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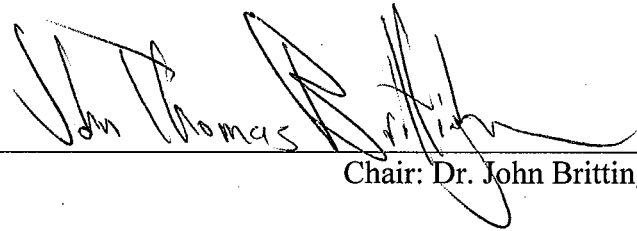
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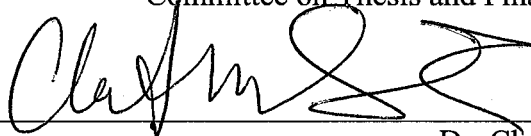
A Decolonial Reconstruction of Linguistic Imperialism in Spanish América

BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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Chair: Dr. John Brittingham

Committee on Thesis and Final Examination



Dr. Christina Smerick



Dr. Richard Huston

Gente Sin Escritura:

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Summer Mengarelli

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek – it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind.¹

In her 1993 lecture upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, Toni Morrison recounted a story of an old, blind, wise woman. The daughter of slaves, she is a Black American who lives on the outskirts of town, and “[t]he honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement.”² One day, the wise woman is visited by a group of young people who are determined to discount her wisdom. As they approach, one of them holds out their hands and tells the woman, “Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead.”³ Of course, the wise woman cannot say whether the bird is dead or alive, because she cannot see it. After a long silence, she replies that she does not know, but that she does know that it is in their hands.

Morrison suggests that what the wise woman means is that whatever the case, the bird is the responsibility of the young people. In her interpretation, the bird is language, and the wise woman is a writer. The writer recognizes that the language in which she

¹ Tony Morrison, “Nobel Lecture,” The Nobel Prize, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

thinks and writes is primarily an agency, a choice with consequences, susceptible to restriction or erasure. She recognizes that a dead language is not merely one which is no longer used or spoken, but also one which is unreceptive to new ways of speaking or new ideas. This type of dead language is like a statist or imperial language, one which is censored and which censors, one which “has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance.”⁴ Oppressive imperialist language, Morrison writes, does not merely represent or recount violence; it *is* violence. It limits knowledge.

As she winds down her address, Morrison points to the essential nature of language: “We die. That may be the meaning of our lives. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.”⁵ The work of this thesis is to demonstrate the power of language to limit knowledge, to restrict being, to inflict violence. Through an historical and philosophical account, this thesis will examine the role of language in the conquest and colonization of Latin America. It will also look at the continued ways in which language, and particularly Spanish in Latin America, has been used to bolster the metaphysical and political power of the settler state. The purpose of these analyses is to highlight that language is not merely a representation of reality, but also a force that can shape and limit reality.

As Morrison writes, language “arcs toward the place where meaning might lie.”⁶ Just as language has been used through coloniality to homogenize and regulate reality, it can be utilized to overturn oppression and redefine reality. This is in many ways the work

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

of decolonial thinkers. In Latin America, writers and revolutionaries have established a realm of philosophy that departs from the hegemonic Western standards, that recognizes the restrictive nature of the language of colonization, and that works to define meaning beyond the limits of colonial policies, methodologies, ontologies, and linguistics. The work done by these thinkers and activists can be loosely categorized as decolonial theory.

During my time at Greenville, my classes, professors, and fellow students have opened my eyes to begin to see the systems of injustice that are at play in our society, and that have been present for many centuries. I am convinced that philosophers in particular have a moral imperative to highlight these unjust systems and work toward something better, and nowhere have I found a better demonstration of this philosophical work than in the actions and writings of decolonial philosophers.

Orientation of the Project

I was first introduced to decolonial theory in a Topics in Global Philosophy course that focused on Latin American philosophers. In reading the works of such varied thinkers as Linda Martín Alcoff, Enrique Dussel, Ofelia Schutte, Walter D. Mignolo, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, I experienced an interruption in my conception of philosophy. Decolonial writers and activists demonstrated for maybe the first time in my academic career that philosophy is not merely the detached work of analysis and metaphysics, but also has the capacity to be the conduit of real, material change. As decolonial theory works to deconstruct the ontological, epistemological, and political effects of

colonization and coloniality, it necessarily deals with the “non-philosophical,”⁷ the lived reality in which philosophical work occurs.

As such, decolonial thought — encompassing a variety of values and foci but unitedly aimed to liberation — occurs in Latin America within the domain of what Enrique Dussel labels the “periphery,” the areas of the world including Latin America, Africa, and Asia that are marginalized as colonizing Europe situates itself as the axis of philosophical and political power. Peripheral philosophy works to dispute the myth of modernity that allows for this eurocentrism. As I have ventured into these areas of thought, it has been necessary for me to analyze the ways in which my education in philosophy has upheld the myth of Western modernity as established by an ethnocentric interpretation of human development.

Quijano argues that modernity is derived from the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe, as well as the view of the differences between Europe and other people groups as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power.⁸ Dussel discusses the gaze of philosophers from the center — European philosophers who approach and interpret the work of the periphery from the values of the center, values established by this ethnocentric claim to modernity. And Mignolo writes that “Once you get out of the natural belief that history is a chronological succession of events progressing toward modernity and bring into the picture the spatiality and violence of colonialism, then

⁷ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 3.

⁸ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.3 (2000): 542.

modernity becomes entangled forever with coloniality in a spatial distribution of nodes whose place in history is ‘structural’ rather than ‘linear.’”⁹

This thesis is an attempt to reject this view of history as a natural progression toward modernity, an attempt to disengage my centric gaze. As a white woman from the United States, I recognize my complicity in the processes and ideologies of coloniality. That my introduction to this school of thought was in a “Global Philosophy” class that deviated from the standard curriculum of Western philosophy demonstrates that any work I do in the field of decolonial thought is the work of a settler probing into the periphery. Therefore, the perspectives I employ and the decisions I make with regards to sources will attempt to establish peripheral thinkers at the center. Utilizing my majors in history and Spanish, I aim to recount the historical moments of colonization and work of liberation not only from the typical Western perspective, but also and predominantly through the voices of those who experienced colonization and those who work to counter coloniality.

According to Mignolo, “reflections on colonial experiences are not only corrective exercises in understanding the past but helpful tools in speaking the present. Critical perspectives on Western values and ways of thinking have much to gain from understanding colonial situations...”¹⁰ Thus, this projects assumes the value of critically retelling a history that has predominantly been understood through the Western modern/colonial narrative, not only to correct the narrative, but also to understand and

⁹ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 48.

¹⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 317.

deconstruct the power structures and modes of thinking that were put into place during colonization.

With a mind to my position within the Western center, it will be helpful to outline some limitations to this project. This thesis is not an attempt to contribute something new to the field of decolonial thought. Unlike many senior projects, this is not a response to a perceived gap or question that has surfaced in the course of my research, but rather will function as a reconstruction of a story that has already been told many times. My aim is not to address what may not have been addressed by decolonial thinkers. Instead, my goal is to recount the history of colonization in a manner faithful to the experiences of the colonized, and to amplify the work of Latin American decolonial theorists in order to make them accessible to Western thinkers who have never encountered or considered this school of thought.

This thesis will explore the relationship between language and coloniality. I was initially drawn to the intersection of language and the process of colonization because the topic allowed me to draw from my three majors of philosophy, Spanish, and history/political science. As I began researching, I found that it required no stretch of the imagination or creative interpretation of history to perceive the massive role language — specifically, Castilian Spanish — played in altering and controlling Indigenous ontology in Latin America. Enrique Dussel writes in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Liberation* that a “philosophy of liberation must always begin by presenting the historico-ideological genesis of what it attempts to think through, giving priority to its spatial, worldly setting.”¹¹ Thus this project, which will present the historical account and

¹¹ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 1.

ideological underpinnings of the linguistic colonization of Latin America by the Spanish, is only a beginning.

Outline of the Project

After a review of the literature in chapter two, chapter three first summarizes Western philosophy of language at the time of conquest. In particular, it recounts the ideological moves that led to the development of Castilian as the language of the Spanish Empire. This allows the reader to understand how language has been utilized as a weapon of the state. From there, the chapter summarizes the philosophy of language articulated in Nebrija's *Gramática de la lengua castellana* that situated the letter as superior to other forms of writing, a philosophy that resulted in the *conquistadores* and colonizers perceiving Indigenous societies in the Americas to be not only linguistically but also evolutionarily inferior to the Europeans. To counteract this belief, the chapter continues with a brief summary of the major Indigenous civilizations at the time of conquest, and especially of the Aztec/Mexica people of the Valley of Mexico. Next, the chapter recounts Columbus's first voyage and the ensuing moments of conquest, including a detailed account of the fall of Tenochtitlan, considering various theories for the relative success of the *conquistadores*. The chapter ends by establishing the importance of conversion in the mission of colonization, situating Catholic priests and linguists toward the center of the colonial project.

Chapter four begins by discussing the colonial matrix of power which allowed the situation in Latin America to move from the historical moments of colonization/colonialism to the continuing ideological and material state of

coloniality/modernity. This power structure includes Catholicism, Enlightenment-era epistemology, and comparative philology; and its influence is nowhere better explicated than in the work of Catholic friar-linguists in codifying Indigenous spoken languages into the Latin alphabet. Thus, the chapter moves to discuss the scholarship within philology and linguistics that culminated in an evolutionary model of language with alphabetic writing at the apex. To delegitimize the narrow definition of writing that resulted from this dominant school of thought, the chapter summarizes the writing and recording-keeping systems of the Maya, Inca, and Mexica people.

Next, the chapter details the work of Catholic missionaries to develop grammars of Amerindian languages, and especially how the discourse surrounding these grammars described the languages as “lacking” Latin letters, thus emphasizing their supposed inferiority. The chapter then makes the crucial point that the missions, in their commitment to multilingualism, did not explicitly comply with the hispanicizing project of the greater colonial apparatus. Nonetheless, the usage of Indigenous languages was rooted in a comparative philological model that situated Indigenous languages and thus Indigenous peoples as inferior to European languages and people, and thus this multilingualism served in its own manner to uphold the colonial matrix of power. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the move from colonization to coloniality — to the modern era, in which Indigenous languages persist but are perhaps irreparably marred by the work of friar-linguists — and the invention of América.

Finally, chapter five culminates in a discussion of the work decolonial thinkers have accomplished to explicate eurocentrism. The conclusion reiterates the project of reconstructing the linguistic history of colonization in Latin America as an example of

the first step of decoloniality. This reconstruction with an eye to the periphery is analytic, first in framing the fruits of modernity as coloniality, and then as detaching from this Western epistemology.

A Final Note

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa posed to her readers a series of questions which have guided me throughout the process of writing this thesis. She asks:

One thing I urge you to do when you are reading and writing is to figure out, literally, where your feet stand, what position you are taking. Are you speaking from a white, male, middle-class perspective? Are you speaking from a working-class, colored, ethnic location? For whom are you speaking? What is the context, where do you locate your experience? In the bronx, in Southern California? Why are you doing this research? What are your motivations? What are the stakes, what is at stake — to use a popular theoretical expression. In other words, what's in it for you? What are the terms of the debate and who set up the terms? ... These may be some of the stakes for people of color. As a white person you may have similar stakes or you may be doing it because you are tired of living in a racist country, you are tired of your ignorance and you want to learn about other peoples, other cultures. You may want to make a better world in which we all can live and in relative peace. Or you may do it out of guilt.¹²

I have already made it clear from where I think, and from what perspective I am speaking. However, I have found it necessary to consider for whom and to whom I am speaking. It was never my intention or desire to speak *for* the communities and people groups in Latin America whose languages and ontologies were forever marked by the processes and ideologies described in this project. In fact I never intended this project to be me speaking *for* anyone, but rather an opportunity for myself to learn from an area of scholarship of which I had only cursory knowledge prior to researching for this thesis.

¹² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 193.

Thus the first person *to* whom I am speaking is myself, as the greatest challenge and reward of this project has been to dismantle what I thought I knew about colonization, and to study languages I never considered despite my professed love of language learning. I am speaking secondarily to other white scholars within the realms of philosophy, history, and linguistics — who, like me, have received most or all of their education from the Western perspective through Western voices. My hope is that this project challenges and alters their worldview as it has mine.

Anzaldúa asks her white readers specifically to consider their motivations for undertaking this research: is it because we are tired of our own ignorance, because we want to learn about other cultures? Because we are tired of living in a racist country, or out of guilt? I do not think that this project will do much to make a better world in which we can all live in peace; however, part of my motivation for choosing decolonial philosophy as my area of study is that these scholars are already engaged in the work of imagining and creating a better world. My desire to dispel my own ignorance has led me to the genuine privilege of studying scholars who engage critically and thoughtfully with philosophy, history, and linguistics in ways I would have never encountered through a traditionally Western curriculum. If this project accomplishes nothing else, I am grateful for the opportunity it has presented to me to learn from this important body of work.

Chapter Two:

Review of the Literature

Philosophies of language/linguistics

This thesis begins by analyzing the role of language in the process and justification of Spanish imperialism in Latin America. It would be inappropriate to discuss language as a form of power without consideration of the scholarly traditions that have arrived at this conclusion, and those that have evaluated languages from other criteria. In particular, it was necessary in my research to understand the development of linguistics and sociolinguistics, the traditions of logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy in the field of linguistic philosophy, and metaphysical analyses of language within the realm of continental philosophy.

Sociolinguist Peter Burke identified four major points that sociolinguistics has established: “1. Different social groups use different varieties of language. 2. The same people employ different varieties of language in different situations. 3. Language reflects the society (or culture) in which it is spoken. 4. Language shapes the society in which it is spoken.”¹³ Points one through three, José del Valle argues, are in accordance with the development of sociolinguistics to this point: variation correlates to social categories, and the individual’s usage choices can provide information regarding social position and social structure at the time of the utterance or text. It is Burke’s fourth point that represents a deviation into a political philosophy of language, an analysis of language that will be fundamental to the arguments articulated in this thesis. Burke’s project is to move beyond the scope of historical sociolinguistics, which has generally maintained a formal,

¹³ Peter Burke, *The Social History of Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3-4.

grammatically-focused approach to language history, and to situate language within a “culturally and sociologically relevant theory of communication.”¹⁴ Thus, the focus of a social history of language is no longer to trace the history of a specific language, but rather to identify broadly understood patterns of communication within a particular community or social group. Language is not an isolated entity, but a part of a sociologically defined object.

In Del Valle’s *A Political History of Spanish*, contributors articulate Spanish and language in general as both diachronic and synchronic, in accordance with Burke’s description of language and communicative practices. Language is diachronic in that it is assumed to change over time, following identifiable patterns; however, language is also synchronic in that a particular language is inherently tied to a specific cultural and social context — it is historical, and “its nature can only be understood in relation to the context of usage.”¹⁵ Once sociolinguistics shift focus from language to social group, it is clear to see, as Burke affirms, that there is a critical link between language and power. Del Valle notes, however, that this critical link represents a break in the genealogy of language theory: continental philosophy of language branches off with the likes of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Louis Althusser; while logical positivism, ordinary language, and analytical philosophy of language continue with Ferdinand Saussure, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Bertrand Russell.

The root of this break is found in the discord between positivism, which underlies much of linguistics, and metaphysical investigation, which characterizes the work of

¹⁴ José del Valle, “Language, Politics, and History: An Introductory Essay,” in *A Political History of Spanish: The Making of a Language*, ed. José del Valle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

philosophers of language. Russell provides a definition of logical positivism: “‘Logical positivism’ is a name for a method, not for a certain kind of result. A philosopher is a logical positivist if he holds that there is no special way of knowing that is particular to philosophy, but that questions of fact can only be decided by the empirical methods of science, while questions that can be decided without appeal to experience are either mathematical or linguistic.”¹⁶ Russell continues that while many logical positivists define themselves as those who reject metaphysics, he prefers to say that questions of fact are decided by empirical methods of observation, rather than by experience.

In his first work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), Wittgenstein utilizes seven propositions to outline what would become a key work of logical positivism. Through these, he develops “a conception of language as consisting of elementary propositions related by... elements of first-order logic.”¹⁷ Wittgenstein’s purpose in developing this position is “to find the limits of world, thought and language; in other words, to distinguish between sense and nonsense.”¹⁸ Any statement, or proposition, that has any sense, once sifted through the functions of syllogistic logic, should render its sense; if a proposition cannot survive the analysis of logic, it has no sense. According to Wittgenstein’s seventh proposition — “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”¹⁹ — if something cannot be spoken of with “sense,” as revealed by first-order logic, then we should not speak of it. Science is one field that holds up to the demands of

¹⁶ Bertrand Russell, “Logical Positivism,” *Revue Internationale De Philosophie* 4, no. 11 (1950): 3-19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23932366>

¹⁷ Michael P. Wolf, “Philosophy of Language,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/lang-phi/>.

¹⁸ Anat Biletzki and Anat Matar, “Ludwig Wittgenstein,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/#TracLogiPhil>.

¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Charles Kay Ogden, (London: Kegan Paul, 1921), §7. <https://people.umass.edu/klement/tlp/tlp.pdf>.

logical positivism, as is mathematics, which is why logical positivists are “complete empiricists;”²⁰ however, theology, ethics, and metaphysics do not.

Later, in his seminal *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953), Wittgenstein corrected his earlier work and helped lead the Ordinary Language movement as a reaction against logical positivism. Together, logical positivism and Ordinary Language philosophy constitute the realm of linguistic philosophy: both schools believe that philosophical problems are, at their roots, linguistic problems; and thus that what is necessary to solve the problems is linguistic analysis. However, Ordinary Language philosophy differs from logical positivism in its understanding of how to carry out that analysis.

Ordinary Language philosophy looks to the *ordinary* use of words/phrases in order to understand their meaning, or solve the problem of their misunderstanding, when the words/phrases are used in a philosophical, non-ordinary context. In other words,

Non-ordinary uses of language are thought to be behind much philosophical theorizing, according to Ordinary Language philosophy: particularly where a theory results in a view that conflicts with what might be ordinarily said of some situation. Such ‘philosophical’ uses of language, on this view, create the very philosophical problems they are employed to solve.²¹

Thus Ordinary Language philosophers argue that the meaning of words cannot be separated or differentiated from the words’ common usage. Philosophy’s problem arise when the words are used in abstraction, or when philosophers attempt to assign new definitions to commonly-used words. Ordinary Language philosophy was never a unified, intentional philosophical move, and those who are now regarded as Ordinary Language

²⁰ Russell, "Logical Positivism," 4.

²¹ Sally Parker-Ryan, “Ordinary Language Philosophy,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ord-lang/>.

philosophers — John Wisdom, Norman Malcolm, Alice Ambrose, Gilbert Ryle, J. L. Austin, and John Searle, to name a few — would not have identified with this philosophy. However, their work, together with Wittgenstein’s later writings, represent a unified, significant move in linguistic philosophy.

Wittgenstein writes, “For a large class of cases of the employment of the word ‘meaning’—though not for all—this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.”²² This represents a shift: according to logical positivism, including Wittgenstein’s earlier work, meaning is a representation, or a denotation. The focus now is on *use*. *Philosophical Investigations* offers the term “language-games,” “goal-directed social activities for which words were just so many tools to get things done, rather than fixed and eternal components in a logical structure.”²³ An example of a language-game is the conversation between a supervisor and a construction worker, in which particular terms (like *pillar* or *beam*) are used to accomplish the task at hand. Wittgenstein cites a long list of examples, like reporting an event, making a joke, or thanking, to illustrate the possibilities available in our use of language.

Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* offer other key concepts in linguistic philosophy, such as rules/rule-following and the private language argument. He considers the role of rules in language, and in *PI 201*, considered the climax of the argument, he asserts that no course of action (or use) can be determined by a rule. This is because every action can be argued to accord with or conflict with the rule, creating a paradox. According to some interpretations²⁴ Wittgenstein is offering a skeptical solution to a skeptical challenge:

²² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2001 [1953]), 43.

²³ Wolf, “Philosophy of Language.”

²⁴ Such as Fogelin, 1976 and Kripke, 1982.

there are no real facts to determine whether an action is following a rule, so there must be other conditions to assess rule-following. This interpretation has been challenged,²⁵ but will nonetheless be useful in this thesis's treatment of grammar, as it aligns with Wittgenstein's own description of grammar in the *Investigations*.

Contrary to the conception of grammar as the collection of rules of correct syntactic and semantic usage, this new understanding of grammar widens to a network of "rules" that determine whether linguistic moves/uses are allowed to make sense or not. Grammar is no longer prescriptive, technical instruction, but rather descriptive, expressing the norms of meaningful language.²⁶ And language is meaningful, functional, when not only definitions are in agreement, but also judgments: this is "agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life."²⁷ Thus, grammar is established by use in everyday life; language is made possible by human life. This is underscored by the sections of the *Investigations* dealing with what has been labeled the "private-language argument." Although scholars cannot agree whether Wittgenstein intended for these sections to present a veritable argument, they nonetheless point out that language use can only be meaningful within the context of public criteria and standards. A "private language," one in which words refer to what only the speaker can know, cannot be meaningful. Just as his earlier work necessitated first-order logic to determine sense, Wittgenstein's concept of language now requires the possibility of judging usage to justify its meaning.

