

**LANGUAGE,  
CAPITALISM,  
COLONIALISM:  
TOWARD A  
CRITICAL HISTORY**

Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

## Language and Inequality: A Wary Approach to a Red Thread World

So it is not, as people try here and there conveniently to imagine, that the economic position produces an automatic effect. Men make their history themselves, only in given surroundings which condition it and on the basis of actual relations already existing, among which the economic relations, however much they may be influenced by the other political and ideological ones, are still ultimately the decisive ones, forming the red thread which runs through them and alone leads to understanding. (Friedrich Engels 1894)

The core of this book is an account of how ideas about language play a central role in the making of social difference and social inequality. Our starting point is our present and our future: we are looking for ways to understand what is happening around us now, and to develop the tools we need in order to participate in making our world more equitable—and therefore safer. To get there we need to go first to the past, in order to understand how it came to pass that we have inherited both specific conceptual tools and the conditions that make us want to use and refine them, or possibly pick up or make new tools altogether.

But we are wary of a linear, progress-oriented understanding of the relationship between past and present. We conceptualize our approach here as “walking backward into the future.” We draw this formulation from three frameworks that mean, precisely, to unpack capitalist and colonial logics from different sites around the world that are inspired by radical hope. Each offers tools for what it means to critically approach space, time, and subjectivity, to think about decolonizing each of these. Each, also, sees language as central to this project. They are linked to the Welsh Marxist, Raymond Williams; the Jamaican decolonial thinker, artist and visionary, Sylvia Wynter; and the Anishinaabe philosophies linked to the Great Lakes. We will consider each of these, in due course, in this chapter.

The Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams (1921–88), in his book *Resources of Hope* (1989), has an essay titled “Walking Backwards into the Future.” He notes that often the future refers to an idealized past—rehabilitation, rebuilding, recovery—such that a better future is often linked to a return to the past. He writes that we need to face how this is linked with Christian ideals of the fall of man. Instead, he says, we need other ways to imagine a better future, ones with a different understanding of the past. We therefore turn Williams’s title to our own purposes. We look for the red threads, in the sense of the key ideas about language that have been turned to the making of

social difference and social inequality through the stories that have unfolded over various times and places.

We also look at the red threads in the substantive way in which Engels defines them, although understood somewhat differently. Without understanding economic forces as wholly determinist, we nonetheless note the ways that certain moments in capitalism have global, interconnected, and near simultaneous effects in a range of sites, a clustering that needs to be accounted for (see also Williams 1977, for an approach that has deeply influenced us). These clusters are often visible in, indeed played out on the terrain of, language. But it is not enough, in our view, to track what people thought and said and did about language. We also need to explain why.

Our assumption is that people have an interest in language because it has value, and it has value because it is tied to how all kinds of resources are produced, circulated, and consumed, including how they are identified as resources at all. We need therefore to look at the nature of the economic and political activities in which language is bound up. In order to understand our present conditions, we need to situate them in the intermeshed histories of capitalism and colonialism. The book is therefore structured to take us loosely, bumpily, unevenly, from the ways in which imperial mercantile capitalism rendered language salient, through industrial capitalism, nationalism, and colonialism, to late capitalism and the globalized new economy, its dislocations and backlashes, and its creative possibilities.

The challenge here is to understand how exactly language gets bound up in more complex circulations and exchanges. We will follow two threads: the first has to do with how language can act as a resource, and therefore how it is used to make boundaries that help produce, reproduce, or contest the unequal distribution of other kinds of resources. The second has to do with its role in legitimization, that is, helping such inequities not only make sense, but also seem like the only, or the best, way to do things.

Our search for explanations in political economic conditions has led us to the interlocking stories of colonialism and capitalism. To understand how we got to today, we take these as the central formations for the organization of social and material relations of production and distribution of resources, and of people, and of how and by whom they are valued. Embedding language in histories of colonialism and capitalism helps us to illuminate how inequities are constructed, and sometimes deconstructed, on the terrain of, or through, language. It helps illuminate where and how attempts to change these structures have been constrained or obstructed, and where they have succeeded. It helps us understand where our own ideas come from, and what they are connected to, and so what might happen if we follow some threads of the intertwined conditions of our lives, rather than others.

