

***T* RANSLATION AND *E* THNOGRAPHY**  
**The Anthropological Challenge of Intercultural Understanding**

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Transculturation and the Colonial Difference

## Double Translation

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“Translation” is indeed a large issue, and the accumulated bibliography is not easy to summarize. Our interest in it is limited to the geohistorical frame of the modern/colonial world-system,<sup>1</sup> in its double relation with modernity and coloniality and their related but differing perspectives. We would interrogate translation beyond the domain of the “word,” oral or written, and beyond the literary model that has pervaded thinking about translation in the recent past. Framed by the modern/colonial world-system, translation is theorized here as one element in a larger set of processes we call “transculturation,” following Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1995).<sup>2</sup> In our argument, translation and transculturation are conceptualized as fundamental processes in building the very idea of modernity and its constitutive companion, coloniality. The process of translation and transculturation, as we will show, is also crucial to current efforts at reshaping modernity/coloniality. However, now it will be an enactment and theory of “double translation” that reverses the translation and transculturation that has followed in the global scenario.

The initial scene of the modern/colonial world is the Atlantic as an emergent commercial circuit linking communities and civilizations of the “Old World” (Asia, Africa, and Europe) to the “New World” (America). In this scene, the violent contact of Christian ideals with the great civilizations of Mesoamerica (Aztecs and Mayan) and the Andes (Incas and Aymaras) brought translation/transculturation into contact situations and established them as part of the consolidation of mercantile capitalism, slavery, and conversion to Christianity. The Christian mission, projected from Rome and implemented by Spain and Portugal in the New World and elsewhere, found in translation/transculturation a useful and necessary tool. “Conversion” necessarily relied on and was inseparable from translation and transculturation. Further, translation and transculturation in the service of conversion were marked by a value system and a structure of power—the coloniality of power implemented by the bearers and metaphorical soldiers of modernity—of the right

religion and of the true word. Structured by the coloniality of power, translation and transculturation became unidirectional and hierarchical and, therefore, one pillar for the foundation and reproduction of the colonial difference,<sup>3</sup> from the sixteenth century to the Cold War and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

### **Territorial Thinking and Translation/ Transculturation in the Modern/Colonial World-System**

Critical reflections on translation in the last fifty years have shown how the realm of linguistics—literature, philosophy of language, and anthropology—pre-supposes the macronarrative of Western civilization from the Greeks to the invention of the alphabet through modern/colonial and European languages (Robinson 1997). Not all translation involves Europe or the United States. Certainly there have been translations from Chinese to Taiwanese or from Argentinean Spanish to Brazilian Portuguese. Our interest, however, lies in theorizing translation across the colonial difference and as shaped by the coloniality of power. Anthropology, for instance, presupposes cross-cultural understanding brought about by coloniality and modernity, such that the expansion of the Western world in the name of modernity justifies coloniality. Anthropology often remains caught up within Eurocentric notions of progress and civilization, thereby dooming to disappearance any alternatives to Western cultural models (Alexandrov 1998).

Missionaries and men of letters faced a similar problem in the sixteenth century. They set the stage for what later would be codified into the emerging social science of anthropology. Between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, the intense traffic of ideas and linguistic interactions among Arabic, Greek, and Latin implied constant effort at translation and transculturation. However, the underlying structure of power differed from the one that would operate after 1500 upon the emergence of the modern/colonial world. Since then translation contributed to the construction of hierarchical dichotomies that have imposed certain rules and directionalities of transculturation. Translation helped build the colonial difference between Western European languages (languages of the sciences, knowledge and the locus of enunciation) and the rest of the languages on the planet (languages of culture and religion and the locus of the enunciated).

Translation was indeed the process wherein the coloniality of power articulated the colonial difference. Franciscans and Dominicans in Mesoamerica, in the first half of the sixteenth century, and Jesuits in China, toward the end of the

sixteenth century, planted, so to speak, the banner of the modern/colonial world imaginary in terms of translating knowledge and establishing the principles in epistemic colonial power (Quijano 2000). This is illustrated by the imbalance in translation efforts aimed at assimilation and by the imposition of urban and a European gender imaginary. Christian missionaries initiated a massive project of writing grammars and vocabularies of Amerindian languages. The approximately fifty years (from 1528 to 1578) that the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagun devoted to translating Nahuatl into Latin and Spanish and the time that many religious orders devoted to translating Spanish and Latin into Nahuatl for the purpose of conversion are dramatic and exemplary cases of translation for assimilation. They are dramatic and exemplary because these became models that later were recon-verted and adapted by subsequent religious orders in Africa and Asia.

This translation machine entailed an enormous effort to write grammars of non-European languages and to adapt them to the Latin grammar, or to translate the concepts and ideas of other cosmologies to the Christian one that emerged in the New World (Mignolo 1995, ch. 1). And here the question was not simply the incommensurability of different worldviews but of different worldviews tied up by the coloniality of power in the making of the colonial difference. Translation and interpretation designated one particular epistemic/theological perspective as correct, conceiving as deviant and insufficient other forms of knowledge, be it Confucianism or Buddhism in China (Jones 1999; Hart 1999), or unnamed forms of knowledge among the Aztecs and the Incas (Mignolo 1995, chs. 2 and 3).

During the Renaissance, translation in service of conversion intersected with debates over the body that established the idea of fixed, dichotomous, and unchangeable gender identities, no longer subject to medieval conceptions that explained gender as a result of body heat and thus capable of sudden change.<sup>5</sup> These medical debates were linked to the issue of colonialism, as the New World continued for some time to function as a space wherein undecided gender identities could continue in their ambiguity. The life of Catalina de Erauso may be an example in point. The anxiety about Amazons may be another (Mott 1992; Montrose 1991).