The genealogy of linguistics eventually arrived at this concept of language as determined by use in human life. However, even Wittgenstein's later works failed to

²⁵ By scholars such as Baker and Hacker, 1984; McGinn, 1984; and Cavell, 1990.

²⁶ Biletzki and Matar, "Ludwig Wittgenstein."

²⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 241.

recognize, or at least to analyze, the role of power structures in language usage, rule-following, or meaning-making. The example of the builder and his supervisor served Wittgenstein and proponents of the ordinary language movement to demonstrate how use determines meaning, but the example is not fully analyzed without consideration of the supervisor's position of authority, the builder's position of submission, and the effects this power structure would have on language usage. For this end of language analysis, it will be necessary to turn to post-structuralism.

Post-structuralism, Critical Theory, & Decolonial Theory

Post-structuralism was developed, unsurprisingly, as a response to structuralism. The structuralist school attempted to understand human culture through examining structures, and especially the structure of language, as mediations between concrete reality and abstract concepts. Post-structuralism critiques structuralism's presupposition of the stability of structures and the binary oppositions necessary to structuralist analysis. Judith Butler, who approached gender post-structurally, construed post-structuralism as a rejection of "the claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions that implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification."²⁸

Post-structuralism acknowledges that while structures such as language *do* function to mediate between lived reality and abstract ideas, the structures cannot be regarded as universal, consistently stable, or unambiguous. Language is endlessly ambiguous and arbitrary. For Butler, post-structuralism recognizes, where structuralism

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 40.

did not, that the possibility for difference between who/what signifies and what is signified is endless: “the discrepancy between signifier and signified becomes the operative and limitless *différance* of language, rendering all referentiality into a potentially limitless displacement.”²⁹

Claude Levi-Strauss helpfully summarized the four basic tenets of structural linguistics as defined by Ferdinand de Saussure:

First, structural linguistics shifts from the study of conscious linguistic phenomena to study of their unconscious infrastructure; second, it does not treat terms as independent entities, taking instead as its basis of analysis the relations between terms; third, it introduces the concept of system. . . ; finally, structural linguistics aims at discovering general laws, either by induction ‘or. . . by logical deduction, which would give them an absolute character.’³⁰

Levi-Strauss was an anthropologist and used Saussure’s categories to analyze anthropological data, thus helping to initiate structuralism. In general, post-structuralism retains the first three tenets. The second states that terms/words are not treated or understood as individual entities; they are understood in relationship with each other. The third tenet begins to consider these relationships as a system/structure, and the first recognizes that we understand and navigate these linguistic relationships subconsciously. However, the fourth tenet suggests that by studying these relationships, we can arrive at general laws considering the nature of language — and this is where the post-structuralists depart from structuralism.

Rather than attempt to draw universal statements about linguistic relationships, post-structuralism focuses on and recognizes the significance in the differences and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Structural Analysis,” in *Structural Anthropology*, Claire Jacobson & Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, eds., (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 9-53.

ambiguities in linguistics. In rejecting the fourth tenet of structural linguistics, post-structuralists recognize that

structures of meanings are not universal, and do not reflect ontological truths about humans or society. Poststructuralists focus on those gaps and ambiguities in the system of meaning and find meaning there. The inquiry is, in essence, flipped on its head: the idea is not to find regularity, but instead to probe what the ‘discovered regularity’ could possibly mean... This is the key move of poststructuralism: How is it that we come to believe the meaning we impose in order to hide the gaps and ambiguities?³¹

Thus post-structuralism does not attempt to construct universalities, but instead, while looking at the significance of the gaps and ambiguities, asks how we can ignore those gaps and believe the universalities. Michel Foucault in particular calls our belief in these supposed general laws, or discourses, like structuralism, into question. His works endeavor to discern how we can believe that knowledge is possible, that discourses are “true,” that we are objects that can be judged, thought about, studied, and categorized. The answer, for Foucault and other post-structuralists, is that the power differentials inherent in the gaps in the structures of meaning define and enforce discourses. The school focuses on the association between the social distribution of power and the construction of knowledge — for instance, following the line of questions addressed in Foucault’s *Discipline & Punish*, how is it that we came to believe a progress narrative of punishment? What institutions and practices shape us to believe particular discourses, and at what cost?

Foucault asks a question particularly salient to the aims of this project: “My question is this one: at what price can the subject tell the truth about himself?”³² He is

³¹ Bernard E. Harcourt, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Poststructuralism?’” (University of Chicago Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper No. 156, 2007), 17-18.

³² Michel Foucault, “Structuralisme et poststructuralisme,” in *Dits et écrits*

asking what it will take for the subject, the person who is construed as an object of study through the power/knowledge discourse, to tell the truth, which stands in opposition to the general laws derived from established structures. Foucault applies this question to authority, discipline, and sexuality; Butler asks the same question of gender. This thesis will ask the question regarding the colonized subject and the power/knowledge discourse established through linguistic imperialism.

Post-structuralism also influenced critical theory. Defined narrowly, critical theory is a branch of deconstructionist philosophy fomented in the German Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School, and particularly through the work of Max Horkheimer. If post-structuralism seeks to examine why hegemonic discourses are persuasive, and deconstruction as construed by Derrida is a rejection of those discourses, critical theory is a step further in presenting a practical alternative. Horkheimer defines critical theory, or what he called materialism, as that which seeks human liberation from slavery, which seeks to “create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings.³³ However, if what makes a theory critical is its aim to explain and change that which enslaves human beings, then critical theory includes a much broader field of work than the particular school led by Horkheimer.

In seeking to understand the circumstances of human bondage — material, ontological, and/or epistemological — critical theory draws from ethics, political philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies, and history. Critical theory is inherently interdisciplinary. This broader definition, which is more often presumed than that of the

1954-1988: *IV 1980-1988* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1983), 431-457. Translated in *Ibid*, 18.

³³ Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972; reprinted Continuum: New York, 1982), 246.

Frankfurt School, includes feminism, critical race theory, and post-colonial criticism. An important distinction between critical theory and post-structuralism/deconstruction is that latter operates as an internal critique — Foucault critiqued discourses surrounding discipline and sexuality from within those discourses, Marx and the Frankfurt School examined economic production and criticized capitalism from within the capitalist structure.

Critical theory, however, is an external critique. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said examines Occidentalism and its construction of the East as the inferior difference to the West from a position outside of the occidental. Frantz Fanon's work centers around a critique of the West and of colonization from the perspective of a Black Martinican who experienced the racist nature of colonization. Thus, closely related to critical theory is decolonial theory, which likewise critically analyzes the structures of colonization. However, decolonial theory developed within the specific geographical/political/historical milieu of colonization within Latin America. Decolonial theorists such as Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres — the three philosophers from whom this project draws most heavily — engage in a post-structuralist examination of colonial discourses in tandem with critical theory toward liberation and decolonized future.

Relying on the work of such decolonial thinkers, this thesis endeavors to provide an analysis and critique of the discourses surrounding European philosophies of language. Its aim is to deconstruct the structures that transformed subjects, the people inhabiting the continent that became America, into objects to be defined and colonized,

and ultimately, to answer Foucault's question — at what price can the [colonized] subject tell the truth about himself?

Chapter Three

Compañero del Imperio: How Spanish Became an Imperial Weapon

Dos armas son la lengua, y el espada, / Que si las gobernamos cual conviene, / Anda
nuestra persona bien guardada, / Y mil provechos su buen uso tiene / Pero cualquiera
dellas desmandada / Como de la cordura se enajene, / En el loco y sandio causa muerte, /
Y en el cuerdo y sagaz trueca la suerte.³⁴

The tongue and the sword are two weapons, / That if we govern them appropriately, /
Will keep us well-guarded, / And their use will bring us a thousand advantages. / But
whichever of them escapes us / As if driven from sanity / Will bring death to the lunatic
and the foolish, / And rescind the good fortune of the sane and the shrewd.³⁵

From Castilian to Spanish

Before Spanish *conquistadores* stepped foot on the soil of what would be called Latin America, the Castilian language already had a lengthy history as a political force. In the 13th century, the Iberian Peninsula was divided into eight states: Portugal, Galicia, Asturias, León, Castile, Navarra, Aragón, and the Muslim Almohad state in the south.³⁶

³⁷ Ramón Menéndez Pidal asserts that the Spanish language as it is currently spoken in Spain is the result of the three central Romance dialects of the Peninsula: Castilian, Astur-Leonese and Navarro-Aragonese; and that Castilian in particular played a colossal role in the development of Spanish.³⁸ Menéndez Pidal roots his “Castilian nationalist

³⁴ “Emblemas morales de Sebastián de Covarrubias,” *Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Española*, Departamento de Filología Española e Latina - Universidade da Coruña, Emblema 66, Libro 3. <https://www.bidiso.es/EmblematicaHispanica/FindEmblems4Work.do?action=Open&author=COVARRUBIAS+HOROZCO%2C+Sebasti%2E1n&briefTitle=Emblemas+morales+de+Sebasti%2E1n+de+Covarrubias&startIndex=1&count=1&first=0&startIndexEmblem=266>

³⁵ Translation mine.

³⁶ Tore Janson, *Speak: A Short History of Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 167.

³⁷ Refer to Appendix 1.

³⁸ Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, “Menéndez Pidal and the beginnings of Ibero-Romance Dialectology: a critical survey one century later,” in *Ramón Menéndez Pidal after Forty Years: A Reassessment*, ed. Juan-

views”³⁹ primarily in literature, arguing that Castilian was the first language to have its own literature, the epic poem, ignoring that much of what is left of epic poetry from the region is in Leonese or Aragonese. Moreover, his focus on literature as a metric for linguistic development or significance denies the persistence of Gallego, Asturiano, and Leonese dialects in the modern era.

Because of this literary nationalism, Menéndez Pidal’s most renowned work, *Orígenes del español* (1926), fails to fully consider the roles of Astur-Leonese and Navarro-Aragonese in the development of the Spanish language. His incomplete *Historia de la lengua* (published posthumously in 2005) demonstrates a desire to account for the merging of Castilian with Aragonese and Leonese, although he maintains throughout his writings that Castilian’s literary presence earned it the title of *la lengua común española*, and not other romance dialects spoken in the regions of Spain: “El castellano, por servir de instrumento a una literatura más importante que las de otras regiones de España, y sobre todo por haber absorbido en sí otros dos romances principales hablados en la Península (el leonés y el navarro-aragonés) recibe más propiamente el nombre de lengua española.”⁴⁰ Moreover, subsequent scholars of Menéndez Pidal have for the most part passed over this syncretic analysis in favor of a theory of Castilianization, in which Castilian was imposed on linguistically distinct territories.⁴¹

Carlos Conde (London: Department of Hispanic Studies, Queen Mary, University of London, 2010), 114-115.

³⁹ Ibid 128.

⁴⁰ Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *Manual de gramática histórica española* (Madrid: 1940), 2. My translation: Castilian, by serving as the instrument of a literature more important than the others from other regions of Spain, and above all by having absorbed into itself two other principal romance dialects spoken in the Peninsula (Leonese and Navarro-Aragonese) receives most appropriately the name of the Spanish language. Considering the argument this thesis is making, that languages can colonize or liberate, quotations will be in their original languages in the text, and a translation will be provided when necessary in the footnotes.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Scholars' infidelity to the influence of Leonese and Navarro-Aragonese can perhaps be excused, however, because Menéndez Pidal's work dealt above all with the *phonetic* development of *la lengua común española*; Castilianization is a more defensible theory if it is used to analyze the *political* development of Spanish. In the early thirteenth century, a new Ibero-Romance writing style began to replace traditional Latin writing style on the Peninsula. This style gradually developed semantic, lexical, and syntactic changes that reflected regional speech more accurately than did Latinate writing. In Toledo, local government mainly used Arabic, but soon the new written Romances — regional, colloquial languages derived from Latin — took over as knowledge of written Arabic gradually diminished.⁴² Important documents such as the Treaty of Cabreros of 1206, the Posturas of the Cortes of Toledo of January 1207, a few regional laws in Toledo, and even the famed *Cantar de Mio Cid* (written somewhere around the beginning of the thirteenth century) appeared in written Romance form. Due to political power granted to a few Latinists who exhibited hostility toward written Romance, its use particularly in Castile fell away soon into the century, but once Fernando III came to the throne in 1217, Romance writing was quickly rehabilitated.⁴³ Its development as a proper form for legal texts accelerated in the 1240s as monastic centers in Castile began using Romance for transactional documents. This change in writing forms may likely be attributed to the increase of Romance *fueros*, or compilations of relational laws, in

⁴² Roger Wright “The prehistory of written Spanish and the thirteenth-century nationalist zeitgeist,” in *A Political History of Spanish: The Making of a Language*, ed. José del Valle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 39.

⁴³ *Ibid* 41.

Castile; the writing style worked well for *fueros*, because it made it easier for the documents to be read aloud in public to a wide audience.⁴⁴

The success of Romance in Castile is ultimately attributed to Alfonso X (r. 1252-1284), who lent Romance political prestige and validated its status as a separate language from Latin by having his *Fuero Real* of 1255-1256 written in both Latin and Romance. The use of Romance in court documents in Castile rendered at least two significant effects: The concept of a specifically Castilian Romance emerged, and Leonese lost political and practical value as the need for more than one Romance writing mode at court was non-existent. At the same time, Alfonso brought respect to written Galician through his own use of the language for his lyrical poetic compositions; however, it was *romance castellano* that maintained prestige as a political writing style. Written Romance, which was originally developed to aid reading aloud, became not only linguistic but also political as Alfonso utilized *romance castellano* in his pursuit of international prestige for Castile. Meanwhile, other regions of the Peninsula, such as Portugal, Galicia, and Catalunya, developed their own metalinguistic identities and writing styles as they became separate political entities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Tore Janson establishes that it was the new Romance mode of writing that inspired the concept of Romance as a separate language, and not the other way around. While the Castilian Romance writing style continued its development from the reign of Alfonso X through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to understand its codification as a unique linguistic entity it is most useful to examine Castile in 1492.⁴⁵ In this year, Elio

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Janson, *Speak*, 168.

Antonio de Nebrija published what is generally regarded as the first European vernacular grammar, his *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, solidifying Castilian's reputation as an imperial language. Meanwhile, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile had married in 1469, and by the end of the century their union had allowed Castile to become the strongest kingdom on the Peninsula.⁴⁶

Nebrija's grammar introduces the modern era to a philosophy of language that does not ignore its relation to political power. This is clearly seen in the famous dictum contained in the prologue to the *Gramática: siempre la lengua fue compañero del imperio*, or "Language was always the companion of empire." Menéndez Pidal characterizes Nebrija as a "visionary whose linguistic ideas about the peninsular and global victory of Spanish predated the actual events,"⁴⁷ who wrote his grammar "en la esperanza cierta del Nuevo Mundo,"⁴⁸ in the certain hope of a New World, which no one had sailed yet to reach. It is significant that Nebrija's work, after its original publication in 1492 in Salamanca, would not be reprinted until the eighteenth century.⁴⁹ The first Castilian grammar, though often lauded as the signal of the unification of Spain and the homogenization of its language, would in reality have little to no effect on linguist scholars of the Peninsula in the fifteenth century. However, Nebrija's ideas concerning the relationship between language and empire would soon be confirmed in the New World.

⁴⁶ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 29.

⁴⁷ Miguel Martínez, "Language, nation and empire in early modern Iberia," in José del Valle, ed., *A Political History of Spanish: The Making of a Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44.

⁴⁸ Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *El lenguaje del siglo XVI* (Madrid: Cruz y Raya, 1933), 11.

⁴⁹ Martínez, "Language, nation and empire in early modern Iberia," 45.

“The Vanquished Receive the Language of the Vanquisher, Surrendering Their Own with Their Land and People.”⁵⁰

The moment in which Nebrija presented his Castilian grammar to Queen Isabella in 1492 is frozen in time as the beginning of the imperial rule of the Spanish language, a sentiment represented by the words of Nebrija’s prologue: “Soon Your Majesty will have placed her yoke upon many barbarians who speak outlandish tongues. By this, your victory, these people shall stand in a new need; the need for the laws the victor owes to the vanquished, and the need for the language we shall bring with us.”⁵¹ Throughout his work, Nebrija emphasizes that it is language that sets human beings apart from the other animals. The elevation of language fits snugly into Nebrija’s humanist ideology, which — with its emphasis on the medieval trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the *studia humanitatis* (reading and writing in Latin and vernacular tongues)⁵² — understood well the power of a unified language, a pact between “armas y letras,” to civilize barbarian populations.

Nebrija and Queen Isabella both originally looked to a Castilian grammar as a means to unify the Iberian Peninsula, and not as a tool or model for overseas colonization. On March 31, 1492, Isabella and King Ferdinand signed an Edict of Expulsion, or the Alhambra Decree, giving all Jews in Spain (which at this time constituted all of the Peninsula except for the kingdoms of Portugal and Navarre) four months to convert or leave.⁵³ Some scholars estimate that less than a quarter of the

⁵⁰ Bernardo Aldrete, *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana, o Romance que oy se vsa en España* (Madrid: 1674).

⁵¹ Elio Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (Salamanca: 1492; London: Oxford University Press, 1926), preface. Cited in Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 344.

⁵² Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 39.

⁵³ David Fintz Altabé, “The Significance of 1492 to the Jews and Muslims of Spain,” *Hispania* 75, no.3 (Sept. 1992): 729.

population chose to convert, while the majority emptied the *juderías*⁵⁴ across Spain and fled to Portugal (which withdrew its tolerance of Judaism in 1497), Navarre (which withdrew support in 1498), north Africa, and Turkey; other scholars contest that the majority chose conversion, and those who left did so gradually.⁵⁵ The estimations for the total number of Jewish refugees emigrating from Spain immediately following the Edict range from a conservative 50,000 to more than 150,000.⁵⁶ Regardless, one can imagine the trauma experienced by Jewish Spaniards who were either forced to sell their belongings and flee their homes, or disavow their faith and live as marginalized *conversos*.

Meanwhile, the *Reconquista* was already well underway, as the Muslim Nasrid kingdom of Granada in the south of the Peninsula had fallen to Ferdinand and Isabella's Christian kingdoms in 1491. A series of edicts from 1499 to 1526 forced Muslims remaining in Granada and throughout Spain to convert to Christianity, until in 1605 Spanish Muslims were also expelled from the Spanish empire.

It was the influx of wealth afforded to the Spanish crown by the expulsion of Muslims in Granada that funded Columbus's voyage in 1492 and began a new era of Spanish imperialism.⁵⁷ The philosophy of language articulated in Nebrija's *Gramática* provided the ideological framework to enable Isabella and Ferdinand to see themselves not only as conquerors but also as civilizers.⁵⁸ Understanding this shift necessitates

⁵⁴ Jewish quarters, also commonly known by the Arabic *aljama*.

⁵⁵ Henry Kamen, "The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492," *Past & Present* No. 119 (May, 1988), 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ David Fintz Altabé, "The Significance of 1492 to the Jews and Muslims of Spain," *Hispania* 75, no.3 (Sept. 1992): 728.

⁵⁸ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 41.

understanding the traditions on which Nebrija's argument rested — specifically, St. Augustine and the merging of Platonic and Christian thought, and Lorenzo Valla's *De elegantia latinae linguae* (1435-44). Saint Augustine, as a neoplatonist and a Christian, assumed “an original unity from which the complicity of things came,”⁵⁹ including a single original language. Augustine's syncretism of neoplatonism and Christianity emphasized the need for and power of a unified language to counteract the pluralism that followed Babel, and this thought influenced Nebrija's imagination toward Castilian as a unifying force.

Meanwhile, Valla's *De elegantia latinae linguae* proposed a program to save the Holy Roman Empire that recognized the role of language in imperial expansion. Valla contrasted the Latin of his ancestors with that of the expanding Roman Empire and highlighted the role Latin had once played in geographical and political conquests. By projecting this philosophy of language onto the Holy Roman Empire, he foresaw the empire's recovery of its power and predicted the role a unified Italy would play in the development of Europe. As Nebrija encountered Valla's work while he was in Italy, he could imagine a Spanish empire similarly empowered by the force of language.⁶⁰

Nebrija's philosophy of language rested on the union of “armas y letras,” but its development into an ideology to guide Spanish imperialism was also rooted in another axiom from the *Gramática*: to write as we pronounce and to pronounce as we write.⁶¹ He was obsessed with the concept of the letter, and believed that the alphabet was one of the greatest achievements of human civilization. According to Nebrija, the letter was superior

⁵⁹ Ibid 40.

⁶⁰ Ibid 41.

