CRUSHING COLONIALISM

THE MAGAZINE

September 2024 | Edition 04



THE LAST WHISPER OF RESISTANCE

The Muinane's fight to preserve their language.

TRAGEDY AT THE BORDER: A CALL FOR LANGUAGE ACCESS

Ignoring the language needs of Indigenous migrant children.

GRANDMOTHER

A poem on the generational impact of assimilation.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the September issue of *The Magazine*, where we continue our mission of amplifying Indigenous voices and dismantling colonial systems. This quarter, we dive into a deeply resonant theme: the intersection between language and colonization. Across these pages, we examine how the essence of Indigenous existence—their languages—is under threat, and with it, the wisdom, culture, rituals, and ancestral knowledge passed down for centuries.

Language is not merely a tool for communication. For Indigenous communities, it is the lifeblood of identity, the vessel through which their history, values, and spiritual practices are carried forward. Yet, colonization has long sought to sever these vital connections. Today, many Indigenous languages are on the brink of extinction, with elders—the last speakers of these sacred tongues—leaving us without the ability to preserve what they know.

This issue serves as a tribute to those fighting to preserve their native languages and a call to action. The loss of language is not just a linguistic concern; it is a preservation issue that threatens the very survival of Indigenous peoples. When a language dies, so too does a worldview—along with a wealth of knowledge about the planet, healing practices, rituals, and the ancient wisdom of living harmoniously with nature.

Our contributors explore how language preservation is a direct act of resistance to colonization. They share stories of communities striving to keep their languages alive, the systemic barriers they face, and how the loss of language impacts future generations. These stories remind us that language preservation is a fight for existence, for without all languages, we risk losing not only words but the connection to who we are and the lands we come from.

As you read through this issue, I hope you are moved to reflect on the power of language and its role in preserving the heart of Indigenous cultures. We must recognize that the fight to save Indigenous languages is inseparable from the broader struggle to protect their lives.

In solidarity,



Isabel María Riofrío Miranda
Editor-In-Chief
Crushing Colonialism





The Muinane ethnic group, settled in the Amazon, in the south of the so-called "Colombia," has dwindled to fewer than 59 people, with only 13 still speaking their native language. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024.

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Cover photo: Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024

**Throughout The Magazine, we default to using Indigenous place names unless otherwise stated. Colonial names are indicated in quotation marks for context.*

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THE LAST WHISPER OF RESISTANCE

BY RYAN CORTÉS

The Colombian Amazon is home to a large and diverse Indigenous culture. There, numerous ethnic groups have coexisted peacefully, and together they have resisted the attacks of colonization.

The Muinane ethnic group is one of them.

Settled mainly in the Amazonas department, in the south of the so-called "Colombia", where the Caquetá, Putumayo and Paraná rivers converge, this Indigenous community has disappeared little by little, along with its language. Today, the Muinane population is reduced to less than 59 people, of which only 13 speak their Native language. A small number of Muinane can also be found on the banks of the rivers Caquetá and Putumayo in La Sabana, near Araracuara, and the urban area of Leticia.

The extermination of this ethnic group began with the rubber boom and other extractive activities in the Igará-Paraná river. To preserve their life, language, and traditions, the few who survived were forced to leave their territory. Some were welcomed by the Uitoto, Bora, and Okaina, neighboring ethnic groups that opened their arms and territories in La Chorrera, located to the south of the same department. They have also resisted timber exploitation, the fur boom, and evangelization. However, their Native language has been threatened by the imposition of Spanish as the dominant language and other deeper problems, which not only put their identity at risk, but also the continuity of their rich culture and worldview.

The mother tongue is the soul of an ethnic group, and in the case of the Muinane, that soul has quickly faded, deepening social isolation, especially among younger generations who increasingly feel less connected to their cultural heritage.

With young Indigenous people moving to cities in search of better opportunities, the intergenerational transmission of their culture has been interrupted, eroding their way of life and reducing opportunities to use their language in their daily life. Added to this is a context in which the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated digitalization have further altered the social and cultural dynamics of the community.The loss of words, songs, and rituals represents the extinction of a cultural legacy that leaves the community with a fragmented identity and its youth culturally orphaned. That is why the fight to revitalize the Muinane language is more crucial today than ever.

