

BOOK REVIEW

TRANSLATION, COLONIALITY, AND EPISTEMICIDE

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Translation and Epistemicide. Racialization of Languages in the Americas, Joshua M. Price, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2023, 189 pp, \$55, ISBN 978-0-8165-4782-1.

Inspiring: This is the word to describe *Translation and Epistemicide: Racialization of Languages in the Americas* by Joshua Price. The book takes the reader on a diachronic journey from colonial times to the present, exploring the connections between translation and epistemicide in the Americas. The book's cover, which features a detail from the work of Colombian artist Keko, aptly illustrates the ambiguities and the sense of intricacy radiating from the book's thematic axis that interweaves three main dimensions: colonialism/coloniality, translation, and epistemicide. Epistemicide refers to forms of power abuse characteristic of the coloniality of Eurocentered modernity, which "destroying, marginalizing, or banishing Indigenous, subaltern, and counterhegemonic knowledges" (2023, p. 4). Translation is a social practice that can reproduce but also challenge epistemicide, moving beyond the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy. The translation is indeed understood as "refraction" "not only of texts but of worldviews, epistemologies, and ontology (multiple ontologies), as well as the translation of sense of self or selfhood" (2023, p. 12), in its contextual, social, cultural, political, and material dimensions, while considering power asymmetries that can racialize languages, the epistemologies and ontologies they convey, and their speakers.

The book includes five chapters. In the first four, Price identifies and shows the mechanisms of 4 main strategies of the "translation-as-epistemicide" (2023, p. 1): the commensuration of languages and worldviews (chapter 1); epistemic marginalization (chapter 2); epistemic criminalization (chapter 3); and translation as intellectual extractivism (chapter 4). Above all, the final chapter (chapter 5) analyses examples of methodologies and strategies of decolonial translation. Indeed, with the premise that "not all translation is epistemicide, not all epistemicide involves translation, and not all epistemicide in Eurocentric or involved in racializing language" (2003, p. 13), the case studies, framed within their broad historical and political contexts, show how translation can function both as a tool of epistemicide and as a means to defiance power hierarchies in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Chapter 1 explores how, during colonial times in the Americas, bilingual dictionaries that graphically combined colonial Spanish with indigenous languages served the purposes of

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evangelisation and colonisation of the colonised populations and territories. However, linguistic policies changed over time and were not homogeneous. The dictionaries constructed and naturalised asymmetries between indigenous languages and Spanish. Price emphasises the paradoxical aspect of the colonial project, noting that “the *vocabularios* glued two worldviews together hierarchically in a way that favored a Christian cosmology, an emerging Renaissance humanism, and an incipient universalist understanding of the human, even as many of the missionaries racialized language in such a way that they both recognized the humanity of Indigenous people and depicted them as intrinsically inferior” (2023, p. 26). Despite attempting to impose a forced commensuration implicit in the fixed and dichotomous structure of dictionaries, they also created neologisms, demonstrating the changing character of languages and cultures in contact. The translation project of dictionaries involved matching words and phrases in a binary system and implied a supposed equivalence of referents and domains. This epistemicidal translation system, on the one hand, suppressed differences and eliminated and denigrated concepts that did not correspond to the Christian worldview, as colonialism had imposed a system of representation that racialised Indigenous languages and their epistemologies as inferior. On the other hand, dictionaries attempted to mould Indigenous worldviews to fit into the Christian epistemological framework. The commensuration of worlds perpetuated through dictionary translation was based on the assumption that the categorisation between nature and culture in Western thought was universal.

These processes of epistemic injustice have dynamically regenerated throughout history through the marginalization of translators, interpreters, and theorists who have laid the groundwork for a theory and practice of decolonial translation, as exemplified by the Peruvian writer, translator, and anthropologist José María Arguedas. Price reads Arguedas’s essay *The Anguish of the Mestizo Between Quechua and Spanish* (1939) in counterpoint to Walter Benjamin’s *The Task of the Translator* (1923). Arguedas, on the periphery of modernity, “provides an embodied theory and he places Western rationality in tense conflict with other forms of thinking rather than transcendentally above other ways of thinking” (2023, p. 67). However, as valuable as Arguedas’s decolonial approach to translation theory may be, his contribution has been marginalised compared to Benjamin’s classic text.

If Chapter 2 provides an example of epistemic marginalisation, Chapter 3 demonstrates contemporary instances of how epistemicide operates through criminalising translations, translators, and interpreters. The racialisation of languages entails the racialisation of translations and the knowledge they convey, as well as the individuals who speak them, given that “translating is an embodied activity” (2023, p. 105). These processes are instrumental in imperialistic state control of counterdiscourses. In the logic of the war on terror, the United States justice system has controlled and prosecuted various Arab American and Latinx translators and interpreters for their translations, as the cases in the book, such as those of Tarek Mehanna, Mohamed Yousry, and Erik Camayd-Freixas. These

cases exemplify how imperialism can compel translators and interpreters “to be obedient to epistemicidal rather than liberatory logics” (2023, p. 21).

Chapter 4 investigates a potential case of epistemicide in the academic realm related to “intellectual imperialism” (2023, p. 107). Starting from the analysis of the growing academic field of ‘performance studies’ and the (non-)translation of the same notion of ‘performance’ in Latin America, the book examines possible risks of cultural homogenization and extractivism by the American and Anglophone intellectual hegemony, which may draw from the cultural and artistic practices of Latin America. These theoretical and methodological attitudes can reinforce the cultural and academic domination of the Global North and do not support “decolonizing imperial knowledge or open the way to a thorough reconstitution of the academic departments that produce that kind of knowledge” (2023, p. 136).

Chapter 5 concludes the book with a constructive outlook, delving into techniques and strategies of decolonial translation. The chapter highlights two examples of how subaltern intellectuals and activists can question hegemonic systems that reproduce themselves “not just between groups but also among members of subaltern, racialized groups” (2023, p. 138). Price illustrates the ‘stereoscopic reading’ as a decolonial methodology, which, as Marilyn Gaddis Rose explains, involves “a translation [being] read in ‘stereo’ with its source and it is read as an interpretation of its source” (2023, p. 139). Price selects contemporary Latinx queer theorists Rick Santos and Ernesto Martínez as paradigmatic examples of ‘stereoscopic reading’. Their translation projects bring to life not just an interpretation of differences but also produce a “transformative effect” (2023, p. 139) as political practices. Indeed, as translators and cultural actors, they “live in translation” (2023, p. 149), interpreting and reframing “the dangerous intersections of cultures in conflict at points of colonial predation and the policing of subaltern and racialized masculinity” (2023, p. 22).

The book concludes by reflecting on the ethical role of translation, both in its theoretical and practical dimensions, to facilitate the emergence of a plurality of views of worlds, with all their ambiguities and frictions. For this reason, as the author suggests, it is crucial to continue delving into the connections between translation, epistemologies, and ontologies in contexts of power asymmetries. With a selection of bold and original examples, the book constitutes a valuable and necessary contribution to translation studies and cultural studies, illuminating the mechanisms that link epistemicide and translation. From a transhistorical perspective, it consistently highlights forms of epistemic and decolonial defiance.

About the author: Paola Mancosu holds a PhD in Hispanic Philology from the University of Barcelona and a PhD in Translation Studies from the Univesitat Pompeu Fabra. She is Associate Professor in Spanish Translation at the University of Milan. Her research focuses on sociological translation and postcolonial translation, with particular attention to self-translation.