⁶¹ Nebrija, *Gramática castellana*, book 1, chap. 10, *Reglas de la ortografía en la lengua castellana* (1517), second principle. Cited in Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 345.

to other forms of writing; this he demonstrated by highlighting the distance between the graphic sign and the voice — the figure of the right hand stretched out could represent generosity, but it could not give any indication of the proper pronunciation; it could not “control the voice.”⁶² A language that wished to unify and subjugate conquered people could not be left to interpretation; but a careful grammarian could tame the voice through the codification of the letter.

Thus the *conquistadores* landed in the New World not only with swords and arquebuses and calvary, but also with the double-edged dagger of linguistic imperial ideology: A genealogy that began with Augustine’s original language and traced the lengthy history of the development of Castilian framed the Spanish language as a member of a prestigious legacy.⁶³ Swiss philologist Konrad von Gesner considered all languages barbarian except Greek, Latin, and Hebrew (which many consider to be Augustine’s original language). Castilian was at least rooted in Latin — how quickly would Indigenous languages that spread no etymological roots into Gesner’s respectable languages be labeled barbarian. Meanwhile, Nebrija’s turn to the significance of the letter provided another argument for the superiority of Castilian over Indigenous languages. Whereas spoken Castilian was treated to a prestigious location in a synchronic hierarchy, written Castilian was celebrated as the peak of an evolutionary model: Nebrija shared the sentiment with other linguists that the letter represented an evolutionary stage beyond sign systems, which were employed by many Indigenous cultures at the time of conquest and colonization. Pedro de Gante, the first Franciscan to arrive in Mexico after

⁶² Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 42.

⁶³ *Ibid* 44.

Tenochtitlan fell, wrote to Philip II that the Amerindians were “gente sin escriptura, sin letras, sin caracteres y sin lumbre de cosa alguna.”⁶⁴

Pre-Columbian Civilizations

In reality, as demonstrated by the following examples, the civilizations and people groups inhabiting the American peninsula prior to colonization were often complex, organized societies with equally complex religious customs, power structures, and language systems. One of the first known organized civilizations in Mesoamerica, the Olmecs, built elaborate religious and ceremonial centers in the jungles of what is now Veracruz, along the Gulf Coast of Mexico, around 1500 B.C.E.⁶⁵ The Olmecs established far-reaching interregional trade routes, and although the civilization declined sharply around 400 B.C.E., later societies like the Aztecs and Mayas were highly influenced by the Olmecs. In fact the word *olmec* is a Nahuatl⁶⁶ word for “rubber people,” as the Olmecs were known to have traded rubber, and it is unknown what the Olmecs called themselves. The Teotihuacan people built the great city of Teotihuacan sometime around 200 B.C.E., establishing the first grid city of the Americas. Little is known of the Teotihuacan people, as the city was abandoned by the time the Aztecs found and claimed it around 700 C.E. Nonetheless, it once housed upwards of 200,000 inhabitants, and as such also claims the title of the first major metropolis in the Americas.

⁶⁴ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 45. My translation: a people without writing, without letters, without characters, and without enlightenment of any kind.

⁶⁵ Charles A. Truxillo, *By the Sword and the Cross: The Historical Evolution of the Catholic World Monarchy in Spain and the New World, 1492-1825* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 4.

⁶⁶ Nahuatl is the language of the Aztecs/Mexicas.

The Maya, who occupied the Yucatan peninsula and parts of modern-day Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, reached their height during the Classic period (from about 300 C.E. to 900 C.E.). By this time, Maya culture was “highly stratified, with a ruler at the apex of six or seven clearly defined social classes. A complex cosmology held places for gods, natural forces and ancestors. An elaborate calendar provided the framework for ritual and historical events.”⁶⁷ Ceremonial centers, which formed the cores of large cities, hosted religious rituals. The Maya people employed a fully developed written language through hieroglyphics, which is significant, among other reasons, because it proves that writing developed at least twice independently (once in Eurasia, and once with the Mayas).⁶⁸ Although the great Mayan cities such as Chichen Itza were abandoned by the time the Spaniards arrived to the Yucatan (the apogee of both the Maya and the Teotihuacan cultures coincides with the fall of the Roman Empire)⁶⁹, the Maya people still lived in the region and were colonized by the *conquistadores*.

The Inca civilization settled in the Andes mountains in what is now Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia in the fifteenth century, and it would soon become the largest empire ever seen in the Americas, and the largest in the world at that time. The hardy Inca people navigated three ecological zones of mountains, coast, and tropical forest; and organized into groups called *ayllus*, the Quechua word for “family” or “lineage.”⁷⁰ Members of each *ayllu* shared communal landholdings and were considered kinship; the

⁶⁷ Norman Hammond, “The Emergence of Maya Civilization,” *Scientific American* Vol. 255, No. 2 (August 1986), 106.

⁶⁸ Janson, *Speak*, 188.

⁶⁹ Miguel Leon-Portilla, ed., *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), xxix.

⁷⁰ Gary Urton, *Inca Myths* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 8.

economy of each *ayllu* consisted of trade between members who lived in the lowlands of the tropical forests, the high altitudes of the mountains, and in between. The Incas developed systems of steppes and terraced fields to cultivate tubers and quinoa at high altitudes, and grew cacao, chili peppers, and avocados in the lowlands. They also used alpaca and llama as sources of food and clothing.⁷¹ The capital city of the Inca empire was Cusco, which was divided into four ritual and administrative districts called *suyus*.⁷²

The Inca king, or the *sapa Inca* (“unique/sole Inca”) was believed to be the earthly manifestation of the sun, Inti; and the queen (*coya*) was the closest human descendent of Mamakilya, the moon. Under the androgynous creator god Viracocha, the sun represented the beginning of the masculine hierarchy of deities, which continued with Lord Earth and then to human men; and the moon was the center of the religious realm designated to the care of Inca women; this lineage of deity continued with Mamacocho, the Sea Mother.⁷³ As will be discussed later, the Inca empire was in the midst of civil war when the *conquistador* Francisco Pizarro arrived in Peru, a factor which in large part made it possible for the Spaniards to overthrow the massive empire.

In the ninth century C.E., the Toltecs occupied the area surrounding Teotihuacan and spoke the Nahuatl language before their Mexica descendents. The Toltecs centered cultural and ritual life around their “great culture-hero”⁷⁴ Quetzalcoatl, a deity passed down from the Teotihuacan people. Later Indigenous texts describe the Toltecs as superbly dedicated worshippers and skilled craftsmen; so much so that in the later

⁷¹ Paul R. Steel and Catherine J. Allen, *Handbook of Inca Mythology* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 5.

⁷² *Ibid* 10.

⁷³ Irene Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 48.

⁷⁴ Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, xxx.

Mexica civilization the word *toltec* would become a Nahuatl noun for “artist.” The Toltecs’ cultural achievements spread so far beyond their city of Tula that their influence has been found in the Mayan religious center at Chichen Itza, and the Mayan people experienced a cultural renaissance due to this Toltec influence. However, like many civilizations before them, the Toltecs ultimately abandoned Tula, possibly because of northern invasions. Afterward, numerous city states began to emerge along the shores of Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico.

The Mexica⁷⁵ people were the last of the nomadic tribes to arrive in the valley from the north, but when they migrated south in the middle of the thirteenth century, the flourishing city states all drove them away. Thus the “indomitable” people group established themselves on an island in the middle of the lake; this occurred, according to their ancient codices, in 1325.⁷⁶ By the time of the conquest, the capital city Tenochtitlan had been expanded by means of fills until it was a roughly equal square of two miles on each side. Laborers employed *chinampas*, floating rectangular areas of land in the shallows of the lake, to cultivate crops. On the north, it was joined to Tlatelolco, another island city which had been annexed by the Mexicas in 1473. On the east, across the wide expanse of the lake, lay Texcoco, a city state that would eventually become a powerful ally; and on the west a causeway connected Tenochtitlan with its ally, the kingdom of Tlacopan.⁷⁷

Mexica society was stratified, beginning at the top with the *tlatoani*, or king, and then to the class of the nobles, the *pipiltin*. Although the *pipiltin* received the best

⁷⁵ Also known as the Aztecs, this civilization will be referred to as the Mexicas throughout this paper.

⁷⁶ Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, xxxi.

⁷⁷ Refer to Appendix 2.

education — reading, writing astrology — the common citizens, or *macehualtin*, were also mandated to attend the communal schools (*telpochcalli*), and learned agriculture, warfare, and artisan trades. In addition to these two main social groups, the *mayeques* were land laborers, both serfs and slaves; and the *tlamatinime* were groups of wise men who maintained belief in only one god, the Giver of Life who went by many names. Thus although the Spanish *conquistadores* regarded the Mexicas as idolatrous and polytheistic, at least in the upper social levels only one deity was worshipped.

By the fifteenth century, Mexica gender roles were best described by “gender parallelism,” in that there existed parallel social structures and cultural configurations for men and women.⁷⁸ This is not to say that Mexica society was egalitarian; there was certainly a gender hierarchy, but women played significant roles in many areas of life. According to Susan Kellogg, “in late pre-Hispanic Tenochtitlan, gender roles and relationships consisted of both complementary and hierarchical elements. Generally, however, the former outweighed the latter.”⁷⁹ Amongst other significant roles, a Mexican woman could act as *tlatocacihuatl*, the wife of a high official, who herself acted as a governor and administrator and whose position demanded obedience; or as a *tianquizpan tlayacanqui*, an administrator of the marketplace.

The city state of Tenochtitlan grew in power in part because of the leadership of Itzcoatl, who ruled from 1428 to 1440. It was he who joined with Nezahualcoyotl, king of Texcoco, to defeat the powerful kingdom of Azcapotzalco on the western shore; together

⁷⁸ Susan Kellogg, “The Woman's Room: Some Aspects of Gender Relations in Tenochtitlan in the Late Pre-Hispanic Period,” *Ethnohistory* Vol. 42, No. 4: Women, Power, and Resistance in Colonial Mesoamerica (Autumn 1995), 564.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

with Tlacopan they formed a “triple alliance.”⁸⁰ During Izcoatl’s reign, the Mexicas began to claim descendancy from the Toltecs, and the Mexica war-god Huitzilopochtli was raised to the same level as the ancient Toltec creative god, Quetzalcoatl. Then the Mexicas began expanding, conquering and making tributaries of city states first around the shore of the lake, and then toward the Gulf coast in the east, and ultimately toward the south, annexing present-day Oaxaca and Chiapas. By 1519, the year Spanish *conquistadores* arrived in the Valley of Mexico, the Mexicas ruled over several million people, and Tenochtitlan itself housed well over a quarter of a million.⁸¹

This brief overview of several major Indigenous civilizations has established a general geographical and cultural landscape of the continent prior to the conquest. Ideally it has demonstrated that the Maya, Inca, and Mexica people lived in complex, organized societies with deep religious and cultural traditions. The languages and record-keeping systems of these civilizations will be discussed in the next chapter, while this overview is sufficient to provide a contrast to the peoples and lands once Europeans arrived.

Analyzing European Conquest

Attempts to explain relative European success in conquering Indigenous populations in the Americas have historically trod into racial determinism, bringing forth racist ideologies that suggest European conquerors were simply superior to the Indigenous people.⁸² A more recent interpretation of the events of the past takes into

⁸⁰ Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, xxxviii.

⁸¹ *Ibid* xli.

⁸² John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 21-22.

consideration three factors: “Guns, Germs, and Steel.”⁸³ This view, amplified by UCLA professor Jared Diamond, argues that Eurasian hegemony and success in conquest is not due to any form of Eurasian moral, intellectual, or genetic superiority. Rather, external factors allowed Eurasia to develop technology such as gunpowder and steel ships, which gave *conquistadores* a supposed technological advantage. Geography in particular plays a major role in this theory: that Eurasia is longitudinally oriented allowed for easier dissemination of ideas and technology, while America’s latitudinal orientation thwarted interregional intellectual trade.

The brief summary of the Indigenous civilizations given above, however, readily proves that pre-Columbian societies engaged in trade and contact throughout the continent. For instance, the Mexicas recognized a god of merchants and trade routes called Yacatecuhtli, and the *pochteca*, the professional merchants, traveled as far as what is now the United States Southwest to trade jade, turquoise, precious metals, feathers from tropical birds, and cacao with the Ancestral Puebloans.⁸⁴ Aztec cosmology and religious tradition included an elaborate ritual that the *pochteca* performed each night that they camped during a trade expedition. Yacatecuhtli’s symbol is a bundle of sticks, and so the merchants each carried a a traveling cane. In the evening, the *pochteca* tied their canes together into a bundle and adorned the bundle with strips of willow paper. Then, they would pierce their tongues and ears as an act of submission to the god and

⁸³ Derived from the title of Jared Diamond’s 1997 *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*.

⁸⁴ Refer to Appendix 3.

sprinkle the blood onto the papers, which they would subsequently burn as an offering to Yacatecuhtli for protection and good fortune during trade.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, the Inca empire built an elaborate road system which ran through present-day Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, and Argentina, and comprised around 23,000 kilometers of interlinking roads.⁸⁶ This massive system obviously allowed for cultural and economic trade throughout and beyond the Inca empire. The long-distance trade system employed by the Maya has also been well-documented. Trace element analyses have indicated that the Maya people traded obsidian, salt, corn, beans, and squash interregionally from the Gulf of Mexico, throughout modern-day Belize and Yucatan, and to Chichen Itza, where they came into contact with the Mexicas as well.⁸⁷ While a thorough analysis of Pre-Columbian trade routes would require a thesis in itself, these facts alone demonstrate that while economic and cultural transmission between Indigenous societies may have been affected by geographic features and the longitudinal orientation of the Americas, these factors clearly did not prevent trade and transmission.

Due to his emphasis on geography in rationalizing the success of European conquerors, Diamond has been criticized for reviving the theory of environmental determinism. This theory suggests that the physical environment predisposes societies or civilizations to certain trajectories — here, that the physical environment of Europe predisposed the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and English to conquer the Amerindians and other civilizations. Environmental determinism has been linked with eugenics, and its

⁸⁵ Franke J. Neumann, “Paper: A Sacred Material in Aztec Ritual,” *History of Religions* Vol. 13, No. 2 (November 1973), 158.

⁸⁶ John Hyslop, *The Inka Road System* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984).

⁸⁷ Traci Ardren and Justin Lowry, “The travels of Maya merchants in the ninth and tenth centuries AD: investigations at Xuenkal and the Greater Cupul Province, Yucatan, Mexico,” *World Archaeology* Vol. 43, No. 3 (September 2011), 429.

emphasis on climate and geography determining human activity and psychology supports beliefs that some people groups are “naturally” superior to others. Thus, in the case of Diamond’s argument, this theory lends European conquerors a convenient deniability of human agency. He has also been critiqued for his use of the term “Eurasia,” which may mislead his readers into believing western Europe to be responsible for Middle Eastern and Asia technological advances such as gunpowder or the printing press.⁸⁸

Despite the eurocentric errors in Diamond’s theory, one aspect that must be considered in the conquests of the Americas is disease: “...the critical factor in the European conquest and collapse of New World civilization was disease, deadly illnesses that devastated native Americans weeks and even years before the foreigners were faced directly, for sickness spread from one native group to another.”⁸⁹ The Spaniards who colonized Hispaniola and other Caribbean islands, which were the first areas Columbus encountered, were fresh off an outbreak of typhus in Spain in the late 1480s and early 1490s, and also carried diseases such as smallpox, measles, and bubonic and pneumonic plagues — diseases against which the Spaniards had developed immunity, but which the Taíno of the Caribbean had never encountered.⁹⁰ Disease was coupled with outright military conquest — horses in particular were useful on the Caribbean islands — to initially overthrow Indigenous populations that would then be subjected to slavery and exploitation in mines and plantations, rape, and pillage. The process was repeated throughout the Americas.

⁸⁸ See for example James M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.

⁹⁰ *Ibid* 18.

Columbus, Disease, and the Fall of Tenochtitlan

As is well known, Columbus departed on his first voyage in search of western access to Asia in 1492. By this time, the Reconquista was well under way, and Isabella and Ferdinand were able to finance Columbus's trip with their spoils from expelling Muslims from Spain. Columbus's famed three ships made landfall on October 12 not in Asia, as Columbus believed, but rather on one of the islands contained in present-day Bahamas. When Columbus turned back to Europe in 1493, he left behind a small number of men to establish a colony, La Navidad, on the island he had named Hispaniola. What occurred on that island and its neighboring Caribbean archipelagos would be mirrored again and again throughout the period of conquest.

The people group residing on Hispaniola were the Taíno, a subgroup of the greater Arawak people group united by the language of Arawak. Scholarship on the Taíno has failed to pinpoint a significantly more convincing estimate of the Indigenous population in 1492 than that offered by a German settler, Nikolaus Federmann, who lived on Hispaniola from 1529-30 and 1531-32: "It is hopeless to speak of the natives or inhabitants of this land, because forty years have already passed since the conquest of the island, and... almost all are gone... of five hundred thousand... inhabitants of various nations and languages that existed on the island forty years ago, there remain fewer than twenty thousand living."⁹¹ In 1496 the port city of Santo Domingo was founded on the south coast of the island, and it soon became the main point of entry into the New World

⁹¹ Nikolaus Federmann, *Historia indiana*, trans. Juan Freide (Madrid: Artes Gráficas, 1958), 29.

from Europe. Meanwhile, the Indigenous populations of the island were “virtually extinct”⁹² by 1542, a mere half-century after Columbus’s arrival.

To examine the processes of conquest employed by the Spaniards, we will examine in particular the conquest of the Valley of Mexico and the subsequent fall of Tenochtitlan. Spaniards first set foot on the coast of Veracruz, Mexico, on Good Friday, April 22, 1519.⁹³ Because of the extant Spanish presence in the Caribbean, by the time Hernán Cortés encountered the Mexica empire, he had been witness to and participant in the conquest and enslavement of Indigenous peoples for fifteen years.⁹⁴ Aside from his previous experience with conquest, Cortés strode into Tenochtitlan on November 8th also accompanied by six hundred Spanish soldiers and a “great many” Indigenous allies — enemies of the Mexica empire.⁹⁵ The emperor who stepped out to greet him, Motecuhzoma II, did not yet play the role of the vanquished, but rather of the host.

The Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún recorded in his sixteenth-century *Codex Florentino* the events leading up to and during the conquest, as told in Nahuatl by his Indigenous informants.⁹⁶ According to this text, the Mexicas observed eight omens in the ten years prior to Cortés’s arrival in Tenochtitlan, including a flaming visage in the night sky for a full year, and the temple of the war-god Huitzilopochtli bursting into flames of its own accord: “And now it is burning, the wooden columns are burning! The flames, the tongues of fire shoot out, the bursts of fire shoot up into the sky!”⁹⁷ Other signs including the lake of Texcoco flooding, a strange bird the color of ash with an

⁹² Cook, *Born to Die*, 16.

⁹³ Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, xxv.

⁹⁴ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 49.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Refer to Appendix 4.

⁹⁷ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 5.

ominous mirror on the crown of its head, and monstrous beings with two heads walking through the streets of Tenochtitlan — these they called *tlacantzolli*, “men-squeezed-together.”⁹⁸ One of the most foreboding signs was the passing of a weeping woman through the city in the middle of the night. She cried out night after night, “My children, we must flee far away from this city! My children, where shall I take you?”⁹⁹ This is apparently a reference to Cihuacoatl, an ancient earth goddess who wept in the night, and who is one of the antecedents of *la llorona*.¹⁰⁰

Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc’s *Cronica mexicana* records that Motecuhzoma consulted various *tlamatinime* and seers to discern what was meant by the omens, but they could not give him a satisfactory answer. Instead, a *macehual* (common man) arrived from the Gulf coast to Tenochtitlan and relayed that he had seen “towers or small mountains floating on the waves of the sea.”¹⁰¹ Later, another report from the coast described strange people with light skin, long beards, and hair that only came to their ears.

It has commonly been reported that Motecuhzoma believed that the arrivers might be Quetzalcoatl and other divinities returning to the Mexicas, and indeed this is the explanation given in such accounts as Tezozomoc’s chronicle and Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*. In fact one of the first times the idea that the Mexicas believed the Spaniards to be divine showed up in print was in the 1552 account of the conquest written by Cortés’s secretary and chaplain, Francisco López de Gómora. Gómora himself had never been to the New World, but recorded that

⁹⁸ Ibid 11.

⁹⁹ Ibid 6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 12.

¹⁰¹ Ibid 13.

when the Mexica men saw the Spaniards, they exclaimed, “These men are gods!”¹⁰² Modern scholarship, however, has argued that the Mexicas were never under the impression that the Spaniards were divinity, and that the pervading narrative that says otherwise originated as a means to justify the actions of the *conquistadores*. Camila Townsend writes, “... it perhaps comes as no surprise that the relatively powerful conquistadors and their cultural heirs should prefer to dwell on the Indians’ adulation for them, rather than on their pain, rage, or attempted military defense.”¹⁰³ Restall concludes that “The Spaniards-as-god myth makes sense only if natives are assumed to be ‘primitive,’ childlike, or half-witted [but]... there was no apotheosis, no ‘belief that the Spaniards are gods’, and no resulting native paralysis.”¹⁰⁴ Bernhard¹⁰⁵ and further work by Townsend¹⁰⁶ concur that there is little substantial evidence of a Nahuatl prophecy regarding the return of Quetzalcoatl as a white-skinned man prior to the records of the conquest written by Spaniards.

