

In Conversation with

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson

Uma Maheshwari Chimirala¹; Satish Kumar Nainala²; Kumari Mansi³; Kunal Anand⁴; and Mian Md. Naushaad Kabir⁵

1. UMC, Assistant Professor, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, India. Email: chimiralaumamaheshwari@gmail.com
2. SKN, Post-Doc Fellow, EFL University, Hyderabad, India. Email: nainala.satish@gmail.com
3. KM, Assistant Professor, Amity University Haryana, Gurugram, India. Email: mansijnu@gmail.com
4. KA, Assistant Professor, Amity University Haryana, Gurugram, India. Email: kunalg2@gmail.com
5. MNK, Assistant Professor, Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: naushaaadk@gmail.com

Background: Through Global Initiatives for Academic Networks (GIAN) initiated by the Ministry of Human Resources, India, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad invited Prof Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (TSK) and Prof Robert Phillipson (RP) to organise a two-week course titled “Language policy, language in human rights, language imperialism, languages and linguistic genocide in education, language ecology”. This course addressed the question: WHY DO LANGUAGES DISAPPEAR? The course explored some of the drivers such as globalisation, growthism, military, economic and other structural inequalities, linguistic imperialism as one dimension of neo-imperialism, and internal colonialism for rationalizing global and local injustices. The interview that follows this introduction was documented during the two-week course.

The Interview: Prof Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Prof Robert Phillipson need no formal introduction. Researchers in Language politics, Bilingualism, SLA and Teacher education, Language Rights and Educational Cultural Studies, Language Policy and Planning, and so on will be familiar with their writings and their perspectives on language and educational access and equity. We wish to highlight candidly, right at the beginning, that the issues raised in this interview have been poignantly addressed by the experts in several of their writings along their illustrious careers. The experts express this view at several points in the interview as well and hence the readers are warns against expecting any earth-shaking questions being asked. What the interviewers did attempt earnestly was to localise issues that ranged from the effect of seemingly innocent looking language legislations (promoting/restricting languages) to language death to political stand on the Rohingya to concerns on traditional knowledge – all of which are directly/indirectly implicated to or by language. Two reasons necessitate this attempt to localise issues: 1) to refute denial of the presence of some of the issues highlighted in the interview in Asian contexts in a generic sense; and 2) to raise awareness on language as a
discriminating factor (something that Indian constitution is yet to realise). Further, the questions asked are based on the opinions of the interviewers alone and are aimed at gaining insightful responses from the two experts. Interested readers can access the interview at: https://youtu.be/cye3lA-GpiK

The transcription process: A three step process was adopted: Step 1 involved the conversion of the audio files to text files. Step 2 dealt with processes of ensuring readability by addressing aspects of ambiguity, continuity in the text and punctuation. Step 3 necessitated that the experts review the transcripts to read for conceptual clarity while at the same time as Skutnabb-Kantas puts it “to retain some of the orality.”

Acknowledgements: We express our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kantas and Professor Robert Phillipson for consenting to design and teach the course as well as do the interview; Ministry of Human Resource Development for the scheme called GIAN; GIAN for conceiving and materializing spaces of learning across geographical boundaries; Prof Amita Dhanda, Local Coordinator for GIAN for persisting in the whole process; and Prof Faizan Mustafa, Vice Chancellor, NALSAR University of Law for the institutional support and encouragement.

Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kantas and Professor Robert Phillipson in turn thank GIAN, NALSAR, the participants of the GIAN and the interviewers for having brought the interview in text form.

So the conversation begins….

KM: Salikoko S. Mufwene, the Congolese linguist in his article ‘Colonisation, Globalisation, and the Future of Languages in the Twenty-first Century’ states “…languages are parasitic species whose vitality depends on the communicative behaviours of their speakers, who in turn respond adaptively to changes in their socio-economic ecologies. Language shift, attrition, endangerment and death are all consequences of these adaptations.” What is your take on the aforementioned statement?

RP: I have a lot of respect for Salikoko Mufwene as a scholar. He has done fundamental research in the way languages evolve. But I think that his way of listing the factors that can influence things seems to me a very passive kind of way of looking at social and linguistic change or evolution, including disappearance - where he refers to death as a kind of natural process. And clearly, those of us who are trying to resist the
oppression of languages would think in different terms. We would think that active policies can influence things so that languages are maintained rather than being killed off, which is often the case. I think he is very thoughtful, still, and does in fact show how complex these processes are. At the same time, I know that in some writings he has tended to totally reject the need for language rights and has written as though these cannot in fact be of benefit, whereas we know from many contexts that when there are active policies to support ‘minoritized’ languages, their future can be assured successfully. So in that sense he doesn’t even reflect on positive ways of influencing and maintaining the diversity of languages. I am also a bit suspicious of the way, in relation to the European Union, he always comes up with broad statements, like in this particular quotation. He is sometimes not always completely up to date in what he chooses to comment on— which is a fairly polite way of saying that I think that I would challenge him in just the same way as he in writing has challenged what I have written about these things.

KM: How do you see bilingualism in relation to language endangerment studies? What role does bilingualism play in language reclamation and revitalization?

TSK: My first reaction when I saw that question was—I don’t understand the question because obviously, if you want to revitalize or reclaim a language, that means that you already have one language, and if you try to learn the other language or revitalize it—even reclaim it, when it has been sleeping, then you become bilingual. So bilingualism and after that trilingualism or may be quadrilingualism is an essential aspect of revitalization. It cannot be done without high levels— later higher levels of bilingualism or hopefully, at least, trilingualism. So to me it is self-evident that bilingualism is a part of revitalization and reclamation of language. It cannot be done without bilingualism.

SKN: What do you think is the ideological impact of global rise of extreme right-wing fascism as we can see in America and many other countries like Turkey and even in India on language policy and preservation of language ecology in particular?

TSK: It seems that at least those extreme right-wing neo-fascist organizations and political parties that we know are all absolutely against minority languages, even national minority languages, often even those languages which have a national official status. For instance in Sweden
the Sámi languages as Indigenous languages have a national official status. In addition, four other languages are official minority languages: Meänkieli (very close to Finnish), Yiddish has it and Romani Chib, the language of the Roma in Sweden (the so called gypsies). Representatives of the extreme right-wing party, ironically called Sverigedemokraterna, with roots in a neo-fascist party, have claimed that the Sámi are not Swedes, even if they have been in what is now Sweden there at least as long as the Swedish majority population. Probably much longer. Historically it is very difficult to really show “who came first”. The oldest Sámi rock carvings, with elk/reindeer, are around 7000 years old, (https://www.thelocal.no/20150826/7000-yr-old-elk-carving-found-in-arctic) but there have been many changes and immigration to those areas more or less as soon as the ice age finished. But the extreme right-wing party would not even admit that speakers of official minority languages are “Swedes”, and they would not like to maintain or support them or their languages in any way. So the question is their status. And when it comes to immigrant minorities, and especially now asylum seekers, this Swedish extreme right-wing party would like to remove all of them from Sweden and send them “back” - even those who have got Swedish citizenship. Looking at several other countries which have similar parties, for instance Hungary right now, they want to build as big walls as Trump wants to build. So, minorities, Indigenous peoples and minoritized groups do not have much hope if these parties get too much to say. Even if one cannot call whole countries with this kind of extreme suggestions and policies neo-fascist, we know from history how the population in what became fascist countries had chosen these leaders (Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, etc), it is scary to think that many still democratic (?) countries today have also chosen leaders whose actions come very close to dictatorship which is negative towards ITMs (USA, Hungary, maybe even Poland). Turkey and Brazil are also examples of countries which are physically waging war against their minorities (Kurds in Turkey) and Indigenous peoples (Brazil), including their language rights and land rights.