Some efforts focus on bilingual education and seek to integrate the dialect not only in classrooms, but also in traditional learning spaces such as the *maloca*, the *chagra*, and the river. Still, Muinane children face significant barriers to learning and using their Native language in an educational system where Spanish predominates. Although some schools in the Amazonia offer education models with a differential approach, Muinane is not part of the curriculum, which aggravates the problem.

Furthermore, despite the fact that documenting the language is limited, initiatives such as the creation of dictionaries, digital records and cultural memories are vital steps to ensure that this invaluable linguistic treasure is not lost in time, as it has happened with nearly 44 Native languages in "Colombia" since colonization.

The resilience and determination of the current leaders of the Muinane ethnic group are a powerful example of the importance of cultural diversity in a constantly changing world. These leaders not only express their concern about their language disappearing, but also demand that the Government provide tools and actions that allow them to create cultural memories to resist.

However, the projections are grim: it is estimated that in the next 20 years, the number of Muinane language speakers could shrink to fewer than five people. With the loss of the last speaker, the Muinane ethnic group would join the statistics of the more than four dead languages in the Amazon, shared by "Colombia", "Brazil" and "Peru".

Is it possible to prevent centuries of knowledge from disappearing before our eyes?

About the author

Ryan is Murui Muina Indigenous, originally from La Chorrera, Amazonas, in Colombia. Ryan is a documentary filmmaker and travel photographer.

AN INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORKER'S CALL FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

BY LUCERO GONZALEZ ALVARADO

Indigenous wisdom empowers me as an Indigenous social worker to advocate for decolonization within my field. In this role, I confront the reality that social work, as it stands today, is not inherently designed to end marginalization or exploitation.

A clear example of colonization in social work is when non-Indigenous children are separated from their families, culture, and language by being placed with white foster parents, even when stable biological relatives, like an aunt or uncle, are available.

For six years, I have worked with foster children, survivors of human trafficking, emergency responders, and homeless families. Yet, I have often felt I was applying temporary fixes to deeper systemic issues, as bureaucratic barriers and rigid policies overshadowed opportunities for genuine, long-term solutions.

Colonization persists when social workers maintain a "business as usual" mentality, refusing to change harmful policies that prevent individuals and families from breaking free from oppressive systems. Early in my career, as an Indigenous social worker advocating for systemic change and the implementation of transformative policies, I was often told that "our role is to work with individuals, not change the system," and that "policy change is the responsibility of politicians." I was surprised by social workers' silence in the face of harmful systems, relying instead on politicians for solutions despite our expertise and ability to make meaningful connections that could drive systemic change and reduce harm.

Decolonizing social work is an intentional practice aimed at lessening the negative impacts of social services on already marginalized communities, like Indigenous peoples. I realized that my mission needed to be about both decolonizing the profession and changing these systems. Communities deserve services that not only provide temporary relief but also address the oppressive structures in which they live. Through macro-level social work, I've found myself advocating for Indigenous language access and the distinctiveness of Indigenous language expression, particularly in agencies like the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Lack of language access leads to Indigenous erasure and further marginalization. I've also trained social service case managers and supervisors to understand that Indigenous clients should not be dismissed simply because their communication style differs. For instance, "U.S" mental health services often take a direct approach to gathering demographic information, but Indigenous peoples often prefer to build rapport before sharing personal details. In the past, Indigenous clients have been labeled as "non-compliant" for not responding quickly or remaining silent. Decolonizing social work requires understanding that Indigenous peoples use language to build rapport, often through storytelling, and should not be dismissed as uncooperative.

I aspire to go beyond the status quo, which often dismisses Indigenous peoples, and guide us toward a more empathetic, holistic society with decolonized policies and systems. This involves gently challenging fellow social workers; engaging in introspection at the individual, team, and organizational levels; and critically examining the harmful systems we perpetuate. I encourage every social worker or mental health professional reading this to reflect on the harm caused by complacency, embrace accountability, and join in collective efforts to decolonize social work. This is itself a form of harm reduction and prevention.