It is thus improbable, despite the popularity of the myth, that Motecuhzoma believed Cortés to be divine. What is certain is that as Cortés approached the city, he did not come alone, but rather with the aid of Indigenous allies from the city of Tlaxcala. Tlaxcala was located between the Gulf Coast and Tenochtitlan, and its inhabitants, like

¹⁰² Lesley Byrd Simpson, trans. and ed., *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary* (Berkeley, 1965), excerpted from Francisco López de Gómora, *Historia de la conquista de México* (Zaragoza, 1552), 137.

¹⁰³ Camila Townsend, “Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 108, No. 3 (June 2003), 660.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108.

¹⁰⁵ Roland Bernhard, “‘Be Welcome in Your Country My Lords’: the Story of Quetzalcoatl and the Spanish Gods in Textbooks As a Spanish Construction to Justify the Conquest,” *History Education Research Journal* Vol. 13, No. 1 (Autumn 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Camila Townsend, “No One Said it was Quetzalcoatl: Listening to the Indians in the Conquest of Mexico,” *History Compass* Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 2003).

the Mexicas, spoke Nahuatl. However, Tlaxcala was one of the few cities near the lake that had managed to avoid becoming encapsulated in the Mexica empire, and as such, the Tlaxcaltecas were already situated as enemies to Tenochtitlan. Believing, like other Indigenous allies, that the Spaniards merely desired material wealth, and had no imperial inclinations, Tlaxcala allied with Cortés.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, as the band of Spaniards drew near to Tenochtitlan, they were accompanied by two individuals crucial to the imperial enterprise: Gerónimo de Aguilar, a Spaniard who had been shipwrecked on the Yucatec coast seven years prior; and Malintzin, the infamous Mayan slave who was given to Cortés by the people of Tabasco in 1519. Aguilar spoke Yucatec Maya, and Malintzin spoke both Maya and Nahuatl, and it was through this chain of interpretation that Cortés was able to communicate with Motecuhzoma.

Malintzin's story offers a poignant example of the mistreatment of Indigenous women through the narratives crafted by Spanish historians and perpetuated throughout Mexican culture. Malintzin is perhaps more commonly known by another name, La Malinche, which originally served to designate her as the woman of the captain, Cortés. However, the word *malinchista* is now used, especially in Mexico, to ridicule someone for being a traitor or a disloyal compatriot.¹⁰⁸ Malintzin is also known as "la Eva mexicana," the Mexican Eve, which draws an obvious comparison between the Maya slave and the first woman of the Genesis creation narrative. Malintzin, also known by her baptismal name of Marina, is also compared to the serpent: "Recourse to the biblical

¹⁰⁷ Thomas J. Brinkerhoff, "Reexamining the Lore of the 'Archetypal Conquistador': Hernán Cortés and the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Empire, 1519-1521," *The History Teacher* Vol. 49 No. 2 (February 2016), 177-178.

¹⁰⁸ Juan M. Lope Blanch, *Léxico indígena en el español de México* (El Colegio de México: 1969), 52.

image of the serpent gives Marina a dual negative role: she is the serpent in the way she instigates evil as well as the Eve whose acquiescence allows the evil to enter paradise.” Despite Malinztin’s negative portrayal throughout history as a traitor to the Mexica people and an enamored mistress to Cortés, in reality she was a slave, both sexual and political. Her example demonstrates the argument underlying this thesis, that the appropriation of knowledge production in the Americas by the Spanish distorted the story of conquest and colonization by applying a Western lens to factual events.

To return to the conquest of Mexica, the Spaniards and their Indigenous allies arrived at Tenochtitlan on November 8, 1519. The events that followed have been well-documented by both Nahuatl and Spanish chroniclers. Motecuhzoma, his nobles, and the chieftains of the Triple-Alliance went out to greet Cortés in the avenue linking Tenochtitlan to the mainland, and the emperor bestowed many gifts on the *conquistador* (likely because he was accompanied by a sizable Indigenous force). When the Spaniards entered the Royal House, they placed Motecuhzoma under guard, demanded supplies, and seized the gold and treasures of Tenochtitlan. Months later, Cortés was gone from the city and the Mexicas were preparing to celebrate Toxcatl, the fiesta for the god Huitzilopochtli.¹⁰⁹ Cortés’s deputy, Pedro de Alvarado, gave the order in the middle of the dancing in the temple patio to kill the celebrants. The Spaniards closed the gates into the patio and posted guards so no one could escape, and then they slaughtered those contained within. “The blood of the warriors flowed like water and gathered into pools. The pools widened, and the stench of blood and entrails filled the air... the people shouted and wailed and beat their palms against their mouths.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 70.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 76-77.

In response, the Mexicas entered into battle against the Spaniards with arrows and javelins. The Spaniards, in turn, chained Motecuhzoma and sequestered themselves with him inside the Royal House. In the days that followed (twenty-three, according to the *Codex florentino*), the people of Tenochtitlan besieged the palace, refusing to deliver food to those inside. Cortés returned with more Spanish troops and fired cannons on the city; the Mexicas retaliated by re-engaging in battle for four more days. During this time, Motecuhzoma's body was removed from the palace and brought to the water's edge; the cause of his death is still debated. On the night of June 30, 1520, Cortés, having recognized that he was outnumbered, led his men to retreat over the Tlacopan causeway. However, their retreat was discovered, according to Sahagún's report, by a Mexica woman drawing water from the canal.¹¹¹ The Mexicas were advantaged in the ensuing battle by their superior knowledge of the waterways, their greater numbers, and perhaps most significantly, the shallow boats designed to navigate the canals. So many Spaniards and Tlaxcalteca allies died that night that it is known as *la noche triste*, the Night of Sorrows.

In the months that followed, the Spaniards retreated to Tlaxcala and the Mexicas established Motecuhzoma's brother Cuitlahuac as emperor. The Mexicas likely believed that the Spaniards would not return, and they resumed their fiestas and holy days as normal. However, soon the city of Tenochtitlan would be ravaged with what they called *huey zahuatl*, or the big rash¹¹² — the Spaniards had brought a plague of smallpox. Cuitlahuac was among the victims, and his nephew Cuauhtemoc succeeded him. In 1521, Cortés returned with nearly 200,00 Indigenous allies from Tlaxcala, Chalco, Xochimilco,

¹¹¹ Ibid 84.

¹¹² Cook, *Born to Die*, 63.

and Acolhuacan.¹¹³ The Mexicas defended the city and endured a long siege, but ultimately, on August 23, 1521, Cuauhtemoc surrendered Tenochtitlan to the Spaniards.

The stories of conquest followed similar patterns throughout the regions that became the Spanish viceroyalties of New Granada, Peru, New Spain, and Río de la Plata, as well as the Portuguese viceroyalty of Brazil. Immediately after the initial conquests, Spain began to parcel out the plunder of its conquests in the form of the *encomienda* system, in which conquerors were “entrusted” with Indigenous people and the land on which they lived. The conqueror had the responsibility to Christianize the Indigenous people, and in exchange, they would work for him. This was a system utilized in Spain after the Reconquista, so the conquerors who soon became nobles were already familiar with the serflike organization of the *encomienda*. Meanwhile, “[c]alamitous, repeated epidemics”¹¹⁴ ravaged Indigenous populations throughout the 1500s and reduced them to a fraction of their former size, just as had occurred with the Taíno and Mexica people.

Conclusions: “It all goes back to conversion, Father, a most ticklish concept and a most loving form of destruction.”¹¹⁵

Colonization in Latin America was always tied up with religion. In fact, the driving force to conquer and colonize was the Christian impulse to convert and evangelize;¹¹⁶ and this Christian motivation does not dissolve or lessen the horrors of colonialism, but rather points to the culpability of the Eurochristian imagination in

¹¹³ Brinkerhoff, “Reexamining the Lore of the ‘Archetypal Conquistador,’” 178.

¹¹⁴ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 53.

¹¹⁵ Louise Edrich, *Last report on the miracles at Little No Horse* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001).

¹¹⁶ Cristine Gorski Severo, “The Colonial Invention of Languages in America,” *Alfa: Revista de Linguística* 60, no. 1 (2016): 14. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1981-5794-1604-1>

salvific exploitations of Indigenous peoples and their languages. This impulse is clearly demonstrated even in the earliest voyages, during which Columbus was ostensibly searching for nothing more than an alternative trade route to India. His reports back to Spain record, “Your Majesties, as Catholics and Sovereign devout of the holy Christian faith, your enhancers and enemies of Mahomet sect and of all idolatry and heresy thought to send me, myself, Christopher Columbus, to the regions of India to go and see the so called princes, peoples, the disposal of their land and the way we could stick to their conversion to our faith...”¹¹⁷

This theme continued throughout colonization as friars and priests from various Catholic orders arrived in the New World and established missions, which operated as arms of the imperial machine. The presence of Catholic clergy in colonial Latin America meant not only that the Castilian language was imposed upon Indigenous communities, but also that European philosophy of language and literacy was imposed upon Indigenous languages. In locations like the Jesuit *reducciones* in Paraguay and the Dominican missions in Mexico, priests and friars codified Indigenous languages into the Castilian alphabet, and in doing so changed the way the languages functioned for Indigenous speakers. A language’s functionality does not exist on its own, but rather exists as the mediation of that which is experienced phenomenologically and understood cognitively. Thus, there are very real ontological and material consequences to the altering of a language. The significance of Catholicism and language codification in the power structures of colonization will be discussed further in the next chapter.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Ibid.

For now, this tracing of Castilian through Spain and up to its arrival in the complex and diverse communities of the Americas demonstrates that linguistic history cannot be captured without due diligence to the material history that encases it. As sociolinguist Peter Burke says, “Language is too important historically to leave it to the linguists.”¹¹⁸ The following chapter will utilize the work of decolonial Latin American thinkers to examine the role of linguistics in the colonial machine and in the invention of the Americas.

¹¹⁸ Peter Burke “Introduction” in *The Social History of Language*, eds. Peter Burke and Roy Porter, (New York: Cambridge University Press 1987), p. 17.

Chapter Four:

“Object Among Other Objects”¹¹⁹: The Colonization of Indigenous Languages and the Invention of América

In tepetl huitomica ni ya choca. Aya. / Axaliqueuhca nicnotlamatia...
Nacxitl Topiltzin /Aic polihuiz ye motoca: / ye ic chocaz in momacehual. Ayyo.¹²⁰

The mountains are broken: I begin to cry. / The sands of the sea rise: I become
saddened...

Oh Nacxitl, our prince / Never will your renown be extinguished / But your vassals will
mourn for you.¹²¹

The Colonial *Dispositif*

Having recounted the philosophy of language at work in Europe at the time of the conquest, this project will now examine how that philosophy was enacted in colonial Spanish America. Nelson Maldonado-Torres draws an important distinction between colonization and coloniality that will drive the discussion of linguistics in Latin America from this point. Colonization refers to “specific empirical episodes of socio-historical and geopolitical conditions,” historical moments in which the imperial machine impresses itself upon the colonized subjects.¹²² Colonialism refers to past realities and decolonization to the empirical moments of formal independence and desegregation necessitated by colonization/colonialism. Coloniality, however, is “a logic, metaphysics,

¹¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 29.

¹²⁰ Nezahualcoyotl, “Caída de Tula,” in Angel Ma. Garibay, ed., *Poesía Náhuatl: Cantares mexicanos* (Mexico City: Manuscritos de la Biblioteca Nacional de México II, 2000), 1-2.

¹²¹ My translation.

¹²² Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” *Fondation-Frantz Fanon* (2016), 10. file:///home/chronos/u-5137b0b38bcf8587efc36048571e26551a9ab81a/Downloads/maldonado-torres_outline_of_ten_theses-10.23.16_.pdf

ontology, and a matrix of power that can continue existing”¹²³ after the formal process of decolonization.¹²⁴ Decoloniality refers likewise to the efforts at dismantling coloniality and its products, including Western modernity, Western civilization, and the West’s hegemonic discourses and institutions.

The scholarship upon which this thesis rests has determined that the modern and colonial Western enterprise “built and legitimized a relatively homogeneous way of interpreting languages and colonized people,” that the treatment of languages during the era of colonization implicated linguistics in the power matrices of coloniality.¹²⁵ Walter Mignolo writes of America in general and Latin America specifically not as a continent waiting to be discovered, as the dominant narrative has described, but rather as “an *invention* forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the Western worldview and institutions.”¹²⁶ Thus the idea of America is in itself a product of coloniality, an idea conceived through the conceptual framework of Western knowledge. Mexican philosopher and historian Edmundo O’Gorman points to the idea of America as an appropriation of the continent into the Euro-Christian imaginary,¹²⁷ and again, that “la clave para resolver el problema de la aparición histórica de América estaba en considerar ese suceso como el resultado de una invención del pensamiento occidental y no ya como el de un descubrimiento meramente físico...”¹²⁸

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ The terminology of a “colonial matrix of power,” or the *patrón colonial de poder*, comes from Anibal Quijano, particularly in the article “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.”

¹²⁵ Gorski Severo, “The Colonial Invention of Languages in America,” 12.

¹²⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 2.

¹²⁷ Ibid 3.

¹²⁸ Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America: An inquiry into the historical nature of the New World and the meaning of its history* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1961), 2. Translation: The key to solve the problem of the historical emergence of America was to consider this event as the result of an invention of western thought and not as a merely physical discovery...

America as a concept is also intrinsically tied to the idea of modernity, and both are the results of the imperial project and its institutions. The invention of America represented the moment in which the demands of modernity began “to require the imposition of a specific set of values that relied on the logic of coloniality for their implementation,”¹²⁹ values that were derived from the “colonial matrix of power that includes the renaming of the lands appropriated and the people inhabited them.”¹³⁰ Thus, the invention of America served a nodal point that allowed Europe to become the model for the achievements of humanity, and the othered inhabitants of America — both Indigenous and those from Africa — to become subject to “an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for every one.”¹³¹ The invention of America was the key to the move from colonization/colonialism to modernity/coloniality, which Mignolo considers as two sides of the same coin.

The colonial matrix of power that enforces and upholds coloniality is explicated by Cristine Gorski Severo, a Brazilian scholar of colonial linguistics, in terms of Foucault’s *dispositif*. Although Foucault uses this term throughout his career, nowhere is it better explained than in an interview from 1977 which is included in *Power/Knowledge*.¹³² Foucault says, “What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements,

¹²⁹ Ibid 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions — in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus [*dispositif*]. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.”¹³³ The methodological role of the *dispositif* is fleshed out in *Discipline/Punish* (1975), in which Foucault describes the carceral system as a combination of discourses and architectures, programs to correct delinquents and mechanism to reinforce delinquency, scientific propositions and real social effects.¹³⁴ Thus the apparatus incorporates both discursive and nondiscursive domains. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, in which Foucault examines the change from the *dispositif* of alliance to that of sexuality, he writes, “...power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organization,”¹³⁵ and later, “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.”¹³⁶

The colonial *dispositif* is identified by four interconnected spheres: economic, by the appropriation of land and exploitation of labor; political, through the imposition of authority and hierarchies through violence; social, by controlling gender and sexuality; and epistemic and subjective, through the appropriation and production of knowledge and ways of being.^{137, 138} These spheres of control are enacted by three institutions that

¹³³ Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh” in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 194-195.

¹³⁴ Matti Peltonen, “From Discourse to ‘Dispositif’: Michel Foucault’s Two Histories.” *Historical Reflections/ Reflexions Historiques* Vol. 30 no 2. (Summer 2004), 215.

¹³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92.

¹³⁶ *Ibid* 93.

¹³⁷ Mignolo, as paraphrased in Gorski Severo, “The Colonial Invention of Languages in America,” 14.

¹³⁸ Refer to Appendix 5.

comprise the *dispositif* — Catholicism, the Enlightenment, and comparative philology — and regulated by “a wide and heterogeneous set of practices and discourses that comprise laws, documents, treaties, letters, cartography, travelers’ notes, chronicles, artistic illustrations, grammars, dictionaries, word lists, translation of texts, invention and adaptation of alphabets, among others.”¹³⁹ This exploitation and control of the Other — conceived of as exotic or primitive in the Eurochristian colonial perspective — was driven by a Christian impulse for conversion and control through evangelization. Such an impulse permeated all four interconnected spheres through the institutions of colonization in the historical moments prior to formal decolonization, and continues in modernity/coloniality.

However, before the colonial apparatus can be examined in modernity/coloniality, it must be explicated in the processes of colonization/colonialism, particularly in relation to languages, and this explication is the aim of this thesis. As stated above, beginning in the sixteenth century, the *dispositif* of colonization was constituted of three frameworks: Catholicism, and especially missionary work; the European Enlightenment and the emergence of nation states; and the scientific discourse surrounding language.¹⁴⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, European thought surrounding languages operated through concepts of comparative philology, ranking languages based on language evolution. It was this thinking, along with religious ideas of divinely ordained colonization and Enlightenment-era ideas of European superiority, that led missionaries and men of letters in the colonized world to think of written European languages (here, specifically Spanish) as superior to Indigenous languages which “lacked letters.”

¹³⁹ Gorski Severo, “The Colonial Invention of Languages in America,” 13.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid 15.

The three-fold colonial *dispositif* of Catholicism, Enlightenment, and comparative philology resulted in the codification of Indigenous languages into the Spanish alphabet — an appropriation and control of knowledge. To analyze this function of the epistemic sphere requires discussion of the literacy of pre-columbian Indigenous societies and the Catholic missions through which codification of Indigenous literacies, particularly the Nahuatl of Mexica, occurred.

Indigenous Languages and Literacy in the Pre-Columbian Era

Pedro Henríquez Ureña, a Dominican philologist whose work in Latin American Spanish emerged in the first half of the twentieth century, identified five zones of Latin American dialects of Spanish. These zones reflect his understanding of the geographical distribution of major Indigenous language families, an approximated classification scheme which is helpful when discussing Indigenous languages. The zones and corresponding Indigenous language families are as follows:

- I. Mexico, including New Mexico and most of Central America — Nahuatl
- II. The Caribbean, including Antilles and coastal regions of Colombia and Venezuela — Carib/Arawak
- III. Highland South America, from Colombia to Bolivia and northern Chile — Quechua
- IV. Central and southern Chile — Mapuche/Araucano
- V. Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay — Guaraní¹⁴¹

There are several weaknesses in this scheme's account of the distribution of Indigenous languages. For example, grouping the region of Mexico under Nahuatl ignores the influence of Maya in Central America, particularly in Yucatan and Guatemala. Henríquez

¹⁴¹ John M. Lipski, *Latin American Spanish* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1994), 6.

Ureña's classification of the Caribbean also excludes Taíno as a distinct language (although derived from Arawak). Moreover, his scheme does not account for the merging of Quechua languages with Aymara, a language which has demonstrably influenced Spanish in southern Peru and Bolivia. Nonetheless, this classification launched more empirically accurate dialect research in Latin America and serves our purposes of establishing basic language families.¹⁴²

As has been discussed, evolutionary philology regards a written alphabetic language as the apex of linguistic evolution. For instance, in 1899 Isaac Taylor published a five-stage model for the development of writing that progressed from pictures to pictorial symbols, verbal signs, syllabic signs, and finally alphabetic signs.¹⁴³ Under this schema, no colonial-era philologist would consider any of the Indigenous record-keeping systems as writing, with the possible but unusual exception of Maya hieroglyphics, and this exclusion more or less continues in modern philology. To fairly analyze literacies in pre-Columbian civilizations necessitates an upheaval of traditional definitions of writing.¹⁴⁴ Most scholars who examine writing systems have defined writing as spoken language transcribed or referenced phonetically by visible marks,¹⁴⁵ and regard systems of communication that are not based in speech as "Partial/Limited/Pseudo/Non-Writing."¹⁴⁶ However, such a narrow definition of writing is rooted in ethnocentrism and logocentrism. In reality, according to Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, "writing no

¹⁴² Ibid 7.

¹⁴³ Isaac Taylor, *The History of the Alphabet* (New York: Scribner's, 1899), 2 vols., 5-6.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge," in Elizabeth Hill Boone & Walter D. Mignolo, eds., *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica & the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid 5.

¹⁴⁶ John DeFrancis, *Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 7.

longer relates to language as an exterior or frontier... the concept of writing exceeds and comprehends that of language.”^{147, 148}

According to Elizabeth Boone Hill, the evolutionary model of writing development does not even hold true for modern languages with an alphabetic writing system: musical notation, mathematical formulas, and dance notations to record choreography all exemplify useful and efficient modes of writing which are not tied to language and, in fact, developed *after* the phonetic alphabet. As Mignolo has noted, “the history of writing is not an evolutionary process driving toward the alphabet, but rather a series of coevolutionary processes in which different writing systems followed their own transformations.”¹⁴⁹ If the evolutionary model is to be rejected, a new definition of writing can be proposed, as articulated by Boone: *the communication of relatively*

¹⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Writing Before the Letter,” in G.C. Spivak, trans. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 3, 6-9.