RP: In Sweden the neo-fascist party is not in government. Whereas if they are in government, as in your country, if it is correct to call that a kind of trend towards fascism, but in Turkey, in Brazil now, quite definitely the people in power believe in this traditional 18th and 19th century idea of one country, one state, one culture, one language - which of course is in clear contradiction with the reality in all these countries, and
which is extremely threatening to the maintenance of diversity of culture and languages. It seems that most of those countries are moving in a much more ruthless direction which is extremely worrying. In the European Union you have 28 member states and 24 official and working languages of its institutions, and used in links between the institutions and the member states. But there are in addition to that something like over 200 local languages of ancient origin and another several hundred of more recent origin. There are lots of pretty words about respecting diversity, including the European Parliament resolution which we looked at during this course. But those are pretty words on paper, like many international human rights declarations, and clearly if you have an avowedly nationalist, potentially fascist movement, then the chances of those diversities being recognized at all are very small and you are the ones who have to assess what this could mean in your particular context, in those of that you are familiar with.

TSK: I will give you one personal example. When we lived in Denmark I wrote over 20 years ago one fairly small article about language rights in a big newspaper. The first one who reacted was the chair of the neo-fascist party in Denmark. One of the many nasty things he wrote was that I should go back to my country, I had according to him nothing to do in Denmark. My university reacted by at least for a year having a policy where my name was not on my office door, and when there were phone calls to me, they asked first who it was and whether that person knew me. So they tried to protect me.

RP: And this is a country which regards itself as progressive and democratic and which has a business of exporting human rights worldwide. But even getting the Danes to admit there could be human rights problems in their own country is a non-starter in the political world.

SKN: We do also see some sort of trends towards the one nation, one language ideology here also. Of course these are localized impacts of global rise of neo-fascist governments on the language policy and language ecology. What do you think are the larger ideological impacts on the cognition and on the reasoning?

RP: Well, to hope that governments react to argument or reason is always very optimistic even if it’s a very tolerant state. And unfortunately, these ideologies are much more prevalent now than say than 10 years ago. So, in that sense it makes it even more important for people who
are trying to work for greater social justice to work bottom-up in order to try to make sure that there may be movements to maintain rights within certain local communities. The more people have arguments based in international law or national law about diversity, about the mother tongues, about them being used in education, and the more one can attempt to resist all of these pressures to conform, or for instance in academia in the university in research work not to ask embarrassing questions, the better. It’s incredibly important that they do so and there are people doing this worldwide and it’s not as though you are isolated. There are definitely very strong movements for greater democratization and greater social justice in many countries.

MNK: What might be the practical and immediate ways of maintaining or revitalizing minority languages which do not offer any immediate advantages, privileges or brighter future in a country?

TSK: It is a difficult question from the point of view that if people, especially parents and teachers, don’t know even about the immediate benefits, not to speak of the long-term benefits of maintaining ITM languages, then the parents may make decisions that are harmful for their children. Without research-based knowledge about the long-term consequences of alternatives, there is no choice.

One immediate benefit could be that the child understands what the teacher says. Without understanding, the child cannot learn. But if parents and teachers do not know enough, then all those benefits that we have been talking about, those which are a little bit more long-term than the immediate situation in a classroom, will not materialize. We can think of the T-shirts with ‘blessed with bilingual brains’ [high-level bilinguals as a group often do better on various types of “intelligence tests” than corresponding monolinguals], in addition to all those other benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism, everything with cognitive development and flexibility, diversified thinking, creativity, being able to focus and concentrate better, learning other additional languages makes better and faster. If parents really know about the benefits that the children could get through mother-tongue-based multilingual education, then as I said a few days ago, which parents would not like their child to become more intelligent or more creative? If we think of it from an economic point of view, when countries move to some extent to using robots in production, to physical labour becoming a little bit less important as many countries
in the west already have done, then those countries which are going to become richer and those people and families which are going to become richer in some sense, may be not always only economically but also economically, they are going to need a population with other types of characteristics, meaning, for instance, creativity. If you want to be in a service sector or if you want to do something with the IT or medicine or law, or if you want to be a teacher, the more creative you are the better are your chances to get a job. And obviously if/when parents know all of this, then they can start a change, also in education, from bottom up [as you know I don’t like the expression bottom-up]. Then they could demand and choose mother-tongue-based multilingual education much more often. All solid research shows that children through this kind of education, in addition to getting a chance to solid knowledge in the various school subjects, also become better not only in the regional dominant language but also English. Ajit Mohanty has just published a marvellous book. Reading it you can see why this is the case. The literature about education leading to high levels of bi- or multilingualism, good school achievement and a positive identity is enormous, and convincing.

Which parent doesn’t want their child to become better in English? Of course, it takes 6-7-8 years but if the parents know the positive end results, then I’m sure they would choose this. Governments need people who are better problem solvers - that is also one of the benefits of this kind of education. Finally, if we think of the capabilities of the nation, a whole state, then obviously a state which wastes a lot of possibilities of developing their children’s capabilities up to the highest possible level, those countries are going to be poorer than they would need to be. That is both a human rights argument but also an economic argument.

RP: I’d like to just stress that the fact that if people become successful in education through language which they are familiar with when they arrive in school, that is very clear evidence that this means their learning of other languages would be better. This is why jumping into English-medium only from the start is totally uninformed, because all the evidence says that this is not going to give those people educational success. So if the argument is you want everyone to become competent in English then you have to start from the scratch with the languages people know, and that in itself is something which research evidences shows. Why some Europeans are very good in foreign languages? Obviously, they have education in the national language locally, which
means they have secured cognitive development in a familiar language, gradually, over a period of time and then this skill can be used when adapting to other languages. And doing exactly what Tove has just said, becoming more creative, more diverse, more culturally sensitive, and proud of their own language and but also proud and happy to use other languages.

**MNK:** English masquerades as a 'saviour' or 'healer' language, in opposition to its 'killer language' persona when neutralizing tensions between the dominant language of a state, for example, Bangla in the case of Bangladesh, and other minority languages like Chakma, Kokborok etc. when people speaking those languages prefer writing in the Roman alphabet to writing in Bangla alphabet, sometimes even over their own alphabet, especially in social networking sites, blogs, SMSs and so on. In such cases, the death and/or shift of the minor/minority languages happens due to Bangla hegemonization rather than due to English. English seems to be the only resort they can turn to. Please comment.

**RP:** Yeah, it’s a fascinating twisted sort of logic in all of that. Because clearly if relatively demographically small or isolated languages, in relation to centres, cities and so on, are threatened, it’s by the nearest dominant language which of course will be Bangla in the case that you mentioned. And in itself English is still the language of prestige, and power and influence, and it is English which threatens the status and use of Bangla. So the classic linguistic term for all these which is used a lot is diglossia, meaning one language dominating another, but it’s very helpful also to use the term triglossia where you have a hierarchy at three levels. This is exactly the same in other post-colonial contexts. One country in sub-Saharan Africa which does have a unifying local language is Tanzania where all the basic education is through Swahili even if there are dozens of local languages - something near a hundred I think. But it doesn’t alter the fact that the dominance of Swahili vis-a-vis diversity is tragic if those communities possess lots of richness which is being eliminated. One of the warnings for this is, that we have heard about, is when people from one tribal language marry people from another tribal language. They then get into married life in Swahili. What this means is that the domestic scene, which languages you maintain domestically, would tend to be to use the dominant language in a diglossic situation, Swahili at the expense of both languages. Whereas one could argue the case for each parent to use
whichever language background they have come from. This would be important for contact with the grandparental generation. And then it would in theory be possible to maintain trilingualism with Swahili and two indigenous languages. Whether this happens or not I don’t know, you would have to look into it, just as the same is true of the particular case that you refer to. But I would suggest that the research indicates very clearly that there is a three-level system, and using triglossia would be a helpful way of describing this pattern, rather than getting stuck in diglossia, because this is in a sense what might lead to Bangla being taken off the hook in the way that you’ve suggested, and if you want to avoid that. But when one thinks in terms of language ecology, what is logical may not be viable.

