Introduction

Taking a stance toward an object of public attention is a consequential semiotic process across scales of social interaction. Through stances toward public signs—whether they are particular flags, poems, language varieties, kinds of identity, or even ideas such as democracy—subjects situate themselves in political and power relations with others. Stances are the fundamental method of constructing subjectivities or points of view about the world and social relations. Often, stance is thought of as a form of positionality that subjects take in regard to objects of mutual attention. This implies the objects of attention exist independently and prior to the stance. Analysis of stancetaking has privileged the relationship between subjects and the production of intersubjectivity, leaving the objects of mutual attention relatively unexamined. People are often described as aligning or disaligning on particular topics of social importance such as the truth value of a statement or the meaning of a particular sign. In this book, we will foreground and examine the labor, agency, and consequence that mutual attention casts on the world. We will argue that stances are not just positioning but also consequential social actions that shape the objects that people pay attention to. By making stances, people change the world they live in. Subjects not only negotiate with each other their positions in social life but also intervene and change the conditions in which their relationships unfold. For example, our analysis of testimonies and truth and reconciliation commissions in Chile (Chapter 4) examines the Chilean government's attempt to build democracy as something good and desirable for all Chileans. New democratic Chile, however, is not something that exists prior to or independent of the search for truth and transparency. It is instead a consequence of such search. The stances that different sectors of Chilean society take toward truth, testimonies, and

transparency are all produced by and shape the particular idea of democracy, forming the basis for a peaceful and just country in the future. This democracy is not to be taken for granted, but understood as the product of semiotic and political labor.

Chile's democratization and its projection as a multicultural country was argued to rest on the recognition of Indigenous peoples as *pueblos originarios*. These 'original peoples' and their Indigenous languages are objects that are produced by the stances and labor of activists, government institutions and newly recognized citizens and community members. They each mobilize and circulate these objects for their own projects, such as Indigenous sovereignty or nation building, changing the conditions of their world, and having social integrative effects. Peace, justice, recognition, and transparency are then things that people not just agree or disagree about but are the products of their effort, constant work, and everyday practices.

As ethnographers, we begin our inquiries about the world by identifying the relevant public signs that reflect preferred views and ways of doing in the communities we study. This first ethnographic moment directs our attention to see how people follow or do not follow each other, adhere to or deviate from ideas, agree or disagree about what they do and the things they pay attention to. This is also a moment of paying attention to the secondary rationalizations and imaginaries people have about their own world. Taking this metapragmatic awareness seriously, scholarship on language ideologies—ideas about language and people that mediate between social structures and language use—has been useful in exposing and analyzing inequality and power dynamics in struggles over meanings. But taking a step back, as Michael Silverstein would remind us, metapragmatic awareness and language use are what produce the language and the world we live in. Practice is what instantiates and constitutes a particular language or speech way, acting as-if, confirming that it is what it is. Language structures or regimes do not just exist. They are brought into existence by communities of speakers who practice them and recognize their beauty, appropriateness, communicative effectiveness, and rationality, or lack thereof. When does a language become a "language"? Where are its limits and boundaries? Whose language is it? When is it worth studying, translating, preserving, or dying for? The socio-ontological existence of a language, and other similar objects or semiotic forms, do not precede the stances social subjects take in relation to them.

Stancemaking, an idea we will detail in Chapter 1, helps us understand how our world is also the product of our own making. It helps us understand how languages become objectified and enshrined as cherished

forms, but also why some linguistic varieties are not even considered language. It also helps us understand the great deal of work that communities that are at the periphery of the state, such as diasporic migrants, need to put in to (re)make their own worlds. The belief that languages and societies must have essential structures is a product of the kinds of attention that communities project upon them through particular communicative and semiotic practices. Having a formalized grammar or not, being or not Chilean, Venezuelan, or Rapa Nui, are not just a matter of the actual qualities of objects or subjects themselves but the projection of particular stances toward the nature of our practices.

