) disabused of any lingering disappointment over this pandemic change of plans. "My people, we've made it through waaaaay worse," he said. Illness, war, migration . . . being under Spanish, then Mexican, then US control . . . discrimination, being poor . . . we'll be okay and we can still do language stuff, Erin."

Here, the idea of "crisis" isn't something that interrupts a community, but an ongoing state that can be used to measure how much the community has endured. Although the rates of COVID transmission and death in El Paso at the time of this conversation were truly harrowing, and many at the reservation ended up contracting (or even succumbing to) the disease, Santiago, along with others I have spoken to at the Pueblo, characterized the pandemic period as a story of survival, drawing connections to the diseases that decimated Native people following European arrival. In stark contrast to popular political discourse, none of my colleagues described the COVID crisis as "unprecedented." What was unprecedented, however, was the speed at which the San Pedro language program went from a program relying on minimal digital tools to one celebrating media technologies, even those that have the potential to depict and circulate the Keiwa language.

One of the projects we had planned for the summer was a community language survey, so, as one of my colleagues there said, "we could find out *exactly* how much 'Indian' people know." We were planning on going house to house, and to set up booths at community events as well as the Rocking the Rez Pow Wow that the tribe hosts every year. While I was looking forward to the social aspects of helping to administer the survey, I admit I was a little lukewarm about the project, worrying that respondents would feel embarrassed if they knew little to no Keiwa. However, when it was decided this would be the first project undertaken during quarantine, I was just relieved that we were able to do anything, and enjoyed the time I got to spend over Zoom and email with my colleagues at the Pueblo planning the project. When they opened the Google form in their inboxes, all tribal members who had subscribed to the Listserv read the following introduction:

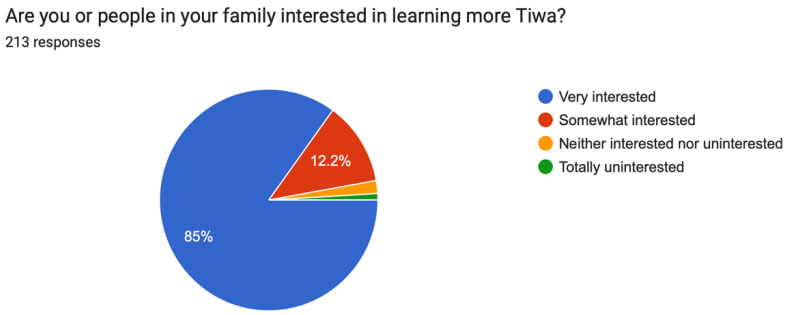
> This short survey (about five to ten minutes) is designed to gather information about language use and the Keiwa language program at San Pedro. It is voluntary and confidential, and you don't have to answer all of the questions if you choose to participate. The information we receive will be used to identify trends across the community, and any individual opinions you offer will not be specifically connected to you. It is our hope that, with more information about your language abilities and needs, we can keep growing the tribal language program in a way that benefits all tribal members.

We received 213 responses in a week, which everyone agreed was an excellent rate. Reading over the results with my colleagues, I was struck by the fact that, although most respondents indicated that they knew very little Keiwa, most didn't treat this like something to be ashamed of. Instead, respondents depicted this "lack" of fluency

as something that united them with all other tribal members. Language ability wasn't a personal failing, but a direct effect of colonization and proof of the community's ability to endure and thrive against all odds. While I don't use any direct quotes from the survey for reasons of confidentiality, on the whole they read less like your standard opinion survey responses and more like small autobiographies or stories. People shared their own language histories, expressing anger at the way Indigenous language use was suppressed while also conveying hopefulness about the language's revival at San Pedro and for other Native languages. There was also an explosion of ideas about what they would like to see in the language program. Podcasts, webinars, short films in Keiwa, language courses at El Paso Community College, and on and on.

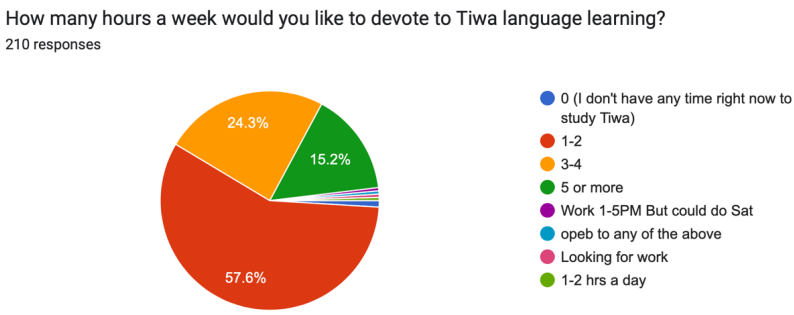
The aggregated data was also hopeful and future-oriented. Here, the top pie chart conveys the widespread enthusiasm for learning Keiwa:

Figure 1. *San Pedro Pueblo Community Language Survey, Question 7.*



Another question—asking readers how many hours a week they would like to devote to learning Keiwa—is also future-facing, especially evident in some of the write-in responses, several of which appear here:

Figure 2. *San Pedro Pueblo Community Language Survey, Question 10.*



One respondent one-upped our possible choices by responding, "1–2 hours *a day*" (emphasis my own), while another gave specific times they were available, which my colleagues and I chuckled about, since we couldn't identify the respondent. There is another way that this survey data points to the future: Santiago, along with Andres, the language program director, are putting together a PowerPoint presentation they plan on presenting to the tribal council now that COVID levels allow for in-person gatherings. As Santiago said, "Once the council sees these fancy charts and how much support there is for language, there's no way they won't vote to continue our funding!" As an academic, I paused to think about our own focus on grant writing and funding, and realized that, in addition to this being a professional expectation, it is a process that focuses on an imagined future and one's ability to stake a claim on an enduring professional identity over time, not unlike the project of community language work.

The language team's next project also utilized new digital technologies: a children's dictionary designed and produced in partnership with a graphic design firm in El Paso. Everyone's favorite problem to have—needing to use up some funds in a grant that was about to close—meant that we were able to outsource a lot of the labor and quickly produce this *Keiwa Language Book* (as it ended up being called) for preschoolers (and by extension, their teachers and caregivers). During our first meeting with the graphic designers, Andres suggested a toddler "board book" format that contained animal words and pictures. Elizabeth, one of the graphic designers, asked if this would be one of many future vocabulary books for kids, and after a pause, Andres said, "You know, we should make one of those books they have on restaurant tables that list the types of margaritas," an especially effective illustration in Tex-Mex-rich El Paso. Soon, we arrived at an upright binder design that will allow for hundreds of vocabulary cards, materially embodying what hides behind all dictionary projects—that, to be successful, they must never truly be finished.

Throughout the design process, we met with the graphic designers via Zoom, sending the digital mockups with Keiwa words back and forth via email. Allowing nontribal members to see language examples and exchanging digital files containing words in Keiwa took me by surprise. Later, Santiago told me the good news that the tribe had received a multimillion-dollar CARES Act grant and had bought laptops for every tribal member over the age of five, to be used for distance learning. Andres quickly added, "It's so great, 'cause we can also do Keiwa classes now that folks are used to learning on Zoom." While these might seem like obvious steps for any group trying to revitalize their language (or teach any subject, for that matter), for Pueblo communities this stood out.

The prevalence of laptops and Zoom rooms in everyone's lives was also poised to have an effect at the much more conservative San Miguel Pueblo. During the summer of 2021, in the postvaccine, pre-Omicron lull when travel became more of a possibility thanks to lower rates and readily available self-tests, I took a trip to New Mexico to meet with colleagues there. While we had continued to check in with one another during the darkest days of COVID, we hadn't done any work on the language. I dropped in to visit the staff at the stunning new Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, located in the old elementary school where many elders still remember being punished

by English- and Spanish-speaking teachers for speaking Keiwa. After situating my face within the torso outline on the screen that took my temperature before I was allowed to enter the building, I got an update on the official state of the language activities during COVID from the center director. I was not surprised when he told me that, during the pandemic, the education department was focused on providing the teachers and students in the Head Start program and the elementary school with laptops and WIFI connections. The Pueblo's borders had been closed to nontribal members, a strict curfew was enforced, and gatherings with multiple families were prohibited to prevent the spread of the virus.

During my trip, I also had a series of meetings with former members of the cultural committee, with whom I had worked previously. To call these approximately eight-person gatherings "meetings" is perhaps a misnomer, as they took place in private homes over meals and, in one case, at a restaurant in Albuquerque's Old Town neighborhood. We used these times to visit about our pandemic experiences, people we had lost, and how we had all adapted. Many of my colleagues told stories about the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, and how their grandparents and great-grandparents had told them about the decimation of their village. One elder, Jorge, explained that "the flu arrived on the railroad, and we had no idea what was happening. We lost so many people, but we just weren't connected to the news like we are today."

Language was always a part of these conversations, too, with San Migueleños introducing me to unfamiliar friends or family as "that linguist we work with from UCLA." In the two weeks I was there, we didn't come up with a formal plan or discuss the shape of future language projects. However, these visits were anything but informal. During each get-together, each of the elders present took turns speaking at length in Keiwa about the importance of the language, how the younger generations needed it for both ceremonial and everyday life, and how this was the key to the future of the Pueblo. These contributions were reminiscent of other forms of oratory I have heard at all of the Keiwa-speaking pueblos over the years, sharing grammatical, phonological, and generic features with prayers offered before meals and formal introductions. Here, the expansive term coined by Miami linguist and language activist Wesley Leonard used to describe community-based linguistic projects, "language work" is applicable.[7] Reaffirming collaborations and relationships had become integral parts of the larger documentation and revitalization efforts at San Miguel.