We examine how capitalism and colonialism, working together as an uneven and shifting world system, have made possible and salient particular ways of mobilizing language in the production of inequality and the social differences that legitimize it. We look to discursive struggle, resistance, and change. As we show, the chronology is not linear, and effects on the making of difference and inequality are unevenly spatialized; there are often contradictory and always complex struggles over things that count. Indeed, they often end up being double-edged or ambivalent, as ideas meant to be emancipatory have the unintended consequence of shoring up existing inequalities or making new ones, while ideas meant to be conservative unexpectedly sometimes create openings for resistance and emancipatory social change.

In this chapter we take up each of the points that form the basis of our understanding of how language, colonialism, and capitalism intersect, and lay the foundation for the structure of the book. This backward walk into the future will show us language in many forms. People have different ideas about what language is: a part of our core identity, an attribute of social groups, the working of our brain, and so on. People have notions about what constitutes good or bad, admirable or deficient, polite or aggressive language, whether it is better to speak one language or many. Language has been thought of as a divine gift, as something inherently human and that distinguishes us from animals, or conversely as something shared by all living things. It has been understood as an autonomous system, as a cognitive process, as a technique for mechanical communication, as a social practice. It has been thought of as located in the brain, the soul, nature, and the divine; as a property of the self, of the nation, of humanity, of the universe. But there are reasons why people think these things, in certain places and certain times. Those reasons are connected not just to how we make sense abstractly, but also to how our sense-making allows us to organize ourselves socially, politically, and economically.

### Red Flags: Keywords, Hegemonies, Ideologies, and Warty Genealogies

Our approach relies on three main strategies: a focus on keywords, on ideologies and hegemonies, and on genealogies. The notion of keyword comes from Raymond Williams ([1976] 1983), who uses the term to identify words that are particularly useful for thinking about how important and social historical processes occur through language. Keywords act as red flags, showing where the people with stakes in the game are located, and indeed where the game is taking place. They can therefore also act as red threads, insofar as they link the actors and debates with stakes in the game helping us uncover what those

stakes are, and so what the game is. We follow Williams's ([1976] 1983) lead in tying keywords to "structures of feeling"; feeling is what makes the social and moral orders stick (Eagleton 1991). Williams argues that to understand keywords we need to focus on social rather than personal experience with regard to the institutions, formations, and positions that make experience what it is: part of processes of structuration (see also Giddens 1982).

Let's take one example from debates unfolding as we completed this book: "alt-right," a term that emerged in the United States in 2016 to describe an alliance of right-wing groups largely supportive of the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump. In an article published in the *Globe and Mail* (one of Canada's main English-language newspapers) on November 25, 2016, after Donald Trump was elected to the U.S. presidency, the journalist Sylvia Stead cites the writer Marian Botsford Fraser, who calls "alt-right" a deceptive term:

"This is not a benign descriptive adjective. It is a euphemism that apparently has been accepted by mainstream media as nothing more than an identifier or description.... To use it as such, without signaling its true meaning, is careless journalism," [Botsford] wrote in an e-mail. "In a very short time, the phrase 'alt-right' has become the new normal, defining the terms for a highly contentious debate, just as the phrase 'pro-life' does." (Stead 2016)

Stead's editorial attracted 32 comments. Some were vitriolic, lambasting Stead as a "Bolshevik" (sic), "raging anarchist," and "socialist," and a believer in "extreme liberalism, feminism, progressive-destructive ideology." Others argued that one couldn't call 50 per cent of Americans White racists: "Assigning derogatory labels for those you disagree with is simply a propaganda effort, a tool designed to suppress critical thought and one that is unfortunately employed just as much by the left as the right." These posters wanted to argue that "alt-right" described extremists, the KKK supporters who tipped the scale for Trump, but weren't the bulk of his support. An interesting minor strand of posters asked what the "alt-left" might designate. Social justice warriors, said some.

As a result, the editor-in-chief of the *Globe and Mail* announced a new policy. While noting that the term "alt-right" had been used numerous times in the paper up until that point, he stipulated that henceforth it should be avoided, and if used, explained. To do otherwise, he said, is to accord legitimacy to White supremacy, to assist it in its own propaganda work. He noted, further, that "the precision of language, married with facts, is the most effective weapon the journalist has to hold people to account. This is never more

keenly felt than at times of polarized debate. Adjectives should be used sparingly, and only when the journalist actually knows the subject. It is too easy to slide into caricature at precisely the point the audience is seeking objectivity" (Stead 2016).

