# INTRODUCTION

## Translation and Epistemicide

FROM THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY THROUGH the present day, translation practices have facilitated colonialism. Epistemicide is one result. *Epistemicide*, as described by legal theorist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2005, 2014), involves destroying, marginalizing, or banishing Indigenous, subaltern, and counterhegemonic knowledges. As such, it has been a means and a goal of modern imperial powers across the globe.

This book gives an account of translation-as-epistemicide in the Americas, drawing on a range of examples from the early colonial period to the war on terror. The first four chapters demonstrate four distinct operations that lead to epistemicide: the *commensuration* of worlds (chapter 1), the epistemic *marginalization* of subaltern translators and the knowledge they produce (chapter 2), the *criminalization* of translators and interpreters (chapter 3), and translation as *piracy* or *extractivism* (chapter 4).

Translation has also been used as a tool to contest colonization. Each of the chapters is accompanied by a counterdiscourse on how these operations are contested, undermined, realigned, or abetted by subaltern translators, interpreters, and theorists. In the final two chapters, I further flesh out examples of decolonial translation.

## CENTRAL QUESTIONS

In the signal year of 1492, noted linguist and grammarian Antonio de Nebrija presented the first Spanish (Castilian) grammar book to Queen Isabel. The queen reportedly asked what use the book could possibly be to her, since she already spoke Spanish. "Your Most Enlightened Majesty," he wrote, "language has always been a companion of empire" (que siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio) (Nebrija [1492] 1981). This book proposes a corollary: translation has been a companion or instrument of empire.[1]

As an instrument of empire, translation has taken various forms. The preeminent example is the translation of the Bible. In the last two centuries, Christian missionaries have, for the purpose of evangelizing, translated the Bible into hundreds of languages throughout the world. The use of Bible translations to promote religious conversion has been one of the most enduring and readily identifiable examples of the imperiling of Indigenous knowledge through cultural domination. For centuries, legions of missionaries have translated not only the Gospels but also the catechism and other Christian teachings and texts into Maya, Guaraní, Tagalog, Wolof, and other languages (see, e.g., Sales 2015; Hanks 2010; Oyěwùmí 1997). As a shorthand, we could call this imperialism through epistemic imposition, or translation-as-imposition.

However, *imposing* ideas is only one type of intellectual or epistemic imperialism. If we take Antonio de Nebrija at his word—that a grammar book can be an instrument of empire—then we can look for practices

1. Though the focus of this book is translation in the Americas, translation practices have played a crucial role in the battle for control throughout the colonial world (see, for example, Kothari 2018; Tageldin 2011; Bandia 2014; Oyěwùmí 1997; Rafael 1996, 2015, 2016; Sales 2015; Stam and Shohat 2012; Achebe 2009; Mazrui and Mazrui 1998; Valdeón 2014; Chakrabarty 2000; D. Robinson 1997). Nineteenth-century French colonialists translated Ibn Khaldûn in terms of their own racial categories to justify their divide-and-rule racial policies (Hannoum 2003). English colonialists, and their American descendants, have used interpreters and translators to establish their dominion from Shakespeare's time through the current prosecution of the war on terror (Cheyfitz 1997; Greenblatt 1991; Rafael 2015). Translation scholars have documented many of the ways in which translators and translation practices have both participated in and, at times, combated colonization, or at least redirected or rechanneled colonial power (see, for example, Niranjana 1992; Ngũgĩ 2011; Simon and St-Pierre 2000; Wolf 2008; Pratt 2007; Shamma 2019).

of *ordering*, *classifying*, *naming*, *labeling*, and *categorizing* as part of a colonial structure.

For instance, early bilingual dictionaries were also instruments of colonization. The bilingual dictionary, as we currently think of it, was a sixteenth-century invention of Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit missionaries from the Iberian Peninsula and other parts of Europe who had devoted years, even decades, to New World evangelism. In order to preach more effectively, Bernardino de Sahagún, Maturino Gilberti, Luis de Valdivia, and others studied languages indigenous to the Americas. The learned clergymen developed word lists, glossaries, and eventually full-fledged bilingual dictionaries, known as *vocabularios*, as well as grammars to assist in their missionary work (see chapter 1; see also Calvo Pérez 1997; Sales 2015; Gonçález Holguín [1608] 2007; Valdivia 1606; Gilberti 1559; and Lagunas 1574).