¹⁴⁸ Derrida’s argument concerning language, which is articulated in *Of Grammatology* and *Voice and Phenomenon*, is a response to the conception of language outlined by Husserl — what Derrida calls the “metaphysics of presence.” Following Husserl’s argument, language is authorized by what is outside of it, by the authority given by the presence of the speaker. The speaker is able to contextualize what is being said, and their presence lends legitimacy to a certain interpretation of the words over other possible interpretations. In writing, however, the presence of the speaker is immediately removed, and so, according to Husserl, written words lack this kind of authority. Thus Husserl’s argument favors *phonē* over *graphē*. Derrida’s response rests on the concept of supplementarity: language is not simply iterated; it is also reiterated, and each reiteration alters the meaning of the words. Thus it is not evident that the presence of the speaker lends any sort of lasting authority, as Husserl would like to believe. The sign will mutate regardless of the presence of the speaker. In written language, however, Derrida famously argues that “There is nothing outside the text,” and we cannot rely on authority outside of the text. Writing situates the message in a location removed from the authority of the author/speaker, and as the message is read, interpreted, and re-written, its new reiterations inevitably alter the message. Derrida’s argument situates *graphē* in a position at least equal to, if not superior to, *phonē*. Given the context of this project, it is important to note that Derrida formulated his argument as a thoroughly European thinker, and when he spoke of *graphē* he was referring specifically to Latin alphabets. He was not attempting universality in his conception of language, and it does not work for Indigenous languages that rely on a strong tradition of oral transmission to interpret graphic signs. If anything, the way Indigenous languages function agrees with Derrida that the authority is not in the author/original speaker — however, for languages like Mayan and Nahuatl, neither is the authority in the text itself, but rather in the reader/interpreter. In any case, while Derrida was certainly making no attempt to decolonize linguistics or to point to the ethnocentrism of evolutionary philology, his argument serves to emphasize that writing does not function merely as an exact, permanent record of spoken language.

¹⁴⁹ Walter D. Mignolo, “Literacy and Colonization: The New World Experience,” in Rene Jara & Nicholas Spadaccini, eds., *1492/1992: Re/discovering Colonial Writing* (Minneapolis: Prisma Institute), 62

*specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks.*¹⁵⁰ Thus the focus becomes communication, the structured use of conventions, and the element of permanency; and this definition allows for a much broader range of inclusion. Among the systems that can now be understood as writing, two basic kinds can be described. The first is glottographic systems, those which compose the original definition of writing and which represent speech. These are also called “phonographic,” “phonetic,” or “syllabic” systems.¹⁵¹

The second kind of writing is that which is of interest here. Boone cites philologists such as Samson and Gelb to use the term “semasiographic systems,” which combines the Greek word *semasia*, “meaning,” with a “graphic” presentational style. These systems convey concepts independently from language; they are “supralinguistic” and use their own internal structures and conventions to relay meaning. Contrary to what an evolutionary model would lead us to think, semasiographic systems are increasingly pervasive even in modern alphabetic societies — international road signs, cleaning instructions in garments, and symbols of the kind providing instructions on the front of automatic hand dryers function as iconic semasiographic systems.

Pre-Columbian societies used both glottographic and semasiographic writing systems. The most widely-known example is the hieroglyphics of the Maya people. Maya writing initially consisted of a linear series of logographs, each occupying a glyph block; however, within a few years during the Classic period (ca. A.D. 250 to 900) scribes began providing phonetic “clues,” or syllabic reinforcement to diminish the ambiguity of the logographs. This development provides another clue, this one regarding degrees or

¹⁵⁰ Boone, “Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge,” 15.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

percentages of literacy within Maya civilization: that phonetic clues and, ultimately, purely phonetic spellings were used with increasing frequency in Maya glyphs suggests that the number of people able to read them began to grow beyond a small, elite group who would be well versed in the obscurities and intended readings of the writing system. “Or, to put it another way, the increased use of phonetic clues by the beginning of the Classic period, and, increasingly, purely phonetic spellings reflected not a writing system of heightened inaccessibility, but the existence of a growing number of literates during the course of the Classic period.”¹⁵²

Other archeological clues such as the number of surviving texts (between 7,500 and 10,000), the use of mortuary offerings, and even the prevalence of graffiti all suggest that a relatively small but growing number of Maya people in pre-Columbian Yucatan were literate.¹⁵³ The evidence also points to a range of literacy, including some people who could barely read and write. This continuum existed in part because of crucial aspect of the Maya writing system — its close ties with recitation literacy. Eric Thompson, a linguist specializing in Maya literacy, notes that “Interpretation of the painted codices depended on intensive memorization by select groups... [and] ... transmission of the extensive bodies of hymns, poems, and chronicles was essentially oral.”¹⁵⁴ Thus aids such as phonetic reinforcements increased accessibility, but full mastery of the glyphic texts required substantial memorized information outside of what was inscribed on the actual codices. Reading in a society with recitation literacy required an extended process:

¹⁵² Stephen Houston, “Literacy among the Pre-Colombian Maya: A Comparative Perspective,” in Elizabeth Hill Boone & Walter D. Mignolo, eds., *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica & the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 37.

¹⁵³ Ibid 38.

¹⁵⁴ J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 37.

first “seeing” the paper, then “counting” or construing the signs, and finally “speaking” or “calling aloud.”¹⁵⁵ The element of interpretation inherent in logographic glyphs meant that more people fell into positions of semi-literacy on the reading/writing continuum.

However, there is also no evidence to suggest that Maya logographic writing developed from an early stage of pictographic or ideographic writing — a progression which would be assumed by the standard evolutionary model of language development. Rather, purely ideographic writing developed in the late stages of Pre-Columbian Maya civilization, and actually supports claims to an increasingly large group of people possessing various levels of literacy. Scholars such as George Kubler and Stephen Houston have suggested that pictorial quality in Maya glyphs enhanced readability, so that “even ‘farmers in the field’ could discern, say, the names of rulers” on Maya monuments.¹⁵⁶

This brief exploration of Maya literacy indicates most significantly that languages and writing systems do not always, and probably do not often, follow the pattern outlined by evolutionary or comparative philology. Moreover, the close connection between reading and recitation literacy in Maya logographic writing supports arguments for revising traditional Western definitions of what is writing and who can read. That extensive, memorized information was necessary for full literacy in Pre-Columbian Maya societies should not suggest that Mayan was less developed than Spanish or other colonial languages, but rather should point to the reality that, as Derrida states simply, “phonetic writing *does not exist*.”¹⁵⁷ Although standard definitions paint syllabic and

¹⁵⁵ Houston, “Literacy among the Pre-Colombian Maya,” 36.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid 37.

¹⁵⁷ Boone, “Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge,” 12.

alphabetic writing as “visible speech,” written language can never be an exact transcription of spoken language, nor should we expect it to be. Of course writing and speaking are often different discourses — with some languages, like Arabic, the written is distinctly separate from the spoken, and even in English written prose is often quite different from spoken prose¹⁵⁸ — but even when writing consciously attempts to record or replicate speech, it can only approximate its goal. Perhaps this realization, underlined by Maya recitation literacy, may help to implode traditional and ethnocentric understandings of literacy.

Recitation literacy was a common aspect of writing systems throughout pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, particularly with regard to record-keeping and histories (as opposed to official and administrative Maya texts). As with all written histories, Mexican pictorial records worked within several presentational forms, structuring history around participant, event, location, and time. The first of these forms is what Hill Boone calls the *res gestae* (“deeds done”), painted codices inherited from Mixtec genealogical-historical panels on animal hide.¹⁵⁹ These records were oriented around the intersection of event and participant, with time and place functioning as secondary dimensions. A second structure is cartographic histories, large panels of hide, bark paper, or cloth that pictured the whole story as a single statement oriented around spatial relations (the “where,” rather than the “who/what” of the *res gestae*).¹⁶⁰ Finally, the form related most specifically to the Tenochca Mexicas is year-count annals, or the *xuhtonalamatl*. This continuous history is oriented around time; each year is accounted for with events painted adjacent to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Refer to Appendix 6.

¹⁶⁰ Refer to Appendix 7.

the years in which they occur. Each of these forms, which were eventually altered and combined to overcome each structure's individual shortcomings, represents the fascinatingly blurry line between art and writing in pre-Columbian literacy. What is significant, though, is that the pictorial histories of the Mexicas did not operate independently of language — although conventionalized glyphs allowed large portions of a history to convey meaning “without a detour through speech,”¹⁶¹ these histories were painted to be the rough texts of a “performance” completed by an interpreter/reader who approached the pages already having memorized the stories, people, locations, and times. The *Cantares Mexicanos* contain the words of a Nahuatl scholar:

“I sing the pictures of the book
And see them spread out;
I am an elegant bird
For I make the codices speak
Within the house of pictures.”¹⁶²

Inca record-keeping diverges even further from Western definitions of writing. Like the Mexicas, the Incas utilized a form of painted records, called *tocapu*. These are abstract geometric shapes arranged within square or rectangular borders. On textiles, the *tocapu* probably demarcated the ethnic, political, and religious status of the wearer. However, they were also painted onto wooden boards and used to record Inca history. In an effort to explain the *tocapu* to his Spanish audience, Martín de Murúa compared the design of Inca textiles to a more familiar “other,” the Moors who had lived on the Iberian Peninsula until their recent expulsion: “*esculpin en ellos maravillosas labores de tocapu*

¹⁶¹ Elizabeth Hill Boone, “Aztec Pictorial Histories: Records without Words,” in Elizabeth Hill Boone & Walter D. Mignolo, eds., *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica & the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 54.

¹⁶² As translated by Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Colombian Literatures of Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 11.

*que ellos dizen que significa dibersidad de labores con mil matices de subtil manera, al modo de los almaisares Moriscos...*¹⁶³

The *tocapu* were already difficult to assimilate into a Western conception of writing; no effort was made to recognize the *quipu* as such.¹⁶⁴ The *quipu*, which was the primary Inca mode of recording information, consists of cotton and wool cords that were colored, spun, twisted, and knotted in different ways and combinations to hold and convey knowledge entirely separate from language.¹⁶⁵ Like the pictorial records of the Mexica, the *quipu* were communicated through the *quipucamayoc*, the accountants who read the cords and knots; thus, the function of the *quipu* relied on recitation literacy as well. None have been deciphered, and their three-dimensional nature, as well as their apparent lack of linguistic referents, have worked to exclude them from the status of writing, even by Mesoamericanists. Instead, they are usually understood as codes or counting or mnemonic devices — “Spanish chroniclers and legal authorities acknowledged the accuracy of this Inca mode of recording information, but unlike the Mexican figural images, the *quipu* as a form of representation never entered directly into the record.”¹⁶⁶ The incommensurability between the *quipu* and European forms of memory meant that *quipu* were spared from early campaigns of the destruction of Indigenous records (for example, the Nahuatl texts burned by Bishop Juan de Zumárraga), and although the *quipucamayoc* were called to present their evidence orally

¹⁶³ Martí de Murúa, *Historia General del Perú* (Mississippi: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1613), folio 205. Translation: They carve into their *tocapu* marvelous works that they say represent a diversity of things with a thousand subtle nuances, in the mode of the Moorish *almaisares* [inscribed Islamic textiles]...

¹⁶⁴ Refer to Appendix 8.

¹⁶⁵ Boone, “Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge,” 20.

¹⁶⁶ Tom Cummins, “Representation in the Sixteenth Century and the Colonial Image of the Inca,” in Elizabeth Hill Boone & Walter D. Mignolo, eds., *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica & the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 192.

in law suits or other legal situations, they were not subjected to “retraining” to work with European forms, as the *tlacuilos* (readers of Nahuatl records) had been.¹⁶⁷

Spanish Missions and the Codification of Indigenous Languages

Walter Mignolo described how Renaissance-era philosophy of language (as discussed in Chapter 1) provided a model for interpreting Indigenous writing systems at the same time that it justified writing grammars of these languages in order to teach reading and writing.¹⁶⁸ “Spreading literacy” — the idea of which already ignores the forms of literacy present in pre-Columbian civilizations — meant teaching Amerindians Western ideas of reading and writing. The missionaries “understood a kind of negotiation with signs that the Mexicas conceived in terms of painting and telling oral stories by looking at the paintings.”¹⁶⁹ Thus what had to change, what *did* change through the work of missionaries and men of letters, was the Amerindian relation with written signs.

The Catholic orders that sent missionaries to América were the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Augustinians, and the Jesuits — the first three, mendicant orders with long histories; the fourth, founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius Loyola. Loyola was formerly a Spanish Basque soldier who experienced a miraculous conversion during recuperation from a leg injury. He established the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, with a vision predicated on a belief in God’s enduring presence: God’s design was everywhere, and simultaneously Satan was everywhere and all the time attempting to subvert the work of

¹⁶⁷ Ibid 194-195.

¹⁶⁸ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 45.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

God's grace. Loyola imagined the Jesuits as recreations of Jesus's disciples, with an emphasis on poverty, chastity, and mobile, adaptable, and charitable missions work.

Franciscan missionaries arrived in New Spain in 1524, only a couple of years removed from the fall of Tenochtitlan. In fact, it was Cortes who requested from Charles V, the grandchild of Isabella and Ferdinand, spiritual assistance to Christianize the indigenous peoples. This should come as no surprise, since missionary work was integral to the colonial *dispositif*. Gorski Severo writes, "The Catholicization of politics and the politicization of missionary Catholicism were two sides of the same coin in the Iberian colonial enterprise," a direct result of the medieval crusades and the Counter-Reformation.¹⁷⁰ The Dominicans arrived in Mexico in 1526 and the Augustinians in 1533. The Jesuits first landed in Brazil in 1549, spread to Peru in 1568 and up into Mexico in 1571, and ultimately reached the northern regions of Mexico in 1591.¹⁷¹ Although each order enforced different routines and practices in their mission stations, or *reducciones* (so named because the stations *reduced* widespread Indigenous communities into one location), they shared the goal of conversion primarily and of economic growth secondarily.

One description of the missions summarizes, "They were centres of conversion and also contributed to the economic and cultural conquest of the native population. The resettlement of natives in missions permitted missionaries to regularly gather children and adults for religious service and indoctrination... At the same time, it facilitated the

¹⁷⁰ Gorski Severo, "The Colonial Invention of Languages in America," 15.

¹⁷¹ Maria Waldinger, "Colonial Missionaries and Long Run Development in Mexico," (Master's thesis, London School of Economics, 2013), 5.
http://personal.lse.ac.uk/fleischh/missionaries_in_mexico_version_3.pdf

use of the native labour force by Spanish land owners.”¹⁷² Most orders were directly linked to the *encomienda* system, enforcing native labor by effectively enslaving the native populations to work for the Spanish landowners. The Jesuit order did not enslave the Indigenous people, but they were nonetheless obligated to labor for the benefit of the order. In fact, despite the order’s commitment to poverty and charity, Jesuits were the only order permitted to have personal wealth; and more significantly, the order itself could acquire property and other forms of material wealth.¹⁷³ In Brazil, this wealth was unsurprisingly gained through sugar estates, a venture which “made them one of the wealthiest [orders] in the colonies.”¹⁷⁴

Herbert Bolton described Catholic missions in Mexico as the “frontier institution” of Spanish conquest. Missions “... were characteristically and designedly frontier institutions and ... pioneer agencies ... They served not alone to Christianize the frontier, but also to aid in extending, holding, and civilizing it ...”¹⁷⁵ By 1650, the Jesuits alone had baptized over 400,000 indigenous persons, many of whom died shortly thereafter of a European disease.¹⁷⁶ As demonstrated by Bolton’s description, the missions were often the first push into a previously uncolonized Indigenous population, and the more recognizable purveyors of the colonial *dispositif*— *encomienda* landowners, administrators, and of course military forces — would follow in the disease-ridden wake of the missionaries. Although the missions, both mendicant and Jesuit, served

¹⁷² Ibid 9.

¹⁷³ John Frederick Swaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 84.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Herbert E. Bolton, “The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies,” *The American Historical Review* vol. 23 (October 1917): 47.

¹⁷⁶ Daniel T. Reff, *Plagues, Priest, Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

innumerable roles in the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the European schema, what is of particular interest here is the friars and priests' role in the assimilation of Indigenous languages into European philosophy of language.

Mendicant and Jesuit priests and friars on colonial missions worked to develop orthographies, wherein they “transformed familiar alphabets [Latin] into visual images of strange speech...”¹⁷⁷ These, used to aid in indoctrination and conversion of Indigenous populations, were the starting point for writing grammars, dictionaries, and other modes of knowledge appropriation/production. Errington writes that the writing of Indigenous languages in European alphabets functioned to establish comparability: once “their” talk was writable, like “ours,” resemblances could be established. This meant that the intellectual work of codifying speech was never distinct from the ideological work of devising images of colonized people, that language difference figured in the creation of human hierarchies.¹⁷⁸ Colonial subjects could be recognized as human, but deficiently so, following the logic of comparative philology that failed to recognize pre-Columbian Amerindian record-keeping systems as writing.

Mignolo writes that the majority of Amerindian language grammars written by Spanish friars in Mexico begin with a discussion of the letters of the alphabet and by identifying which letters the Indigenous languages did not have. This preoccupation suggests that “the letter had been promoted to an ontological dimension with a clear priority over the voice as well as any other writing systems. The classical tradition was inverted, and the letter no longer had the ancillary dimension attributed to it by Aristotle

¹⁷⁷ Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 4.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid* 5.

but had become the voice in itself, while nonalphabetic writing systems were suppressed.”¹⁷⁹ Suppression in the case of the Mexicas in one sense meant literal burning and destruction of the Nahuatl texts, which Errington describes borrowing Derrida’s phrase from *Of Grammatology*: “the violence of the letter.”¹⁸⁰

However, a more symbolic violence was committed in the application of Latin letters to the Nahuatl language. Linguist-friars were guided by a principle of “one letter, one sound” which led them to perceive a supposed “lack” of sounds in Amerindian languages; this is made clear by the common and repeated expression “*esta lengua carece de tales letras*” (this language lacks such and such letters). For instance, the Jesuit missionary Horatio Carochi’s 1645 grammar of Nahuatl begins with this observation: “[t]his language is written with the letters of the Spanish alphabet, although it lacks seven letters, which are b, d, f, g, r, s, and j.”¹⁸¹ Mignolo reminds readers that if these Spanish observers did not presuppose that the letter was not located in the voice but “outside” of it, then these men of letters would have pointed out what types of sounds Amerindian languages possessed, rather than noting what they “lacked.” Carochi in fact writes a bit later in his text about a “letter” which Nahuatl possesses that is not found in Latin — here, though, “letter” means “speech sound,” rather than “visual symbol,” as it meant in his original statement. This Nahuatl “letter” is the sound codified into *t* plus *z* in the Latin alphabet, as in *nimitznotza*, “I call you.” Another example is the sound captured by *t* plus *l*, as in *tlazo’camati*, “thank you.”

¹⁷⁹ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 46.

¹⁸⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Writing Before the Letter,” in G.C. Spivak, trans. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹⁸¹ Horacio Carochi, J. Lockhart, trans., *Grammar of the Mexican Language with an Explanation of its Adverbs* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001 [1645]), 19.

Another challenge posed to friars composing Latin orthographies of Nahuatl was what Carochi called the *saltillo*, the “little jump.” Now referred to as a “glottal stop,” this speech sound is captured by the hyphen in “uh-oh” or “uh-huh.” Carochi transcribed the *saltillo* with an apostrophe, as in the above example of *tlazo'camati*, and emphasized to his readers that “Whether to put a *saltillo* or a long accent rests on almost imperceptible practices, so that not even those who are very expert in this language can manage to give the reason for the difference. Yet if it is not observed, it will be a barbarism and a very great impropriety.”¹⁸²

Carochi’s use of the word “barbarism” here is significant as an inversion of the Eurochristian perspective toward Amerindians. Earlier it was discussed that writing Indigenous languages into the Latin alphabet utilized language difference in the creation of hierarchies. However, before friars began to develop orthographies, the *conquistadores* had to make sense of the “distant, human-like creatures” they encountered in the New World.¹⁸³ The example of the Requerimiento demonstrates that the Spaniards’ first instinct was not to establish comparability and commonality, but rather to refuse language difference in favor of a rigid binary distinction between humans who could understand the imperial language, and those who could not — those who fell beyond the pale of humanity. The Requerimiento went, in part, as follows:

“We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us. And that we have said this to you

¹⁸² Ibid 267.