Decolonization is not only relevant to my professional life but also to my identity. I've had to work on decolonizing my Indigenous heritage, particularly in how it has been portrayed through patriarchal lenses. For example, Indigenous women have been expected to remain silent, endure suffering, and avoid leadership roles. Decolonized Maya leadership demands that I use my voice to speak out when harm is done to me or others, just as my matriarchal ancestors did. However, I've also learned that not all Indigenous social workers support decolonization. Some Indigenous leaders have reprimanded me for advocating on a policy level, but I won't let that deter me.

The importance of decolonization in social work extends beyond addressing harm experienced by marginalized communities. It fosters the well-being of all communities through transformative policy changes. Decolonizing social work isn't just about serving Indigenous peoples—it's about creating systemic changes that humanize all individuals. By decolonizing social work, we prioritize collective life, ensuring that we all thrive. Social workers have a collective responsibility to decolonize our perspectives, practices, and systems for the betterment of everyone.

About the author

Lucero Gonzalez Alvarado is a Maya Q'anjob'al woman with a Masters Degree in Human Rights Practice and a Bachelor's in Social Work. She has seven years of experience in social work and four years of human rights research. She currently works at Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim (CMPI) as a full-time Program Manager for the Maya and Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Program, she also previously spent two years working on Human Rights Research with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples, worked as a documentary research associate, and as a CMPI Human Rights DEI contractor.

THE UNTOLD STORY OF ALEUTIAN SURVIVAL, LANGUAGE, AND COLONIAL DEVASTATION

BY AKINBEMI HERNANDEZ ABREU

I am going to tell you a story. It is a story of pain, bloodshed, resilience, and survival. It is a story passed down in my family through oral tradition that runs through my veins. It is my history.

It begins in Unalaska, an Aleutian island that chains west of the Alaskan mainland. Our Native community, the Qawalangin, lived in harmony with nature and the neighboring Aleutian tribes. There was a respect for their surroundings: the seasonal shift between the snap-cold long winter nights and the fresh endless summer days, the thriving ecosystem of wildlife, and even the smell of the ocean at sunrise.

Hunting was only done out of necessity, and every part of the animal was used. The meat provided nourishment, hollow organs insulation, bones became tools and fat fueled fires. Hunters would kayak out to sea and ask the ocean for its grace, and when an animal was caught, they would ask for the blessing of the animal's spirit. Everything was connected through a spiritual language, an unwritten, unifying language that transcended the tribes and their dialects.

> *"Everything was connected through a spiritual language, an unwritten, unifying language that transcended the tribes and their dialects."*

Then, one day, foreign people came on big ships, speaking a strange language that lacked the transcending kindness. Their language was laced with material greed and shrouded in religious doctrine. They were explorers of the Russian Empire, seeking to expand their capital and spread the word of the Russian Orthodox Church. Soon after they arrived in 1741, the Russians focused on a discovery: the abundance of fur seals.

The northern fur seal was a thriving species in the region, and its relationship with my ancestors was imperative to their survival. The Aleutians knew the nature of the fur seal, when to hunt the animal, and when to show respect and leave them in peace. However, to the Russians, this species was a goldmine that could be exploited for fur trading, particularly with the Empire of China. The Russians began sending fur hunters to the region but quickly realized that their hunters lacked the skill and patience—the spiritual connection and respect—that the Aleutian hunters practiced.

The Russians began pillaging villages, robbing them of their fur and resources, and leaving my ancestors no choice but to negotiate with these oppressors. What started as an offer of Aleutian servitude in exchange for preserving their families, devolved into the widespread enslavement of thousands of Aleutians at the hands of the Russian Empire. Once enslaved, the Aleutians were forced to turn against their culture, no longer living in harmony with nature.

Within the hunting culture of the Aleutian tribes, there were certain islands and hunting grounds that were respected and kept off limits to maintain a balance within the aquatic ecosystem. Among these protected grounds were the Pribilof Islands, the region's primary fur seal mating grounds, north of the Aleutian chain. Known as Amiq by the Aleutians, the islands located 240 miles north, were discovered by Gavriil Pribylov in 1786, and renamed St. Paul and St. George, after key figures within the Russian Orthodox religion. These islands were respected and left uninhabited by the Natives, but that soon changed with the rise of the profitable fur industry.