These missionaries came to their ministrations with all the precepts and presuppositions of their time regarding language, non-Christian gods, the humanity of the people they encountered, and whether they possessed souls. Fray Diego Gonçález Holguín's *Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo el Peru llamada lengua Qquichua, o del Inca* (1608) left out or distorted Indigenous concepts perceived by the conquistadores as antithetical to Catholicism or diabolical, while he, Ludovico Bertonio, and other missionaries found ways to translate *confession*, *God*, the liturgy, and so on by infusing existing Quechua or Aymara words with new meanings or by fashioning hybrid neologisms. This was part of an effort to promote and purvey a Christian worldview and eschatology as truer than and spiritually superior to the subject epistemologies. Under the guise of a word-for-word symmetry between languages, the bilingual dictionaries imposed a hidden asymmetry.

By linking them together, the bilingual vocabularios transformed Nahuatl, Aymara, Purépecha, *and* Spanish. In addition to the mutual linguistic transformations built into the vocabularios, these tomes also included introductory narratives that advanced colonial philosophies of language and provided rationales for the study of the subject languages. While a few of the friars praised the dignity of the Nahua, Guaraní, and other people they came to know, and made note of the elegance of their languages, Bertonio and many other priests laid out in their vocabularios a series of complaints about the people and the languages that have

been repeated by others over the subsequent centuries of colonial and postcolonial rule. For them, Indigenous languages were deficient, lacked crucial concepts, and were unstable. The Spaniards characterized Indigenous people as recalcitrant and dissolute, and their beliefs as magical and dangerous, not least to their very souls. These arguments date from at least the initial period of colonization, although they were prefigured in Catholics' attitudes toward Jews and Muslims who lived in the Iberian Peninsula in the previous centuries of the Reconquista.

Most of these early bilingual dictionaries thus contained an implicit ranking. They were elaborate devices to show that the languages of the Americas, their speakers, and the knowledge they produced were inferior to Castile, its people, and their Christian orthodoxy. In this case, processes of racialization went beyond skin color and extended to the *racialization of languages* themselves, as well as the racialization of *knowledge* and *religion*. In the most extreme cases, missionaries conceptualized the racialized subaltern and colonized subjects as "homunculi," to use Ginés de Sepúlveda's infamous phrase (Sepúlveda [1550] 2006), whose subjectivity and humanity were circumscribed and whose intellectual capacity was limited, such that from the standpoint of the logic of Eurocentrism or white supremacy, they were understood to be or were constituted as simple users of language, as Gabriela Veronelli (2012; 2015, 118) has put it, and the knowledge they produced was considered unsatisfactory. Put differently, translating epistemologies from one language to another presupposed and played a crucial role in arranging people and traditions of knowledge into hierarchical categories of worthiness. In this way, translation was, and is, sometimes involved in race-making. Translation has been, and can be, enlisted as part of a racializing project.

Ranging from the symbolic and the social to the material, translation here involves employing rationalities and techniques as part of a system of colonial governance. In the case of Iberian missionaries, epistemicide involved both royal and ecclesiastical authorities. However, employing translation as a technology of the coloniality of power is not confined to one particular form of government, modality of governmentality, or imperial power.

It must be emphasized that using translation in the service of colonization was hardly a case of a Western juggernaut rolling over submissive Indigenous cultures and other subaltern cultures such as those of the

African diaspora. In this uneven war, different elements of the colonial structure (military, ecclesiastical, royal, mercenary, settler) struggled for cultural ascendency against the arrayed elements of Indigeneity (most prominently the existing Aztec/Mexica/Nahua and Inca/Quechua hegemonies as well as the thousands of other nations responding in their respective ways to the threats Europeans posed).

Struggles over interpretation have always been at the center of these colonial wars of domination. To have one's interpretation, or interpretive framework, be ascendant or hegemonic was of key importance. When subaltern interpretations of the world were sidelined or erased, this was epistemic injustice (see Fricker 2007; Medina 2013).

Translation is a privileged location from which to identify those struggles over interpretation. Analyzing translation practices is one way to study the struggles on a granular level. Translation, even amid tremendous power imbalances, is

> not merely a site of passive appropriation or of unresolvable contradictions but rather . . . a site of complex negotiation, deployment, and reworking of Western symbols and images to suit the needs of a target readership. (Baer 2018, 42)

In his work on translating contemporary queer terminology, Brian Baer warns against seeing translation from hegemonic to nonhegemonic cultures as limited to imposing foreign ideas and eclipsing nonhegemonic knowledge:

> By focusing not only on what is lost but also on "what is *brought to life* through cultural permeability, exchange, influence or simple coexistence," translation can be seen as an expression of linguistic and political agency rather than an act of submission to the dominating Anglophone culture. (2018, 42, quoting Kulpa, Mizielinska, and Stasinska 2012)

Embedded within these imperial wars, Indigenous people, people of African descent, and other people racialized as nonwhite, when they have served as translators or interpreters, have been active as linguistic and political agents in just the way that Baer describes. Subaltern translators have sometimes destabilized Eurocentric knowledge, rechanneled it, or

otherwise shored up resistance to it. They have sometimes succeeded in unsettling the terms of coloniality, to use the term that Sylvia Wynter employed (2003).