In November of the following school year, this same group of tribal members began convening on Zoom, a surprise considering the emphasis placed on eschewing technologies of language circulation at San Miguel. One of the tatas reached out via email through his wife, another member of the group, wanting to revisit some of the word lists we had made during the cultural committee years.[8] Soon, we were meeting weekly, with an ever-growing collection of elders gathered around nana and tata's long kitchen table, the site of many of our past lunches and conversations, clustered around several laptops. Eventually, we were joined by several Head Start teachers and other young adult tribal members who all joined from their own desks. I acted as scribe in a shared Google doc in which I transcribed the elders' Keiwa words and phrases. The younger participants (who are all fluent, if self-deprecating, Keiwa speakers) were instrumental in catching

my spelling mistakes and asking questions about the grammar and alphabet. Two side conversations proliferated during these online sessions: discussions in Keiwa among those present at the kitchen table and lively exchanges via the Zoom Team Chat function between me and the young adult participants, typed in English, Keiwa, and emoji.

During summer 2022, I took two two-week visits to San Miguel, During both, I spent the bulk of the in-person visits sharing meals, exchanging gifts, making plans for future language work, and discussing the importance of the group's activities. I saved the majority of the elicitation and editing for the weekly Zoom meetings, which continue to this day. Toward the end of one of these visits, we gathered everyone from the group in a classroom equipped with a projector to watch the DVD I had compiled from cell phone videos. In a dark room (over special-occasion Indian tacos and tamales that necessitated a trip by one of the tatas to the famous El Modelo in Albuquerque), we quietly watched the hourlong collection of movies. Afterwards, people affectionately recounted stories about the two speakers who had passed away in the intervening five years, and carefully packed up leftovers for people to bring to their families and for me to bring back to my Airbnb.

However, I left this lovely gathering worrying that we didn't get to start work on the English translations and subtitles for the films, or check on some of my spelling questions (word-initial sounds are notoriously hard to hear on Zoom, making it hard to tell, for example, if the word begins with a *p*, *b*, or *p'* sound). Indeed, in both of these cases—the community language survey and the impromptu film screening—it would be hard to prove to a granting organization or even to casual onlookers that these activities "did" anything. We didn't find out anything we didn't know about language shift at San Pedro, and we didn't add or edit any words or phrases to the spreadsheet at San Miguel. Instead, these ethnographic examples from San Pedro and San Miguel Pueblos point to the focus on building the capacity of collaborators through emphasizing group sociality, whether in-person or online. In addition to both tribes continuing to use the controversial technology of writing, new digital technologies are being adopted to edit and circulate Indigenous language materials—seen in the beautifully designed children's dictionaries at San Pedro—and by continuing to revisit the word lists at San Miguel. The future of language work in both cases is one that relies on the cohesion of groups and the reaffirmation of such groups' shared purposes and histories. In the next section, I consider how digital technologies designed to organize, store, and share these types of language materials also point to different versions of Indigenous futures, what constitutes a crisis, and how individuals and groups should respond.

Selling Missionary Archives, Reclaiming Indigenous Futures

The idea that there aren't any meaningful differences between academic calendars based on semesters versus quarters was firmly laid to rest during spring quarter 2021. Like everyone else, UCLA went fully remote right before spring break, so I returned to a virtual classroom full of undergraduates I had never met, and most of whom, like me, had never taken or taught an online course. The seminar-style course, Language "Endangerment," drew on ethnographic work in linguistic anthropology focusing on

community language reclamation programs in Indigenous communities. In addition, each student had to choose one language or language community (broadly defined) and gather information about its speakers, learners, history, and available linguistic and pedagogical materials. Their final projects presented these findings in the medium of their choice: students designed language-learning apps for their communities, completed surveys of descriptive materials for particular languages families, and made short films about how national education policies affected specific language groups. Most of the students had exited their dorm rooms and LA apartments and returned to live with their families, and were able to draw on their everyday experiences under quarantine to talk about language practices in their own households. Regardless of whether or not they were focusing on their heritage language(s) or simply a language they were curious about, on the syllabus I directed them to the Ethnologue website as a good place to get started.