TSK: This is of course what Ajit Mohanty calls a double divide. Meaning you have this three steps hierarchy, where the big one is above the second one, which is above the third and so on. It’s not only a double divide it is often much more.

UMC: The theory of Linguistic Imperialism underscores neo-imperialistic intentionality in ‘a’ language i.e. English for maintaining dominance and power over the third world nations as a ‘project’. In the pedagogic space, you advocate Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBE-MLE) as a strategy for countering the colonization of the mind. MTBE-MLE then is seen as affirming identity and capability-building while providing a legitimate and aspirational space for English for the ITM people. This implies that ITM children will need to assimilate English to be bilinguials, while the other way around, i.e. the advocacy that schools for dominant language speakers need to study the language of the tribal is not voiced. The status quo of English as the dominant is not questioned and thus remains intact while neither Status nor Corpus planning for the indigenous language is advocated. Comment.

RP: I think this is a very good analysis of the challenges that there are in this area. The whole business of the colonization of the mind is well established. It is a tricky kind of concept because it fails to reveal how this has happened, and what forces there have been behind it. These factors are not there actively and visibly in the term. That is why I think that the way that Frantz Fanon, who is a key theorist of third-world liberation based in Algeria but from the Caribbean originally, understood the term is important. He was greatly involved in the whole
business of attempting to establish post-colonial countries, like India and Pakistan and Bangladesh, though his experience was in several parts of Africa. Fanon did not strive for just westernization or communism but something else. He refers to a colonized consciousness, the internalization of which is what the colonizer wants. So the identifiable agents are there, the forces from outside, which are dominant politically and economically and with military back-up, as well as elites within the country, which have in fact maintained the illusion that a dominant language is what the whole country needs. Whereas, as you rightly say, this policy may not be relevant except for certain types of activity within the country. That is why definitely the need for people who are in a disadvantageous situation to help themselves would mean working for the diversity that mother-tongue based education represents. Adding a regional or dominant local language may be fundamental to success for many people in relatively well-anchored traditional society that has not been urbanized- and the challenges in urban contexts differ. Creating strong economies for the whole country, with a high standard of living everywhere, could well mean that you become proficient in one or two very local languages and a regional language, and that English is not acutely necessary. Information that is necessary to run the community, with agriculture or administration, should be in a locally comprehensible language for the entire population in that area. For other purposes it may be important to learn English, but it could just as well be important to learn Chinese nowadays as an alternative to English, or Japanese or Bahasa Indonesia if you think of regional alliances and links so on. So I think that what is important is to encourage a variety of approaches within language policy and to plan education bottom-up in the sense of meeting the needs of the people who literally are the bottom of the society at the moment. That does not mean discrimination as if somehow they are inferior - of course they are not. They are strong in their own local values and those are the ones that should be built on in order to create a more just society.

TSK: If we then look at the countries like Canada- what made English speakers want to learn French there? That was in 1967, when the big report about bilingualism in Canada was published and when Canada became officially bilingual in French and English. Until then maybe some English speakers had had French as a foreign language in the schools - one or two hours per week, whereas many (not all, of course)
French speakers where high-level bilinguals. When Canada became officially bilingual in French and English, then the English parents who looked into the future said “Oh, now all the French Canadians are going to get all the good jobs where bilingualism in French and English is needed. How can we make our English speaking children high-level bilingual in French and English?” That was the starting point of the immersion programmes.

RP: But that was the Majority children who are English speakers but not minority children.

TSK: Yes we are talking about that now. Yes, but the question at the end says something about majority children learning the minority language.

RP: Majority demographically…

TSK: Yes, So when the immersion programmes started some parents who knew more about the benefits of bilingualism, regardless of which languages children were bilingual in, said to Wallace Lambert “Yes we know that bilingualism has all these beautiful things with it - children become much more intelligent and much more creative and better problem solvers and so on. SO make them bilinguals. We don’t care which languages in addition to English”. There were in fact immersion programs also in Armenian and in Hebrew and several other languages. There are now for instance immersion programmes in Navajo and English. Navajo is a fairly small indigenous people. At some point, they had around 170 thousand speakers. There are not so many anymore. But English speaking parents, some of them, wanted their children to become bilingual in Navajo and English - those were the parents who really knew a lot. That was the beginning of revitalization immersion. But unless some of these languages get higher status than what they have now, the majority of English speaking parents are not going to vote for their children to become bilingual in those languages. So the status question is incredibly important.

How can one raise the status of the minority languages? If we think of Nelson Mandela in South Africa, he never spoke in an indigenous African language on radio or TV. (His mother tongue was Xhosa). Those who spoke African languages were very disappointed with him because he speaking African languages on TV would have raised the status of those languages really much. But there are many people all over the world, who are majority language speakers but who do not
want to learn the minority languages. Likewise, there are future-oriented majority people who DO want to learn ITM languages. One person that Robert mentioned when we are discussing it is Aino Snellman, a completely Finnish person, Finnish-speaking medical doctor. She learnt the North Sámi language so well that many of the Sámi have said to me: ‘She speaks it better than we do’. She has spent her whole adult life up in the North, where they needed doctors who spoke their language. Now there is at least training for nurses who are not always necessarily Sámi speakers from the beginning but who learn the language at the same time as the training is through the medium of the Sámi language. Aino Snellman’s daughter Aura was the first person in the world who took the mother tongue test of her ‘A’ levels exam – the school leaving examination in Sámi. She was the first one, and she was completely Finnish, but her mother had learnt Sámi so well and spoke Sámi to her children. That encouraged many Sámi youngsters to want to do the same. But Aura was the first one. There are lots of examples all over. We just have to try through those examples and other work to raise the status of those languages and create institutions and high level jobs where it is required that you know these minority languages, and know them well. For instance, in the Basque country and in Catalonia in Spain many people even among those for whom it is not an ancestral language have started learning those languages, because there are also good jobs and high level status jobs which require those languages.

RP: But to go back to the beginning of the question, clearly there are massively powerful forces behind the expansion of English worldwide and in that sense I think it is very clear, one can identify what is happening. There is a concentration of the power among the elites worldwide, nationally and internationally due to corporate control worldwide, due to the banks worldwide, and also to the promotion of English worldwide not least as choreographed by the British Council which evidently has a massive influence in this country, India, as well. So that one needs to try to make sure that the media take the interests of the mass of the population in this country more seriously. This is something I have just read in the latest book by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions. There is virtually no coverage of the needs of the mass of the population in all the media, even though there are, something like, 700 newspapers in this country. This is the vicious way in which the needs of the mass of
the population are totally neglected when it comes to having better quality in schools, health, public services and so on. All of this is the knock-on effect from the neo-imperial forces. I would also say that if you are elite and mainly concentrate on English - this is to serve the elite’s interests. They are the ones who suffer from a colonized consciousness. This has not reached the masses of the bottom. This is something that Ashish Nandi said was also true in the British Empire. It was a fact that the whole of the population in the U.K. had a colonizing consciousness, whereas it only penetrated the elites in India. Now they are the ones who are maintaining this inequality and who need to be challenged by the kinds of people who have been doing the course here for the last two weeks.