But the picture is far from black-and-white. As they ply their intercultural craft, translators or interpreters also sometimes demonstrate a certain complicity with the terms of domination even as they may otherwise subvert the workings of power. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Latin American criollo intellectuals used translation as part of their ongoing struggles for national and regional independence. Texts such as the French Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen of 1789, the United States' Declaration of Independence, and others were translated as part of emancipation and nation-building movements (see Bastin 2011, 2006; Piñeiro 2019). This process was not without contradictions; in addition to the importation of European thought for the articulation of the local political structures, some forms of domination were to remain unchanged. For instance, for many bourgeois revolutionaries, independence was consistent with maintaining slavery and gender hierarchy.[2]

More generally, no matter their identity, translators and interpreters in the Americas have been agents located ambiguously and ambivalently within these larger imperial projects. The ambiguity and ambivalence may be intrinsic to the role of translator. Shuttling between worlds, translators have historically been both valued and maligned, necessary for colonization even while subject to suspicion by colonizer and colonized alike, and feminized as unfaithful (see Ayan 2019). Legions of amanuenses, bilingual lieutenants, kidnapped Taíno, Maya, and other Indigenous people, missionary priests, their Indigenous acolytes, hybrid scholars, court interpreters, conversos, enslaved mistresses, professional linguists, adventurers, amateur philologists, and mestizx royalty have played formal and informal roles as translators in the colonial project.[3] Over the centuries countless bilingual and multilingual actors were forcibly enlisted, and sometimes volunteered, in

2. It was a different story for Toussaint L'Ouverture, for whom these revolutionary documents may have inspired a vision of racial equality far beyond that conceived of by their framers.

3. Here and in the rest of the book, in accordance with emerging usage throughout the Spanish-speaking world, I use a gender-neutral form of *mestizo/a*: *mestizx*. The exception is when an author I cite has opted for exclusive language (e.g., "mestizo").

ways planned and unplanned, to translate or interpret in the cultural interface implicit in cultural domination. In these often humble, barely visible roles, usually outside of the starring part, translators and interpreters contributed to the form modernity has taken in the Americas.

Everyone—colonizer and colonized—was changed through the encounter. Given the monumental violence visited by Europeans on Indigenous nations and people of African, Arab, and Asian descent (among others), combined with the social and cultural complexity of these colonial encounters and the heterogeneity of the elements involved, the mutual changes reverberated throughout every sphere of life—the material, the economic, the spiritual, the sexual, the racial, and the linguistic. Fernando Ortiz calls these processes of mutual transformation "transculturation" (1940; see also Rama [1982] 2012, 18). Transculturation is a constant and perhaps inevitable part of colonization.

## TRANSCULTURATION

As early as his first letters back to the Castilian Crown, Columbus introduced new words into Spanish. *Ají*, *canoa*, *hamaca*, and *aguacate*—"chile," "canoe," "hammock," and "avocado"—are taken from Arawak, Taíno, Nahuatl, Carib, and other languages of the Americas, and have since become a standard part of the Spanish lexicon (Zamora 1993); the standard English words are also derivatives from Indigenous languages. European obsession with chocolate, potatoes, corn, and chile peppers—all vegetables of the Americas—changed not just European gastronomy and European languages but also European and global economies. Indigenous people from (what is now) the Caribbean had used tobacco as part of ritual activity for centuries, possibly millennia; the Europeans took tobacco and industrialized its production, processing, and consumption, thus transforming its meaning and purpose, a process emblematic of transculturation (Ortiz 1940).

With the Conquest and the transatlantic slave trade, Catholic practices changed, combining with Yoruba, Quechua, Tupí, and other cultures, as people engaged in spiritual and cultural movements that came to be known as santería, candomblé, the Ghost Dance, and myriad other practices and syncretic traditions. If the resulting hybridity was

pervasive, the material aspects of appropriation were decidedly one-sided. The financing of the Spanish Armada and the gilding of baroque churches throughout Spain relied on the gold and silver taken from the Caribbean and New Granada, or mined in Potosí. These material relations changed Europe.

No less important were the conceptual transformations on both sides of the Atlantic related to these material changes. Colonialism represented a technological launchpad for racial or racialized capitalism and the inculcation of binary sexual difference and heteronormativity (Lugones 2007; Gunn Allen 1992; Quijano 1992, 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2017; C. Robinson 1983).