An important goal of this book is to advance a theory of stancemaking in relation to the construction of social realities. Some semiotic forms are experienced by subjects as being more real than others. This reality depends on the certainty a subject can have about their existence and qualities. Belief in a particular semiotic form, for example identifying a pure and proper version of Rapa Nui language (see Chapters 2 and 3), depends on stabilizing its meaning and value. Believing in a Rapa Nui language that is completely separate from Spanish and in strict continuity with a Rapa Nui genealogy fixes the value of this language in relation to Rapa Nui ancestors as well as to Chile. Rapa Nui speakers can practice their language, and inscribe it in their bodies as having a fixed value with a cultural and linguistic essence that is inalienable for the Rapa Nui people. Fixing and embodying this belief stabilizes this ethnolinguistic world. They believe not only that their language and culture exist but that they are anchored in deeper values that have been incorporated into their bodies as a disposition.

In Rapa Nui (*Isla de Pascua* in Spanish, which means Easter Island), this is articulated by appealing to the principle of *haka ara* or genealogical continuity. The existence and continuity of a Rapa Nui language is fixed and believed because it is part of a collective corporeal consciousness, or embodied disposition accumulated through everyday experience of semiotic forms and kinds of relationality on the body (see more discussions of corporeal consciousness in Chapters 1 and 3). A firm belief in the Rapa Nui language has been developed in the community through a relationship with the ancestors. Corporeal consciousness brings the values developed and fixed in community back to the individual body of the speaker subject. This helps us think of subjectivities not only as interpellated selves defined by powerful others but also as particular points of view with a sense of embodied certainty in their beliefs. A speaker-subject who is certain about the value of core semiotic forms in a community is one who has been socialized thoroughly, and who experiences these values as their own.

Consider language activists for whom the revitalization of their ancestral language is a goal that often seems almost impossible but also nonnegotiable. As we will see, corporeal consciousness of cherished semiotic forms, such as a pure language or a democratic political ideal, emerges as the product of work that not every member of a community is equally willing to do. This is as true for the revitalization of Rapa Nui as it is for the democratization of Chile, both of which are unfinished social projects in which stancemaking is helping produce or remake a society, culture, and community of speakers that were not always there.

This book is a comparative exploration by two ethnographers who have studied indigenous and diasporic communities and subjectivities in Chile and Venezuela and, more recently, issues of democracy, nation building, truth, and multiculturalism. Through our proposed theoretical framework of stancemaking, we hope to deepen our understanding of the ethnographic experiences we bring together here. Chile and Venezuela, rarely compared, have undergone different but profound sociopolitical changes and crises since the end of the 1980s, and their economic and political paths have become recently entangled.

Chile began a new democratization process while Venezuela has moved ever deeper into authoritarianism. In a sense, while Chileans were placing their faith in the possibility of creating new and more democratic state institutions, Venezuelans were losing faith in democracy and state structures. Chile has linked itself to a version of democratic development tied to a free-market economy, and inserting itself into expanding capital and trade networks with Pacific Rim and other economies. While Chileans have often expressed frustration at the inequities of their society and their disillusion at the perceived corruption of some of their politicians, these expressions have generally led to moments of democratic reckoning and accountability. Venezuela, on the other hand, has embraced a stronger revolutionary rhetoric of anti-imperialism, socialism, and above all popular participation (as opposed to democratic representation). The ambition of this strong leftward shift was fueled by the rise in oil prices during the early 2000s, which allowed Hugo Chávez to embark on large social welfare projects both at home and around Latin America, even as it expanded the privileges of a large and increasingly entrenched, corrupt, and democratically unaccountable political class within the Bolivarian Revolution. The trajectory of these two very different projects of nation and state building has entailed the construction of two very different kinds of national subjectivity—a liberal democratic one in Chile, and a Bolivarian revolutionary one in Venezuela.

