

"Catherine Rhodes takes a new theoretical approach to enduring questions of Mayan language revitalization, standardization, and pedagogy from a grounded ethnographic perspective. *Undoing Modernity* makes substantial contributions to transdisciplinary understandings of decolonization, Indigeneity, and critical efforts to configure unequal worlds differently."

**BRIGITTINE M. FRENCH**, Grinnell College, author of *Maya Ethnolinguistic Identity: Violence, Cultural Rights, and Modernity in Highland Guatemala*

"This lively and detailed work raises the question of what it means to be Maya—and by extension, what it means to be Indigenous—through the process of undoing modernist approaches to language and culture. Through our deep ethnographic study of a Maya university in the Yucatan, Catherine Rhodes challenges us to reconsider the intellectual and institutional foundations that we often take for granted."

**ANNA M. BABEL**, The Ohio State University, author of *Between the Andes and the Amazon: Language and Social Meaning in Bolivia*

On the Yucatan Peninsula today, undergraduates are inventing a new sense of being Maya by studying linguistics and culture in their own language: Maya. In this bold theoretical intervention informed by ethnographic research, Catherine R. Rhodes argues that these students are undoing the category of modernity itself. Created through colonization of the Americas, modernity is the counterpart to coloniality; the students, Rhodes suggests, are creating decoloniality's companion: "demodernity."

Disciplines like linguistics, anthropology, history, and archaeology invented "the Maya" as an essentialized *ethnos* in a colonial, modern mold. *Undoing Modernity* follows students and their teachers as they upset the seemingly stable ethnic definition of Maya, with its reliance on a firm dichotomy of Maya and modern. Maya linguistics does not prove that Maya is modern but instead rejects the Maya-ness that modernity built, while also fostering within the university an intellectual space in which students articulate identity on their own terms.

ANTHROPOLOGY | INDIGENOUS STUDIES

Undoing Modernity

CATHERINE R. RHODES

# Undoing Modernity

LINGUISTICS, HIGHER EDUCATION,  
AND INDIGENEITY IN YUCATAN



## Book Talk: Undoing Modernity: Linguistics, Higher Education, and Indigeneity in Yucatan

Author: Catherine R. Rhodes, Ph. D., UNM Department of Anthropology

**APRIL 10** Thursday, April 10, 2025 | 3:00 PM | Zoom

Join the LALI and the UNM Department of Anthropology for a presentation on Dr. Catherine R. Rhodes's book, *Undoing Modernity: Linguistics, Higher Education, and Indigeneity in Yucatan*.

On the Yucatan Peninsula today, undergraduates are inventing a new sense of being Maya by studying linguistics and culture in their own language: Maya. In so doing, they are engaging and challenging stereotypical understandings of what counts as 'Maya', be that people, their language, or other cultural practices. *Undoing Modernity* follows students and their teachers as they upset the seemingly stable ethnic definition of Maya, with its reliance on a firm dichotomy between Maya and modern. Doing linguistics in Maya does not prove that Maya is modern but instead rejects the Maya-ness that modernity built, while also fostering within the university an intellectual space in which students articulate identity on their own terms. Created through colonization of the Americas, modernity is the counterpart to coloniality; the students, Rhodes suggests, are creating decoloniality's companion: "demodernity." *Undoing Modernity* dares to imagine the world on the other side of colonial/modern ideals of Indigeneity.



Join Zoom here:  
<https://bit.ly/3Fk1Lp6>

**Catherine R. Rhodes** is an Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department and affiliated faculty in LAS; Educational Linguistics; and OILS at UNM. She is a semiotic and linguistic anthropologist of education and conducts research primarily on the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. She is a co-author of *Migration Narratives*, co-producer of the film *Adelante*, and is co-authoring with Ahearn the 4th edition of *Living Language* and Spanish-language 1st edition, *El Lenguaje Vivo*. She is currently a Fulbright U.S. Scholar fellow to Mexico, where she is internationalizing linguistic anthropology by developing curricula in Spanish. Dr. Rhodes holds a dual-Ph.D. in Anthropology and Education (UPenn), an M.A. in the Social Sciences (Linguistic Anthropology) (UChicago), and a B.A. in Latin American Studies (UNC-Chapel Hill).

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