At the time of conquest, land was conceptualized as feminine, a territory to be penetrated and governed by masculine rule. Communicating with or resenting to the self and to the authorities in the Spanish homeland an unknown reality created problems of translation that were resolved by containing the unknown in European metaphors. The indigenous populations were thus translated as innocent children, fierce barbarians, or Amazons. In the case of the Amazons,

indigenous social roles that clashed with European expectations symbolized a gender-bending threat that needed to submit and be contained at home as well as in the colonies (Mott 1992; Montrose 1991). Each of these subject-images lacked the civilized masculinity that was under construction in early modernity and that would come into its full after the European Enlightenment. By the end of the Renaissance, these ambiguities were translated and fixed into the dichotomies that differentiated civilized from uncivilized men and women, self from other.

In the nineteenth century, Eurocentric definitions of colonial relations again employed gender imagery to construct progress, development, science (knowledge), and Europe (or in Latin America, the European-oriented city) itself as masculine. The rural space of barbarianism, often populated by Amerindian people, was landscaped as the city's/Europe's binary other, identified as static and again fitted with the lack of a particular masculinity. Until recently, the rural/urban divide that allocates knowledge within an urban and public geographic sphere continued to firmly associate the private and rural with femininity (Massey 1994). The gendering of the colonial difference thus operates on a one-way notion of translation that resists contamination by the "other" despite the insufficiency of language to represent the "other" within the dominant order.

Translation was indeed unbalanced. In the sixteenth century, conversion to Christianity offered the general frame for establishing the directionality of translation and transculturation. Although neoliberal economics is not the same as Christianity, neoliberalism's logic contains a hidden principle of "conversion" even as the strategies and discourses have changed. Today it amounts to nothing less than a total conversion to global market relations and consumerism that leaves no space for alternatives. We locate translation and transculturation as processes within the overall frame of the colonial difference and the context of the modern/colonial world-system, grounded in an ethnorracial, gendered, and epistemological foundation.

### Cosmologies, Cultural Practices, and Translation/ Transculturation

~ If chroniclers and missionaries fixed an enduring model of translation in the sixteenth century, the Zapatistas drastically changed this model at the end of the twentieth and contributed to a theory of translation/transculturation that is undoing the principles under which colonial differences were established all over the world. The missionaries' project consisted of translating Amerindian

languages into Spanish for the twin purposes of assimilation and conversion. Like the chroniclers, the missionaries' translations were conducted from the hegemonic perspective of local Christian histories projecting and enacting global designs (e.g., to Christianize the world).

On the contrary, the Zapatistas' theory of translation and the project attached to it underscore how the missionaries' translation constructed the colonial difference at the same time the missionaries intended to erase this difference by assimilation through conversion. The Zapatistas brought the colonial difference to the foreground as a place of epistemic and political intervention (Mignolo 2002). The dictum "Because we are all equal we have the right to be different" is the most concise and clear formula of the colonial difference as a place of translation/transculturation from a perspective of subalternity. The Zapatistas' enactment and theory of translation (see the example from Subcomandante Marcos below) was performed from the subaltern perspective of local Marxist and Amerindian histories in resistance against and transformation of global designs. Their performance and theory of translation is not merely from one language to another, but also a complex and double movement. First, there is the double translation/transculturation of Marxism and also of feminism into Amerindian cosmology and vice versa. Second, this double translation is not isolated, but rather it occurs in response and accommodation to the hegemonic discourse of the Mexican state that, in 1994, was identified as neoliberal. Let us explore this scheme and explain our perspective on translation/transculturation and the colonial difference by focusing on Major Ana María's opening address to the Intercontinental Encounter in the Lacandon Forest in August 1996:

*For power, the one that today is globally dressed with the name of neoliberalism, we neither counted nor produced. Did not buy or sell. We were an idle number in the accounts of Big Capital. Here in the highlands of the Mexican Southeast, our dead ones are alive. Our deads who live in the mountains know many things. Their death talked to us and we listened. The mountain talked to us, the macehualo, we the common and ordinary people, we the simple people as we are called by the powerful.*

*We were born war [sic] with the white year, and we began to trace the path that took us to the heart of yours, the same that today took you to our heart. That's who we are. The EZLN [Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/Zapatista National Liberation Army]. The voice which arms itself so that it can make itself heard. The face which hides itself so it can be shown. The name that keeps quiet in order to be named. The red star which calls to humanity and the world, so that they will listen, so that they will see, so that*

they will nominate. The tomorrow that is harvested in the yesterday. Behind our black face. Behind our armed voice. Behind our unspeakable name. Behind the we that you see. Behind us we are (at) you [Detras de nosotros estamos ustedes]. (Major Ana Maria 1997)

The last sentence, *Detras de nosotros estamos ustedes*, deserves careful attention. First, there is the word order between “we” and “you.” The sentence could have been translated as “We are behind you.” Second, there is the ungrammatical use of *estamos* (“are”) instead of *somos* (“are”) that dislocates a simple rendering as “we are you.” Instead, *estamos* creates a fracture in Spanish that has to be rendered by the “non-sense” (in Spanish and English!): “We are at you.” The important point is not whether Ana Maria should gloss and explain for nonspeakers of Tojolabal what she “means” in Spanish or English, but that the fracture in the sentence is produced by the intervention of the “other” grammar, the grammar of an Amerindian language. More than this, two interrelated elements deserve attention. One concerns the grammar and the other, the cosmology that grammar mirrors. In the fracture produced by translation from Tojolabal to Spanish to English, the cosmologies of grammar highlight the dimensions of colonial difference.

Carlos Lenkersdorf (1996) describes Tojolabal as an intersubjective language, by which he means that, unlike Spanish or English, it lacks direct and indirect objects. In languages like Spanish, the grammar places some portion of the world, including persons, outside a speaker’s realm of interactions. Amerindian languages such as Tojolabal are based on a cosmology in which persons, living systems, and nature are not objects but subjects. This interaction between grammar and cosmology has been noticed in other Amerindian cosmologies. As long as grammar, cosmology, and knowledge remain interrelated, translation/transculturation cannot be controlled by one type of correlation between language, worldviews, knowledge, and wisdom.<sup>6</sup>

If we think of the modern/colonial world-system and consider the fact that, since the sixteenth century, God and Reason (a Christian reason, to be sure) became the anchor of the overarching imaginary of the modern/colonial world and the West (or Occident), then the question of translation/transculturation is no longer one of dualism. We are no longer facing the question of “the West and the Rest” but “the Rest in the West” as well as “The West in the Rest.” This is the reinscription of the colonial difference from the perspective of subalterity that the Zapatistas have been teaching us and that impinges on the ways translation/transculturation can be theorized and enacted in the future.