UMC: Dominant languages have had exclusive legislation which initiated specific language policies and language planning that aimed at corpus and status planning. For instance Article 350 in the Indian Constitution for Hindi, or the Toubon Law, for instance, in France may be seen as overt language planning for ‘space reservation and space invasion’ in addition to maintenance of status. Have there been such attempts in Legislation and/or Language planning for a minority/Indigenous language where deliberate attempts have been made for ‘space reservation’ and against ‘space invasion’?

RP: The languages you quote there like the TOUBON LAW in France, this is serving elite interests not minority languages. They defend the national language in view of the force of English and it’s a very optimistic law in the sense that the idea then is that you can somehow control English by legal means through regulating what happens on television and on the radio and in schools and so on, but at the same time this is also a subtractive way of looking at it. It is definitely seeing things as either/or whereas we are convinced in Nordic countries in Scandinavia and Finland that one can control the invasion of English by ensuring a healthy balance – restricting use of English for certain functions rather than allowing English to steamroll over national languages. Specifically in relation to what you say, the way planning for minority languages has been undertaken, that’s much trickier to identify in Canada. I assume that Tove will say something about the Canadian situation for the first nation languages as they are called.

TSK: The First Nations in Canada have been fighting for a language law for a very long time. It has now been written and the draft was published
in the middle of December 2018 [That means that what I replied to the question at the end of November 2018 is obsolete, so I will update it in now, in June 2019]. Those Indigenous lawyers, and others who have been working with it, and who gave very precise input to the process (see, e.g., Fontaine, Leitch, Bear Nicholas & de Varennes 2017) say that it contains fairly little of what Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuits) wanted the law to contain. Read about the Bill C-91 and follow it at https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=10293463 and https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=10293463. It is very weak on both rights and funding. If we then think of positive examples, of course the Sámi come to my mind immediately. There are examples of state-financed spaces where no other languages are allowed unless they are immediately interpreted into Sámi. One example is the 15 minutes of Nordic Sámi television news every working day. If somebody speaks another language there, one can hear them starting and maybe finishing in that other language (for instance Norwegian, Finnish, Spanish, or English) and then their voice is turned off or toned down and everything is interpreted into Sámi. But the news also has subtitles in all the Nordic languages. When I watch the news in Sweden where I live, there are subtitles in Swedish so that I can understand all of it. In Norway, the same news is broadcasted, but with subtitles in Norwegian and in Finland the subtitles are in Finnish. This could, for instance, be used in India for ITM groups that live in several states. We can see very clearly in which country the education for the Sámi has been best and Sweden is bottom. When they interview Sámi Parliament Members on the news, usually the Swedish ones also may understand the Sámi language of the interviewer but they usually mostly answer in Swedish. Meaning the educational progress has not come very far in Sweden. Whereas when the Sámi Parliament Members from Finland and Norway are interviewed, they answer in Sámi. You have to remember that there are ten Sámi languages and they answer in their own Sámi language. All three countries have a Sámi Parliament (in Finland since 1972, Norway since 1982 – a little “gift” from the state after the Alta river, the best salmon river in Europe, was dammed; it was a long process with many years of protesting – and Sweden since 1992). The Parliaments are advisory only; they can make decisions in more or less only in cultural affairs. They can propose rules but they are advisory.
RP: Could I say something about that? The Swedish speakers there, they are, what you referred to as the lost generation linguistically, they are not lost politically and this is where you need to keep these dimensions in mind.

TSK: Yes. But then I will take other countries as an example, and here especially the small Baltic countries Estonia and Latvia. When they were part of the Soviet Union (colonized by Soviet Union), then the Estonian speakers and the Latvian speakers were a minority from a power relations point of view even when they were a demographic majority (despite the fact that many Russian speakers moved to Estonia and Latvia). When they became independent again not long ago, when the Soviet Union collapsed, then the Russian speakers became not only a demographic minority (which they had been all the time), but also a power minority; they can no longer decide in independent Estonia and Latvia. Now a lot of the education in both countries is in the national language, Estonian or Latvian, but the Russian speakers have been allowed as a minority to have school education through the medium of Russian. But it has been obligatory for them to learn Estonian or Latvian in schools as a subject. That was from the beginning meant to be only for a certain period. Now it seems that the laws are becoming more strict so that the Russian speakers have to learn Estonian and Latvian better. Much of the official life happens through the medium of these national languages. Something that we have theoretically started discussing many years ago already is ‘minoritized majorities’ and ‘majoritized minorities’. If you tell the Russian speakers who were a power majority in the Soviet Union times that they have to become a minority, and behave as a minority, it is very difficult for them. So they are now feeling like minority but they still have a majority consciousness and are very insecure in a minority role, asking for rights that many if not most minorities do not have…Likewise and vice-versa.

RP: And they got Russian Television …

TSK: from Russia, telling them that their rights are being violated.

Yes, and vice-versa; the Estonians were during the long time of colonization treated as a power minority. It has been very difficult for some of them to become a secure (demographic AND power) majority which is as tolerant as a majority needs to be towards the minority. So it is only when demographic majorities and demographic minorities in
a new situation learn the consciousness of a power minority and power majority, it is only then that they can live in harmony with each other. It has been a very hard, especially for the Russian speakers but also for the Estonian and Latvian speakers who are now a majority. If one strives to create peaceful relations, with minimal conflict, a majority has to feel secure enough to respect minority rights. This is what Estonians and Latvians are not always doing to the extent that they would need to. And like-wise for the Russian speakers who are now a minority. They need to see that they are a minority and by behaving and having the attitudes of a secure minority, they can get many more linguistic rights than if they are all the time accusing Estonians and Latvians of oppressing their rights. That is counterproductive, as we have just seen now in the spring 2019 in Latvia. Latvia has passed a new educational law which means that Russian speakers no longer have the right to completely Russian-medium upper secondary school education (see, e.g. https://www.osce.org/odihr/394916?download=true). These power relations often play out in educational language policy, towards either maintenance of minority languages and cultures, or assimilation. It seems that is something that one has to think hard about. There is a lot to learn for your country’s majorities or the majoritized people so that they become the tolerant majorities that they need to become.

RP: I think you’ve got evidence of this as well in Spain. If you look at the Basque country and go back 30 years, it was a fascist state, and so were Portugal and Greece, and have had military rule, so the transition from really militarized governments in Europe is not that long back in the past. But the Basque country is definitely aiming at trilingualism and remaining within the Spanish state, and they are not going to be accused of separatism. Trilingualism is well documented there with Basque and Castilian-Spanish and English, whereas in Catalonia, the situation has got into a mess for whole variety of political reasons which we are not going into, but basically they have not resolved the issue of the political status of Catalonia successfully in ways that would have prevented the current massive tension between Madrid and Catalonia.

UMC: Numbers matter. Number of languages in a geopolitical space matter. Norway, for instance, has the indigenous people The Sámi and the Kven (a dialect of Finnish). Correspondingly, the example of Sámi language revival and the Sámi assertion of their language
rights show the importance of three foundational prerequisites for any revitalization effort:
– Constitutional and Legal recognition (The Sámi Act 1992 in Norway and The Sámi Act in Finland, 2003)
– Assertion of political existence (by the Sámi)
– Participatory engagement of the Sámi community in preserving their language through use and not mere mummification in a museum.

In a country like India, with hundreds of tribal languages, acceding to recognize the tribal language rights are often riddled with the fear of secession, and probable demands for separate State, not to mention the paucity of resources despite Article 350 A which provides for primary education in mother tongue for the linguistic minority child. Comment!