Coloniality refers to the structures, institutions, epistemologies, material relationships, and worldviews that maintain a racial hierarchy (Quijano 1992, 2014; Maldonado-Torres 2016). The origin and character of European modernity itself is tied to coloniality and to colonialism (Dussel 1993; Quijano 1992; Mignolo 1995). Modernity has tied into it a discourse of superiority, of Eurocentrism. Modernity conceals or seeks to justify the depredations of colonialism. Epistemicide is one of the aspects of coloniality that modernity often conceals, although at times the epistemicide is clear and evident. Epistemicide is concealed through a variety of strategies that we will explore throughout the subsequent chapters. In each chapter, the examples of epistemicide are placed in the context of cultural exchange, transformation, and transculturation, and within larger social processes that reproduce racial subordination, sexism, and other social hierarchies. At the same time, we will note how translation has been a way of creating spaces for conceptual and cultural flourishing under these evolving forms of domination.

A nuanced study of translation practices in contexts of cultural domination and coloniality can be, as David Scott (1999, 17) has put it, an "interrogation of the practices, modalities, and projects through which modernity inserted itself into and altered the lives of the colonized" as well as the lives of the colonizers. Translation practices are linguistic building blocks for the colonial enterprise in its complexity, accompanied by other aspects of colonization, such as military invasion, enslavement, religious conversion, sexual violence, and the expropriation of mineral wealth. Like these other facets of colonialism, translation has always been an idiom for the exercise of power.

## METHOD: STUDYING REFRACTION

The analysis of early bilingual dictionaries exemplifies this book's method. Each chapter takes cases where translation is at issue and frames these cases in the context of larger historical and political processes. The case studies in the following chapters are not intended to depict a comprehensive chronological narrative of the five-hundred-plus years since the Conquest began. Instead, the criterion for selecting examples is their value for building a theory of how translation has been used, not only as a technology for framing and marginalizing nondominant ways of thinking, knowing, and speaking, but also as a tactic by the colonized to try to fend off colonial predations.

The moments of nonheroic hesitation and contradiction, as Vicente Rafael has put it, that accompany those tactics also move us to see various forms of partial collusion, uses of irony, and multiple consciousness on the part of the subaltern (Rafael 1996, 4; Puar 2008; Tageldin 2011; Matsuda 1989).

Translation "is governed by institutionally defined power relations between the languages/modes of life concerned," Talal Asad has pointed out (2010, 157). The formative role social forces have played in translation activity points to the need for a theoretical framework to inquire into how different translators are socially located, as well as into the ideologies that guide not just the translator but also the reception of a translation. Charting how a text travels means studying the social life of a translation—the sociology of translation (see Dongchao 2014; E. Said 1983; Sapiro 2012). Through these processes, texts are inevitably adapted and transformed for a new audience. This is a methodology for studying how a text is refracted across languages, to use André Lefevere's phrase (Lefevere 2000, 235; see also Bourdieu 1995, 220–21).

Studying this refraction includes examining the social norms at play in how a text or utterance fares in the target, or receiving, society, including whether the translated text is celebrated or stigmatized, seen as a source of power or potential danger, hailed as fresh air by one class or group of people, treated as a source of potential subversion or cultural contamination by another, and so on. An understanding of translation as refraction leads us to see how translation contributes to, or undermines, dominant ways of knowing. The analysis must include the material, semiotic, and

cultural conditions, or else the description of a translation risks being sociologically anemic.

Seeing translation as cultural refraction goes against traditional literary approaches to evaluating a translation. Conventionally, literary criticism of a translated text is reduced to appraising its fidelity to the original and its fluidity. Hence the fixation on what is "lost" in translation and all the clichés that accompany rather narrow views of translation ("Traduttore, traditore," etc.). To see translation in terms of epistemicide is to move beyond a narrowly aesthetic, lexical, and semantic analysis of textual translation to include analysis of an array of political, historical, material, and even ontological conditions that surround the translation (see Lefevere 2000, 205; Inghilleri 2012, 2016; Wolf 2000, 2008; Simeoni 2015; Alvarez et al. 2014; Sapiro 2012; Casanova 2007; Dongchao 2014). Seeing translation as refraction means seeing translation not as the transposition of an intrinsic and unchanging meaning of a text but as a transforming process of reframing identity, knowledge, or being (see Venuti 2019).

The following chapters will examine the translation not only of *texts* but of worldviews, epistemologies, and ontology (multiple ontologies), as well as the translation of sense of self or selfhood. We can speak broadly of "cultural translation" that is not limited to discussions of semiotic processes, as Claudia de Lima Costa puts it (2014, 20; see also Niranjana 1992; D. Robinson 1997, 1–6). Cultural translation "is premised on the view that any process of description, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas and worldviews is always already caught up in relations of power and asymmetries between languages, regions, and peoples" (Costa 2014, 20). Cultural agents "translate themselves" from one language to another (see, generally, Alvarez et al. 2014; Arguedas 1939).