The Russians quickly established a hunting and trading system on the islands, forcing Aleutian hunters to kill the fur seals for their pelts. But the Russians went even further. Fueled by greed, the Russians insisted the pelts be undamaged to retain the most value. They punished anyone who damaged the fur in the killing of the animal and, ultimately, forced Aleutian hunters, my ancestors, to club the fur seals to death. My ancestors were forced to beat the fur seals for hours, bearing witness to their screams, regardless of their age or sex, on ceremonial grounds. Once the pelts were taken, the entirety of the animal was tossed into the ocean and wasted. The Pribilof Islands became a bloodbath, bringing riches to the Russians and psychological destruction to the Aleutians.

Several Aleutians chose to take their lives to save their spirit from causing such pain to the fur seal and the earth. Aleutian hunters brought to the islands by the Russians often never returned home. The Pribilof Islands became a fur seal-hunting

camp that was seen as a force of darkness that mysteriously claimed lives. The Russian-American company in charge of leading operations in the region for the economic benefit of the Russian crown recognized that they were dependent on Native labor for their success.

They coerced the people in Native villages to sign a contract demanding the labor of half of all males between the ages of 18 and 50. This was the short-term solution the Russians employed to meet the growing demand for fur and the growing need for hunters stationed at these camps—and it led to the deaths of thousands more Native men and furthered the destruction of Native communities. The fur seal population was nearly destroyed. It was not until 1848, over 100 years after Russian arrival in the region, that the company restricted killing female fur seals and their pups when the fur seal population dropped by about 80% and threatened their profit.

As the Russians became more profitable, they also became more cruel. The Russians stationed on the island would line up Aleutian slaves in front of a cannon, placing bets as to how many bodies the cannonball would go through for sport. This frequent action to exercise power and strike fear was one of the leading causes of Aleutian death, following foreign illnesses and suicide.

The Russian-American company continued to establish contracts with communities to ensure control over Aleutian life, ensuring a pipeline of slave labor to these hunting plantations and decimating the Aleutian population. Between 1741 and 1866, the Aleutian population dropped by 75%, from ~18,000 at the time of the Russians' arrival to 4,400, just before the Alaska Purchase; this was a destruction of language and culture not through colonial assimilating, but colonial massacring.

The Russian colonization of Alaska had a stronger impact on my people, the Aleuts, than any other Native Alaskan group due to their earlier contact with and dependence on each other. Despite the devastation of the ancient Aleutian lifestyle through forced fur seal hunting, many Russian customs and traditions began to engulf the island chain. The most influential were the missionaries of the Russian Orthodox Church, who were instructed to spread the word of God using education, through preaching and written text. Resources were poured into this project, and, by 1831, a phonetic alphabet was created to mimic the sounds of the Aleutian language known as "Aleutian Fox."

By that point, all education was controlled by the Russians, and they began teaching Aleutians how to read and write using the Orthodox Bible. Several Russian translators and grammatical intellectuals were sent over to the region to support the creation of this Russian-Aleutian dialect, and within ten years of its creation, an Aleutian dictionary was made. Almost every Aleutian had some level of literacy in this new dialect. With this sudden surge in Native literacy rates, utilizing both the Aleutian Fox alphabet and the newfound Russian-Aleutian dialect dictionary, several family stories were able to be written down and preserved for the next generation.

The oral tradition began to shift towards writing: this is when the Native Qawalangin language began to plummet. Younger generations of Aleutians were sent to school and learned the contemporary dialects and Aleutian Fox alphabet, only allowing the practice of the original language in their own home. The Russian-Aleutian alphabet also oversimplified certain unique sounds that cannot be mimicked by Russian phoneticism, further spreading the divide between younger and older generations.

This sudden boon to literacy, using a hybrid language cloaked in dogmatism, also led to the spread of Russian Orthodoxy and the establishment of churches across the islands, with Aleutian leaders appointed as church representatives. Among these church leaders was my Qawalangin 4th great grandfather, Shayashnikov, who led a movement to spread Russian literacy amongst his Native peoples. He helped establish several churches and used them as a proxy for the education of contemporary language and literacy. He also was a teacher for several years and aided in the Aleutian Fox translation of the Orthodox Bible.