Major Ana Maria’s discourse and Lenkersdorf’s observation on Tojolabal language unlock a four-hundred-year history of repressive translation. With apologies for jumping from Tojolabal in southern Mexico to Aymara in Bolivia, let us offer one example from Aymara. The Aymara word *Pachakuti* caused missionaries and anthropologists in the twentieth century a lot of headaches. The problem was to find the “right” translation and interpretation for Pachakuti: what kind of “god” was he, after all? Ethnographic information was very complex, and the full understanding of Pachakuti very elusive. Recently, however, a different understanding about Pachakuti has come from French, British, and Bolivian anthropologists Therese Bouysson-Cassagne, Denise Arnold, Tristan Platt, Olivia Harris, and Veronica Cereceda (Bouysson-Cassagne et al. 1987; Arnold et al. 1992).

A simple but accurate description of *Pacha* is to say that it condenses Western notions of space and time. *Kuti*, on the other hand, means a shift of opposites when contrary terms are irreducible to one another. (Contrary terms are collapsed in another term, *Tinku*, which means the encounter of contrary terms.) If Kuti is the shifting of contrary terms, then Pachakuti is a turn or revolt, a violent turnaround of events. Naturally the situation created by the arrival of the Spaniards was referred to as Pachakuti. So, after all, Pachakuti did not name a “god” but instead described intersubjective relations. Language, for Aymara speakers, was slightly different than for a Spanish speaker: the Aymara speaker was not naming, but rather establishing relations with the world. That world was not divided between human beings, objects, and gods (as objects), but rather it was conceived as a network of living interactions, including those with nature, gods, and—to the Occidental eye—seemingly lifeless objects. *Pacha*, hence, is not the object of space but the relation of space and time.

Perhaps we should understand Major Ana Maria in this sense when she stated that “our dead ones are alive. Our deads who live in the mountains know many things. Their death talked to us and we listened. The mountain talked to us.” Perhaps it also refers to the way that space is a visual archive of knowledge that contains memory—that is, time (Rappaport 1998, 161–73; Salomon and Urioste 1991). In any case, the discourse of Ana Maria and Zapatismo conflates space and time, translates (*tras-ladar*) the past into the present. Amerindian memories of the past are transformed by the perspective of today. They conflate, in a specific manner, the past into the necessities of the present.

The translating subject, Ana Maria, also translates the Amerindians into the present of global time. She claims coevalness with the West, as has Rigoberta Menchú. In so doing she unravels metaphorical attachments between nature,

femininity, stasis, and indigenous people that have held them at bay in Western conceptualizations of development and modernity.<sup>8</sup> Amerindians are not primitives located on a temporal axis of development and occupying a position of premodernity. Amerindians and Amerindian memories are present, and there is no primeval authenticity. They are present in and through the colonial difference as the place where transculturation and the coloniality of power are constantly at work. This transculturation takes place on Amerindian terms; there is no integration to the nation on national terms. Instead, there is a particular kind of translation/transculturation going on in which a dense history of oppression and subalternization of language and knowledge is being unlocked.

There is a fundamental difference between what goes on in the case of the Zapatistas and recent academic approaches to translation, even when the latter are grounded on postcolonial principles.<sup>9</sup> Liu (1999), for instance, situates the problem of translation in the context of coloniality. She combines linguistics (de Saussure) and semiotic theory (Baudrillard) with Marxist notions of exchange value to signal broader contexts of power difference that inform the relations between China and the West. She argues that a theory of translation must consider circumstantial meetings of languages and people that are based on interactive and conflictual processes in colonial contexts, rather than on fixed identities.

Unlike our explorations of Zapatismo in Mexico, however, Liu capitalizes on the violence accompanying colonization and colonial relations as well as the cooperation of colonial intellectuals in translating from English to Chinese—the focus of much recent postcolonial work. The difference is that Liu does not question the geopolitical directionality of translation—that is, the relations between language, knowledge, and power. While the Zapatistas' political visions stem from the translation of Western thought into Maya cosmovision and vice versa, all the while confronted with the hegemony of the state, postcolonial approaches to translation (e.g., Liu 1999; Niranjana 1992) seem to want to prove that an original, multiple way of thinking is legitimized in its existence by the European master's deconstructions. However, this need for legitimation only reinstates the colonial directionality of translation/transculturation.

Still, the centrality of the concept of exchange value in Liu's argument allows her to recognize contexts of translation as exchange not only of verbal and symbolic concepts but also of material objects or "tokens," as she calls them. The terms seem useful in order to think translation/transculturation as a situated practice that includes various forms of engagement.

Perhaps the concept of transculturation, introduced in 1940 by Fernando Ortiz (see Ortiz 1995), can help clarify what is at stake in the issues raised by the Zapatista revolution. Ortiz sought to correct the unidirectional process of translation and acculturation in British anthropology (in this case, as articulated by Bronislaw Malinowski; see Asad 1986). For Ortiz, "transculturation" was a tool for thinking about nation-building in a society wherein homogeneity had to account for *mestizaje*. But important for our argument, it also indirectly underscored how cultural transformations do not go only from East to West but also from West to East or North-South and South-North. The fact remains that transculturation was a process perceived from a postcolonial society, while Malinowski saw acculturation only from the vantage point of a colonizing nation (Coronil 1995).