The notion of translocation provides a rich theoretical vocabulary with which to take stock of the shifting social location of people who travel back and forth among worlds. Sonia Alvarez has described translocation as "linking geographies of power at various scales (local, national, regional, global) with subject positions (gender/sexual, ethnoracial, class, etc.) that constitute the self" (2014, 2; see also Lao-Montes and Buggs 2014, 291–94). This "world"-travel involves crossing lines of power (Lugones 2003). One implication is that terms do not "translate" easily across lines of power drawn by colonialism. Translating "gender" or

"woman" across colonial lines of difference, for example, is not the same as asking how to say "bread" in French (see Mehrez 2007). María Lugones has argued that

> colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers. (2007, 186)

On one side of the line, which Lugones terms the "light" side of the colonial/modern gender system, "ordering only the lives of white bourgeois men and women," "sexual purity and passivity are crucial characteristics of the white bourgeois females who reproduce the class and the colonial and racial standing of bourgeois, white men" (Lugones 2007, 206). But on the other side of the colonial line, people are reduced to the status of animality. Not only are people gendered differently on each side of the line, but the difference is constitutive of the colonial line itself; it is also a relational difference in the sense that white women live the lives they live dependent in part on the lives that women of color and colonized women live, to paraphrase Elsa Barkley Brown (1992, 298).

In this book, I will restrict analysis of *epistemicide* to processes of the racialization of language that construct, presuppose, or suggest that Eurocentric knowledge is inherently better than that of Europe's others. Epistemicide through translation is part of larger Eurocentric and colonial projects to subordinate non-European languages, cultures, and traditions and enact practices and frameworks that perform or uphold hierarchical social relations and social processes.

Not all translation is epistemicide, not all epistemicide involves translation, and not all epistemicide is Eurocentric or involved in racializing language. Merely changing the meaning of a word or phrase through translation is not a sufficient condition to count as epistemicide, since change or transformation is an intrinsic or inevitable part of the process of translation—indeed, translation *is* transformation by definition. To translate a text is to put it in other terms, and thus interpret it. Even when the translation seems to involve destroying or distorting the semantic content, for our purposes this attribute alone will not necessarily be considered epistemicide.

## REFUSAL TO TRANSLATE: ARE THERE WORDS THAT ARE "UNTRANSLATABLE"?

On the other hand, in some cases epistemicide is signaled by an organization's or a legal entity's *refusal to translate*. Two examples illustrate the point. In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), a programmatic and influential book in performance studies, Diana Taylor argues that the word and concept "performance" is untranslatable. Taylor argues that "performance" *should* come into Latin America in English because in her view there is no viable alternative. The English word should travel from the Anglo-American academy to Portuguese-, Spanish-, Quechua-, Guaraní-, Patois-, and French-speaking countries throughout the hemisphere. Does the emerging discipline of performance studies thus perform a kind of intellectual imperialism in Latin America and elsewhere? That is, do its disciplinary categories, even the very terminology of "performance," risk neocolonial imposition on the Global South (McKenzie 2010; Delgado 2015)? Diana Taylor (2007) and Richard Schechner (2007) argue strenuously that this is not the case. By exploring the nuanced ways in which Latin American dramaturgs, directors, and theater studies professors respond to the challenge of performance studies, one can come to a modulated reading of its reception in Latin America (see chapter 4).

A politically laden refusal to translate has also wended its way into the criminal justice system in the United States. A Boston criminal court's refusal to translate the word and concept "jihad" was at stake in the terrorism trial of translator Tarek Mehanna in 2011. Mehanna was on trial for allegedly translating texts that aided and abetted terrorism. In his defense, Mehanna argued that translating these texts was his way of engaging in jihad, which, he argued, was a common, everyday word that could simply be translated as "struggle" (Mehanna 2012). Fueled by the hyperbole of the war on terror, the prosecution argued that the word "jihad" was untranslatable and referred to terrorism. The court sided with the prosecution, and in its decision, which hinged in part on the meaning of jihad, the court insisted on leaving the word in Arabic. Mehanna's interpretation of jihad was not taken up by the courts. Refusing to translate jihad was a way to keep the concept "foreign"—orientalizing Mehanna, in effect, by giving an exotic

aura to his activities and making him dangerous and foreign, despite his best efforts to frame himself as a homegrown American. Insisting that jihad was untranslatable was a way to criminalize Mehanna and his activities (see chapter 3).

*Performance* and *jihad*. In each case, powerful people—powerful forces based in the United States—argued that certain terms are untranslatable. Though the rationale is different in each, both arguments form part of a larger process of cultural domination. To see the distinct logic in each case, and to see how the logic is epistemicidal, requires taking stock of the social and political stakes involved in a particular refusal to translate. Refusing to translate the *performance* in performance studies is part of the logic of extractivism, the practice of extracting cultural goods from Latin America and the Global South and using Western categories to sort them. Refusing to translate *jihad* is part of the logic of criminalizing Arab and Arab American translators.