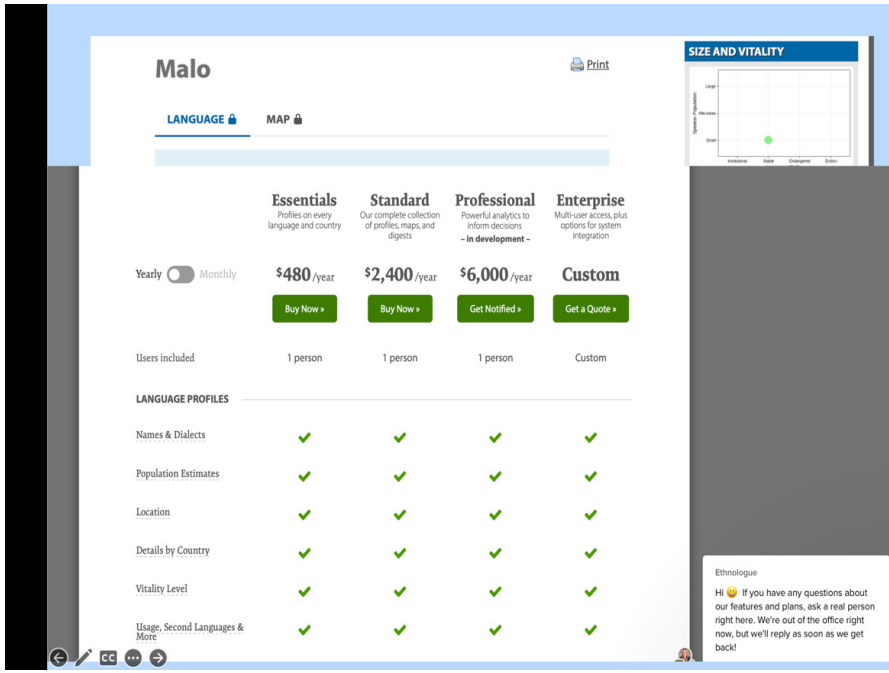
Ethnologue is a vast digital space where one can, as its banner (in 2020) stated, "find, read about, and research the world's 7,117 known living languages."[9] This website is the public face of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, or SIL, a missionary organization whose aim is to train field linguists and missionaries to translate the New Testament into all of the world's languages in order to convert people to Evangelical Protestant Christianity. In addition to the other free tools for linguists that SIL has maintained, Ethnologue remains a resource to research data about language families and number of speakers or find additional resources with no overtly religious content. Ethnologue doesn't provide any linguistic data, but users can follow Ethnologue's links to the Open Language Archives, which then provides further links to materials like dictionaries and grammars.[10]

Other than a user review in an academic journal that followed the launch of the Ethnologue site, scholarship about the SIL has not tended to focus on its specific role in the organization.[11,12] Several histories of the group (originally called Wycliffe Bible Translators) have been published that detail the establishment of the organization, the major figures involved, and the tenets of the groups' particular view of Protestantism.[13] These include a fascinating edited volume published by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs offering anthropological perspectives on the group's missionary work and Courtney Handman's recent ethnographic exploration of the role of SIL Bible translators in Guhu-Semane–speaking communities in Papua New Guinea.[14] A 2009 special issue of *Language* provides the most comprehensive source for understanding the organization that Ethnologue represents. Presenting a very diverse set of papers by academic linguists and anthropologists as well as SIL linguists, guest editors, and coauthors Lise Dobrin and Jeff Good emphasize how interdependent academic and SIL linguists have become. This complicates the view of SIL linguists as single-minded missionaries (the papers emphasize the community- and ethnographically oriented activities of many of their linguists), as well as troubling the idea that academic linguists are more attuned to the needs of language speakers and learners than their missionary counterparts. Returning to the course—because the students wouldn't have time to delve into all but the most introductory grammatical and phonological information about their respective languages in a ten-week quarter, and because

students didn't have in-person library access—Ethnologue was a cheap, quick way for them to begin their projects. Or so I thought, until a student from the class came to my Zoom office hours to let me know that the site was now behind a paywall, and that it was, as they said, "Um, *really* expensive."

When I looked into it, I saw that Ethnologue had actually put up this paywall in 2015. After checking out the entry for their "language of the day" (on this occasion, Malo, spoken in Vanuatu), I found that I had exhausted my "free" monthly page views within a few clicks, and arrived on this subscription page:

Figure 3. *Ethnologue Subscription Page, 2020.*



After reeling from the sticker shock, and confirming that my university library did not hold a digital subscription, I then Googled "responses to Ethnologue decision subscription" and was able to access the Ethnologue press release and some of the posts to Ethnoblog—the site's discussion board—immediately following the switch to subscription model.

On Ethnoblog, the reactions were swift and negative. Detractors pointed to the growing, worldwide emphasis on open-access scholarship, depicting Ethnologue as stodgy at best and dangerously retrograde at worst. Others expressed frustration that the descriptive materials that they themselves had submitted as part of descriptive and/or missionary linguistic projects would now be behind a paywall. Of course, because Ethnologue itself only links to other materials, providing mostly geographic and sociopolitical information, language data could be accessed in other ways, but

these people saw themselves as essentially unpaid content providers. Many commenters adopted a familiar, late-capitalist-speech stance that we might call "customer feedback," criticized the user experience, noting (as I did) that it was easy to exceed one's "free views" very quickly.

Other posts centered on the ethics of using a paywall at all. Some contributors indicated in was unethical from a business and labor perspective, seen in the following post:

> "Netflix is both more likely to be something that people are willing to pay such an amount for, and also that service has to use the money to buy copyrights. Ethnologue's updates are few, and requires very little labor—simply not enough to justify this price" (Ethnoblog, accessed March 2020).[15]

A few critics focused their ethical criticism on the inherent inequality of the subscription model. One said

> "At the least, I would expect SIL to make Ethnologue freely available in those non-Western countries where the organization serves."

Amid all of this negative feedback, only one quote I saw invoked the actual community speakers or learners of these languages, saying

> "Many of my local friends in the country of my former assignment use it, and they really need it in their capacities as researchers, minority language advocates, and language activists."