TSK: One of the issues you mention has been discussed very much by peace researchers in lots of countries. I could just mention Johan Galtung, and Asbjørn Eide; also Joseph Lo Bianco, a sociolinguist who has worked specifically with the role of languages in issues of peace and conflict. Human rights lawyers and peace researchers ask whether it is language rights and demand for language rights that lead a people to start demanding more and more rights, first cultural and linguistic, often in education, then land rights (or the other way round, starting with land rights), then various kinds of autonomy (cultural, economic, political), and then maybe secession. It does not seem to be demanding rights, especially language rights, that lead to secession. Researchers have shown very clearly that when language becomes something that is part of the conflict, usually it is not language that is the causal factor, or at least a main one. But if divisions with distinct languages (with high status language(s) on the one side and low status language(s) on the other side) coincide with other divisions which have to do with power, economics - with how rich or poor the groups are - with land rights, with various kinds of social cleavages of all kinds, if all those coincide so that the people representing speakers of one language have much less political and economic power than those who speak a different language, then language can be used to mobilize the lower-status group to demand all sorts of rights. It has likewise been shown that being granted language rights can in such cases very often lower the level of a possible conflict. So if the group gets linguistic human rights, including educational rights, and maybe a certain type of cultural autonomy - cultural rights, then they do not need and do not always start demanding political rights which they have not had so far.
So linguistic human rights can often be one way of making people happy to stay in that state and only to demand autonomy and not (their) own state. Very few Indigenous peoples all over the world in fact do demand their own state.

We can also exemplify this with bigger groups such as the Kurds - over 45 million Kurdish speakers in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and some in Azerbaijan. They wanted linguistic rights; that was highest up on their agenda, and cultural rights, education using their own language. But when all of this was denied (and it has been denied at least since Atatürk in Turkey in 1923), then they want to have other kinds of rights too in order to be able to maintain their languages, their cultures, their identities. And you know what an awful situation it is and has been. The Kurds have been deceived for instance in the Lausanne Peace Treaty (1924/25) after the First World War. In the Treaty of Sèvres (August 1920) they were promised that if, after one year of the Treaty of Sèvres, they still wanted to have their own state, then there would be a referendum and if they wanted independence, they would get it. And then they were really deceived because in the Lausanne Peace Treaty there was nothing about this, or about linguistic rights. The only people who got rights there were religious minorities, not linguistic minorities. Kurds are continuing to fight, and all the time they are deceived. If they were granted the rights that they have demanded, they would most probably be satisfied. When reading the books (in English) by Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK Chair who has been imprisoned in solitary confinement since 1999, it is clear that he does not suggest independence; he suggests linguistic and cultural autonomy and some economic autonomy. Turkey does not want to grant it because the water is in Kurdistan, the big rivers are there, there is a lot of minerals, there is a lot of oil and so on.

So when all these divisions in terms of economic and political rights (or lack of rights) coincide with linguistic and cultural divisions, then we get conflicts. And it is also clear that those conflicts cannot be solved by military means. Turkey has tried for many decades, without success (one can check the sums they have used for the war against Kurds in the Yearbooks of SIPRI, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, https://www.sipri.org/). Granting a group the linguistic, cultural and educational rights that they demand often enhances or enables the reaching of a peaceful resolution.
I have often suggested at conferences (and Robert agrees) that those of us who don’t speak English as our native language should have double time. That would be true for most of you also, regardless of how good you are in English. At international conferences you should demand double time. As you could see here, I demanded and got double time now.

RP: You asked if it was relevant for India, I think even looking at the Great Britain, you can show that getting resources did not ensure success in Ireland because clearly the Irish language was oppressed by the British, the English for centuries and there were resistance movements over centuries. When independence came in the early 20th century they could do what they wanted to revive the language but they didn’t succeed. Basically, it remains an extremely marginalized language class, except for some elites who opted for immersion education in Irish and succeeded. But, otherwise Irish has been taught as a foreign language, as a subject only and has never been integrated into all the other activities through it. So that’s an example not to follow; resources in themselves do not necessarily ensure anything. In Wales there has been success, as compared with the oppression of Irish earlier, and this is due to many variables but one of them is that the Bible was translated into Welsh 400 years ago. The church has been strong in Wales always, so that it the Welsh language was never eliminated to the same extent as Scottish Gaelic in Scotland. That means that given the decentralized structure in the United Kingdom has provided the Welsh with a great deal of ability to do what they want within their own country, and now the status of Welsh is much stronger than it was 20-30 years ago without in any way threatening the status of English or membership of the United Kingdom. When Scotland now does have more autonomy, partly from Tony Blair’s time in power, it is true that people now talk, because of the chaos of BREXIT, of holding another referendum including perhaps on independence for Scotland. One needs to remember that Scotland was an independent kingdom until 1709. So there are lots of factors including the fact that Scotland already has a good deal of autonomy and its own legal system. It is entitled to do what it wants in education and so on. It also, as Tove was saying, has to do with money and rights and representation in London, and lots of things that ought to be sorted out peacefully rather than either military uprisings or an independence vote when nobody knows what is at stake, because it hasn’t been properly worked through which is of course one of the weaknesses of the whole BREXIT vote and has resulted in appalling
chaos that is the situation in United Kingdom at the moment - which of course makes the Scottish extremely worried because both the Scottish and the Welsh voted very strongly in favour of staying in the European Union so who knows what will happen.

TSK: Just one last remark, Robert Dunbar whose name you know from our literature is a Human Rights Lawyer who has written most of the Scottish Language Law and has just now finished a book on Language Rights in Scotland - before we started on the Nunavut report.

UMC: Contemporary neo-imperialistic practices that encourage publication in English are on the rise. Often monetary, administrative, and reduced workload benefits are referred to when justifying faculty publishing in Scopus-Indexed, double-blind peer-reviewed journals which are predominantly in English. Researchers thus are forced to publish in English. In the absence of domain-specific specialized journals, indexing and quality control procedures, universities will mandate a ‘publishing’ requirement and not engage in or evade the language of publication question. What could be some ways to counter the publication hegemony in theory and in practice?

RP: The European Union is well aware that there are scholars in different countries writing in many languages, and that there is a great deal of it. You are quite right in saying that the pressures behind publication in English, and ranking and budgets being affected by that, are extremely powerful at the moment. There are suggestions that within a given country, and I am here thinking of European countries, where the largest is 82 million or something like that, a different system should be evolved. India is very definitely a different kind of special case, with many languages which have a very powerful written tradition going back millennia, not just centuries. I hesitate to recommend anything, but decentralization in India to a greater extent, in say the cultural, economic, and linguistic fields might encourage a great deal more than what there already is in terms of publications. This could apply not just to fiction but also to scientific works in those languages. There could be a groundswell at a regional level, with publications in a regional language rewarded at least as strongly as or even more strongly than publication in English. This is the way the Catalan language revived its strength after fascism ended in Spain. So obviously there ought to be ways in which it could be done, but such a
policy assumes that university management is willing to recognize that functioning in a different language than English may be the ideal thing for a particular group of readers. Publishing in a very specialized journal may well also be in a different language from the dominant international language but doesn’t get approval because a relatively specialized publication does not have the same status when you rank journals according to their supposed reputation. Which is very biased, all of this, and that means academics should in fact be screaming about this in order to try to change the practice. There is something being done by the European Universities Association right now to complain about the power of the five big publishing companies which publish journals as well as books and that has to do with monopoly legislation in Europe. We are talking here about linguistic monopolies and when this filters through to ordinary academics in very unjust ways. I know this happens in Scandinavia as well with posts that are advertised assuming you publish in English whereas you may have published in German or Italian or Korean. That again means that it’s important to raise awareness that these requirements are in fundamental contradiction to some of the goals of the universities, which is because you want people to develop competence in those languages. Nothing very successful has been done in Europe at the moment which might be a model, and as I have stressed, if your situation is very different in a vast continent which India is, it would depend on whether there are regional forces which could exist, with Bengali at the moment for instance but perhaps not so much for, I don’t know Malayalam, for instance, so although I happen to know that there is vast amount of creative writing in Malayalam, I don’t know about scientific productivity there because clearly it could be raised and it would perhaps be very healthy if it was raised.