He used the foreign language from a foreign land as a means to preserve his culture. Several of his civil, anthropological, and religious documents have survived and proven vital in understanding the expansion of the Russian language. First appointed to lead a church in the Pribilofs, Shayashnikov then returned to our homeland of Unalaska and led the famous Holy Ascension Cathedral near Dutch Harbor, Unalaska, where generations of my family are buried. By 1865, 21,000 schools were established by the Russian Church in the region, with a recorded student population of 400,000 Aleutian students.

When the so-called "United States" bought the Alaskan territory from Russia in 1867, the Government made little changes to the newly formed Aleut Orthodox society. The fur seal hunting and pelting industry was maintained, and there were few resources extended to the Native peoples in the transfer of power. However, the so-called "United States" did use the Aleutian tribes for a national discipline of great curiosity at the time: anthropology.

The American Anthropology Association was established in 1902 and organized several national exhibits of captured and foreign peoples for the public. One of these events was the Kansas Exhibit of 1904, a fair held displaying thousands of Indigenous peoples across the new America after the Louisiana Purchase, including the Native Alaskan. Within this exhibit, my great-grandmother was dressed scarcely and put in a glass cage for people to see, mislabeled as "Eskimo." This indignity was recounted to my mother during my great-grandmother's lifetime and will continue to be shared throughout my future.

Now, there are only about 8,000 Unangan left within the territory of Alaska, and less than 150 speakers of our Native language that pre-exists the "discovery" of our people. Language is the essence of our culture; both the language is spoken by our mouth to others' ears, as well as the language between our spirit and the vastness of the universe. We use foreign languages, Russian and English, to keep our culture alive. It is up to us, as the future of our people, to share our story and empower the cause to rehabilitate ourselves.

R. Ofunshi Hernandez Abreu collaborated on the making of this piece.

About the author

Akinbemi River Hernandez Abreu is a third-year pre-med student majoring in Biology at Columbia University in the city of New York. He is a member of the federally recognized Qawalangin Tribe of Unalaska and is of Afro-Cuban descent. He's interned at the United Nations since 2022, apprenticing at the UN NGO Committee on The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN NGO Mining Working Group. He is a world percussionist and serves as a treasurer for Colombia Acuerdo de Paz, based in Washington, DC.

TRAGEDY AT THE BORDER: A CALL FOR LANGUAGE ACCESS

BY LUCERO GONZALEZ ALVARADO



A great uncle and his nephew walking up a hill of their great great uncle's home. When Indigenous families decide to leave their territories, they leave history and generational family connections. This picture was taken in San Juan Ixcoy, Guatemala. Photo credit: Lucero Gonzalez Alvarado, December 29, 2022

In 2018, the tragic deaths of two migrant Maya children in U.S. custody—Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin from the Maya Q'eqchi'Nation and Felipe Alonzo-Gomez from the Maya Chuj Nation—revealed the consequences of failing to provide services in the migrants' native indigenous languages, as well as in languages they understand.

Jakelin, who was only seven years old, died on December 8, 2018, two days after being taken into U.S. custody. A report published by *The Nation* revealed that Jakelin died from septic shock and cardiac arrest. She and her father were part of a group of 163 Guatemalans who surrendered to Border Patrol at a remote entry point in the New Mexico desert on the night of December 6, seeking political asylum in the so-called "United States". Once in custody, they were given forms only in English, depriving them of their right to effective communication in their native language.
Just one week later during an interview at FoxNews, the then U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, Kirstjen M. Nielsen, stated that "this is just a very sad example of the dangers of this journey," and added they "will continue to look into the situation."

Three weeks after Jakelin's death, Felipe, who was only eight years old, died in custody as well. Felipe showed clear signs of distress—coughing, vomiting, and fever—but, without adequate language support, these symptoms were not properly communicated or addressed.

After their deaths, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) pledged to implement additional medical screenings for children in custody. However, in its year-long investigation into Felipe's death, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) overlooked the significant role language played in the tragedy. The report ignored the fact that Felipe's family primarily spoke Maya Chuj, not Spanish. According to a DHS affidavit, Felipe's father was not provided with an interpreter, preventing him from communicating his son's symptoms. This oversight raises serious concerns about the accuracy of DHS's medical evaluations and highlights the broader issue of Indigenous identity erasure.