These divergent political trajectories have not prevented these countries' histories from intersecting. After Hugo Chávez's death in 2013,

Venezuela's economy rapidly declined and its revolutionary socialist project faltered. The Venezuelan government became increasingly authoritarian as its oil revenues declined. This, together with a combination of mismanagement and US-imposed sanctions, contributed to a mass exodus, with over 8 million people (about 30 percent of the entire population) leaving the country by 2024. One of the main destinations for this newly formed diaspora was Chile, and especially its capital Santiago.

By the time Venezuelans arrived in Santiago, Chileans had been rethinking their own democracy for some time. Chileans had gone through various processes of settling national truth, transparency, and trust in state institutions. This had included the process of three truth commissions. The rising presence of Venezuelans over the last decade has come to occupy a central place in the Chilean imagination, moving from a place of relative obscurity to high prominence in public discussions about the impact of immigration policies as Chile attempted to rewrite its political constitution. Today imagery of Venezuelan migrants crossing the northern border on foot and moving all the way to Santiago is prevalent in the Chilean press. Successive Chilean governments have been concerned with uncovering the truth about its past and its present to produce a sense of justice, reconciliation, and legitimacy for the state in what has been a deeply divided and unequal country. Chile's disparities of wealth and power between the capital and the periphery contributes to a sense of disconnection, particularly felt by the Rapa Nui who live on a distant island in the Pacific. They have long resented the colonial era expropriation of land and resources, and the fact that many of the decisions about their lives continue to be made in Santiago and Valparaíso (where the legislature convenes). They identify as Polynesians, with little cultural connection to continental Indigenous peoples, yet they are all considered *pueblo originarios* by Chile. Theirs is a kind of diasporic subjectivity that gives them a sense of estrangement from Chile, particularly as they have become a minority within their own island, which has received a large and mostly uncontrolled increase in the number of continental residents over recent decades.

The Rapa Nui community's efforts to gain increased cultural and political autonomy is not just about negotiating with the state for increased local decision-making power, or for policies such as regulating and curtailing immigration, but is also expressed through efforts to build community cohesion on the island. Venezuelan migrants and the Rapa Nui, while very distinct, find themselves constructing their subjectivities in relation to the Chilean state. On the other hand, the Chilean state itself grapples with how to recognize and engage with forms of subjectivity that it considers *originario* (of origin) alongside the newer, less familiar identities and

political subjectivities represented by groups such as migrants from Venezuela. By examining the dynamic of stancemaking in the settling of Chile and its communities, we show how the state and its peripheral communities produce their own objects of attention to define subjectivities and themselves in the process.

We also examine Indigenous communities in Venezuela to demonstrate how the process of settling the state and diasporization of Indigenous people impacts their mutual relationship. This process has resulted in culture-conscious political subjectivities that need to work out their relationship with the state, at different scales of interaction. The Venezuelan government, unlike Chile's, has formally recognized Indigenous peoples, and granted land rights and a degree of sovereignty to these communities. However, this recognition has created its own challenges, as demonstrated by the case of Yukpa Indigenous leader Sabino Romero, who was killed while fighting for his community's land demarcation. To claim indigeneity is not devoid of its own semiotic or other kinds of ordeals and risks in Venezuela.

In this book, we analyze how the conditions under which individuals acquire points of view and corporeal consciousness change, transforming their stances and therefore their political reality and sense of possibility. The sociohistorical phenomena we address requires attention to concrete material conditions, and the semiotic labor that sustains the process of worldmaking. Methodologically, we start with concrete instances of language use (and other semiotic acts) that mediate and construct the subject's relationships with others and with their world. In doing this we take seriously the embeddedness and constraints of individual actions. Societies are permeated by contradictory driving forces that exist even in the formation of individual subjectivities. We focus on the individual and the system as they acquire points of view that not only affect them, but also allow them to project performative gazes on the world. An individual point of view is never just individual, it is always also socially acquired and affects the social world. Furthermore, paraphrasing Marx, subjects make stances "but they do not do it as they wish; they do not do so in self-selected circumstances, but in circumstances that already exist, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1913). Making a stance is an achievement of interaction between subjects, but individuals are better understood as assemblies of multiple subjectivities (Deleuze 1992; Overing and Passes 2002; Strathern 1988). Stancemaking then is a process in which individuals are limited by boundaries, power structures, and unequal access to resources, but are also constantly striving to navigate and remake the world.