We can assume that, in its reference to a "former assignment," this critique came from someone who had worked as an SIL missionary linguist themselves. It makes clear that, while SIL is in the business of religious conversion, local communities have long converted religious tracts (such as those produced by SIL missionaries) into pedagogical and historical materials. As linguistic anthropologist Robert E. Moore points out in his analysis of the often-opposing ways that written Indigenous language texts are used by academics and community members, descriptive linguists—often working in the "salvage" tradition—take a "memorializing" view, seeing texts as preserving historical knowledge that would otherwise be lost.[16] By contrast, and as seen in the above post, local communities repurpose language materials designed for (in this case) an evangelical purpose as part of activist and advocacy projects, taking stances that Moore describes as "regenerative."

The responses from the Ethnologue site moderators to these critiques relied heavily on the language of crisis and exception. To explain the decision to put up a paywall, they emphasized the absolute economic "necessity" of moving to this model. Speaking within the late-capitalist consumer register themselves, they assured critics that these revenues would be used to improve the site and user experiences. These responses also painted a picture of who exactly Ethnologue imagines their users to be. As one site moderator wrote,

> "Since most users have an interest in only one language, they should not have any difficulty in accessing the country and language pages related to their primary area of inquiry."

Hidden within this excuse is yet another example of the dominant "monoglot standard" language ideology described by Michael Silverstein combined with a nod toward niche forms of academic expertise.[17] According to this view, nation states—including sovereign Indigenous polities—have come to be seen as inherently possessing a single, standardized national language. Serious linguistic scholars, it is assumed, focus on one particular language, and even if the materials produced by scholars or missionaries are being used by local language activists, such projects must certainly center on the revitalization of one single, easily identifiable language.

Moderators passed over these and other complex ethical issues concerning unequal access with this crisp assurance: "The metering/subscription process is only being applied to users in high income countries as defined by the World Bank." The conversation got me thinking about my colleagues at San Pedro and San Miguel. Where did they fit into this? They do not live in a "developing country," and Pueblos have been resistant to missionary and Bible translation projects that generate information about language for sites like Ethnologue for centuries. For that matter, where did it leave the students in my class who did not have a connection with a particular Indigenous community and might need information on several languages before arriving at one or more to study? The Indigenous students in my classes tend to either be from tribes in California with urban reservations, descendants of families who were moved here during relocation, or are speakers of Mesoamerican Indigenous languages, many of whom were born in the U.S. In our class, I alone fit the stereotype of an Ethnologue subscriber—an academic focusing on studying a single language.

I then decided to reach out to their support team, using the "chat" function on their subscription page. A friendly representative got back to me quickly via email, where we had the following exchange:

> **Ethnologue:** Hi! We do have institution-wide plans that would fit your need. We recently provided a quote to the UCLA Library. You may want to contact your librarian.
>
> **Erin Debenport:** Hey! Thanks so much for your quick reply. Due to COVID, our libraries are facing funding shortages, and I have been told that they are focusing on maintaining subscriptions they already have. Can you offer any suggestions for other solutions or workarounds?
>
> **Ethnologue:** Yes, these are difficult times and I understand the tight budget constraints. If you or any of your students are experts in specific languages, you could apply to our Contributor Program. If accepted, you would get free access.

Feeling more than a little guilty as someone who has worked in customer service before, I pressed on with one final question:

> **Erin Debenport:** While none of the students in the class are trained linguists or fluent speakers of particular Indigenous languages, several are members of US tribes or hail from Indigenous communities in Latin America whose heritage languages are cataloged and stored on Ethnologue. Might these students be able to qualify under the "Contributor Program," based on their linguistic/cultural backgrounds, allowing them access?

And her prompt reply:

> **Ethnologue:** From what I understand, they would need to make data contributions to qualify for the program. I'm not sure if any of your students are living outside of the US and attending classes remotely, but we do offer free basic access to Ethnologue in low- to mid-income economies. Much of Latin America qualifies for this type of access.

After this exchange, I had a depressing thought: the only way I might be able to get free access to the site for myself and, by extension, my students would be to serve as a contributor in my capacity as a trained linguist and provide information about the number of Keiwa speakers and the locally controlled language data that could be added to Ethnologue. Not only would this go against the long-standing agreement I have with my Pueblo colleagues to never share examples of their languages, it would offer for sale quick links to Keiwa language examples for paying customers. With this (and if my Pueblo colleagues' justifiably outraged reactions to the recent article about the monetization of Lakota language materials by the Lakota Language Consortium is any indication), Ethnologue*'s* decision to go behind a paywall is not—to borrow their late-capitalist register—a sustainable business model.[18]

Thankfully, alternatives exist to Ethnologue*'s* approach to gathering, archiving, and (potentially) disseminating Indigenous linguistic materials. The most comprehensive is the previously discussed Open Language Archives, which allows users to link directly to publicly available language data, usually grammars, dictionaries, or linguistic analyses. Two other resources are the World Atlas of Linguistic Structures database, which presents structural data from diverse descriptive sources, and the Glottobank project, which seeks to create "five global databases documenting variation in language structure (Grambank), lexicon (Lexibank), paradigm systems (Parabank), numerals (Numeralbank), and phonetic changes (Phonobank)."[19,20] While both of these databases are open source, they are aimed at scholars interested in linguistic typology, a research area that involves examining grammatical or phonological features across many languages. For example, if you search for the language I call *Keiwa* in the WALS database, you only learn the latitude and longitude for where it is spoken, the language family to which it belongs, and that it does not have grammatical evidentials, a syntactic feature found in some of the world's languages. However, like Open Language Archives, links are provided to published works.