The deaths of Jakelin and Felipe begs the question: How many other Indigenous children's lives have been put at risk due to being misidentified and denied the language access supposedly guaranteed by the DHS´s Language Access Plans?

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, Guatemala accounted for the second largest proportion of migration, with 86,000 reaching the southwestern border reported between January and May 2024, following Mexico. However, data on the number of Maya Indigenous people from Guatemala remains unclear, primarily because the DHS does not distinguish Indigenous individuals from their non-Indigenous counterparts in its records. This lack of distinction complicates the accurate identification of Indigenous people in custody and leads to inadequate language support during their processing.

On August 11, 2000, then-President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 13166 mandating that federal agencies, including the DHS, provide meaningful access to services for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The first Language Access Plan, developed in 2012, aimed to meet the guidance provided by DHS in April 2011. This guidance, titled "*DHS Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons*," stated "the LEP Plan establishes a language access policy for the Department and creates a system for providing meaningful access to LEP persons within DHS. The LEP Plan outlines the Department's existing language access efforts and the additional measures DHS will take to enhance language services for LEP individuals across its operations, services, programs, and activities." Yet in practice, the absence of language services for Indigenous children like Jakelin and Felipe not only jeopardizes their lives but also erases their cultural identities.

The outrage sparked by the deaths of Jakelin and Felipe highlighted the urgent need to address the systemic failures in providing appropriate language services to Indigenous migrants.

As part of the 2023 Language Access Plan, the Department of Homeland Security collaborated with leaders from Indigenous migrant communities to develop its first-ever Indigenous Languages Plan. This initiative aims to improve language access for Indigenous migrants from Latin America engaging with DHS programs and services. However, whether this effort has fully resolved the long-standing issue of inadequate language services remains to be seen.

Language access goes beyond translation; it's about addressing the unique needs and rights of children detained at the border. It is not a privilege but a necessity. For Indigenous children in U.S. custody, it can be a matter of survival. Their stories serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need to protect the rights and lives of all children, particularly those from vulnerable and marginalized communities.



Maya territories and their bountiful soil in the lands Indigenous people leave to migrate. This picture was taken in San Juan Ixcoy, Guatemala. Photo credit: Lucero Gonzalez Alvarado, December 29, 2022