We take inspiration from Bakhtin to propose a mapping of power and politics in this light, with forces that run in opposite directions to both social cohesion and disruption at once. We see the limiting capacities of material conditions and social relations as a form of agency that produces social cohesion—we call this power. At the same time, power does not exist in the absence of the disruptive, transgressive forces that we call politics. These two forms of agency are constantly present in any form of social interaction, intertwined and emergent in social action, and in any attempt to remake our societies.

We propose to think about power and politics as two forms of agency that coexist and depend on each other. Power depends on the anticipation of a disruption of the boundaries of social acceptability. Politics depends on the transgression of boundaries sustained by power. These forces either help subjects to transgress or to coalesce within the boundaries of their social interaction and relations. Politics in this book is a transgressive force, while power is an integrative force bringing cohesion to the social world. We suggest that viewing politics and power as these two forces is a productive way of understanding both individuals' actions and societal interaction.

Book Plan

Besides this Introduction, this book includes a theoretical chapter (Chapter 1), five chapters addressing examples from Chile and Venezuela (Chapters 2–6), and a Conclusion. Chapter 1 sets up the conceptual framework of stancemaking, politics, and power that we then elaborate through concrete examples in the rest of the book. We will detail our ideas about methods of power (discipline, control, modeling, and conventionalization) and how they construct and maintain social boundaries, and their relation to the centripetal disruptive forces of politics. Political subjectivities emerge from the embodiment of forms of agency that compel the individual to transgress or comply with boundaries of social acceptability. Chapters 2–4 focus on Chile addressing topics of indigeneity, diasporic subjectivity, and nation-state building. Chapters 5 and 6 shift attention to Venezuelan migrants in Chile, and Indigenous identities in Venezuela. This move allows us to contrast the formation of diasporic subjectivities and the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in Venezuela. The examples that we discuss across chapters also move between the analysis of the individual speaker to the entire nation-state, allowing us to show the relevance of stancemaking at multiple scales of interaction. The reader will be presented with the perspectives of individual poets, activists, migrants, and leaders, and also

with the work of national truth commissions and the transformation of national public spheres during post-dictatorship Chile and under the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. One point of this comparison between Indigenous and other diasporic subjectivities is to show how they are variously shaped by the process of nation settling.

In Chapter 2 ("Rapa Nui Voice, Stance, and Subjectivities") we center the experiences and voices of Rapa Nui language activists whose stancemaking helped to elevate what we call *maitaki* (clean and beautiful) Rapa Nui language. This is a form that is authorized and pure, and is distinguished from the most common syncretic ways of speaking on the island. We show that language standardization and purification, and language cherishing, are not only transgressive mechanisms in relation to the state, but can also be a source of power within the community. This cherishing is widespread on the island thanks to the work of local activists, but it has not produced a mass of new speakers of the language in the way they had hoped. The elevation of *maitaki* Rapa Nui as the Rapa Nui language was also made possible by the transformation of Chile into a democracy. This transformation emphasized multiculturalism and recognition of *pueblos originarios* (original peoples), and has presented not only favorable but constraining conditions for the community.