¹⁸³ Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 24.

and made this Requisition, we request the notary here present to give us his testimony in writing, and we ask the rest who are present that they should be witnesses of this Requisition.”¹⁸⁴

Written in Castilian, the Requerimiento was in the tradition of the papal bulls which justified and required the crusades and *reconquista* in the decades previous. The document was to be read aloud in the presence of the Amerindians so as to inform that they were bound either to submit to the king of Spain and the Christian church, or to suffer consequences as described. Herein lies the Requerimiento’s refusal of linguistic difference: its presupposition was that the creatures who heard it but did not understand it were therefore subhuman and could be subjugated as such. Of course, denying the Amerindians existence as speaking and understanding humans negated the necessity of their presence for the reading of the Requerimiento:

“It was read to trees and empty huts... Captains muttered its theological phrases into their beards on the edge of sleeping Indian settlements, or even a league away before starting the formal attack... Ship captains would sometimes have the document read from the deck as they approached an island.”¹⁸⁵

The Requerimiento was part of the colonial power that pointed to the non-intelligibility of speech as evidence not of difference, but of deficiency, and that declared the Indigenous people as barbarians who were to be subjugated.

In his classic text *In Defense of the Indians*, friar Bartolome de las Casas wrote that Amerindians could perhaps be called barbarians, but that the category is relative: “A man is apt to be called barbarous, in comparison with another, because he is strange in his manner of speech and mispronounces the language of the other... But from this point of

¹⁸⁴ Arthur Helps, *Spanish Conquest in America; and its Relation to the History of Slavery and to the Government of Colonies*, volume 1 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1856), 361.

¹⁸⁵ Lewis Hanke, “Pope Paul III and the American Indians,” *Harvard Theological Review* vol. 30 (1949): 33-34.

view, there is no man or race which is not barbarous with respect to some other man or race...”¹⁸⁶ Errington discusses “barbarian,” a word with Greek roots which was originally onomatopoeic, reproducing speech sounds which were used by those the Greeks considered to be inferior, as a poor imitation of proper Greek speech. Those who wished to avoid relativistic dismissal of the inferiority of barbarians could consider the authority of the Old Testament, wherein the story of Babel and the confusion of tongues in Genesis explained language difference as sinful humanity’s common heritage.¹⁸⁷ The Amerindians were inheritors of this curse; as described by one linguist-friar, the purpose of developing orthographies and ultimately of assimilating Indigenous languages into the imperial language was “to restore in part the common eloquence of which we were deprived by the arrogance and pride of that building.”¹⁸⁸

The Spaniards’ supposed goal of restoring common communication was not without significant difficulties. The speech sounds used in Nahuatl which evaded easy codification into the Latin alphabet have been considered; another essential factor was the prestige of Nahuatl as the *lengua general* of Mexico: Nahuatl was not the only language spoken in the area, but rather its use indicated membership in or proximity to high ranking social circles. Moreover, different styles of Nahuatl were used by members of different groups. The traditional elite were recognized by their use and mastery of elaborate, prestigious forms of *tepillatolli*, “lordly speech.” Mastery of these forms required years of training and memorization, so fluency indicated a location at the apex of the Mexica social hierarchy. Naturally, linguist-friars wanted to focus on this specific

¹⁸⁶ Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 26.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid* 27.

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man — the American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 181.

group of Nahuatl dialects. It was the form which best fitted their aims to usurp the authority of the Indigenous past with that of Christianity. The task of converting Nahuatl into “closer alignment with the reality of God’s world,”¹⁸⁹ to be used to address audiences of potential converts, was complicated by the friars’ inability to recognize that reducing Nahuatl words to the Latin alphabet did not give them ownership of the meanings already in the ears of Mexica listeners.

Multilingualism as a Piece of the Colonial Apparatus

What is significant throughout this discussion of Catholic missions in the early American empire is that priests and friars for the most part did not function as extensions of the linguistic empirical machine as described in the previous chapter. The Catholic missionaries did not subscribe to Nebrija’s or Aldrete’s ideas of Castilian Spanish as the one language of the Spanish empire. Although some missions included instructions in Spanish for their indigenous inhabitants, work and study on a Catholic American mission was primarily exercised in the language of the native people: “Preaching in vernacular languages, and not following Nebrija or Aldrete’s doctrines, was the appropriate linguistic strategy for an empire whose political strength would rest upon the expansion and preservation of the Catholic faith.”¹⁹⁰

The goal of the Spanish empire outside of the Iberian Peninsula was not one language, but rather one faith. Mignolo articulates how colonization and coloniality are theological before they are secular:

¹⁸⁹ Ibid 40.

¹⁹⁰ Juan R. Lodares, “Languages, Catholicism, and Power in the Hispanic Empire (1500-1770)” in *Spanish and Empire*, eds. Nelsy Echavez-Solano & Kenya C. Dworkin y Mendez (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007), 13.

“...the historical foundation of the colonial matrix (and hence of Western civilization) was theological: it was Christian theology that located the distinction between Christians, Moors, and Jews in the ‘blood’ ... the racial configuration between Spanish, Indian, and African began to take shape in the New World. By the eighteenth century, “blood” as a marker of race/racism was transferred to skin. And theology was displaced by secular philosophy and sciences. The Linnaean system of classification helped the cause. Secular racism came to be based on the ego-politics of knowledge; but it so happened that the agents and institutions that embodied secular ego-politics of knowledge were, like those who embodied theology-politics of knowledge, mostly white European males.”¹⁹¹

Thus Mignolo locates the origin of the colonial matrix in Christian Spain, where Christian theology was deployed in differentiating Christians from the Muslims and Jews, and soon from the Africans and Indigenous peoples. In the move from theological to secular, racial differentiation centered on skin color, with the aid of the Linnaean system of classification. In his work which became the basis of the classification of species, Swedish botanist and naturalist Carolus Linnaeus also divided humankind into four groups: *Americanus*, *Asiaticus*, *Africanus*, and *Europeaeus*. To these groups Linnaeus ascribed physical and behavioral stereotypes:

“*Americanus* were ‘reddish, choleric, and erect; hair black... wide nostrils...obstinate, merry, free... regulated by customs.’ *Asiaticus* were ‘melancholy, stiff; hair black, dark eyes... severe, haughty, avaricious... ruled by opinions.’ *Africanus* were ‘black, phlegmatic... hair black, frizzled... nose flat; lips tumid; women without shame, they lactate profusely; crafty, indolent, negligent... governed by caprice.’ Finally, *Europeaeus* were ‘white, sanguine, muscular... eyes blue, gentle... inventive... governed by laws.’”¹⁹²

Linnaeus’s racial, and racist, classifications helped transform the colonial project of race from a theological concept to a secular, scientific one. In the last parts of Mignolo’s

¹⁹¹ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 8-9.

¹⁹² Michael Yudell, “A Short History of the Race Concept,” 3.
<http://www.councilforresponsiblegenetics.org/pageDocuments/K4IQ3T8YCD.pdf>

argument quoted above, he points out that the people who embodied and developed the “ego-politics of knowledge” (knowledge production that universalizes the ego, de-linking the colonial knowledge structures from European regionality) were the people who stood to benefit from this knowledge production. In other words, those who created ideas of race that favored white European men were predominantly white European men.

To reiterate the point that coloniality began by utilizing Christianity to achieve political aims, Mignolo later enumerates the stages of the logic of coloniality. The first, he says, used “the rhetoric of modernity as salvation. Salvation was focused on saving the souls through conversion to Christianity.”¹⁹³ It is clear that the Spanish priests and friars on colonial missions, who acted as the frontmen in this first stage of modernity, were much more concerned with conversion and indoctrination than they were with enforcing a singular language. They did not participate in the greater, and chronologically later, goal of impressing Castilian Spanish upon colonized people because learning and codifying Indigenous languages proved to be the more expedient path to conversion.

It is also important to note that in their work developing orthographies and grammars of Amerindian languages, linguist-friars did not rely on Nebrija’s Castilian grammar so much as they derived their model from his early Latin grammar. In his introduction to the 1481 edition of *Introductiones latinae*, Nebrija writes that a Latin grammar in Castile is the foundation of the *studia humanitatis*, that Latin is the language of knowledge and science (an idea by no means original to Nebrija). Furthermore, Latin is necessary because the law was formulated in Latin and thus the use of Latin is the means by which humans can live together and build civilization. Finally, Nebrija

¹⁹³ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 14.

considered Latin the foundation of medicine — although Mignolo points out that Nebrija could never have imagined that the Indigenous populations themselves had an elaborate medicinal history, which was at various times written in Nahuatl and translated into Latin.^{194, 195}

Regardless, Nebrija's linguistic program demonstrates his philosophy of language: first, that to have law, medicine, religion, and civilization, humans need Latin; and secondly, that a Castilian territory grounded in civility (religion and the *studia humanitatis*) will be based on the knowledge of Latin. In the American colonies since the Laws of Burgos (1512-1513), the *encomenderos* (the landowners in the *encomienda* system) were instructed to teach natives to read and write Castilian, and various other laws and orders called for Castilian language instruction. However, as we have seen, one of the main branches of the imperial apparatus, the church, was more concerned with learning and codifying Indigenous languages than it was with teaching Castilian Spanish. In fact, Mignolo writes that "Hispanicizing" of the Amerindians was confined to the level of edicts, royal orders, and laws, while friars and Jesuit colleges were the two main enemies of Nebrija's program.¹⁹⁶ Of course the friars were engaged in this work of writing grammars. Practically, Nebrija's Latin grammar was regarded as the "descriptive model, and Castilian as a descriptive instrument" that mediated between sacred Latin and oral "pagan" speech.¹⁹⁷ The universities and Jesuit colleges, meanwhile, were convinced

¹⁹⁴ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 50.

¹⁹⁵ Refer to Appendix 9.

¹⁹⁶ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 53.

¹⁹⁷ Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 31.

that the *studia humanitatis* was the best model of education to civilize the colonies, and thus Latin was the paradigm in higher education during this time.¹⁹⁸

Having established that Castilian did not play a significant role in the colonial American missions work, it is now necessary to examine the adoption of a multilinguistic program by clergymen in this time period. In 1578 Fray Rodrigo de Loaysa, a missionary from Peru, visited Philip II and informed him that, in his opinion, missionary work in America could not be successful because so many of the ordained priests did not know any Indigenous languages. In December of that same year, the king announced a law that forbade priests who did not know an indigenous language — in this case, Quechua — from teaching church doctrine to indigenous peoples. The law also forbade mestizos from being ordained under any circumstances, but public outcry argued in favor of the mestizos' particular skill in languages, and the prohibition on their ordination was repealed ten years later. All orders of the Catholic faith in America were in favor of multilingualism and all orders contributed to writing grammars of Amerindian languages and translated catechisms into those languages.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Maldonado-Torres offers in various places an important critique of the *studia humanitatis* and the European (and later American) university system derived from the *studia*. In his article “Pensamiento crítico desde la sub-alteridad: los estudios étnicos como ciencias descoloniales o hacia la transformación de las humanidades y las conciencias sociales en el siglo veintiuno” (2006), Maldonado-Torres writes, “Fueron sin duda estas culturas y sociedades llamadas premodernas que sufrieron el impacto de una nueva ola de imperialismo de sociedades europeas ahora llamadas fundamentalmente a civilizar, y no tanto, como antes, a cristianizar. Mientras las ciencias naturales le permitían al ideal de hombre moderno intervenir racionalmente en el mundo físico, las ciencias sociales sirvieron para hacer lo mismo en el orden social, más específicamente en el Estado moderno y en las colonias” (147). [Translation: It was without a doubt these cultures and societies that were called pre-modern that suffered the impact of a new wave of imperialism from European societies, now called fundamentally to civilize and not, like before, to Christianize. While the natural sciences allowed the idea of the modern man to intervene rationally in the physical world, the social sciences served to do the same thing in the social order, and specifically in the modern state and the colonies.] Maldonado-Torres' critique of the Western university points to an uninterrupted timeline of ego-political knowledge production that has proceeded since Linnaeus's classification system to the modern university.

¹⁹⁹ Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 24.

The use of indigenous languages was justified through two factors, one ideological and one material. The first is rooted in what Juan R. Lodaes refers to as “Thomism,” the sentiment expressed in Thomas Aquinas’s *In libros Peri Hermeneias expositio* (On Interpretation) that peaceful coexistence can be achieved through the Christian city, a community of nations in which each nation speaks its own language. This concept in turn allowed multilingualism in America to be argued through the principle of Pentecost, that each individual may be saved through their own language. This argument is supported in particular by the 1537 papal bull *Sublimis Deus*, which forbade the enslavement of Indigenous peoples and which would have a strong impact on the infamous Valladolid debate between Bartolome de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda.

The ideological justification of the use of Indigenous languages reflects imperial theory of how to spread the faith, that “natives were considered individuals, persons sufficiently dignified and deserving of an educational policy that required an enormous quantity of patience, effort, and hope.”²⁰⁰ The material justification, however, reflects the actual practice of imperialism. The expectation throughout the colonies and on the missions was that the Indigenous peoples, who were barely more than slaves, were to work and keep the system productive. If the official thrust of the Spanish empire was evangelization, the unofficial driving force was purely economic; and religious theory asserting the dignity and personhood of native peoples flew in the face of economic aims. Thus, it was advantageous to keep church doctrine remote through linguistic barriers. In fact, the missions themselves did not exist only for conversion purposes but also, as has

²⁰⁰ Ibid 25.

been noted earlier, for the economic gain of the friars and priests who ran the stations. Isolating the Amerindians by using the language unique to their area helped ensure the clergymen's success. Father Sepp, a Jesuit missionary to the Guaraní of Paraguay, reported that "We are proceeding in such a manner [speaking the Guaraní language] to avoid any intermingling between our natives and the Spaniards, and so that our charges remain humble and simple."²⁰¹

Thus between the first third of the sixteenth century and the last third of the seventeenth century, the use of Indigenous languages on colonial missions was both protected by legal and papal rulings, and common in its usage. The clergymen's contribution to the colonial *dispositif* was not explicitly tied to Renaissance-era philosophy of language, which dictated Castilian Spanish should be a unifying force throughout the empire. However, their work in preaching church doctrine through Indigenous languages, and especially through producing orthographies and grammars of Amerindian languages, contributed to the colonial/modern apparatus because it attempted to alter Indigenous ontology and appropriate knowledge production. To return to the earlier example of Nahuatl, in Mexico the linguist-friars attempted to subsume the language under their religious aims. Instead, though, the linguist-friars produced a new kind of discourse.

Errington offers the example of the Nahuatl word *tlacatecolot*. Missionaries chose this word to represent the Evil One, the diablo, and so convey that Christianity involves a war against the fallen angel. However, the friars ignored that *tlacatecolot* already meant for the Mexicas the residents of the complex realm of spirits who were involved in

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Mexica lives much more intimately than the Evil One. The missionaries' use of the word could do nothing to replace meanings already understood in the Mexica communities. David Tavaréz describes this new discourse as "doctrinal Nahuatl."²⁰² What the evangelizing Spaniards failed to recognize was that while they could utilize Nahuatl to isolate the Mexica people and keep them subordinate, they could not appropriate and deform Nahuatl into a written language of Christianity without deforming the message of Christianity.²⁰³ Mignolo summarizes the results of the Castilian philosophy of language in the Americas as follows: "In Castile the theory of the letter led to a theory of writing that transcended the regionality of spoken languages and colonized the voice, but application of the theory in the New World led to the colonization of Amerindian languages (by writing their grammars) and the colonization of the Amerindian memories (by writing their histories)."²⁰⁴

The Linguistic Turn: The Decline of Multilingualism and the Rise of Modernity

After the middle of the seventeenth century, the creation of a localized Latin American priesthood through the orders' use of Amerindian languages, which contributed to the rise to power experienced by Creoles (American-born Spaniards), was met with resentment by those in power on the peninsula. Economic factors were also at play in the decline of what Lodares called the "linguistic Indigenism," or multilingualism.²⁰⁵ In particular, the organization of Indigenous labor, production, and

²⁰² David Tavaréz, "Naming the Trinity: From Ideologies of Translation to Dialectics of Reception in Colonial Nahua Texts, 1547-1771," *Colonial Latin American Review* 9, no. 1 (2000): 23.

²⁰³ Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 41.

²⁰⁴ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 59.

²⁰⁵ Lodares, "Languages, Catholicism, and Power in the Hispanic Empire," 26.

vassalage relationships changed drastically by the end of the seventeenth century, and it was no longer fiscally advantageous for priests to isolate natives through usage of their languages. Instead, the Indigenous populations went from working in collective groups to being wage-earners subject to contract by landowners. This meant that natives were transferred and migrated from place to place; everything that was typical of the old collective systems of the *encomiendas* and missions was rendered useless.

Starting with the Viceroy of Peru's 1685 ruling, pro-Spanish language legislation continued and increased through the end of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century. The decline of linguistic Indigenism is marked especially by the Francisco Antonio Lorenzana y Buitrón's 1770 *Cartas pastorales y edictos*. In his letters, Lorenzana complains of the empire's failure to teach Spanish to the Amerindians. Following in the century-and-a-half old footsteps of Aldrete, who asserted that the vanquished take on the language of the vanquisher, Lorenzana argues that "There has never been a Cultured Nation in the World, that when it extended its Conquests, did not attempt the same with its Language..."²⁰⁶ His argument was also, however, rooted in a linguistic hierarchy that harkens back to sixteenth-century European linguistic philosophy: Latin, Greek, and Hebrew are situated as the superior languages. Nahuatl, and by extension other Amerindian languages, cannot compare. In a perversion of the Thomism that rationalized multilingualism, Lorenzana posits that when only one language is spoken, and that language is the language of the ruling power, conditions are created for the possibility of love and familiarity between the people of the empire.

²⁰⁶ Translated into English by Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 59.

Moreover, Lorenzana reminds his readers of the difficulty, previously described, that Spanish friar-linguists had in translating terms of the faith into Indigenous languages — for instance, the missionaries settled on a Nahuatl phrase that translated to “divine white tortilla” to designate the Eucharist, but the translation failed to convey the sacredness of the body of Christ.²⁰⁷ Lorenzana continues in the tradition of the orthographies that described what letters Indigenous languages “lacked” when he attributes this difficulty to the language itself:

“The Mexican (language), in itself meager and barbarous, was made more abundant by the Castilians who learned it and invented various compositions of words so to adorn it: in their Language, the Indians had no terms for the Holy Sacraments of the Church, nor for the Mysteries of our Holy Faith, and even today they cannot find their own (words) to explain them, such as would give an exact idea.”²⁰⁸

This point in American history marks a shift in the ongoing linguistic debate. It had been a conflict between the Crown and the friars — a conflict regarding the implementation of different goals (evangelization and Hispanization) by the same means (Western literacy, or teaching how to read and write the Latin alphabet). Now, the shift is to a conflict between Creole and peninsular linguistic and cultural ideologies, which resulted in a radical transformation in the uses of literacy.²⁰⁹ Mignolo writes that Nebrija’s Castilian grammar found its home in America in the second half of the eighteenth century, and especially during the neocolonial period: “Nation building went hand in hand with the final victory of the Castilian language.”²¹⁰ Although many Amerindian languages have managed to survive through modernity, they are forever marked and marred by the

²⁰⁷ Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 40.

²⁰⁸ Translated into English by Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 63.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid* 65.

²¹⁰ *Ibid* 67.

colonial *dispositif*'s reaches into Catholic missions. Latin was still taught in the late eighteenth century, but it was replaced by Castilian as the language which was taught and used in writing the memories of the new national territories.

As the Spanish New World approached and achieved independence in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the main use of literacy was no longer to be a good Hispanic Christian, but rather a good citizen of one's newly-formed nation. The paradox of Spanish linguistic imperialism was ultimately that "the grammar that Nebrija had intended to serve the expansion of the Spanish empire in fact served as a tool to help build the nations that arose from the liberation of Spanish colonization."²¹¹ Thus formal Spanish colonization/colonialism was concluded with the independence movements, but its legacy continued into coloniality/modernity with the invention of the idea of America.

Literacy & Modernity

Sylvia Scribner, a cultural psychologist who focuses on literacy, reduces literacy to three key metaphors. The first is literacy as adaptation: this refers to the merely pragmatic aspects of literacy in the realm of the individual, the "level of proficiency necessary for effective performance in a range of settings and customary activities."²¹² The second metaphor is literacy as power, which emphasizes group or community advancement. Scribner describes Paulo Freire's conception of literacy: the means to create "a critical consciousness through which a community can analyze its conditions of social existence and engage in effective action for a just society."²¹³ And finally, the third

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Sylvia Scribner, "Literacy in Three Metaphors," *Journal of American Education* vol. 93 (1986), 16.

²¹³ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 322.

metaphor is literacy as a state of grace, which centers sacred and secular values that connect literacy with power, respect, civilization, intelligence — i.e., as demonstrated throughout this thesis the Western world as set literacy up as synonymous with being civilized and refined.

Scribner adds that the “literacy as a state of grace” metaphor allows the power of literacy to transcend politics or economics; the literate person is able to derive meaning from intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual participation in the accumulated knowledge of mankind which is accessed through the written word.²¹⁴ Mignolo adds that this description of literacy corresponds with the ideology of those who “constructed literacy as a state of grace, detached from political and economic parameters. Literacy as a state of grace, in other words, erases its links with economic structures and with literacy as power, because the exercise of power dwells, precisely, in its apparent disconnection with it.”²¹⁵ This third metaphor of Scribner’s summarizes the Western ideology of literacy and represents the divide between Western reason and non-Western thinking.