Other alternative projects follow Linda Tuwiwai-Smith's and other Indigenous studies scholars' calls to "decolonize" research methodologies and information and media studies scholars' emergent focus on creating and maintaining community-focused

archives.[21] One such platform, Mukurtu, is a digital content management system (CMS) developed in 2002 by Kimberly Christen, in collaboration with Warumungu Aboriginal community members. Christen's colleagues were unsatisfied by the options available to them to appropriately store and carefully disseminate materials from a community archive as well as materials repatriated from Australian museum collections, and Mukurtu 1.0 was born. In their article describing the Archive of Languages and Cultures of Ethnic Groups of Thailand, a collaborative project that used Mukurtu, Vera Ferreira et al. provide a broad overview of the platform, saying,

> Mukurtu (meaning dilly bag or a safe keeping place for sacred materials in Warumungu language) . . . is a community-oriented CMS infrastructure based on Drupal (an open-source web content management) developed and maintained by the Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation at Washington State University. Mukurtu is a grassroots project aiming to empower local communities to manage, share, and exchange their digital heritage in culturally relevant and ethically minded ways. It follows archiving standards by supporting and enforcing standard metadata schemas and formats; it has different levels of access, respecting data sensitivity and community wishes, in a user-friendly interface.[22]

Mukurtu also has a feature focused squarely on language reclamation, the "Dictionary." I use quotes here, because in addition to containing the usual components of a digital lexicon (the ability to include multimedia, multiple-example sentences and to accommodate non-English orthographies, among others), it also possesses the core features that define the platform itself: the centering of community consultation; community control over content and access; the ability to add metadata; and, crucially, establishing "relations" among items in the database, including language materials.[23]

In sum, the Ethnologue and Mukurtu archives differ in almost every respect. The former consists of links to language data often provided by missionary and other field linguists, while the latter is populated by entries made by living community members or their designated collaborators. Even if community language workers are working with archival materials, or grammars and dictionaries created by linguists or missionaries, it is community members themselves who decide how language materials will be described, shared, and controlled. Ethnologue advances a view of languages as neatly bounded, geographically specific entities linked to specific polities, tribes, or nation-states. In their decontextualized, searchable (for a price!) forms, they are not linked to their contexts of documentation or contemporary communities. Mukurtu, by contrast, has a more flexible way of capturing the multiplicity of languages, polities, and places, and, in its very design, is linked to specific authors, contributors, and contexts.

Business as Usual?

In this paper, I have moved between in-person and virtual interactions, across websites and databases, in Zoom rooms, Mukurtu training materials, and social events. To riff on a popular phrase in academia, any confusion is due to my own shortcomings as a writer rather than a lack of shared themes across sites and topics. This approach has

allowed me to survey the ways that analog and digital technologies have been and are being used as part of language documentation and reclamation projects in Keiwa-speaking communities, both pre- and postpandemic. It has also enabled me to pull in other sites for language work—the Zoom classroom, the digital archive, the blog comments section—looking to see how practical and ideological aspects of language reclamation and documentation play out across contexts.

Considering all of these examples together also highlights overlaps and divergences between the publication of this issue's earlier companion volume, both in terms of the way things have changed (or stayed the same) within the Pueblo communities where I work and in the broader trends informing how Indigenous languages are documented, taught, circulated, and controlled. Recalling historian Philip Deloria's framing, the two communities I focus on here have leaned into what we might consider to be "unexpected" uses of digital technologies related to language projects, including the use of Google Forms and graphic designers at San Pedro Pueblo and the establishment of regular and ever-expanding group Zooms at San Miguel. I am inclined to think that resilience and creativity in Native language work were the constants, and therefore "expected" outcomes, rather than the anomaly I initially took these innovations to be. In my 2011 article in the related volume, I detailed the supposed unlikelihood of writing being used by youth at San Ramon Pueblo to create a popular cultural form—the soap opera. I see this now as a wholly expected approach, using technologies creatively as part of the ongoing political project that is language reclamation.

One larger change that has occurred in the interim between the earlier, Webster and Peterson–edited volume and this current issue concerns the fate of language materials, centering the practical and ethical question of where linguistic data lives for the long haul. For community members at San Ramón, the answer was to tightly control printed materials, avoid using Keiwa in mediated, digital settings, and eventually set aside the technology of writing altogether. Now, with the advent of Mukurtu and other platforms that center community control and the use of digital tools to limit viewership to specific people, groups, or even words, the digital is recast as a means of control rather than circulation. To me, this is unexpected, given the strong ideological association between writing and inappropriate viewership in Pueblo contexts. What is also unexpected, given its evangelical mission, was SIL's pivot to a paywall, a parallel yet uncanny use of digital tools to *limit* viewership through monetizing others' intellectual property.