When Ortiz wrote about transculturation in human communities, he thought of what we would call cultural diversity within Cuba. But Ortiz also talked about the transculturation of commodities—that is, of the social life of things (see Appadurai and others in Appadurai 1986). In doing so, he extended beyond the boundaries of the nation to consider what would be conceptualized later as the modern world-system, or what we call the modern/colonial world-system (see Mignolo 2000). Following Ortiz, transculturation works bidirectionally in the social life of things. It trans-lates objects that transform modes of being and thinking while also transforming the "original" uses and life of the object. Ortiz provided the example of African drums in Cuba. He thought about transculturation as a world process that made Cuba what Cuba was, as a nation, in the first half of the twentieth century—namely, a part of a new commercial circuit that formed in the sixteenth century and that linked Cuba to the Mediterranean across the Atlantic. This circuit created the conditions for the slave trade from Africa and the basis for Cuba's demographic profile.

Ortiz advocated rationality and objectivity, free of interests and emotions like "enthusiasm," but he also wrote *Cuban Counterpoint* from the perspective of culture and literature—a genre lacking the rationality, objectivity, and (masculine) subjectivity of science. In the *Counterpoint* he launched a contribution to knowledge that entailed a different engagement by a new subject of knowledge. To gain admittance, however, he would have to successfully question the location of knowledge production and his own claim to a universal scientific objectivity. This was not possible in the absence of a global context that would support such a translation. Ortiz could not begin a mutual cross-fertilization with Afro-Cuban intellectuals that would bring the results we find with the Zapatistas. In contrast,

the Zapatistas' theoretical revolution in the domain of translation/transculturation offers a change in directionality: it is a process of double translation, a historical condition for political intervention by subaltern languages. Let us explain.

As noted above, sixteenth-century missionaries translated in both directions between Amerindian languages and Spanish. Amerindians initially assisted in those projects; translations, however, were controlled and manipulated by the dominant group. The missionaries and their translations did not transform the imperial design but instead were absorbed into its logic.

In contrast, syncretism as practice may indicate a long-standing strategy of translation/transculturation that has worked against imperial translations. A tradition of syncretic practices may supply a foundation that allows the Tojolabales to perceive the Marxist/Leninist guerrillas as a revolutionary potential adequate to their needs. In the case of the Zapatistas, the subaltern group manipulates translation but now in multiple directions. First, translation occurs among the four Amerindian languages of the Zapatista movement: Tojolabal, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Chol. Second, and most important, translation from Amerindian languages to Spanish no longer implies a unidirectional translation of Amerindian languages into Spanish concepts and systems of understanding. Rather, an Amerindian understanding is rendered in and even in violation of Spanish syntax, becoming transformed in the process but not entirely losing its difference from Western understanding. In the other direction, from Spanish and Western languages to Amerindian languages, Spanish/Western thinking is transformed and its words inserted and interpreted according to Amerindian cosmologies.

Subcomandante Marcos (Marcos 1997) has talked about these various levels of translations. For Marcos, translation was not just interlinguistic but also intercosmological. He uses the term "translator" (*traductor*) to refer to the "indigenist element" that made possible communication between the Marxist-Leninist guerrilla forces and the indigenous communities in the Chiapan highlands. Crucial to this translation was the transportation of concepts, thoughts, and, ultimately, of revolutionary needs and goals from one cultural context to another. This transport did not go primarily in the direction it has traditionally taken when revolutionary actors equipped with Occidental (Western) knowledge have confronted "the masses." Marcos explains that the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary organization encountered a reality that could not be explained by Western concepts. The organization therefore realized that it needed to "listen": "The [new] EZLN was born from the very moment that it realized that there is a new reality for which it has no answer and to which it subordinates itself to be able to survive" (*ibid.*, 149).

Marcos calls the moment when these two cultures come together a *choque*, a "clash." But rather than a moment in time, this clash produces a space of contact and conflict wherein translation takes place. The EZLN notices that it needs to learn rather than teach. A space opens up where knowledge flows from the Mayan indigenous communities into the thinking of Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries. The pressure for this flow is created because the Amerindian components become a majority in the political organization. Marcos calls this process "translation." It is facilitated and encouraged by "translators," principally Old Antonio and the leaders of the communities.

Marcos's encounter with Old Antonio (*el viejo Antonio*) goes back to 1984. Old Man Antonio is the first translator or, at least, the one who makes Marcos aware of the need for translation. Now, from the perspective of urban intellectuals, the process of translation turns into a process of re-education. "And that is where Old Antonio and the leaders of the communities and the indigenous *guerrilleros* became the teachers of this military-political organization [the EZLN]" (*ibid.*, 148): "We went through a process of re-education, of re-modeling. It was like they unarmed us. As if they had dismantled all the tools we had—Marxism, Leninism, socialism, urban culture, poetry, literature—every thing that was a part of ourselves, and also that we did not know we had. They dismantled us and put us together again, but in a different configuration. And that was for us [urban intellectuals] the only way to survive" (*ibid.*, 151).

Marcos asserts that this process of translation "indianized" the urban part of the EZLN. Crucial once again is the existence of subjects connected to Amerindian knowledges and traditions who were simultaneously taking part in the Occidental urban culture of the cities. In other words, this is how "the indianization of the EZLN tactically displaced itself [*se trasladó—that is, shifted place and translated itself*], contaminated the urban part and indianized it as well" (*ibid.*, 150). Old Antonio emerged in the Zapatistas' horizon in the first Amerindian town the EZLN encountered, in 1985. He explained to the urban intellectuals "who we were and what we shall be doing" (*ibid.*, 154). It was Old Antonio "who gave us the indigenous elements that you find in Zapatistas' languages when we address ourselves to the Mexican or the world audience" (*ibid.*, 155).

But Marcos himself also is a translator. More than that, since the moment of encounter with Old Antonio, he transformed himself into something else. Precisely as Rafael Guillen began to be erased, Marcos transformed himself into what they (the Amerindians) want him to be—a paradigmatic case, indeed, of translation/transculturation transacting the colonial difference and the colonality of power

from a subaltern perspective. Marcos became a transculturated/translated new persona. "What happened," explains Marcos, "is that the glass of that window is dirty, and people began to see themselves in it and it is at that moment that Marcos becomes a symbol, that persona that is being constructed since 1994" (ibid.). He converted himself into someone who could be used by the Amerindians. Marcos, as translator, is the window through which to look both inside and outside (ibid.). However, the temptation to underscore Guillen's vita instead of the significance of the transformation of Guillen into Marcos would take us away from the major point of the argument.<sup>10</sup> That is, translation and transculturation (not just "cultural translation") lead to a theoretical revolution in political as well as ethical terms.