TSK: This is also a question of colonized consciousness in those people who might be able to write in these languages and for instance several Zulu speakers in South Africa said when I asked them why they don’t write in Zulu “but we cannot really write in Zulu the language is not develop enough”. That is of course absolute rubbish. There are more than five million Zulu speakers. We have to tell them then about all the Nordic countries where every country except Sweden has around five million or little bit less or little bit more speakers and still there is a vast numbers of scientific literature in those languages or in the Faroe Islands, some 50,000 people, which is still a Danish colony in some way. At the Faroe Islands university (University of the Faroe Islands), it’s not a big university - all the teaching is through the medium of
Faroese. Or if you think of Icelandic or Iceland until maybe 15 years ago most things, even PhDs were published in Icelandic and they are not more than 350,000 people. So if a group of 5 million speakers think that they cannot publish science in their own language, that’s absolute rubbish. That is, believing in what we are being told by the publishers and our universities and so on, and it just continues.

RP: You can use the Nordic Declaration on language policy because this has strategies for creating a constructive balance between so-called international languages and national languages, or regional languages in your case. That is a solid document in many ways however Euro-centric it is in other ways but clearly you have six governments with the ministers’ signatures saying this is an important document: one needs to maintain diversity within our country and therefore we need a policy for maintaining that, among other things, in publications but also as a medium of instruction. This is something that can be built on very definitely locally. Why don’t you write an Indian regional language policy statement?

But in relation to the example of Korean, which has as a foreign language a status that is different from where the language is dominant. Korea is a very dynamic country of course, with a very proud national language board. I am sure it will be very helpful in trying to raise awareness about the need internationally to publish in that language rather than in English always and when presumably it is also dealing with Korean issues in many of the publications.

KA: The sad part remains that, as Dr. Uma said, when we are talking about the Scopus indexed journal, the pre-requisites for incorporation in Scopus indexing is that the abstract and the title of the article should be compulsorily in English, whether you write it in any other language.

RP: That is sad, but I mean, I know this from colleagues because of English expansion and other languages being pushed out, I know colleagues in French and German who are now expected to publish in English or to teach through the medium of English. I know this is in Germany as well because of the establishment of the Masters’ Programme in English to attract an international audience and I know that people who have specialized for a lifetime in German, in French, in Italian and in Russian in the Soviet countries that I am in touch with are in very difficult position just like yourself when it comes to their expertise certainly been communicated in a different medium with different
discourse traditions and different readerships, and thus exactly why it is neoliberal resistance that is needed in that area.

TSK: Ulrich Ammon had some years ago big book which was called *Ist Deutsch noch internationale Wissenschaftssprache*, ‘Is German still an international scientific language?’ and German is a fairly big language and even that is questioned by some people.

RP: But the Germans have taken this seriously and there is an extremely good book in German on how to maintain German and competence in other languages. And I was one of the two non-Germans who were at the conference which led to the book and it does mean that Germans are taking language policy very seriously both for retaining national unity and competence in German for later dissemination worldwide in English and French and other languages as well as ensuring competence in those languages.

MNK: Often common people do possess a colonial mind and prefer English education, English/ western lifestyle, corporate propaganda to mobilize their status to upper class. How can we counter the hegemonic commonsensical notions (and actions) of English as the only language of mobility at the micro level? Will the top-down policies that strengthen regional languages/ mother tongues be enough to counter English hegemony in such cases?

RP: Was that for you or me?

TSK: It’s for both.

RP: Okay, I mean in a way it’s assuming that English is going to be a dominant language forever and we know from the rise of Chinese in the last 20 years or so that the Chinese economic and political clout is huge and it’s growing all the time and it’s supplemented by language policy. Through Confucius institutes which has started from scratch within the last decade and it’s a small operation initially and now they are sending under-qualified teachers of Chinese to operate monolingually in Confucius institutes worldwide. And there are two books published by *Multilingual Matters* which basically say that the Chinese are not going to succeed in their linguistic ambition at the moment for a whole variety of reasons. And some of them are to do with Chinese ethnocentricity and inability to think more shrewdly about language policy and otherwise of course learning Chinese in let’s
say the Americas or in Europe is a vastly greater learning task than perhaps any other languages although goodness knows, I mean people with an Indian mother tongue have a huge learning load in relation to English because it is so remote linguistically. So it’s a vastly greater step than learning a neighbouring language within let’s say the Germanic or the Romance family of languages.

TSK: I thought that maybe these issues that Ajit has discussed in his book might be useful. And the first is a quotation from Ajit Mohanty (2018):

“Thus, in the hierarchy of languages in multilingual societies, the most dominant language has instrumental significance but little integrative value. The regional majority of national languages, on the other hand have some instrumental significance along with integrative value for their users. The ITM languages have minimal instrumental value for their users but, as identity markers, they are important for group identity and sense of community belongingness”

I have tried to put this in a tabular form, using Odisha as an example but almost any language in this double divide in a similar position could be inserted in that table and as you can see then the other three languages and their instrumental value: for English high, for Odia some, for tribal languages minimal.

| Language         | Instrumental value | Integrative value | Group identity, sense of belongingness |
|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------|
| English          | high               | low               | low                                    |
| Odia             | some               | some/high         | some/low                               |
| Tribal languages | minimal            | high              | very high                              |

At this point, integrative value is low for English except for the elites. It is some or high for Odia, and for tribal languages it is high. If you then look at the third one, group identity, sense of belonging, it is low for English except for the elites again and for Odia some parts are often low and for tribal languages very high. “The double divide in multilingual societies is critical who understanding the processes of
discrimination against ITM languages” Ajit writes. Likewise, to understand the role of formal education as an instrument for perpetuating inequalities (tribal languages at best as a medium for the first couple of years, which is what is happening, meaning early-exit transitional education; and that is what Odia guidelines are saying now; then regional languages as the teaching languages after that (which is often late exit transitional model) and English as a medium at the latest from the final grades in school, and at all higher, technical and university levels. The double divide also explains much of the loss of the linguistic diversity in the world.

Now if we want to change this, what we would need to do would be to make possibly the instrumental value of English lower because in fact it is not high for most people except the elites. The integrative value for English, group identity, sense of belonging, is already low for everybody else except for the English well-knowing elites. What would need to be made higher is the instrumental value both for Odia and especially for tribal languages. That you know much better than we: how can it be made higher? And that means creating jobs that require knowledge of tribal languages, and career possibilities that require it, and a higher general status, for instance so that they are seen, they are heard on radios, they are seen on television, there are people in higher position who have these languages as their mother tongues and speak those languages for instance on television, with simultaneous or consecutive interpretations and so on. Integrative value for the tribal languages should also be much higher and also for the regional languages as compared to other languages. And for both Odia and especially the tribal languages group identity or sense of belonging, even it may be high, that should be accepted by the elites and especially by the English medium elites. This may be helpful trying to see where action is needed and where demonstrations are needed and where changes are needed.