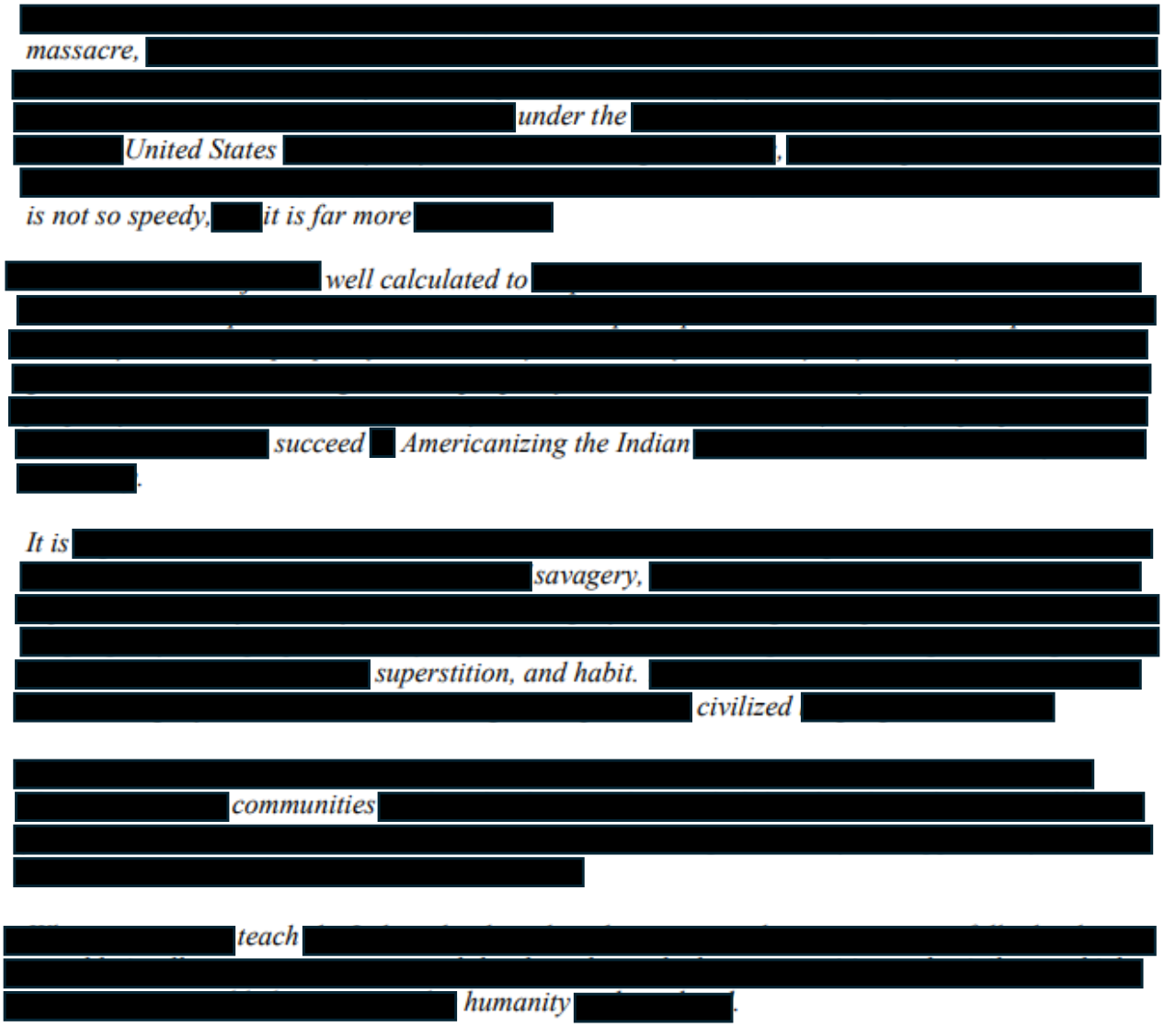
About the author

Lucero Gonzalez Alvarado is a Maya Q'anjob'al woman with a Masters Degree in Human Rights Practice and a Bachelor's in Social Work. She has seven years of experience in social work and four years of human rights research. She currently works at Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim (CMPI) as a full-time Program Manager for the Maya and Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Program, she also previously spent two years working on Human Rights Research with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, worked as a documentary research associate, and as a CMPI Human Rights DEI contractor.

POEM

ERASURE

BY SHANA BAUMGARTNER



About the poem

This poem takes an authentic text, in this case an excerpt of "U.S." Captain Richard H. Pratt's 1892 speech "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites," and blacks out content in order to highlight specific words. These words form the poem. In his speech, Captain Pratt argued that off-reservation boarding schools for Indigenous children was a more humane way to, as he put it, "kill the Indian." Between 1860 and 1978, Indigenous children in the "U.S." were forced to attend these assimilationist schools, taken from the reservation, separated from family, and deprived of their language and culture.

POEM

GRANDMOTHER

BY SHANA BAUMGARTNER

Six years old.
Traveling—
Alone—
(a great distance)
From the wide open prairie
To the land of borders
And boarders.
Nothing of Her own.
Nothing of Her native home.
This new language—
An assault to the ears, —
Like marbles in Her mouth.
Her Lakota language
Receding to the back of Her mind,
A faint whisper from
Her *tetonwan* ancestors.

i wonder
how long
it took Her dreams
to turn to english

i wonder
how long
it took Her
to feel the shame
of existing

my aunt told me
She lived Her life
an enemy
in Her own skin

my mother told me
we still have land
a piece of Her
home

but all is dust

my Grandmother
She wrote me every week
but She told me
nothing.

About the author

Shana Baumgartner is an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and a descendant of an off-reservation "Indian" Boarding School survivor. She is an educator, writer, and editor and resides in the U.S. with her partner and three children.