Ruth Finnegan recognizes the significance of the Western perspective on literacy: It is a myth or ideology based on the predominance of communication in writing, and especially of alphabetic writing. This myth plays a significant role in the organization and control of society and the distribution of power, first during the colonial era, then during nation-building, and even now as the globe is homogenized. The mythical Western conception of literacy is but one of the manifestations of what Mignolo calls the universalization of regional concepts, and this process is derived from those within the

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

colonial matrix of power and their position as both observer and participant in colonialism and later coloniality.²¹⁶

Colonizers not only enact and participate in the processes of colonialism and coloniality, but also are enabled by the colonial matrix of power to stifle counter-narratives and perpetuate the narratives that legitimize and support coloniality. Values and concepts that originate from and benefit the hegemony are applied universally. For instance, alphabetic writing was prized and regarded as the evolutionary apex in Europe and not in the Americas — evolutionary philology and the value of the letter were regional concepts — but a philosophy of language that placed non-alphabetic writing systems and the people that used them beneath the alphabet and the Europeans was necessary to support the project of colonization and maintain the structure of coloniality. Thus, evolutionary philology is applied universally as the dominant colonial apparatus constructs a narrative that says all non-alphabetic writing systems are inferior to those that are alphabetic. Counter-narratives are silenced or subverted to fit into the colonial narrative.

According to Leon Olive, there are certain situations in which cultural relativism applies and certain situations in which it does not. Those situations that allow cultural relativism occur when there is an incommensurability between two or more conceptual frameworks (otherwise, cultural diversity or pluralism would be more appropriate). Mignolo asks whether the framing of colonization/coloniality in the Americas as cultural diversity is the result of a transformation from initial cultural relativism. A response, he argues, would necessitate a third-party observer who can determine the degree of

²¹⁶ Ibid 330.

incommensurability and make the cultures understandable to each other. The problem is that this supposed third-party observer has always been located within the colonial apparatus. Mignolo writes,

“As *participants*, Spaniards and Europeans in general lived and acted according to goals, desires, and needs prompted by a given conceptual framework (or, if you wish, a set of conceptual frameworks). As *observers*, Spanish and European literati became the judges able to compare and evaluate incommensurable conceptual frameworks. One of the crucial points in the construction of otherness was, precisely, this disguised movement between describing oneself as belonging to a given framework and describing oneself as belonging to the *right* one.”²¹⁷

Thus what should have been regarded as *alternative* conceptual frameworks, as understood by cultural relativism, were assigned places in a hierarchy of values established by those who were both participant and observer. This participation/observation beginning in the sixteenth century is situated in the growing idea of a progressive/evolutionary time frame. Mignolo calls this “spatializing time,” as this development renders coevolutionary histories impossible. Within this framework, the regional locus of enunciation — the participant/observer in Western European culture — is complicit in the “universal locus of enunciation of science and philosophy of a subject placed outside time and space.”²¹⁸ Thus Western concepts of science, philosophy, knowledge, and literacy are universalized as the only enunciations of these areas, and it is impossible to imagine alternative loci of enunciation. Essentially, that cultural incommensurability was negotiated by participants within the colonial matrix of power established the structures of coloniality/modernity, wherein participants in alternative loci

²¹⁷ Ibid 328.

²¹⁸ Ibid 330.

of enunciation (i.e., non-Western thinkers) have become the periphery, and Western configurations are universalized in the center.

The Invention of America

This center/periphery organization is at the core of coloniality/modernity, and it is at the core of what is known in decolonial thought as the invention of America. Of course, prior to formal colonization, the mass of land now known as America was known by different names given by the different civilizations that inhabited it: the Inca referred to their land as Tawantinsuyu, the Mexicas called the Valley of Mexico Anáhuac, and the people of what is today Panama named their world Abya-Yala. These people groups did not understand themselves to be living in America, because of course America did not exist before colonizers made it so. Thus, what has been described as the “discovery” of America is truly the invention of America. This ontological distinction was first articulated by the Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman in his 1958 *La invención de América*.

In this work, O’Gorman endeavors to reconstruct Columbus’s mind, referencing Columbus’s journal entries throughout his four voyages to what he would live and die believing was Asia. O’Gorman writes that after his initial 1492 voyage, Columbus had already “attributed a generic meaning to what he found. Columbus conferred on a geographical being (the *Dasein* of some lands) the specific sense that it belonged to Asia. He endowed this land with *Asiatic being* (*Seingebung*) because of his own a priori and unconditional presuppositions.”²¹⁹ Thus, although Columbus had in fact stumbled upon a

²¹⁹ Cited in Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of ‘the Other’ and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 30.

fourth continent, his invention of America as Asia “left the three parts of the world—Europe, Africa, and Asia—intact, like the holy Trinity.”²²⁰ Moreover, his invention designated the Atlantic as the commercial center between Europe and the continent, America-as-Asia, to its west. According to O’Gorman, Columbus had thus invented modernity:

“Because of his departure from Latin anti-Muslim Europe, the idea that the Occident was the center of history was inaugurated and came to pervade the European life world. Europe even projected its presumed centrality upon its own origins. Hence, Europeans thought either that Adam and Eve were Europeans or that their story portrayed the original myth of Europe to the exclusion of other cultures.”²²¹

Soon, in 1502, Amerigo Vespucci would set out from Portugal and reach the coast of Brazil in his attempt to find the strait of India. He crept down the coast of what he believed to be the Asiatic continent, holding to sail south of it, but ultimately had to return to Lisbon without success. In a letter addressed to Lorenzo de Medici, he expressed his concerns that he had not sailed along the coast of China, as was assumed since Columbus, but rather a fourth continent. Vespucci, according to Dussel, accomplished what Columbus had begun; he, the *discoverer*, guided Europe from a particularity in the Middle Ages to a discovering universality in the modern age. Thus, as O’Gorman wrote, “When Vespucci speaks of a *world* he refers to the old notion of *ecumene*,²²² of a portion of the Earth fit for human habitation. If he licitly designates the recently explored countries as a *new world*, it is because he intends to announce the

²²⁰ Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 31.

²²¹ Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 32.

²²² The ancient Greek concept of the known, inhabited/inhabitable world, as opposed to the unknown and uninhabited or temporarily inhabited. It came to stand in for the idea of a civilization as opposed to the uncivilized.

effective finding of one of these *other ecumenes*.”²²³ Thus the “discovery” of a new world means the discovery of a material upon which Europe could reproduce its own likeness, a material which does not resist subsumption — and on which its inhabitants do not appear as Other but rather as possessions of the Same, more material to be colonized and civilized. In O’Gorman’s ontology, the invention of America is immediately and always an act of domination.

In his *The Idea of Latin America*, Mignolo continues O’Gorman’s work regarding discovery/invention. He writes that the two represent not merely different perspectives, but entirely different paradigms. The first, discovery, presupposes triumphant Europe and its imperial perspective on history, a feat described and celebrated as modernity; the second reflects the “critical perspective of those who have been placed behind, who are expected to follow the ascending progress of a history to which they have the feeling of not belonging.”²²⁴ Conceiving of colonization as the invention of America reflects the perspective of the periphery, while the discovery narrative perpetuates the colonial/modern narrative that “points towards and intends to unveil an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for every one.”²²⁵

To return to the discussion begun by O’Gorman regarding the “Holy Trinity” of the three known continents prior to Europe’s “discovery” of America, Mignolo asserts that the idea of “America” cannot be understood without understanding this tripartite division. This is most famously configured in the “T-in-O” map which was published in

²²³ Quoted in Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 34.

²²⁴ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 4.

²²⁵ *Ibid* 6.

the ninth-century edition of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*. In this map, Asia occupies the top half of the circle and corresponds with Shem; Europe and Africa divide the bottom half and correspond to Japheth and Ham, respectively. Because of this tripartite division of the world and its attached Christian geo-political connotations, once the fourth continent was invented as America, it was conceived of as a continent that did not coexist with the other three, but rather came into being later. This contextualizes evolutionary models regarding the colonized as entities "trailing behind" Europe's triumphant and supposedly universal development.

Thus superiority is imbedded in the tripartite division, and seventeenth-century world maps arranging Europe and Asia in the top half and Africa and America at the bottom (usually represented by naked women) demonstrates that the Christian classification of people by continents quickly resulted in the racialization of continents.²²⁶ It was Augustine who first speculated on the relationships between Noah's three sons, a speculation that would result in their assignment to each of the three "original" continents. Augustine wrote in *The City of God*, book XVI, that the Old Testament records Noah commending his sons Japheth and Shem, but cursing Ham. Moreover, the blessing states that God will enlarge Japheth so that he will dwell in the houses of Shem. The danger emerges when Augustine states that all these events were laden with prophetic meaning. When we consider that the T-in-O map designates Africa as Shem and Europe as Japheth, and simultaneously consider the history of Europe's encounters with Africa, it becomes clear that Christian geo-politics resulted in the racialization of people by continent.

²²⁶ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 27.

What this Christian continental divide meant for America was that Europe's encounter with the land mass was primed to be cast as a discovery. In particular, the invention of America was construed as a discovery made by a region, Europe, which was blessed by God and which had been prophesied to be enlarged, following the continent's correspondence to the biblical character of Japheth. From that moment, it became a matter of taking possession. As Spanish missionaries, officials, elites, and military men moved to inhabit the newly-invented America, Western Christianity merged with the transformation of the mercantile trade through the colonial machine's emphasis on land possession and the massive exploitation of labor, both Indigenous and African.

The Catholic church, the model of evolutionary philology that guided the work of friar-linguists, and Enlightenment-era ideas of European superiority invented the idea of America and maintained it through coloniality/modernity.²²⁷ What began during formal colonization continued through the independence era and continues now through U.S. imperial intervention. What remains, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter, is to deconstruct what the myth of modernity invented.

²²⁷ Ibid 31.

Chapter Five:

Conclusion: Toward a Decolonized Epistemology

From this cell of history
this mute grave,
we birth our rage.
We heal our tongues.
We listen to ourselves.²²⁸

What the past chapters have accomplished is to retell the story of colonization/colonialism, particularly with regards to linguistics. This reconstruction served to analyze and uproot Western knowledge production, which has historically dictated how the story of colonization is told. This meant first outlining the dominant Western philosophy of language that allowed Castile to imagine itself as an empire, and its language as a colonial instrument. The Spaniards practiced their new ideology in the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, and then found new opportunities to exercise colonizing techniques when Columbus stumbled upon the New World and its inhabitants.

After the initial violence of conquest, linguistic imperialism took new forms in the mendicant and Jesuit mission stations and *Reducciones* across the continent. Having set aside Indigenous record-keeping systems as evolutionarily inferior to their own writing system, priests and friar-linguists morphed and marred native spoken languages to fit into the Latin alphabet. This work of writing orthographies and grammars coincided with and

²²⁸ Janice Mirikitani, "Prisons of Silence" in *Shedding Silence* (Millbrae: Celestial Arts, 1995), 2002.

worked in tandem with the missions' primary goal, of indoctrination and conversion, and its secondary goal, of economic gain.

Gradually, too, the Castilian Spanish language was impressed upon the colonies through royal decrees, laws, and official rulings. Throughout the period of formal colonization, the appropriation of land and the tremendous exploitation of Indigenous and African labor transformed the continent into America, the periphery to Europe's center. Western philosophy of language once again weaponized Spanish in the era of independence and nation-building with José Martí's "Nuestra América," which at once confirmed that Latin America was no longer European, but also pointed to the distinction between the America of the southern hemisphere and the Anglo-America that replaced Europe as the imperial center of the world. What this legacy of Latin America as a confrontation against Anglo-America and Europe left, according to Mignolo, was an inferiority complex about not being European, felt since the economic and political decay that began in the financial crisis of 1929.

This inferiority complex is connected to another concept Mignolo develops, the "colonial wound."²²⁹ The wound is inflicted by the colonial difference, by the links between the colonizing and colonized where knowledge, sexuality, gender, labor, finance, politics, etc. are defined by the former and impressed upon the latter (more on the colonial difference later). Mignolo writes,

each knot on the web of this genealogy [of decolonial thinking] is a point of de-linking and opening that re-introduces languages, memories, economies, social organizations, and at least double subjectivities: the splendor and the miseries of

²²⁹ The language of the colonial wound comes from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which she says, "The U.S. Mexican border es *una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (1999, 25). Mignolo asserts that the expression holds true in every situation in which the U.S. and Europe impressed or continue to impress the colonial project onto Latin America.

the imperial legacy, and the indelible footprint of what existed that has been converted into the colonial wound; in the degradation of humanity, in the inferiority of the pagans, the primitives, the under-developed, the non-democratic.²³⁰

The colonial wound encompasses the epistemological/linguistic, ontological, and material damages inflicted on colonized people by imperialism and its colonial matrix of power. As Mignolo points out, for everything splendid the empire achieved for itself, there is a corresponding “footprint” in the periphery. The inferiority complex is a part of this wound.

This despair over “not being European” is rooted in the universalization of Western concepts of science, philosophy, knowledge, and literacy. Quijano names this universalization Eurocentrism: “It is... a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic, colonizing and overcoming other previous or different conceptual formations and their respective concrete knowledges...”²³¹ Western hegemonic knowledge production is unyieldingly Eurocentric, and thus always capitalist and modern/colonial. Mignolo equates Eurocentrism to Occidentalism, clarifying two key points: First, that Occidental was the name of the region of the planet and the epistemic location of those who were and are classifying the planet; and secondly, that Occidentalism was not only *a* field of description but rather was and is also *the* locus of

²³⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto,” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, vol. 1 no. 2 (2011), 63.

²³¹ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.3 (2000), 549-550.

enunciation from where the world was classified and ranked,²³² as detailed at the end of the previous chapter.²³³

Mignolo emphasizes the “from where” — the location and the starting point of classification — because it is key to his argument that knowledge is not produced from some postmodern non-place but rather from a particular geo-historical and geo-political location. In particular, knowledge is always located across the “epistemic colonial difference.”²³⁴ The phrase *colonial difference* is used in place of *cultural difference* to underscore that

[T]he *links* between industrial, developed, and imperial countries, on the one hand, and could-be-industrial, underdeveloped, and emerging countries, on the other, *are* the colonial difference in the sphere where knowledge and subjectivity, gender and sexuality, labor, exploitation of natural resources, and finance, and authority are established.²³⁵

In other words, cultural difference ignores the implications of power, while colonial difference takes account of the coloniality of power and modes of knowledge production contained therein. What is necessary to dispel the Eurocentric assumption of knowledge production and universalization is a *geo-political reconceptualization of knowledge* — a decolonizing of knowledge located geographically, historically, and politically precisely where the colonial/modern power apparatus is rooted. Because the colonial wound

²³² Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 42.

²³³ Adjacent to Mignolo’s description of Occidentalism is Said’s classic work on Orientalism. In his introduction, Said defines Orientalism as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (Said, *Orientalism* [New York: Vintage Books, 1979]: 1-2). In this work, Said explicates how the East functioned through European exaggeration of difference to define the West, and establish its supposed superiority/centrality.

²³⁴ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 43.

²³⁵ *Ibid* 37.

inflicted by the colonial difference occurred and occurs in specific geopolitical spaces, healing the wound must occur in that same space, which is the periphery.

In the first chapter of his *Philosophy of Liberation*, Enrique Dussel states, “I am trying, then, to take space, geopolitical space, seriously.”²³⁶ Philosophy of liberation is a tradition of thought in Latin America from the “underside of humanity,” the periphery endeavoring to throw off coloniality/modernity. He writes that this philosophy is postmodern in the sense that it was modern European philosophy — before Descartes’ *ego cogito* but certainly after it — that situated all people and all cultures as malleable tools and instruments. This Western ontology understands all people as interpretable beings; and the spatially centered *ego cogito* interpreted non-Western peoples as other, thereby constituting the periphery. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, one of the early Spanish historians of the conquest, posed the question, “Are the Amerindians human beings?”²³⁷ His unspoken questions were, Are they Europeans? And therefore rational animals? The theoretical response, Dussel writes, is unimportant, as the Americas are still suffering from the practical response.

The *ego cogito* is preceded by the *ego conquiro*, the “I conquer” applied to the Indigenous cultures of America and elsewhere; the “I enslave” applied to Africans sold, enslaved, exploited and killed throughout the world; the “I vanquish” of the wars won by colonizers. From this legacy, Europe establishes itself as the archetypal foundational “I.” This “I,” the *ego*, is Spinoza’s unique substance, perfect divinity and absolute knowledge. “If faith,” Dussel writes, “is the certitude that the representation of the understanding is the absolute Idea, such certitude is that which world dominators have: they are the

²³⁶ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 3.

²³⁷ *Ibid* 419.

manifestation on earth of the divinity.”²³⁸ However, Nietzsche declared that “God is dead” — and here, that is to say that Europe (and by extension the United States) is dead because it has deified itself. The “fetish,” the setting up of Western modernity as divinely ordained, has died; and liberation is possible when one has the “courage to be atheistic vis-à-vis an empire of the center...”²³⁹ Thus decolonizing begins when faith in centered, universalized Western epistemology ends.

Particularly in relation to this project’s topic, decolonizing necessitates being “atheistic” toward Western ideas about language, about how we should think about, use, and value different languages. What Anibal Quijano accomplished was to link Eurocentrism with knowledge, and coloniality with Eurocentrism. Decolonization, then, first requires decolonizing knowledge. This means de-linking from universalized European epistemology, or eurologocentrism, controlled by Western languages and institutions like the church, and grounded in first Greek and then Latin as “the ultimate linguistic ground in which epistemic categories are lodged,”²⁴⁰ as demonstrated through the discussed results of evolutionary philology.

Decoloniality is a double-faced concept. One face “points toward the analytic of coloniality,”²⁴¹ while the second face points toward building decolonial futures. The analytic steps, though, are already decolonial in that naming the fruits of modernity as “coloniality” is using a concept that was created by a particular way of thinking and ideological frame, which is that of the periphery. The analytic side is decolonial again by

²³⁸ Ibid 423.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, “Decolonizing Western Epistemology / Building Decolonial Epistemologies” in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, eds. Ada María Isasi-Díaz & Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 23.

²⁴¹ Ibid 20.

de-linking, as Quijano advises, from Western epistemology. This first step is to think not from the center, but rather from the border, from *exteriority*. While the discourse of modernity defines itself as interiority, its center-ness, through creating the difference to be marginalized,²⁴² exteriority is the dwelling place of the world population that does not belong in civilization or democracy, that resides in the “/” of “modernity/coloniality.” Thinking from the exteriority to de-link from Western epistemology entails rejecting Western modernity’s claim to universality and opening up to what Partha Chatterjee calls “our modernity,” a modernity rooted in the history of power differential that entangled both generations (for Chatterjee, England and India) in imperial/colonial relations.

For the decolonial future in general and particular for a decolonial future of language, the decolonial option — the second side of decoloniality — is an *epistemic disobedience*, where a civil disobedience would merely operate in Western epistemology, regulated by Greek, Latin, and the six European imperial languages.²⁴³ Epistemic disobedience rejects Western epistemology in favor of the epistemology of the border. Quijano urges that “epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings as the basis of another rationality that legitimately pretends to some universality.”²⁴⁴ Thus as the universalizing project of modernity/coloniality is tossed aside, the pluriversal projects of decoloniality allow for the possible future of an epistemology that is genuinely universal. It is universal not because it dominates and

²⁴² Ibid 26.

²⁴³ Spanish, French, English, Portuguese, Dutch, and Italian.

²⁴⁴ Mignolo, “Decolonizing Western Epistemology / Building Decolonial Epistemologies,” 24.

colonizes, but rather because it incorporates an interchange of experiences without the power differential.

This thesis is an effort at the first face of decoloniality, the analytic side which works to uproot Western epistemology. My aim has been to recount the history of Spanish linguistic imperialism in the colonization of Latin America in such a way as to analyze the ideology that made Spain an empire, and its language a tool of modernity/coloniality. Ultimately, my aim is to point to the critical truth expressed in Toni Morrison's story which was retold in the introduction to this project. Language, how we think about languages, which languages we value and how we use language — these are not neutral decisions. The logic of modernity is woven into the disciplines we teach and learn, and at the core of how we operate linguistically within these spheres. Therefore, it is crucial to critically examine what coloniality/modernity lead us to believe about languages, and about the people who use them. Without knowledge of this underside of history, it will be impossible to understand the colonizing effects of imperial language, or the ways linguistic philosophies have contributed to the colonial wound. Reconstructing the history of linguistic imperialism is part of the necessary first step in de-linking from the violent logic of modernity, and the first step in an epistemic disobedience, toward truly universal epistemologies.