In this way, we can map translation practices onto colonial conflict, imperialism, and latter-day forms of cultural domination, collusion, and opposition to domination. Many subaltern translation practices use the resources provided by the colonizer, but in a way that moves us beyond the dichotomy of colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, or Western domination / Native resistance (Liu 1995, 25). Instead we ask, with Shaden Tageldin (2011, 4), what happens "when a 'native' signifier binds to a 'foreign'—especially a colonizing—signifier to shore up the power of the native through the power of the foreign." These complex tactics of the subaltern translator hearken to other possible futures, cracking through the fissures of colonial modernity, as they perform a politics of configuration, to paraphrase Paul Gilroy (1993, 37–38). As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has commented about the subversive strain in Mahasweta Devi's stories (which Spivak has translated), "They must operate with the resources of a history shaped by colonization against the legacy of colonization" (Spivak 1995, 31). This "deconstructive embrace," as Spivak terms Devi's use of language, "is not only her message, but also her medium."

Translation as a struggle for control occurs in the legal realm, the literary realm, the scientific realm, and the academic realm. It involves the inculcation of racial and gender categories (Hannoum 2003; Lugones 2007, 2010, 2014; Oyěwùmí 1997).

## LIMITS OF EPISTEMICIDE

An evaluative term such as *epistemicide* needs to be used with discernment: as with any other transaction involving language, translation as such, in the abstract, is neither intrinsically liberating nor intrinsically oppressive. When translators render texts or terms into other languages, or when terms are borrowed into other languages, sometimes they contribute to the flourishing of the receiving culture, sometimes they eclipse local concepts, sometimes they add a useful nuance, and sometimes they introduce a Trojan horse.

Analysis involves identifying how a term or a text is located in a receiving culture vis-à-vis other terms and other signifiers, how those signifiers may have their own history of connection within a language or across languages by virtue of being paired together by translators, and more generally the various ways in which different languages and cultures are interconnected. Racialized words, for example, are often products of the oppressive structures to which they are connected, but they are also sometimes connected to or shaped by racialized subaltern people who use translation as an exercise of agency.

In this vein, Brent Hayes Edwards writes of translation as "framing" concepts of race and Blackness: Edwards points out that through translation, the French *nègre* has been framed with or hinged to the words *Black* and *Negro* in English (2003, 38). Translation back and forth aligns and realigns these terms over time, leading us to see translation as a process of construction, the way carpentry involves placing a joint.

> Claiming the term *nègre*, investing it with particular signifying content, and then deploying it as a link to another context (using it to translate *Negro*, for instance) are clearly practices with implications that go beyond the "simply" linguistic. In a larger sense, these are all *framing* gestures. (38; emphasis in the original)

By calling them "framing" gestures, Edwards suggests that translating joins together words in different languages in a way that is consequential for both words—and both fields. These translations

> do not just *define* the word *nègre*. They also frame it: positioning, delimiting, or extending its range of application; articulating it in relation to a discursive field, to a variety of derived or opposed signifiers (*homme de couleur*, *noir*); fleshing out its history of use; and imagining its scope of implication, its uses, its "future." (38)

Edwards notes the way Gilbert Gratiant, Lamine Senghor, and Jane Nardal "wrench the term *nègre* into the service of anti-imperialist alliances," as well as recode other racialized words or coin neologisms to develop new notions of Blackness (Edwards 2003, 36–37, 148). In these cases, people of African descent have fashioned and refashioned the sometimes oppressive meanings of these words as they have hitched and rehitched languages to each other.

Achille Mbembe also theorizes the interconnections between understandings of Blackness across languages in his *Critique de la raison nègre* (2015, translated as *Critique of Black Reason* in 2017). His formulation complements Edwards's insofar as it provides a history of translation practices that transcends comparative philology to become not just political philosophy but also a semiotics, a social history, and an ontology. Mbembe states that "neither Blackness nor race has ever been fixed. . . . They have, on the contrary, always belonged to a chain of open-ended signifiers" (2017, 6).

Both Edwards and Mbembe take up how *Black*, *nègre*, *noir*, and *Negro* have been joined together through translation, especially through the work of Black translators, and how the terms have consequently been interconnected over the centuries. They show how translated terms, including words that are racist in origin, can sometimes be deployed in the formation of transnational, transcultural movements against oppressive structures, even if those terms, and those movements, involve a certain amount of semantic ambiguity and complexity. Seeing how a term has been framed, in Edwards's sense, serves as a counterbalance to a tendency to see Western power as unstoppable and other cultures as passive. On the other hand, without a theory of epistemicide, or something like it, one is not able to see the predations of imperial domination. We need both: a theory of power and a methodology to chart the interconnected growth and interactive change of terms and their translations through time.