RP: I think it’s very helpful but at the same time, granted the demographic size of the English elite and granted that there is filtering downwards in terms of levels of competence or influence or social role, it’s a bit misleading to have only the one categorization of English because clearly English is an incredibly widespread language of power and influence and in that sense one would need to explore the complexity of those boxes a bit more along the lines Tove was talking about but not least in terms of hierarchies of functions and uses of English. And again, it has integrative functions at various levels as well. And ideally
it’s multiple identities, multiple identification with different languages. We all have multiple identities and we can have multiple linguistic identities. Probably everyone in this room has them so it’s useful, it’s also a simplification of the complexity of all of these dimensions.

**MNK:** I am going to talk about the Rohingya crisis. So, the Rohingya Crisis is described by the media as an outcome of ethnic cleansing in Burma. The focus of media coverage is primarily on the ethnic identity and secondarily on their religious identity. However, it is also a case of linguistic cleansing, not to be euphemistic, linguistic genocide-in-action. Why is it that language is not the citadel in media, history and other general archival reports on genocides and with scholars who engage in a scholarly study of the genocidal events of the past and the present?

**RP:** Again its very useful that you focused on the linguistic dimension which is, as you say, absent from the media, which is not surprising in a sense but at the same time clearly it is a key constituent in that the Burmese - the Myanmar military - have been oppressing the minorities all around the country for generations. And this means that the extreme case there is hugely tragic in every sense. But as I said a moment ago, clearly people identified by ethnicity or language are often categorized. But what they are suffering from is marginalization, inequality and injustice which are manifestly extreme in this case. And I think sensitizing involves the fact that Western governments were wishing that this wonderful woman who won the Nobel Prize for Peace would somehow make for major change and introduce democracy as understood in some kind of Western sense in the country. And this would help corporate interests worldwide, which of course has happened perhaps to some extent, but I mean the Rohingya people are the immediate sufferers from all of those developments which are both internal and external. And it’s totally indefensible when it comes to the government but they evidently could not care less and it obviously complicates the relationship with Bangladesh hugely.

**TSK:** What happens to the Rohingya is not yet linguistic genocide because they can maintain their languages and cultures to some extent; obviously they can’t do anything else. They can maintain their language and culture to some extent meaning the attack has been against their bodies; there has been a lot of physical genocide but not
yet linguistic and cultural genocide. And that may come, and come very soon.

RP: It is also territorial. They are ripped out of the context where they were functioning and using those languages-

TSK: Sure, their land rights have been completely eliminated. But when you then ask why the debate is not more about linguistic genocide which is happening in so many countries. I would just like to show you the summary of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Report, called “Honoring the truth reconciling for the future”. It is very clear to me that, probably within my lifetime, India will have to write a similar report because what is happening in India now to tribal peoples is very similar to what has happened to First Nations in Canada.

RP: You meant India as well as Burma?

TSK: Yes, absolutely, both. So, to start with this report: The Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Honouring the Truth. Reconciling for the Future (TRC) shows throughout its almost 400 pages in detailed ways how the Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs) of Inuit and First Nations were constantly and intentionally violated, and uses the concept ‘cultural genocide’ for it. The report does not mention linguistic genocide; ‘language’ seems to be subsumed under ‘culture’. The Report starts (p. 1):

For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as ‘cultural genocide.’ Physical genocide is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group, and biological genocide is the destruction of the group’s reproductive capacity. Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned [our emphasis]. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly for the issue at hand, families are disrupted to
prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.

In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.

When we think of India and what Britain did to eliminate Indian government even at a village level, that is obviously similar. The establishment and operations of residential schools were a central element of this Canadian policy, which can best be described as cultural genocide. And you can see there is no linguistic genocide mentioned. They subsume language under culture even if it was as absolutely a linguistic genocide as much as cultural.

RP: We heard a paper on residential schools this morning.

TSK: Yeah, then “Physical genocide is the mass killing of the members of the targeted group, and biological genocide is the destruction of the group’s reproductive capacity”. They are still doing this in Canada, for instances sterilizing Indigenous women, and forced abortion are still going on today in Canada. What about India? “Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow a group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set up to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted.” Does this sound familiar? And “forcibly transferred” is, for instance, what big corporations do, mining and water corporations, as Arundhati Roy, among others, has described. We heard one paper here too about this. “Languages are banned.” So one can see that the languages are subsumed under cultural genocide. But they don’t speak anywhere in this report specifically about linguistic genocide. “Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.” And then they admit: “In its dealing with aboriginal people Canada did all these things.” You can see that it could be very relevant also for India.

But why do they not say linguistic genocide directly? Because it is for many, even lawyers, such a new concept, partly because linguistic genocide is not directly mentioned in the UN Genocide Convention.
Cultural genocide is not mentioned there either, but it is somehow easier to talk about cultural genocide than linguistic genocide. “Culture” is a wishy-washy concept with hundreds of definitions; you can call almost anything culture. Nobody has defined culture in a way that would be a final definition that could be used in law, whereas one can define language in a much more strict sense for the purposes of law.

As you know (and read several times in your readings for this course), both linguistic and cultural genocide were still in the final draft of what then became the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. There were sixteen states which then voted against the final draft; they voted that then linguistic and cultural genocide were removed from the final Convention. But one can still see that linguistic genocide was there, because of some of the definitions of genocide that they formulated. And that’s where Robert and I, together with Robert Dunbar, have really tried to exploit in which ways it’s still there even if they didn’t want it (see Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010 for details). So it’s very recent to talk about linguistic genocide as part of the Convention and that is partly why French-Canadians do not mention language separately, and especially linguistic genocide as separate from cultural genocide. There are many other reasons, but there is no time to go into it here. We three have also discussed the issues further in our Nunavut report (Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 2019) which was not yet written when this course took place.

RP: But at the same time, it’s pretty new to have a report on cultural genocide. Can you think of any other country in the world that would have gone along with producing a document of 388 pages on cultural genocide?

TSK: So it is very interesting to see how those countries which are now working on truth and reconciliation reports, how they are going to deal with these questions. We are obviously following it very closely.

KA: The Boro community of Andaman scaled up particular trees predicting the tsunami that struck in 2004. This led to zero life lost while India lost 7000 lives overall (https://www.firstpost.com/world/10-years-since-tsunami-tribes-survived-disaster-but-their-languages-are-doomed-2016429.html). The Simeulue people of Indonesia possessed the knowledge of an impending tsunami passed on through generations of oral songs. They moved to higher
grounds leading to only seven lives lost as compared to 1.5 million
lost in totality in Indonesia (https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/15/
indonesias-indigenous-languages-hold-the-secrets-of-surviving-
disaster/). The Luritja community of Australia has possessed
knowledge of a meteorite crash on Earth 4700 years ago, passed on
through oral traditions (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-32701311). There are many more known and unknown
stories of scientific revelations in regard to the indigenous peoples.
In the light of such revelations, the scientific community all of a
sudden seems to be “very concerned” about these communities. In
the wake of the specific attention on certain aspects of an
indigenous community’s life [specific aspects because it acquired
more media coverage when Tsunami struck rather than talking
about their linguistic diversity when Boro people of Andaman have
six words for the water that touches different part of the shores or
even practical knowledge when then swam for seven hours to
evade the tsunami] (https://www.firstpost.com/world/10-years-
since-tsunami-tribes-survived-disaster-but-their-languages-are-
doomed-2016429.html), is there a threat lurking over these
communities of being extracted of the desired scientific wisdom or
resources, and then being left in ruins?