Chapter 3 ("Lived Beliefs and Corporeal Consciousness") addresses the relationship between corporeal consciousness and lived beliefs as the basis for poetic emancipatory practices. It centers the work of Mata-U'iroa Atan, a Rapa Nui poet, to understand what his personal stances in relation to Chile can teach us about Indigenous stancemaking and the sociolinguistic disjuncture that produces both individual voice, community, and the nation. Mata's voice makes him an exemplary speaker of Rapa Nui. Part of the point of his poetry is to provide young Rapa Nui people with a model to follow when facing the contradictions of being Rapa Nui and being Chilean. Mata's work is one of the primary examples we use to show how exemplarity is a boundary-making mechanism based on rhetorical persuasion that has the possibility of pointing the boundaries to both break and remake for new generations of Rapa Nui.

In Chapter 4 ("Settling National Truths in Democratic Chile") we move the scale of stancemaking to the nation-state, focusing on its production and settling as the prerequisite for reconciliation after the human rights violations committed by the Pinochet dictatorship. By settling national truths, Chile produces itself as a democracy and a modern nation-state. The chapter also contrasts how national truth commissions led to the creation of double standards for the voices of Indigenous peoples, whose truth was relegated to history in a chronotopic delinking with the past. Selected testimonies were central to give voice to victims and to produce

the evidence of state atrocities. These testimonies were aimed at healing the nation and making Chile whole. Through testimony, the nation was supposed to vicariously learn and experience the personal trauma of victims so that this suffering would not happen again. Yet, not all truth commissions proceeded equally in regard to these goals. We show how testimony was not crucial to uncover the truth of state violence against Indigenous peoples. This truth was historical and uncovered by experts. The nation was led to learn about these distinct cultures as foundations of Chile. At the same time, Indigenous people are supposed to "re-encounter trust" in the state but not necessarily to heal from the work of this commission.

In Chapter 5 ("Venezuelans in Chile") we turn our attention to another diasporic subjectivity, that of Venezuelan migrants in Chile. We show how they become diasporic subjects by developing semiotic intimacy with each other in ways that had not been available before they arrived. Venezuelans have become a peripheral diasporic community at the moment when Chile is attempting to settle itself after the so-called social explosion that rattled the basis of democracy during 2019 and 2020. The relationship between Venezuelans and Chilean society has been changing over time in a process that has required a great deal of semiotic conjecturing. This diasporic community has gone from being relatively unknown to being the subject of very strong stereotypes over the last decade. This has entailed a great deal of remaking of identity signs but also of stancemaking, as they become Venezuelans abroad and Chileans at the same time. Venezuelans project their political experiences on Chile, and articulate that stancemaking as coming from the future.

Chapter 6 ("Indigenous Peoples of Venezuela and their Semiotic Ordeals") shifts attention to Venezuela, where Indigenous peoples are becoming culture conscious, and struggle with their own diasporic and peripheral situation in the context of the Bolivarian Revolution. Here we analyze how Indigenous leaders and newly recognized Indigenous communities undergo semiotic ordeals at the moment of their inclusion in the Venezuelan national public sphere. The government has changed its politics of recognition since the writing of the 1999 constitution, including a change of emphasis on the kinds of characteristics that Indigenous communities must have in order to be recognized. This has pushed Indigenous communities that are seeking recognition from the state to resort to indexes of indigeneity that land them in publicly contested arenas. Indigenous leaders and communities undergo semiotic ordeals in which suppression, hyper-rendition, modification, and replacement of signs of identity are constantly in play.

The arch of argumentation in this book follows the importance of stancemaking in the transformation of subjectivities and other semiotic forms, as well as the importance that this process has in our understanding of power and politics. The theorization of power and politics that we develop is not intended as something completely new but as an articulation of these two forms of agency for the social sciences in which language and meaning are central. We want to understand how the individual and their social relations co-emerge. Societies are, in our view, dynamic entities constantly in the process of changing with forces that pull people together and, at the same time, push them apart, drawing and redrawing boundaries around and between them. The balancing or not of these forces, and the individual positionality between them, is what drives kinds of relationality to be understood more as power or more as political relations. Neither one of these forces can exist by itself. Politics exists as a transgression that pulls social relations apart but is countered by the pulling effect of power, which exists in the anticipation of actual or potential political transgressions.