If the window is dusty, as Marcos emphasized, it also reflects what is left of Rafael Guillen and perhaps even a struggle over whose Amerindian perspective engages in the translating process among the men and women actively figuring in the EZLN. In our previous example, Major Ana María's address, the subject speaking is a female indigenous guerrillera. Her gender alerts us to the subjectivities that are created and organized through the colonial difference and its translation processes. With the protagonism of Old Antonio, Marcos establishes a masculine genealogy wherein Old Antonio is the primeval translator, now transformed into the voice of Marcos who prolongs the process, publishing the EZLN perspective for national and international audiences. If this procedure seems to affirm the requirement of masculinity, asserting that Indian males are also men, the simultaneous protagonism of Mayan women in the EZLN resists this logic as they themselves engage in a process of double translation next to, not through, Marcos. Translations by the female majors and comandantes are not restricted to gender relations; instead, they insist on questioning and reshaping Mayan traditions in order to construct more equal Tojolabal, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, or Chol societies. In the process guerrilla experiences are translated/ transculturated through a critical, but not antagonistic, attitude toward both Mayan tradition and feminist theories.

Marcos emphasizes that the first communities with which the guerrilla entered in contact in the second half of the 1980s were "the most isolated" (ibid., 151). He implies that traditional knowledges were well preserved. However, the Lacandon forest constitutes a heterogeneous place of migration (Leyva Solano et al. 1996). It may be understood as a "borderlands" (Anzaldúa 1987) that precisely enables the processes of translation and the elaboration of a new, transculturated cosmovision. This contradiction points to a tension in which Marcos is still partially caught. The terrain on which indigenous voices are heard and understood is

still informed by a need for authenticity on the part of the West, a need to which indigenous people cater as they simultaneously undo it.

Still, border thinking seems to be an able concept for grasping the theoretical potential of the Zapatista revolution. We can now emphasize that the translators emerge out of border spaces where contact has already been taking place and without subsuming the actors in the tale of integration and acculturation. Whether this contact be the quincennial relations between Spaniards, Mexican Creoles, and *Mestizos* in the modern world order or the national conflict between Mexico and the United States that was formalized in 1848 by the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaty and the drastic relocations of the national frontiers, or whether it be the *Zapatistas* or the emergence of a *Chicana/o* consciousness, we face the emergence of a border-space that rearticulates the colonial difference from a subaltern position and that makes the new kind of translation/transculturation possible. It creates experiences that open up new ways of thinking, not as inescapably or necessarily so, but as a possibility (Moya 1997).

Our notion of border thinking is related to Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) exploration of consciousness and borderlands. She begins this task by retelling or "translating" Chicano history against the dominant Mexican nation-making version, made famous by Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*, by inserting both Chicano and feminist perspectives. She does not discard any of the "identifications" that are only partially available to her, but uses them with and against each other to construct a concept of identity that seeks to go beyond biological fixation, constructivist disembodiment, and harmonious homogeneity. It is a space for ambiguity in constant transition that "translates" (in order to make sense in a new value system) the cultural baggage that seeks to define and fix her. Feminist rewriting is crucial to this translation, but its knowledge is not rooted in Western discourse alone.

For the *Zapatistas*, the translation of Amerindian knowledge becomes a matter of urgency, both for physical survival and for the survival of revolutionary potential. In this process, it transforms some of the blind spots in Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideals and brings to light their limitations. Similarly, Ana María and Comandante Ramona are reworking Maya "identity" by translating "feminism." Dominant feminist theory—as it has been elaborated in France or by white, middle-class women in the United States—has been called "white" feminism because it abstracts from class difference and racism in an effort to identify a universal concept of "woman" and the causes for her oppression. This strand of feminist theory, widely criticized by what could be called "postcolonial feminism,"



has found itself translated into Spanish and into the cultural context of national Mexican society. Mexican middle-class feminists have found it difficult to address feminism in relation to domestic service and Latin American racism. Some have criticized the participation of women in the military ranks of the EZLN and in battle as a betrayal of feminine culture and as adverse to feminism. As the EZLN becomes "feminist"—both in person and in discourse—the protagonism of indigenous women in the leading positions of command again points the process of translation in a different direction.<sup>11</sup> Feminist demands for a transformation of indigenous societies goes hand in hand with the search for solutions to economic and racial discrimination. Feminism being translated back from Mayan cosmology becomes inseparable from issues of race and clan. The essentialized notion of woman as the bearer of a pacifist feminine culture is unmasked as a myth that serves to cover up the complicity of women in perpetuating a modern/colonial world order.<sup>12</sup> Border thinking emerges here not as representation of anything or as a happy hybrid surrounded by repressive purity, but as a place of epistemic and political confrontation with the neoliberal thinking of the state. At the same time, border thinking undoes the dichotomies that sustained the modern/colonial world-system and its hegemonic epistemology. It is precisely here that the Zapatistas' theoretical revolution is located, where the colonial difference emerges as the locus for the epistemic potential of border thinking and where translation/transculturalization has to be remapped. Border thinking, as a new perspective to think translation/transculturalization, is precisely this double consciousness of subalterns in confrontation with hegemony.

An "Indigenous" uprising, with a new language, was and is a social movement yet difficult to process within either the neoliberal frame of mind of the Mexican government or that of intellectuals (like the early Octavio Paz), as well as from orthodox Marxist, leftist, and even feminist positions. It is an epistemological revolution that impacts on how to talk about and think about translation/transculturalization. Zapatism, indeed, began to be defined by the indigenous intellectuals with previous political experience, like Tacho, David, Zevedeo, and Mariabel. They are, according to Marcos, the true creators of Zapatism and the leading theorists for new conceptions and enactments of translation/transculturalization: "The true creators of Zapatism are the translators, translators such as Mayor Mario, Mayor Moises, Mayor Ana Maria, all of those who also had to be translated from dialects [Marcos is referring here to indigenous languages] such as Tacho, David, Zevedeo. They are indeed the Zapatistas' theoreticians; they built, they are building a new way for looking at the world" (Marcos 1997, 338–39).