Here "alt-right" acts as a red flag, a keyword: its use and its meaning are contested. By tracing the debates around it we can find out why it raises strong feelings, of what kind, and for what kinds of people. It points to a conflict over something profound: a vision of society, a struggle over who makes the rules, and for whom, specifically whether racism is systemic or lodged only in certain individuals. It also involves language in more than one way; not only is it materially a piece of language in and of itself, but also what is contested is its use, its form, and to what other linguistic practices it is tied. Indeed, it helps us understand the fundamental ideas about language that people have, and therefore why language is important to them; for example, to the editor of the *Globe and Mail*, avoiding adjectives is tied to an important understanding of the role of the media in society (providing "objectivity").

Objectivity is sometimes contrasted with *ideology*, as here, with ideology thus constructed as something false. Linguistic anthropologists, too, have used a number of different definitions of ideology (see Woolard 1998 for one review), especially since the 1990s (see Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin et al. 1998); while some see such multiplicity as a strength, insofar as it makes it possible for many forms of scholarship to meet on this ground, we think it dilutes the concept's analytic utility. We are also concerned that some work in language ideology simply substituted notions of ideology for culture, with little analytic difference. However, a significant strand of this work examined how the *legitimation of inequity* occurs, challenging overly reductionist accounts of the manipulation of people by ruling class interests (Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 2000; Spears 1999; Zentella 1997). We draw, too, on European work in *critical discourse analysis* emerging at around the same time and focussed on deconstructing the dominant discourses of the state and its agencies (Fairclough 1989, 1992; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van Dijk 1991; Wodak 1996; Wodak and Richardson 2013).

The conversations engendered at this moment were enabled by a number of converging processes. One was the civil rights and decolonization movements beginning in the 1960s, and the recognition of the limitations of the response of sociolinguistics at the time. Linked to this was the emerging critique of notions of *culture* heretofore dominant in anthropology and linguistics, increasingly seen as overly bounded, as homogenizing difference, and as continuing to place certain groups "outside of time" (Abu Lughod 1993; Fabian 1983; Ortner 2003). Another process was a certain loosening

of the strictures of the early Cold War (see Chapter 6) in both the United States and the Soviet Union, which meant that key works by communist linguists became available in English for the most part in the 1970s and 1980s, though they had long been familiar to European communist intellectuals, especially French ones (see Chapter 7).<sup>1</sup> We find ourselves now at another moment of change in relations of power, one in which much of this work remains deeply useful.

Building on this work, we orient to Williams's perspective on ideology, in which the concept needs to be understood as "different formations and distributions of energy and interest" ([1976] 1983, 11) that tie different meanings to the same words. With Williams, Terry Eagleton (1991), and Susan Philips (1998), we agree that the notion of ideology is most useful when used to discuss relations of power; ideologies, in this sense, can be seen as ideas associated with certain groups. Eagleton (1991) ties ideology specifically to the ideas that legitimate dominant political powers; we would extend the notion to the legitimization of any form of power (or attempt at it), and link it necessarily to discourses and practices that constitute their expression and their workings, whether they are explicit or implicit, and whether held by those who benefit most, or, in ways that may be harder to explain, by those who do not benefit much at all.

We will be particularly interested in the recurring intersection of ideologies of language, class, race, gender, sexuality, humanity, and nation. We therefore draw on the insights of work on language ideologies in several ways. One is its focus on *positionality*, *multiplicity*, and *awareness*. The concept of *positionality* is part of the wider approach we mentioned above to thinking about standpoint, and about the provincialization of broad claims to authoritative accounts that were triggered by decolonization and other movements for social justice in the 1960s. By the 1980s, influenced by such critics as Edward Said (1978), anthropologists began looking critically at the role their discipline played in colonialism, and at the effect of their work in the production of colonialism's subjects and subjection. Scientific attempts at producing "neutral" or "universal" or "objective" knowledge became more difficult to sustain, triggering a

<sup>1</sup> Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* were smuggled out of prison in the 1930s, but not published until the 1950s and not translated until 1971 (see Gramsci 1971). Valentin Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, written in the 1920s, was translated in 1973. Lev Vygotsky's work, much of it written in the 1920s, was translated in the early 1960s, but its impact was felt first in psychology, and had little impact on linguistic anthropology until *Mind in Society* appeared in English in 1978. Mikhail Bakhtin's book, *The Dialogic Imagination*, was a collection of essays written in the 1930s and 1940s that were collected and translated in 1981; his *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (a set of essays written across his life span) was published in the

broad move to understand where the core ideas of our discipline come from, and what kinds of conflict they might flag.