Epistemicide has other significant limits as a lens through which to view cultural domination. For example, the word itself emphasizes *knowledge* rather than *being*, epistemology rather than ontology. It represents knowing rather than *doing*. We will see that in some cases this distinction does not hold.

The use of the term "epistemi*cide*" is intended to draw attention to one aspect of genocide. Epistemicide is a kind of genocide, or an element of genocide, and sometimes a precondition for it. Epistemicide can occur through straightforward genocide or ethnocide (killing the knowers), but it can also be the result of other operations: a subordinate's knowledge can be rendered nonsense (Hoagland 2002), or knowledge and knowers can be criminalized (Puar 2008).

The examples herein document acts, practices, technologies, frameworks, and projects that have potentially epistemicidal effects—some intentionally, and others unwittingly. Whether they are epistemicidal does not rest on intent. Total elimination or successful genocide, moreover, is not a necessary condition for identifying epistemicide or an attempt at epistemicide. Just as the eugenicist projects of sterilizing Puerto Rican women en masse were genocidal even if ultimately unsuccessful, just as the Third Reich attempted genocide but did not succeed in killing all Jews or Roma, so too can attempts at epistemicide, or epistemicidal projects, be unsuccessful and still be genocidal/epistemicidal. On the other hand, epistemicide is sometimes complete in just the way that genocide is sometimes complete. Indigenous languages throughout the world are endangered, and some are driven into extinction each year. When a language becomes extinct, the condition for the possibility of the unique knowledge associated with that language is also made extinct.

## TRANSLATION AS ERASURE AND TRANSLATION AS STRUGGLE: A TYPOLOGY OF EPISTEMICIDE

Several theorists have already taken up epistemicide as a tool to analyze how power works through translation (Bennett 2007, 2014; Vásquez 2011; see also Bordet 2016; Karnedi 2015). Karen Bennett notes the global dominion of English in contemporary academic journals and in academic publishing, such that it has become a scholarly lingua

franca. As Lillis et al. (2010, 131) have commented, "English cannot be viewed as a transparent medium, simply 'translating' knowledge from one language to another; its status within global evaluation systems is actually shaping what gets counted as knowledge." Bennett shows how a style of logic and argument common among contemporary Portuguese scholars, influenced by centuries of Jesuit scholasticism, has to be flattened and reworked by translators in order to be presented in the simple, supposedly transparent declarative sentences and syllogistic logic Anglo-American positivists favor (Bennett 2007, 163). She calls this epistemicide. While Bennett is no doubt correct that English has come to exercise global hegemony in academic discourse, she does not pay attention to the proliferation of counterhegemonic Englishes (Kothari and Snell 2012; Mazrui and Mazrui 1998; Mazrui 2019). Bennett also tends to assume that the original text has an intrinsic meaning, and epistemicide for her is the corruption or erasure of that original meaning. Since I do not believe a text has an essential meaning, I shift the focus and look instead at how translation is used to destroy a target culture, or plunder the resources of the source or original culture—the epistemicide is at a social or cultural level, and not in the meaning or semantic content of a text (see Venuti 2019, 58). In other cases, the epistemicide lies in marginalizing or criminalizing the translated text, the subaltern translator, the language, or the nondominant culture from which those words or translators are drawn.

In a brilliant article, Rolando Vásquez has observed that colonizers have used translation "to incorporate knowledge within the borders of intelligibility and . . . to erase the knowledge of the colonized" (2011, 27). This binary—*incorporating* or *erasing* subaltern knowledge—serves as a useful shorthand to help understand epistemicide in the Americas. Working through case studies—seeing how translations are refracted across languages—allows us to further refine this distinction, go beyond the binary, and add to the inventory of translation techniques colonizers have used from that early colonial period through the war on terror.

A taxonomy of epistemicide makes this point a bit more concrete. The following chapters will provide such a taxonomy or typology. In some of these cases, epistemicide is the implicit or explicit goal; in other cases, epistemicide is a tactic, method, or effect of cultural domination. The final two chapters focus on decolonial methodologies of translation.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries in the early colonial period followed a religious injunction to evangelize. In order to do so, they developed a set of linguistic tools, including grammars of many Indigenous languages, and put together glossaries, the basis of what would develop into the first bilingual dictionaries in the Americas. Chapter 1 considers some of the epistemic, racial, and practical consequences of the production of these colonial-era bilingual dictionaries. Even though Quechua, Aymara, and Spanish are all called "languages," they may have different, even incommensurate epistemological and ontological statuses for their speakers. Mario Vilca, Lee Maracle, and José María Arguedas (to whom I return in the following chapter) all make this point about the incommensurability of different "languages." These early bilingual dictionaries do not countenance these various Indigenous understandings of language itself. Instead, dictionaries grind the incommensurate languages and worldviews into commensuration. Forced commensuration is an operation of epistemicide.