TSK: THAT is a real threat. And if you think about what the big medicinal
corporations, the big pharma, has done during many years already:
they go to the Indigenous community and they ask what kind of
medicinal herbs they use and then they exploit the knowledge. There is
a lot of medicinal knowledge in, what we call, traditional ecological
knowledge of Indigenous and local people. The corporation
representatives (or anthropologists) go there, they take the knowledge
and who gets the economic benefits? Big pharma does. There are many
areas, where you can see this. You may remember the example that I
gave you (told by Pekka Aikio, for a very long time the Chair of the
Sámi Parliament on the Finnish side of Sápmi, the Sámi country). It
was about the salmon spawning grounds, in the small rivulets in Sámi
country where the Sámi had for hundreds of years had the knowledge
of what these Finnish fish biologists ‘discovered’. According to Peter
Mühlhäusler, it takes minimally 300 years before that kind of
knowledge is encoded in languages, meaning before there is some kind
of correspondence between the knowledge of a new environment and
the language to talk about that environment, and, often, to use the
environment sustainably. But the Sámi had had that knowledge probably for at least thousand years. And suddenly these researchers came up with this “big big discovery” and published it in *Nature* and *Science*.

One of the very few documents where there is some kind of protection which should be used is the “United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity” from 1992 ([https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf](https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf)) and 193 states have signed and ratified it, among them India, for instance. Going to the relevant article, page 6, the last part tells what the states have bound themselves to do, “Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge”. So before the states can use this knowledge they have to have the approval and involvement of the holders of this knowledge, “innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices”.

You notice that there are formulations such as “encourage”, meaning it is not mandated. States do not need to do it; states are just “encouraged” to do this. But this is, as far as I know, the only place where we have something about at least sharing the benefits and at least asking those people and their approval for getting out this knowledge from them. I don’t think there is anything better in the international law right now. I hope there might be and there are some guidelines for this, and framework and application and so on. But this is the only thing that we have so far. Of course the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP, ([https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf)), also later introduced in several Articles the formulation that is nowadays always repeated: ‘with free, prior and informed consent’ – but UNDRIP is a Declaration, not a Convention, and as such is does not make states firm duty-holders. We all know how much this formulation has been respected in issues of oil, mining, water, etc rights – mostly not at all.

RP: I think it is very important that you raised it because the Andaman Islands are now in the media because there is a Westerner involved’, and clearly the people have been treated abominably for centuries by
all powers around them as well as India currently. And in that sense, I think, it’s a very sophisticated synthesis of different cosmologies which we tend to be totally ignorant of, in Westernised culture at least. So that’s very helpful.

I happened to read an article in the Times of India, either 2 or 3 days ago, by an anthropologist and historian pleading for this kind of act of understanding of the community to be taken seriously at the moment, in view of the fact there is a crisis, so that whatever has survived of authentic local knowledge is not just crushed even more by “helping hands”, when there suddenly happens to be more focus on it. And I suppose that in terms of linguistics survey, this is where Anvita Abbi has worked with some of the groups, who may or may not be existentially threatened at the moment.

But you (interviewer) are quite right to stress how ignorant we are about other cultures, other cosmologies, when we exclusively concentrate on certain ones which tend to be ‘hierarchised’ at the moment in terms of sophisticated western, so called, scientific knowledge whereas clearly other ‘knowledges’ do exist and are still functional in certain extreme contexts. So it’s a very useful reminder to all of us about that.

TSK: I have just one more example, the story that you may have heard me tell already. There are many indigenous peoples in Latin America who have started following the first ones who did what the quote below describes; one action vis-à-vis anthropologists (called ‘ideological vultures’ by Deloria). Could that label apply to others too? Should some of us also be ‘escorted out’? And the missionaries? A couple of years ago Roger Jourdain, chairman of the Red Lake Chippewa tribe of Minnesota, casually had the anthropologists escorted from his reservation. This was the tip of the iceberg breaking through into visibility. If only more Indians had the insight of Jourdain. Why should we continue to be the private zoos for anthropologists? Why should tribes have to compete with scholars for funds when the scholarly productions are so useless and irrelevant to real life? (Deloria, 1988: 95).

I think that’s something that many more Indigenous peoples should do if those people who come to study them, to do research on them are people who are not of the right kind.
RP: So far as alternative cosmologies are concerned, in the fourth volume on Language Rights, there is an article by an Australian lawyer who is trying to get the Australian legal system to take aboriginal law practices on board so that more justice may be delivered to the extremely marginalised Australian aboriginal communities. She has written a whole book on this, so that even from the list of contents you would be able to see the name of the author - the very final article in the fourth volumevi. And very definitely this means that there are people in collaboration with the aborigines who appreciate that there is this sort of alternative knowledge there and if you wish the whole population to have the legal system operating with more justice towards it, then clearly this should be with a dialectic approach to this kind of understanding and should influence what’s done in courts of law in that particular context.

TSK: I think I would like to finish my part, by Uma coming here and reading this poem: “Apolitical Intellectuals”vii

“One day
the apolitical
intellectuals
of my country
will be interrogated
by the simplest
of our people.

They will be asked
what they did
when their nation died out slowly,
like a sweet fire
small and alone.

No one will ask them
about their dress,
their long siestas
after lunch,
no one will want to know
about their sterile combats
with "the idea
of the nothing"
no one will care about
their higher financial learning.

They won't be questioned
on Greek mythology,
or regarding their self-disgust
when someone within them
begins to die
the coward's death.

They'll be asked nothing
about their absurd
justifications,
born in the shadow
of the total lie.

On that day
the simple men will come.

Those who had no place
in the books and poems
of the apolitical intellectuals,
but daily delivered
their bread and milk,
their tortillas and eggs,
those who drove their cars,
who cared for their dogs and gardens
and worked for them,
and they'll ask:

"What did you do when the poor
suffered, when tenderness
and life
burned out of them?"

Apolitical intellectuals
of my sweet country,
you will not be able to answer.
A vulture of silence will eat your gut.

Your own misery will pick at your soul.

And you will be mute in your shame.”

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For more, see Tove’s BigBib: http://www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org/en/Tove-Skutnabb-Kangas-Bibliography.html).

1 Mummification here is seen as preserving an indigenous and endangered language in a transliterated version using the script of another language rather than take initiatives to teach those languages. TSK’s addition: In the case of the Saami, all of them in the Nordic countries use the same script as the countries that colonized them. This is true for many other Indigenous peoples also outside Asia.
ii The most reliable figures are probably from the Kurdish Institute in Paris https://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/the-kurdish-population-1232551004 (as of 2 September 2018).

iii https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Sevres

iv PKK, The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Kurdish: PartiyaKarkerênKurdistanê). See also Öcalan 1999, 2006, 2011, 2012. See also Miley &Venturini (eds) 2018. My short back page blurb for that book says: "Shocking revelations make this an emotionally powerful book. It is an objective, extremely well-documented analytical report of Turkish state terrorism against Kurds... Despite the tens of thousands jailed, tortured, and killed, the courageous Kurdish resistance grows, and their pursuit of peaceful democratic solutions continues."

v Referring to the killing of 26 year old American, John A. Chau being by the endangered tribes of North Sentinel Islands, Andaman in the November of 2018. He went there to convert the tribes to Christianity. North Sentinel Island of Andamans is off limits for visitors.

vi Referring to “Extracts from Declaration of Interdependence: A legal Pluralist Approach to Indigenous Rights” by Kirsten Anker in Language Rights: Challenges in Theory and Implementation ed. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson

vii “Apolitical Intellectuals” is a translation of a poem originally written by Otto Ren Castillo as “Intelectuales Apolíticos”. Castillo was a Guatemalan revolutionary and poet. He was executed by the Guatemala Army on 19th March, 1967.