The concept of multiplicity follows from the observation that societies are never homogeneous. Indeed, the discipline of linguistic anthropology stems, as we shall show, from a long-standing concern with linguistic and social diversity as a phenomenon to be described, in order to control it. If societies are heterogeneous, and traversed by relations of power, there are multiple positionalities possible, and multiple ideologies. The question is how some become hegemonic and others marginalized or erased; how at times many frames can coexist even if they may partly overlap or contradict each other, and how others work hard to reduce them to a hegemonic centre.

A linguistic ideological approach also asks questions about awareness, including which aspects of language and social life people tend to focus on, and why and how. This includes challenging the distinction between expert and lay analysis, asking analysts to identify their own positions, histories, and ideologies. Such an account needs to ask both why such questions are being asked by those who are asking them, and why those questions are arising at a particular moment, in ways that go beyond intellectual histories, to thinking about political and economic ones.

Most importantly, we aim to understand which assemblages emerge as contested space, and where keywords might instead signal hegemonies. We ask how it comes to pass that certain ways of understanding and acting in the world get naturalized, taken for granted, as the best or only way things can unfold, even when they produce conditions that may not be good for everyone. Here we draw on the work of Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), Sardinian Italian, linguist educator, and journalist. He was also the founder and one-time leader of the Communist Party in Italy, and was imprisoned by the Italian fascist regime from 1926 to 1937. He wrote regularly in prison, with scattered writings smuggled out and later collected as *The Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1971).

Gramsci argued that there are two major routes to domination: coercion and consent, and that ruling classes govern with both. Coercion involves naked force, which usually triggers naked opposition. Consent involves convincing all participants in relations of domination that things are the way they should be; achieving such consent requires shared frames of interpretation, and thus is a profoundly cultural and communicative process. Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony suggests how ruling interests elaborate as "common sense" ideas that support their own position.

As a linguist and a Sardinian living in northern Italy at the crucial juncture of its industrialization, Gramsci was well placed to appreciate the place of language in the elaboration of cultural hegemony. He experienced directly the domination of northern Italy and of standard Italian in the making of

southern Italians as deficient and as exploitable workers. Under equivalent conditions, others linked (and still link) resistance to centralized state domination to minority nationalism, including linguistic minority nationalism, socialist or otherwise, and to the valuing of the vernacular. Gramsci took the position that, on the contrary, the development of workers and their access to a position of power required investment in dominant language literacy. He argued:

If it is true that every language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture, it could also be true that from anyone's language one can assess the greater or lesser complexity of his conceptions of the world. Someone who only speaks dialect, or understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilised and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interests will be limited, more or less corporate and economic, not universal. (1971, 325)

In order to be an actor on the world stage at this particular historical moment, Gramsci was saying, workers and peasants, who are the speakers of the dialects, had to both share a language and own the national language, since it was on national stages that contemporary struggles were being carried out. That language must spread out (diffuse) from urban centres of modern life, he argued, building on a concept of linguistic diffusion characteristic of his professors' positions on language change.

Gramsci's specific ideas about language have to be understood in the context of the prevailing political and economic conditions of his time, as they connect to prevailing debates about language; not surprisingly, those are not necessarily the ones we share for our place and our time. But we do share his notion that language is a key site for the making of consent and for exploring its complex connection to coercion. Indeed, as Susan Gal (1989) notes, a number of Marxist scholars through the twentieth century have discussed the same concerns using different terms (she looks at the work of Gramsci and Williams, but also Valentin Volosinov and Pierre Bourdieu): "Whether the term is hegemony, symbolic domination, oppositional culture, subjugated discourse, or heteroglossia, the central insight remains: Control of the representations of reality is not only a source of social power but therefore also a likely locus of conflict and struggle" (348).

Attending to keywords, structures of feeling, ideologies, and hegemony requires a detailed attention not only to discursive form and practice, but also, to history, politics, and economy. (see also Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009). Intellectual histories of ideas often describe what at least one intellectual

argument that ideas change because of the way rational scientific debates proceed; instead, we are interested here in understanding *why* and *when* certain ideas happen, with an explicit argument that ideas also change because material and symbolic conditions for making their meaning and value change.

Throughout, we have opted for the telling case over any pretense at exhaustivity. While our account is a loose chronology, we prefer to think of it as taking the form of *genealogies*, which we approach as stories to be told about how and why ideas—in this case about language—become important, contested, circulated, powerful, modified, marginalized, and erased in ways which are far from linear.