## Translation/Transculturalization from the Borders

There are a series of issues that the Zapatistas' theoretical revolution helps us in framing and arguing. First, the links among language, nation, and writing can no longer be sustained. Second, the ties of language, location, and subjectivity to epistemology are coming unglued. Third, a new potential for intercultural communication in border spaces requires reflection, not least of all, on academic practice.

The Zapatistas call for redefining the concepts of translation and transculturalization. Both terms have a close link with imperial and national beliefs and assumptions, as we have outlined in this article. Translation, in terms of translating texts and literature, was redefined in the modern world (from the Renaissance) under the presupposition of the unity and uniqueness of certain languages based solely on their grammar. In the modern world, the proliferation of grammatical treatises based on alphabetic literacy and the expansion of Western Christianity (generally referred to as "Western expansion") are interpreted to mean the unity and distinctiveness of certain (other) languages. As self-contained entities they are placed into dichotomous relations that are not equal with or even complementary to each other, but rather defined hierarchically by the geopolitical location of the language as nation. Talal Asad insisted on keeping in mind the inequality of languages that were involved in the production of anthropological knowledge. The Zapatistas opened up a new possibility, the possibility of speaking and writing Amerindian languages through Spanish, or using and appropriating Spanish as the official language of the nation. Such a possibility also has important consequences for indigenous movements in Latin America, from Bolivia and Ecuador to Guatemala and Mexico as well as for international and interlingual relations in the production of knowledge and its political consequences.

For three centuries, 1500 to 1800, Amerindians were targeted for conversion to Christianity and to learn Spanish. Translation was part of a project of transculturalization, equated with "conversion" or "assimilation." After 1800, Amerindians were marginalized as the target of bilingual education in emerging nation-states. That is, Amerindians had to learn Spanish, but the Creole elite in power did not have to learn Amerindian languages. Today, Amerindian debates within nation-states across the Latin American continent take place in Spanish, while English, as in the case of the Zapatistas, connects indigenous peoples at a global level. "Transculturalization" is here best described as a social conflict between languages and cosmologies in hegemonic and subaltern positions, respectively.



Thinking translation/transculturation from the perspective of the Zapatistas makes clear that the war of interpretation being waged at the national level in Mexico can no longer be contained by the boundaries of a nation-state. If the government and its media seek to codify the indigenous people as primitive or infantile, they rely on a traditional/colonial translation that anachronistically reiterates masculinity as a requirement for citizenship, along with an obvious Enlightenment framing that gathers children, women, the insane, and (Europe's) racial Others into the group lacking this masculinity. But the Zapatista discourse reverberates with developments at a supranational level that cannot be isolated from thinking in Mexico itself. This is what makes the Zapatista discourse forceful in the "war of interpretation." The global situation at the end of the twentieth century witnessed a certain preparation of terrain that is significantly different from the conditions of possibility in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today we are witnessing a desubalternization or a decolonization of knowledge that places translation/transculturation into a new epistemological context and structure of power. Western Christian rationality, an imaginary that is also identified as "Occidentalism" (Deloria 1978), confronts "multiple others" that have been elaborating alternative engagements with Reason, on both its interior and its exterior borders.

The rethinking of gender dichotomies, for instance, challenges binaries on the inside by proposing that gender is a socially assigned category and ultimately a performance of identity (Butler 1990). Critics like the Brazilian Mott (1992) have explored the way these gender constructions have shaped Western (mis)understandings of their colonial objects. Postcolonial feminist critics like Mohanty (1988) challenge the category "women" across the external borders of the modern/colonial world-system by pointing to the different economic and epistemological positions this system has assigned to women because of their ethnicity or geopolitical location. With the 1992 award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú, Amerindian thinking has been valorized to some extent—and with it, the *testimonio* as a narrative genre (as a means of transporting/translating subaltern voices) emancipates itself from ethnography and becomes a challenge to the disciplines of literature and history, since we shall be reading more than a "peace manifesto." *Testimonio* may still be allocated within the poetic realm, but on its borders; it is now breaking open the dichotomies of fiction and science, of Self and Other, toward a continuity of knowledge and memory, opening up not only the directionalities of translation but also writing as its genre.

Marco's writings exploit precisely this tension as he disguises a political discourse as magical realism. Nevertheless, his writing consistently escapes this frame: fictional writing mixes with Amerindian knowledge and political declarations that are backed by a mortal war between indigenous peoples, landowners, and the Mexican army in Chiapas and thus construct new terms for public discourse. The Zapatistas are translating/transculturing Western languages into Amerindian knowledge and enunciating it back in Spanish (and English and German translations) at a global audience. They are profoundly undoing the binaries at the basis of their subalternity, creating border spaces for translation/transculturation from the epistemic potential of the colonial difference—at the other end of the spectrum, so to speak, from early missionaries in the New World. The thesis of incommensurable cosmologies begins to be rethought in terms of an intervention in the colonial difference from a subaltern perspective. The concurrency of these interventions provides the link that creates the basis for their impact. Dichotomies are dissolved because these multiple others challenge the center and critically engage with each other, on its interior and exterior borders.

The colonial difference in the modern/colonial world is the location of cosmologies in conflict articulated by the coloniality of power. Thus, the concept of translation/transculturation we are developing here is related to borders established by the colonial difference. Our conceptualization runs contrary to the concept of translation/transculturation generally known and defined in the territorial internal domain of empires (translations, say, between English and Spanish), as well as contrary to the one direction/translation on the external borders of the modern/colonial world-system where the colonial difference operates (translations, say, between English and Hindi, English and Arabic, English and Chinese, or, if you prefer, Spanish and Aymara or Nahuatl).