PHOTO ESSAY

THE MUINANE, IN THE HEART OF THE JUNGLE

BY RYAN CORTÉS

A look at the past is a memory of a prosperous and numerous ethnic group, today resigned to its possible disappearance. Armando's family is the last existing family of the Muinane ethnic group.



Armando Umirez (traditional name: Jan+fo) is one of the last Muinane who speaks his native language fluently, having learned it from his father. Although his mother is from the Bora ethnic group and he currently resides in Uitoto territory, Armando always tries to speak his language with the few relatives who still speak it. Armando extracts bark to weave a matafrío, a task shared between men and women, to extract the juice from the cassava and obtain starch. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024



Armando Umirez, from the Muinane ethnic group, with his wife, from the Uitoto ethnic group, and his mother-in-law, from the Bora ethnic group. These ethnic mixtures resulted from forced displacements during the rubber era. A practice that did not occur before, today it is common to see families of mixed ethnicities. It is difficult for children to learn three dialects and Spanish so they usually inherit the father's native language and learn Spanish. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024



Marcelo Buinage, leader of the Uitoto ethnic group, explains that after the genocide, his ethnic group opened its territory to receive survivors of different ethnicities, including some Muinane families like those of Armando. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024



Even now the subsistence of the Muinane depends on harvesting, planting, hunting, and fishing. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024



The use of technology in the Indigenous communities of the Colombian Amazon brought new challenges in the protection of their cultural practices. Learning priorities for young people have changed and the native language is barely one of them. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024



The houses of the last Muinane families are located in Santa María, next to the La Chorrera area, in the Amazonas department, in southern Colombia. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024



The evangelization of the Indigenous communities of the Colombian Amazon was one of the main reasons for the compulsory learning of Spanish and the prohibition of native languages. Through faith and Western education, subsequent generations felt the gap between colonialist culture and their own. Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024

About the author

Ryan is Murui Muina Indigenous, originally from La Chorrera Amazonas, in Colombia. Ryan is a documentary filmmaker and travel photographer.

AI TOOL TO REVITALIZE ENDANGERED INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

BY CRUSHING COLONIALISM

In a groundbreaking effort to preserve endangered languages, a team of students has developed an AI-powered tool aimed at revitalizing Indigenous languages at risk of extinction. The project, highlighted by *Tech Xplore*, focuses on using cutting-edge technology to bridge the gap between modern communication and traditional linguistic heritage.

The AI tool, which is still in its prototype stage, is designed to assist speakers of endangered languages by providing real-time translation, educational resources, and language preservation strategies. Many Indigenous languages are in danger due to a decline in native speakers, often driven by external factors such as colonization, urbanization, and cultural assimilation. According to *Tech Xplore*, over 40% of the world's approximately 7,000 languages are currently endangered, with Indigenous languages facing the greatest threats.

This AI tool offers new hope for reversing that trend by creating a platform where younger generations can engage with their native languages. The team behind the innovation seeks to encourage not just language preservation but also cultural continuity through educational systems and accessible tools for communities.

This initiative comes at a critical time when several organizations and Indigenous communities around the world are ramping up efforts to safeguard their linguistic heritage, with the United Nations declaring 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Technology has increasingly become an ally in this fight, providing resources that were previously unavailable for smaller, marginalized communities.

By leveraging machine learning and AI, the tool aims to create a more sustainable and scalable solution to language preservation, especially for languages with limited written records or those passed down through oral traditions. As we continue into an era of rapid technological advancement, initiatives like this AI-powered tool signal a promising future for the preservation of Indigenous identities worldwide.

Source: *Tech Xplore*

Call for submissions!

The Magazine is seeking submissions for our December issue which will focus on the importance of reproductive justice. We invite Indigenous journalists, artists, and content creators to submit pitches for thought-provoking stories, insightful articles, and powerful narratives that embody this topic. Whether it's a personal anecdote, cultural analysis, or artwork – we want your unique voice to be heard!
Submit your pitches to: info@crushingcolonialism.org



Photo by: Ryan Cortés, August 19, 2024

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As a non-profit organization (501c3 in the “U.S.”), your donations go directly towards supporting our small but growing organization, and its mission to produce high-quality news that is free and accessible to Indigenous communities and their allies around the world. Please consider contributing today at CrushingColonialism.org/donate.