While we explicitly eschew the Great Person theory of history, a genealogical approach leads us to be interested in the agency of social actors. As a result, we explore how the biographies of some key figures help us understand why they entered the field at all, and why certain ideas about language make sense to a person with that kind of life experience—as we did above regarding Antonio Gramsci. (This is why we have provided the birth and death dates of the figures we discuss, as a rough way of situating people within political economic formations.)

Since we believe knowledge is socially produced, we need to figure out who is (and is not) doing the producing. This history of social approaches to language may feel unfamiliar to those who have read other accounts. Figures that are central in those accounts may take up a more liminal role, or be more critically understood; figures that are marginal, or erased, from other accounts become more central. Some of the stories we include here may not be familiar, but that does not mean they are new: often, they have been told, but by scholars not widely heard or in places not often frequented by many of us. Sometimes the stories were well known at one moment, but have been forgotten. Sometimes the stories are hard to tell because they reveal wars on major figures in the field; sometimes they are hard to find. Sometimes people are wary of telling the stories because of forms of interrogation, repression, or surveillance that they have been subjected to in the past. Sometimes those who conducted the surveillance do not want to share the stories.

In that respect, we owe a great intellectual debt to the work of Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (2003). Their book, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*, examines how particular features of European ideologies were cast as universal features of the world, in ways that foreclosed new modes of thinking and certain acts of political resistance through the twentieth century. They showed how certain texts, once seen as dusty and remote artifacts of intellectual history, were “in close dialogue with those demons that haunted us in the late twentieth century. Hobbes, Locke, Herder, and their kin seemed to be sitting in the room with us as we read. And their presence did not always seem like that of a trusted ally.” (2003, ix)

Bauman and Briggs unpack the ways that scholars of language, especially English, German, and American ones (such as Francis Bacon, John Locke, Hugh Blair, Johann Gottfried Herder, the brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and Franz Boas), participated in the hegemonic construction of modernity over and against a constructed pre-modernity linked with labourers, the illiterate, country people, women, and residents of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Indeed, they show how many such scholars, then and now often construed as progressive, contributed to this binary. Drawing on the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and Partha Chatterjee (2010), they work to provincialize the West by showing how the putatively universal ideas about language and tradition were historically produced, and by identifying the work that was invested in constructing them as universal.

Bauman and Briggs, concerned that readings were less productive when they moved too quickly between authors, texts, places, and periods, chose admirably to undertake extended, subversive discussions of a small group of authors. Our work thus complements theirs because we have taken the opposite tack, with the lacunae that accompany that attempt to make linkages across a number of contexts, and to hold the hegemonic and the marginalized in the same frame. Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt (1906–75), we are interested in exploring how tracing language ideologies helps us discover how imperial and colonial ideologies and practices are intertwined not just with the elaboration of liberal democratic capitalist regimes, but also fascist and communist ones (Arendt [1951] 1968). We aim at understanding not just the elaboration of modernity/pre-modernity, but a finer-grained account.

We also owe an intellectual debt to the European traditions, especially in Catalonia, France, and Britain, which have long used sociolinguistics to engage problems of social inequality and social conflict. The role of the Communist Party in sustaining the postwar anti-fascist movement was crucial in this respect. As we mentioned above, in some cases the concern for social inequality was tied to discourses of decolonization, of particular interest to minoritized peripheries in places like Catalunya and Occitanie (we will discuss the work of Lluís Aracil and Robert Lafont in Chapter 7), and increasingly tied to decolonization-related labour migration and the linking of race, language, and class. In other spheres, the labour struggles at the end of the welfare state drew the attention of French sociolinguists (such as Josiane Boutet, Bernard Gardin, and Jacques Brès), and decolonization itself was a key concern for the former colonies of France that were directly integrated into the French state. These are traditions that explicitly link language to emancipation, and understand sociolinguistics as a necessarily political endeavour. Our effort here is to bring that sensibility into a historicizing frame, one that links nation to empire, over space as well as over time.

## Language Out of Place

These critical approaches to Europe show it is impossible to write only local, regional, or national histories (Braudel 1967, 1979a, 1979b; Fabian 1986; Hobsbawm 1987; Tsing 1994; Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989, 2011; Wolf [1982] 1997). We have always been global. Those global connections need to be understood as inscribed in relations of power, and imperial centres have a stake in obscuring precisely this. Some people get to tell the stories; other people do not. The stories that get told reflect specific perspectives about who we are, who others are, about who belongs where. We inevitably write from some centres, and account therefore for certain points of view while being inattentive to others. But we try also to write against taking them for granted. In this endeavour we try to take on the call of the literary critic Edward Said (1935–2003) to see how language has played a role in legitimizing empire.