The framework of expectation also connects with two other themes that appear across this paper's examples: varied views of what is labeled a crisis and how the possible futures for Indigenous languages and their speakers are imagined. Calling something a crisis indicates it is unprecedented, and as we have all seen, new approaches or tools often appear in the wake of crises, whether linguistic, political, economic or health-related. At San Miguel and San Pedro, tribal members did not employ the language of crisis when describing COVID, despite its grave consequences and the choice to use digital technologies in new ways, including some that seemed to belie prevalent language ideologies. Instead, they connected it to the 1918 flu pandemic as well as the ongoing violence of colonialism, framing the pandemic as belonging to a larger "crisis

chronotope"—relying here on Bakhtin's term for a narratively enacted space-time (see also Marks, this volume)—the ongoing era of surviving colonialism.[24,25]

Delving into ideas of crisis also connects us to ideas about futures, especially the way that the future for Indigenous language materials is being depicted. Futures in which tribal communities are able to adjudicate the creation and dissemination of their languages is visible in the many examples of community work being done to reverse language shift. Ethnologue's response to the *very* different kind of crisis (an economic, institutional one) reminds us of the economic comparisons that Jane Hill cautioned linguists against using by charging money to access examples of Indigenous languages.[26] The fate of Indigenous language data in this example, it is implied, is left up to market forces. Here, the site managers of Ethnologue will always play a part, whereas in Mukurtu, the platform is designed in such a way that those involved in training tribes how to use the site will not maintain site access, with community members going on to manage the sites themselves.

However, it is not only the future of Indigenous languages and the materials produced by language reclamation projects that has been the focus of discourses about crisis and futurity in the years between volumes—it has been the future of the discipline of linguistic anthropology itself. In the 2011 volume, when I published "As the Rez Turns," I was drawing on a decade's worth of critiques of linguistics and linguistic anthropology that failed to center issues of community desires and local language ideologies, especially for those working as part of language revitalization projects. As Georgia Ennis and I argue in our editors' introduction, knowledge dissemination practices have changed, as have expectations regarding how to best serve community needs. This has been accompanied by growing activism around reforms to tenure and promotion for scholars contributing to community-based or "applied" projects more generally. Alongside this, we have also seen methodological shift in linguistic anthropology, with more research projects focused on online language and even the use of corpus data, approaches that exploded in frequency during the pandemic. These new methods emerged at the same time that ethnographic fieldwork was being reexamined within the larger field of anthropology, with calls for "slow" or "messy" ethnography, reexaminations of the ethical and practical dimensions of ethnographic writing, greater support for multisited ethnographic projects, and the use of data gathered online.[27,28,29] Similarly, the pandemic made these emergent trends necessities.

Many of these developments, and the ways that the pandemic brought them into stark relief, were discussed by Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe in their 2020 introduction to a planned Wenner-Gren workshop and eventual edited volume. Coining a new term, *patchwork ethnography*, they write:

> By *patchwork ethnography*, we refer to ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations that resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process. *Patchwork ethnography* refers not to one-time, short, instrumental trips and relationships à la consultants but rather to research efforts that

maintain the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterizes so-called traditional fieldwork.

Reading this, I was struck by how closely it hewed to the tenets of language reclamation in terms of its emphasis on long-term commitments to community and its resistance to looking at languages or communities as totalizing wholes. In addition, the practice of patchwork ethnography, by recognizing that all knowledge is partial, resonates with those of us who are non-Indigenous linguists contributing to Indigenous language projects. Linguistic knowledge has not only always been fragmentary, it has never belonged to us. Community language-reclamation projects required creativity and flexibility before the pandemic to accommodate religious and work schedules, but also respect for local language ideologies and long-standing methods of knowledge transmission and control. I have tried to suggest—by relying on multisited, slow, patchwork ethnography—that new methods that became necessities during COVID mimic methods already being used by my Pueblo colleagues. Returning to Santiago's point that creativity and resilience in the face of crisis was not an anomaly, we must work to avoid returning to business as usual, and instead work for a linguistic anthropology that centers Indigenous futures.

Notes

1. Anthony Webster and Leighton Peterson, "Introduction: American Indian Languages in Unexpected Places," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 35, no. 2 (2011).

2. Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe, "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography," Member Voices, *Fieldsights* 9 (June 9, 2020).

3. Erin Debenport, *Fixing the Books: Secrecy, Literacy, and Perfectibility in Indigenous New Mexico* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2015).

4. Paul V. Kroskrity, "Arizona Tewa Kiva Speech as a Manifestation of Linguistic Ideology," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 103-22; Paul V. Kroskrity, "Language Renewal and the Technologies of Literacy and Postliteracy," in *Making Dictionaries: Preserving indigenous Languages of the Americas*, ed. William Frawley, Kenneth Hill, and Pamela Munro (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 171–92; Paul V. Kroskrity, "Language Renewal as Sites of Language Ideological Struggle: The Need for 'Ideological Clarification,'" in *Indigenous Language Revitalization: Encouragement, Guidance, and Lessons Learned*, ed. Jon Reyhner and Louise Lockard (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University, 2009), 73.