### Translation/Transculturation and Disciplinary Knowledge

There is, therefore, another dimension to the inequality of languages, and not just between English and Swahili or Aymara, as Talal Asad implies, or between Tojolabal and Spanish. The various imperial languages are themselves unequal, as with Spanish *vis-à-vis* English. Among the imperial languages of the modern world (Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, and German), Spanish is itself a subaltern language, a part of a complex spectrum of unequal languages of business

in the modern world-system. There is, on the one hand, a hierarchy among imperial languages and, on the other hand, the hierarchy of languages on the borders of the world-system. Arabic, for instance, is not the same as Aymara or Nahuatl, although both of them are marginal to the system. The result is that translation from English or French into Arabic is very common, although not into Aymara. For the same reason that links language to knowledge, Arabic translations into English or French are less common than are translations in the opposite direction. The same happens with Spanish or Portuguese. Translations from German, French, and English into Spanish abound; there are not many translations in the opposite direction (Heilbron 1999).

What gets translated is literature, but literature, we know, has its place within the intellectual distribution of labor in the system: Third World, or Third World-like countries seem to produce culture, not knowledge. With this frame in mind, Talal Asad's final recommendation makes sense: "I have proposed that the anthropological enterprise of cultural translation may be vitiated by the fact that there are asymmetrical tendencies and pressures in the languages of dominated and dominant societies. And I have suggested that anthropologists need to explore these processes in order to determine how far they go in defining the possibilities and the limits of effective translation" (1986, 164). This conclusion and recommendation is made with the scenario in mind of an anthropologist from the United States going around the world and coming back to translate knowledge for the academic community. As we have shown, language translation concerns the hierarchies of power between nations and, above all, has been and is shaped by the coloniality of power and the colonial difference. We can revamp the notion of "internal colonialism" here to understand how the coloniality of power and the colonial difference worked in the nation-building process. Modern nation-states reproduced, within the territorial frontiers, the structure of power put in place by the colonial model. That is why the coloniality of power is not a question related only to colonial "periods," here and there, but also to the entire modern/colonial world-system from its inception to its current form of global and transnational coloniality.

The epistemological dimensions opened up by the Zapatistas cannot be divorced from the geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference: the new scenario for translation/transculturalization. It is within the Cold War and area studies frame that such observations make sense. The question for us is, What about anthropologists in Bolivia or Argentina, working and living in the Andes? Are

their translation efforts similar to paradigmatic examples governed by area studies where Third World culture is translated into First World anthropology? Do they experience the ideological underpinnings of area studies for anthropological knowledge in the same way?<sup>13</sup>

The anthropological work that consists of "studying" Aymara or Quechua communities—that is, of translating from Aymara and Quechua into Spanish—is an interesting case because the three languages coexist as languages of the nation, although only Spanish is recognized as the official national language. But not only that, the emergence of an Amerindian intellectual community in academia complicates issues further. And it is here where, at least as a projection toward the future, the Zapatistas' theoretical revolution begins to make sense, since it becomes a model for academic-institutional work and a theoretical model for theoretical production. It is communication not only between peasants and scientists but also between different versions of intellectual knowledge, each translating and transculturating the other. The "disadvantage" of epistemic subaltern languages—languages, that is to say, that are not seen as "sustainable" from the perspective of the Western production of knowledge—begins to offer an epistemological potential unfamiliar and strange to the epistemic/hegemonic languages. In all these cases, including the emergence of Amerindian intellectuals (for which the Workshop for Oral History in Bolivia has been a very important institutional site), translation and transculturalization as epistemic and political practice are moving beyond area studies and beyond the modern/imperial versions of translation/transculturalization. There is thus a geohistorical sequence that will be displaced, and this geohistorical sequence is the following:

1. Translation of Amerindian languages into Spanish in building "Occidentalism";
2. The translation of Arabic, Hindi, or Chinese into English and French as the second phase of the modern world-system, building "Orientalism"; and finally,
3. Area studies and the rise of the social sciences and the reconversion of anthropology, in which discipline "became" a crucial issue and re-elaborated epistemic sites in the polar distinction of subject and object of knowledge.

There is still another aspect of translation/transculturalization and subaltern languages and knowledge that we would like to consider in the colonial horizon of the modern world-system. The problem arises with the use of Spanish, an

imperial language of the modern world-system (but a minority language in the United States) from the perspectives of Aymara intellectuals in the Andes and from the perspective of hegemonic knowledge production.

The area studies anthropologist and Andean specialist has a specific issue to solve with Spanish and the “Hispanic” component in the United States and within the U.S. academic community. If the anthropologist studying the Andes deals with Aymara or Quechua, the question is again Spanish because of the way in which it mediates between the language and culture “studied” (Aymara or Quechua) and the language and culture from which the former is “studied” (English and the U.S. anthropologist). On the other hand, writing in Spanish for Andean speakers of Aymara and Quechua is an ethical responsibility and a political imperative if anthropologists are interested in more than appropriating knowledge and information from the culture that is the object of study. Thus Spanish, in this case, is part of the object of study but also part of the language of scholarship. These strategies are balanced by another move: the recuperation of indigenous languages through bilingual education efforts of indigenous movements.

“Language” no longer equals “nation” as multiple languages and knowledges transculturate, breaking down the dichotomy of nation and Other. On the other hand, although language is linked to memory and shapes understanding, this link is not ontologically necessary. As the appropriation of Spanish by Tojolabal shows us, language in translation can also become the means of transport for other knowledges and memories. The same may be said for English. English language does not necessarily go with English memory. This presupposition, based on national ideology, is no longer sustainable in a transnational world. Rosario Ferré, writing in English in Puerto Rico (*The House on the Lagoon*, 1995) and filling and transforming English with Spanish memories, is a case in point. So are the claims to indigenous identity by people who no longer speak indigenous languages, like many of the Nasa (Paez) in Colombia. If English is the hegemonic language in a transnational world, English can also be the transnational language in which positions of subalternity are rearticulated.