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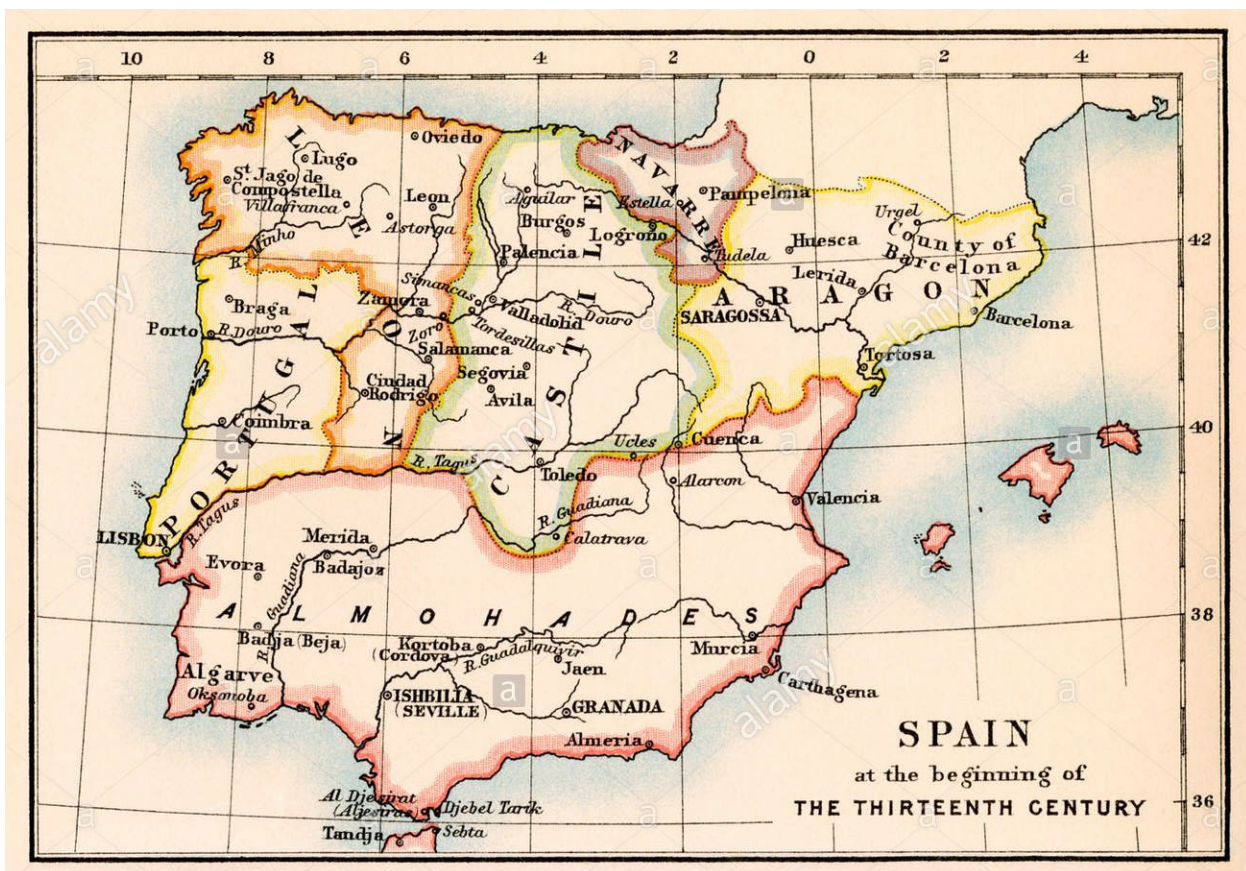
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Appendix A



Map depicting the Iberian Peninsula in the 13th century. Color lithograph.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ *Map of the Iberian Peninsula Under the Moors, 13th Century.* North Wind Picture Archives / Alamy Stock Photo. <https://www.alamy.com/map-of-the-iberian-peninsula-under-the-moors-13th-century-color-lithograph-image60634872.html>

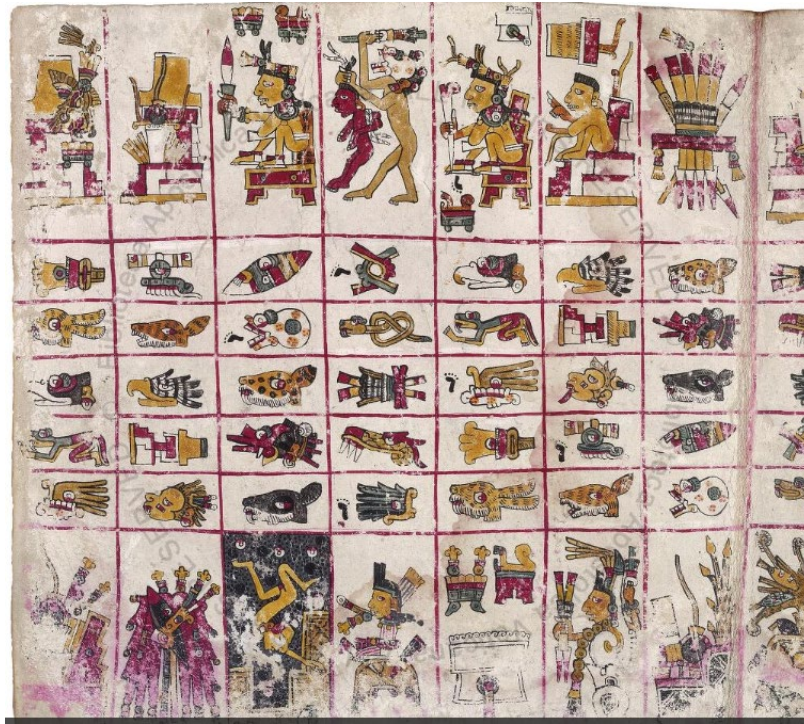
Appendix B



Image depicting the Valley of Mexico, Lake Texcoco, and Tenochtitlan.²⁴⁶

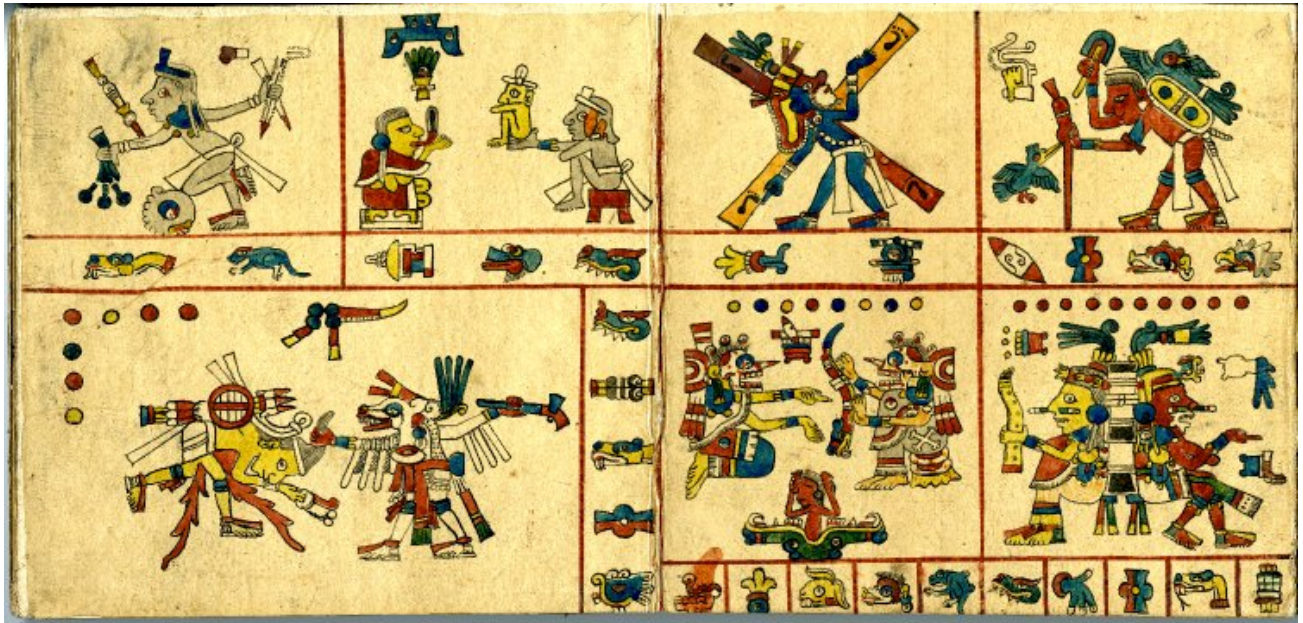
²⁴⁶ *The Valley of Mexico*. In Miguel Leon-Portilla, ed. *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), xxxi.

Appendix C



Images from the Borgia Codex. Yacatecuhtli is depicted on the bottom row, in the sixth box from the left, and can be identified by the bundle of staffs in his hand.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ *Codex Borgia*, page 8. Year unknown. Digital Vatican Library, Vatican City.
https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Borg.mess.1



Images from the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer. Yacatecuhtli occupies the second box from the right on the top row. The cross behind him represents crossroads in trade routes.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ *Fejérváry-Mayer (facsimile) / Códice Mayer (facsimile) / Codex de Pesth (facsimile)*. Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, The British Museum, 8.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=568552001&objectid=662518

Appendix D



Drawings based on the Codex Florentino depicting the evil omens warning of the coming of the Spaniards. The top depicts a great column of flame; the middle, the dark-feathered bird with a mirrored diadem on its forehead; and the bottom, the *tlacantzolli*, or “men-squeezed-together.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ *Evil Omens (Codex Florentino)*. In Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 8.

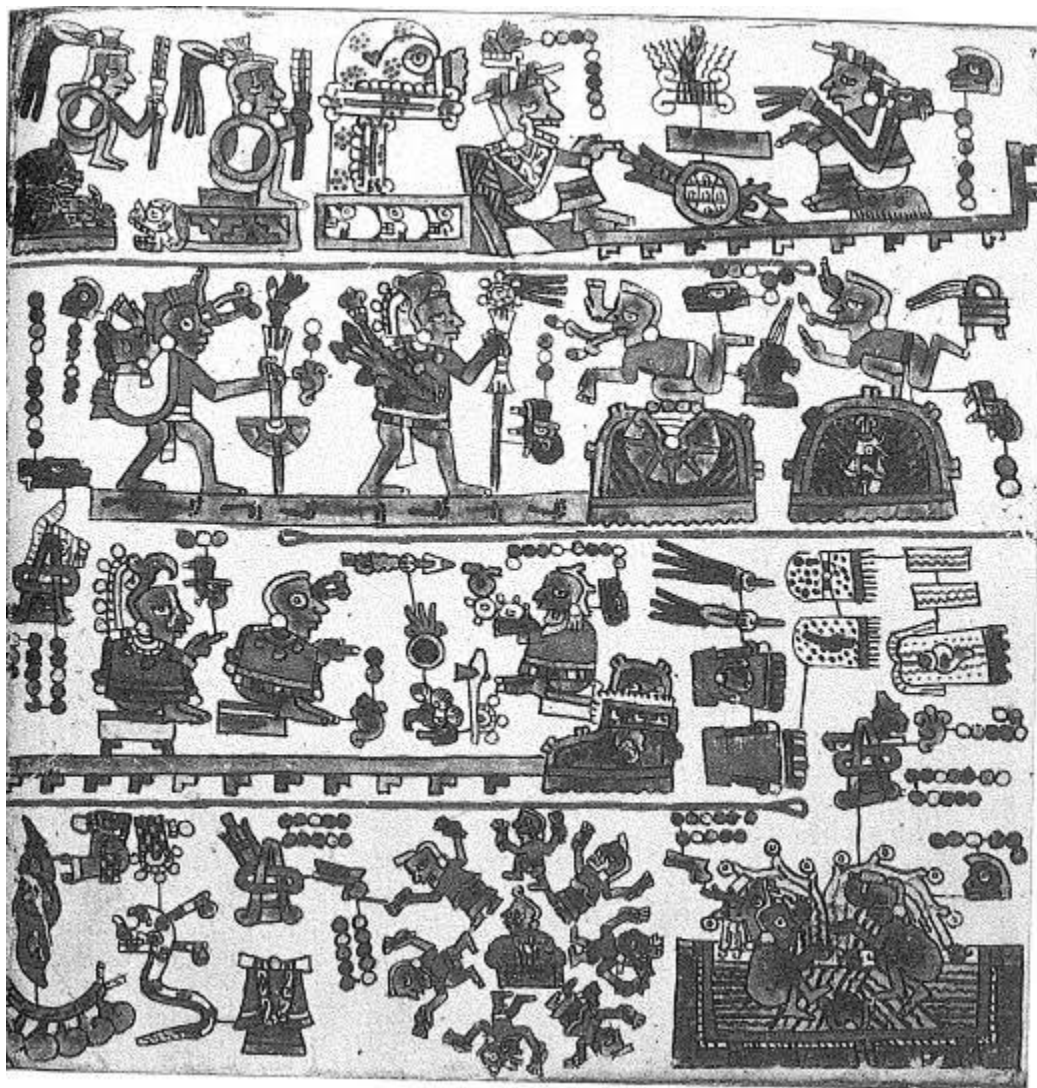
Appendix E



The colonial matrix of power.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Schematic visualization of the colonial matrix of power. In Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 9.

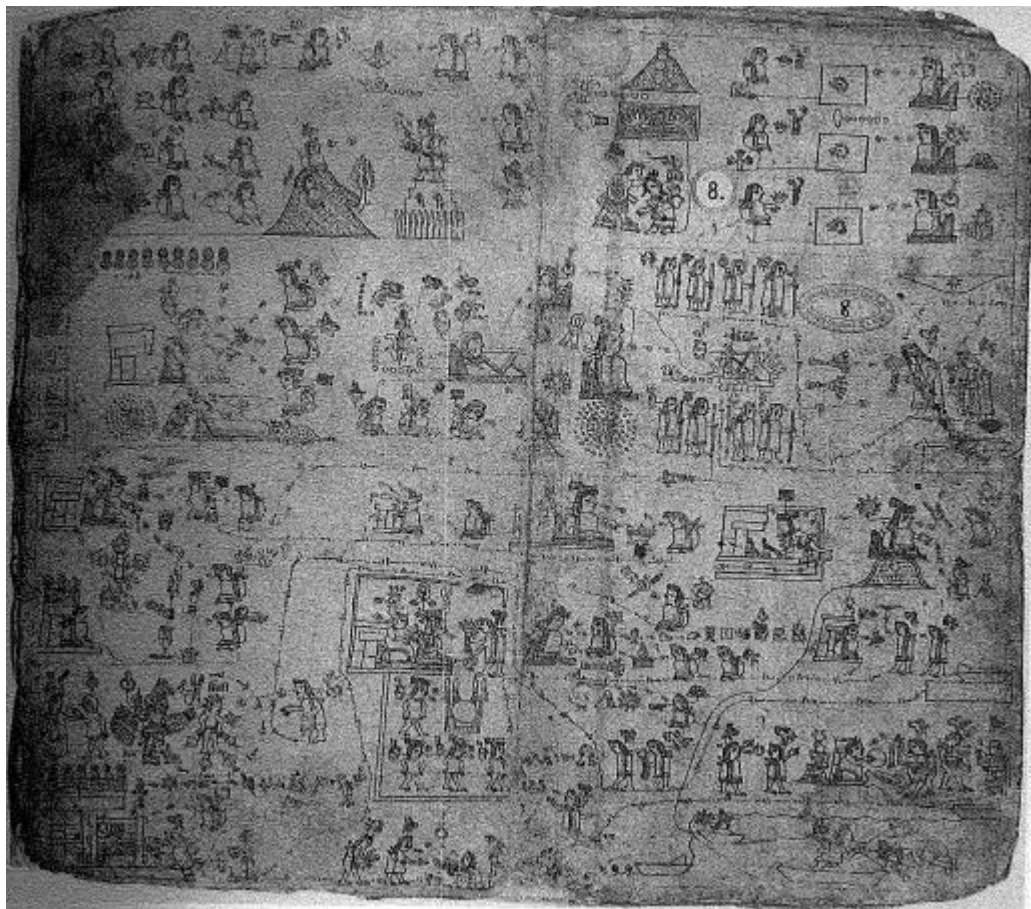
Appendix F



Example of a Mexica *res gestae*.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Figure 3: The story of Lady 6 Monkey, Codex Selden page 7. In Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Aztec Pictorial Histories: Records without Words," in Elizabeth Hill Boone & Walter D. Mignolo, eds., *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica & the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 57.

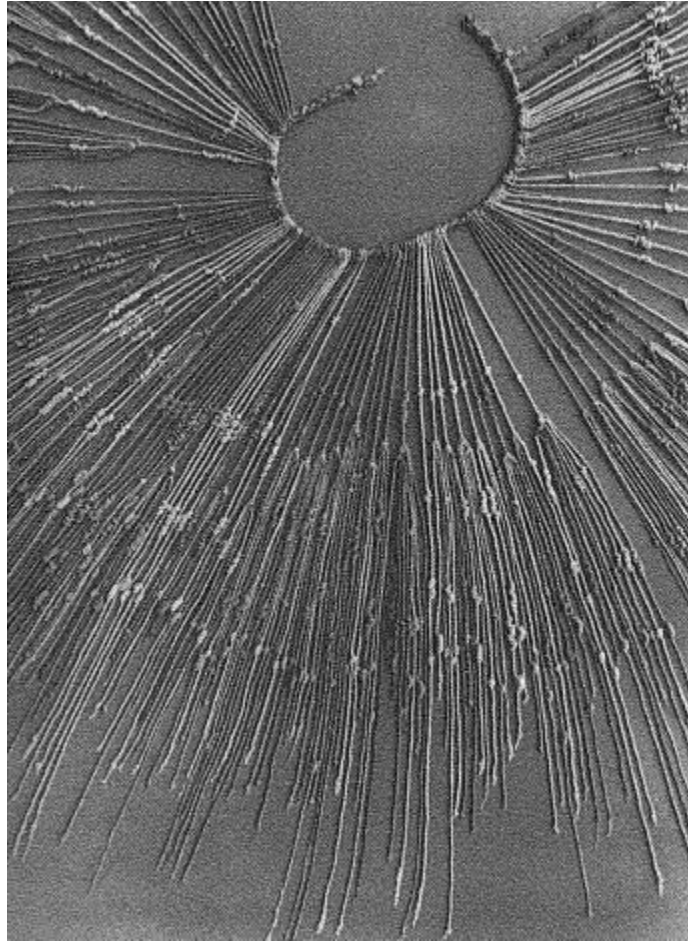
Appendix G



Mexica cartographic history.²⁵²

²⁵² Figure 6: *Codex Xolotl*, map 8 (after the 1980 edition), in *Ibid*, 63.

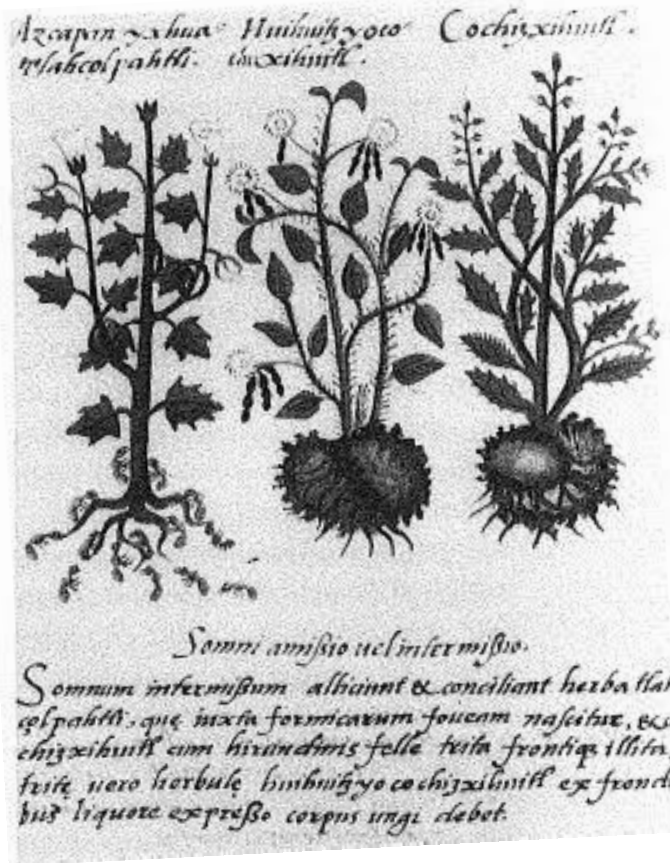
Appendix H



An Inca quipu.²⁵³

²⁵³ Figure 7 in Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge," in Elizabeth Hill Boone & Walter D. Mignolo, eds., *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica & the Andes* (Duke: Durham University Press, 2011), 21.

Appendix I



A treatise of Indigenous medicine written in Nahuatl by Martín de la Cruz (Nahuatl can be seen at the top of the image, written in alphabetic writing), and translated into Latin (at the bottom).²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Fig. 1.6. The Spread of Western literacy in central Mexico: a treatise of Amerindian medicine written in Nahuatl, in alphabetic writing, and translated into Latin (Martín de la Cruz, *Libellus de medicinalibus indorum herbis*) in Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 57.