5. Debenport, *Fixing the Books*, 80.

6. For general information on COVID transmission and mortality rates among Native Americans, see German Lopez and Ashley Wu, "COVID's Toll on Native Americans," *New York Times*, September 8, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/08/briefing/covid-death-toll-native-americans.html.

7. Wesley Y. Leonard, "Producing Language Reclamation by Decolonizing 'Language,'" *Language Documentation and Description* 14 (2017).

8. "Tata" and "nana" are honorifics used across the Pueblos when speaking to (or about) respected elders.

9. Visit https://www.ethnologue.com. At the time of publication, its banner reads "A reference for making informed decisions in every language context worldwide."

10. On its website (http://www.language-archives.org), the Open Language Archives describes its mission: "OLAC, the Open Language Archives Community, is an international partnership of institutions and individuals who are creating a worldwide virtual library of language resources by: (i) developing consensus on best current practice for the digital archiving of language resources, and (ii) developing a network of interoperating repositories and services for housing and accessing such resources."

11. Lyle Campbell and Veronica Grondona, "Review: Ethnologue: Languages of the World," *Language Journal of the Linguistic Society of America* 84, no. 3 (2008): 636–41.

12. A few days before submitting this article for review, I happened upon a special issue of the linguistics journal *Language* that focused on the impact of SIL linguists on the discipline. I will be reviewing these materials to see if there is any relevant information about Ethnologue specifically, or any other relevant issues.

13. William Lawrence Svelmoe, *A New Vision for Missions: William Cameron Townsend, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, and the Culture of Early Evangelical Faith Missions, 1917–1945* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008).

14. Søren Hvalkof and Peter Aaby, eds., *Is God an American? An Anthropological Perspective on the Missionary Work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Copenhagen: International Work Group of Indigenous Affairs, 1981).

15. As of this writing, Ethnoblog is defunct. The link on the Ethnologue website (https://www.ethnologue.com/ethnoblog/) leads to a series of past blog posts with the comments removed. Subscribers may have the ability to access the comments sections for old blog posts, but the ability to view the commentary I cite here has since been disabled.

16. Robert E. Moore, "Disappearing, Inc.: Glimpsing the Sublime in the Politics of Access to Endangered Languages," *Language and Communication* 26, nos. 3–4 (2006): 296–315.

17. Michael Silverstein, "Monoglot 'Standard' in America: Standardization and Metaphors of Linguistic Hegemony," *The Matrix of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 284–306.

18. Graham Lee Brewer, "Lakota Elders Helped a White Man Preserve Their Language. Then He Tried to Sell It Back to Them," *NBC News*, June 3, 2022, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/native-american-language-preservation-rcna31396.

19. Visit https://wals.info.

20. Visit https://glottobank.org.

21. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Second Edition) (London: Zed Books, 2012).

22. Vera Ferreira, Leonore Lukschy, Buachut Watyam, Siripen Ungsitipoonpor, and Mandana Seyfeddinipur, "A Website Is a Website Is a Website: Why Trusted Repositories Are Needed More than Ever," *Proceedings of the International Workshop on Digital Language Archives: LangArc 2021* (2021), https://doi.org/10.12794/langarc1851176.

23. For general information about Mukurtu, see Kimberly Christen, "Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation" *American Archivist*,74, no. 1 (2011): 185–210; Kimberly Christen, "Does Information Really Want to be Free? Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Question of Openness," *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 2870–93; Kimberly Christen, "Tribal Archives, Traditional Knowledge, and Local Contexts: Why the 's' Matters," *Journal of Western Archives* 6, issue 1 (2015); Kimberly Christen, Alex Merrill, and Michael Wynne, "A Community of Relations: Mukurtu Hubs and Spokes," *D-Lib Magazine* 23, nos. 5– 6 (2017). For a review of the features specific to the Mukurtu dictionary, see Erin Debenport, Mishuana Goeman, Maria Montenegro, and Michael Wynne, "How a Dictionary Became an Archive: Community Language Reclamation using

the Mukurtu Content Management System," *Dictionaries: Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America* 44, issue 2 (2023).

24. I'm grateful to my copanelists Lily Chumley, Derek Milne, Sarah Muir, Shunsuke Nozawa, and Rihan Yeh, who helped theorize this idea of "crisis chronotopes" at the 2022 Society for Linguistic Anthropology meeting, examining how particular spatiotemporal contexts are narratively constructed as such.

25. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics" (transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist), in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Slavic Series), ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 84–85.

26. Jane H. Hill, "'Expert Rhetorics' in Advocacy for Endangered Languages: Who Is Listening, and What Do They Hear?" *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2002): 119–33.

27. Kathleen Stewart, "In the World That Affect Proposed," *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (2017): 192–98; Liza Grandia, "Slow Ethnography: A Hut with a View," *Critique of Anthropology* 35, no. 3 (2015): 301–17.

28. John Law, *Messy Ethnographies in Action* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2018).

29. Carole McGranahan, ed., *Writing Anthropology: Essays on Craft and Commitment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).