In order to illuminate some of the basic terms of a decolonial translation theory, chapter 2 takes up Peruvian anthropologist José María Arguedas's essay "The Anguish of the Mestizo Between Quechua and Spanish" (1939). The terms of translation theory can be changed by paying attention to the "replies" to European modernity made from outside of Europe, especially those replies that come as theory from the colonized. Reading Arguedas's essay contrapuntally to Walter Benjamin's canonical "The Task of the Translator" ([1923] 1969) throws into relief the critical difference of Arguedas's decolonial methodology. Nevertheless, Arguedas's work has not been given the platform that Benjamin's essay has. Ignoring Arguedas's work is an example of epistemic marginalization.

After focusing in the first chapters on the mechanisms of Spanish expansion and domination, in chapters 3 and 4 I turn to epistemicide in the present day by looking at contemporary U.S. imperial ambitions. As part of the war on terror, a number of Arab American and Latinx translators and interpreters have been caught up in the criminal justice system in the United States. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has monitored, detained, and prosecuted them for their work *as translators*. Criminalizing translators, criminalizing the act of translating itself, and

criminalizing the knowledge or information in their translations represent contemporary forms of epistemicide. Tarek Mehanna and Mohamed Yousry both served prison time for translating texts (as of this writing, Mehanna is still in prison). In a third case, Erik Camayd-Freixas, a federal court interpreter caught up in court proceedings he felt were fundamentally unjust, wrote an exposé denouncing the government's attempts to criminalize undocumented workers as part of the war on terror. The analysis of these cases in chapter 3 tells us something about contemporary state tactics to control competing narratives of state power and intimidate translators and interpreters through selective prosecution that rests on racist tropes. State actors, moreover, try to control exactly how translation is to be performed and to force translators to be obedient to epistemicidal rather than liberatory logics.[4] These cases reflect ongoing historical processes of imperialism and racial domination.

In chapter 4, I take up an instance of potential epistemicide in the academic sphere. From the beginning, the nascent academic field of performance studies has studied a broad spectrum of performance-related activity (Schechner 2010). Some performance studies scholars worry that a prevalence of Anglophone theorizing in performance studies, combined with this omnivorous approach to the study of other cultures and traditions, can lead to intellectual imperialism (Rae 2011; Reinelt 2007). Taking as a point of departure the (non)translation of the word and concept "performance" in Latin America, this chapter explores whether performance studies is involved in a kind of academic piracy insofar as it draws on cultural and artistic production in Latin America and elsewhere to feed and therefore reinforce U.S. and Anglophone intellectual hegemony.

In the following chapter, I present a decolonial methodology. A "stereoscopic" reading, writes theorist Marilyn Gaddis Rose, involves reading a text alongside its translation. The methodology of stereoscopic reading can be a *decolonial* methodology if it is applied at points of difference in power. Stereoscopic readings can provide critical insight into exchanges and translations that amount to epistemicide. Furthermore, stereoscopic readings at these nodal moments of tense encounters can potentially be more than merely interpretive: they can have a transformative effect.

4. I thank Matthew Gleeson for the formulation.

Contemporary Latinx queer theorists Rick Santos and Ernesto Martínez each provide examples of stereoscopic reading as political intervention. As theorists who are simultaneously cultural actors and cultural translators, they interact with and affect cultures, languages, and politics as they translate, interpret, and theorize the dangerous intersections of cultures in conflict at points of colonial predation and the policing of subaltern and racialized masculinity.

The conclusion outlines the contours of an approach to translation that does not engage in epistemicide. I take the term *desnudo* from the early chronicler Cabeza de Vaca ([1542] 2004, [1542] 2002; see also Stavans 2002). As a member of a shipwrecked crew of would-be colonizers, Cabeza de Vaca describes himself as "desnudo" or naked. For Cabeza de Vaca, "desnudo" comes to connote, not merely physical nakedness, but beyond that a general vulnerability when one is immersed in another reality, playing by another's terms with which one is scarcely familiar. He is unsure how to proceed, stripped of his armor and stratagem. I take up this expanded, metaphorical sense of "desnudo" as a helpful decolonial posture. In this context, the condition of desnudez (nakedness) implies a certain epistemic humility that I describe as bewilderment, an attitude or disposition that is a healthy alternative to cultural imperialism. Desnudez/bewilderment is a potentially creative position. Several examples illustrate decolonial translation projects in which the translation is made for an incipient, uncertain future of which we can only discern the outline.