However, Spanish continues on a regional level as the means of transnational communication, while indigenous languages are being recuperated through the bilingual educational efforts of indigenous social movements. If networking, information systems, and technoglobalism are shaping the world today, the same are also being appropriated by those who seek social transformation as subalterns,<sup>14</sup> relocating neoliberal global coloniality from the perspective of subalternity. This is not to say that Rosario Ferré is offering the “right answer,” but rather that she is

contributing to asking new questions and offering a critique of national language assumptions upon which modern approaches to translation have been operating.

The theories of translation/transculturation we foresee are coming from a critical reflection on the colonial difference and from seeking to overcome the national-language ideology frame in which translation was conceived, practiced, and theorized in the modern/colonial world. Translation can no longer be understood as a simple question of moving from object language A to subject language B, with all the implications of the inequality of languages. Rather, translation becomes a “translanguaging,” a way of speaking, talking, and thinking in between languages, as the Zapatistas have taught us. This translanguaging is a form of border thinking, opening new epistemic avenues beyond the complicity between national languages and cultures of scholarship established in the modern/colonial world-system and in which the “modern” concept of translation was articulated (Mignolo 2000, ch. 6). We surmise that this direction will keep on gaining ground in the future, as intellectual production is being recognized beyond the academic and theories are . . . where you can find them.

## Notes

1. We refer here to the notion of “modern world-system” as proposed and elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1999), and as modified by Walter Mignolo to account for the double perspective of modernity/coloniality (Mignolo 2000).
2. “Transculturation” as a concept emerged, precisely, from the perspective of coloniality. See Ortiz (1995) and Fernando Coronil’s analysis of the colonial differential between Malinowski’s concept of “acculturation” and Ortiz’s “transculturation” (Coronil 1995).
3. “Colonial difference” is a concept introduced by Indian historian Partha Chatterjee to account for the differential relations between India and the subsequent legacies of British colonialism (Chatterjee 1993, 16–18). It was extended by Mignolo to account for the formation and transformation of the modern/colonial world-system (Mignolo 2000, 49–90).
4. There is a history of translation theory in the Western world with which we cannot engage here. Of importance is that our argument develops in relation and in epistemic, ethical, and political conflict with that tradition. We refer to a concept of translation founded, on the one hand, in a philosophy of language from Plato to contemporary analytical philosophy (Quine, Davidson) and, on the other, in

a philosophy of language linked to the hermeneutical tradition that goes from Greek philosophy to Heidegger and Derrida. Both philosophical traditions have been blind to the colonial difference, and, although critical of modernity itself, neither moved beyond modernity toward recognizing coloniality and the colonial difference. Beyond this history of translation theory, there is now emerging a sociological theory of translation "within" the concept of world-system (Heilbrun 1999) that, although closer to our own conception, still remains blind to coloniality of power and the colonial difference. On the contrary, we feel that our position is very compatible with the one developed in the volume edited by Liu (1999). In this book, Chinese scholars as well as Chinoists take on the theory of translation from the very foundation of the colonial differential since the arrival of the Jesuits in China, at the end of the sixteenth century.

5. The medical tradition conceived of four different genders, depending on the degree of body heat and amount of body fluid (Huarte de San Juan 1989 [1594]). Sudden changes in body heat were understood to produce hermaphroditism by causing the vagina to reverse to the outside (Daston and Park 1985). For a general idea of the status of sexuality and the body in the Renaissance, see Goldberg (1994).

6. See also Vine Deloria, Jr., (1978) and Roger Hart (1999). Deloria has devoted many essays to redrawing the map of translation/transculturation that has been dominated since the sixteenth century by a hegemonic view of Spanish and English cosmology, language, and epistemology. He uses the word "relatedness" to describe Native Americans' experience of the world, instead of "isolation," the word used to describe Spanish or English patterns of experience. Deloria's formulation, as with the one offered by Lenkersdorf, may sound like a reinscription of Western dualism. Hart (1999) correctly criticizes the reproduction of the "incommensurability" in translating worlds or cosmologies in J. Gernet's "incommensurability" thesis on the confrontation of two cosmologies (assuming, of course, that Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are part of the same cosmology or episteme). Our point of engagement, in any case, is not with incommensurability, but with negotiations across the colonial difference.

7. See Mignolo (2000) for a detailed account of "languageing."

8. See Massey (1994) for the production of gendered space; see Schiwy (2000) for the link between gendered spaces, temporalities, and indigenous peoples. See Escobar (1994) for a critique of the underlying assumptions of developmentalism.

for a feminist critique of translation. See Niranjana (1992) and Liu (1999) for postcolonial approaches to translation.

10. For example, the misguided biography written by two journalists, one from Spain and the other from France (La Grange and Rico 1998). Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova has pointed out the same blindness among the European left: the Italian former director of *Il Manifesto*, Rosana Rossanda, described Marcos as Leninist and Castrist and added that Latin American revolutionaries are "Leninist" by definition (González Casanova 1996a, 33). The colonial difference cuts across and reveals the silence occupied by universal theories, (neo)liberal or (neo)Marxist. Obviously, these theories were aware of the colonial difference, although they did not recognize it as an epistemic location but merely as a space for expansion of capital and of the proletarian revolution. Translation/transculturation were caught in the same limitations.

11. For an account (elaborated from extensive interviews) of the often difficult process of women's organizing and integration into the EZLN, see Guiomar Rovira (1997).

12. For critical evaluations of the engagement of women in violent military actions from preconceived feminist positions, see several essays in Rosa Rojas (1994-95).

13. There has already been an interesting discussion in *Current Anthropology* (35, no. 1 [1994]) about these issues, provoked by Orin Starn's article "Rethinking the Politics of Anthropology: The Case of the Andes" (Starn 1994). We cannot summarize it here, but we take it as a reference point to draw on our own knowledge and experiences of the issue.

14. The use of the Internet by the Zapatistas is of course a case in point, as is the use of video and television by indigenous peoples from Australia to Latin America (Ginsburg 1994; Aufderheide 2000; Schiwy 2003).

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