Said's (1978) book, *Orientalism*, catalyzed a new wave of studies of colonialism that considered how imperial domination needed to be understood not just through political and military histories, but also through the role that knowledge and culture played in elaborating ideas of a distinct "us" and "them." He argues that colonialism is implicated in, and indeed drove, the development of such disciplines as history, literary studies, anthropology, medicine, geography, and linguistics. For Said, one of the most developed forms of Orientalism is linked to philology.

Said's insights were enabled by the ways in which he felt *Out of Place* (the title of his 2000 memoir). This is a generative phrase for us. As we will see, many critical linguistic insights are generated from people who are considered out of place or are displaced; the biographies articulate political economic and epistemological insights in complex ways. Said was a Palestinian Arab born in the British Mandate of Jerusalem to Christian parents, and lived in Cairo and Jerusalem until he was sent to the United States for further education. He had an Arab family name, but a British first name (his mother admired Edward VIII, the Prince of Wales) and an American passport (his father also was American, because of military service in World War I). He was trained at Victoria College, a school in Egypt that was meant to educate an English-speaking elite in the Middle East for rule after decolonization (a classmate became King Hussein of Jordan). He describes his linguistic experience there:

[T]he school's first rule, emblazoned on the opening page of the handbook, read: "English is the language of the school; students caught speaking any other language will be punished." Yet, there were no native speakers of English among the students. Whereas the masters were all British, we were a motley crew of Arabs of various kinds, Armenians.

Greeks, Italians, Jews, and Turks, each of whom had a native language that the school had explicitly outlawed. Yet all, or nearly all, of us spoke Arabic—many spoke Arabic and French—and so we were able to take refuge in a common language, in defiance of what we perceived as an unjust colonial stricture. (Said 2000, 556–57)

To be colonized, he said, was to be made Other, inferior in ways that legitimized imperial rule over bodies and land, subject to someone else's ways of being. He points out, though, that at the same time colonization usually also unfolded in ways that failed to be completely hegemonic—that forgot or was unable to notice, for instance, that Arabic might be available as a space for alternative modes of being and thinking.

In the chapters that follow, we will see the military enforcement of colonialism, the enslavement of Africans, genocide against colonized populations and Jewish ones, and the interrogation or incarceration of progressive and critical scholars in Italy, the Soviet Union, and the United States. But we will also see revolutionaries overturn the aristocracy in France and new world creoles challenge British, French, Dutch, and American power, we will see working class social movements in Europe attempting to define new linguistic norms, and we will see the civil rights, feminist, and environmental movements in the United States and elsewhere shape new ways of approaching language.

Many scholars have thought about what it takes for spaces to turn into sites for making alternative worlds, radically other and elsewhere, or decolonized and here (see Césaire 2000; Fanon [1952] 1967; Grimshaw 1992). A range of anti-racist, anti- or decolonial, socialist, feminist, and queer scholars are working on the importance of imagining futures, and holding on to hope (Ahmed 2010; Berardi 2011; Berlant 2011; Gibson-Graham 2006; Hage 2002; Harney and Moten 2013; Harvey 2000; Jameson 2005; Muñoz 2009; Narotzky and Besnier 2014; L. Simpson 2011, 2013; Wynter and McKittrick 2015). Many scholars argue in particular that it is necessary to recentre in order to rethink.

Here we return to thinking about walking backward into the future. We draw from decolonial Caribbean thinker Sylvia Wynter (1928–), who is thinking precisely about what it means for those who have been uprooted to become linked to a place, which she calls *becoming Indigenous*. She argues that we need to give humanness a different future by giving it a different past (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 70). Arguing that the Caribbean is the crucible of modernity—the site where enslaved Africans intermingled with occupying Europeans, Indigenous peoples, and the indentured labourers recruited from Asia—she argues, also, that the ex-slave archipelago is thus a crucial site for thinking what new versions of the human might be (McKittrick 2015, 2). This work introduces a diasporic narrative too into thinking about humanness. *Wynter*

Hope

alongside many others, argues that thinking about and from the perspective of "those cast out as impoverished and colonized and undesirable and lacking reason—can, and do[es], provide a way to think about being human anew" (McKittrick 2015, 3), to move beyond *just existing* to a *just existence*. And she asks what kinds of discursive work need to be done to achieve this (see also Mignolo 2015, 112). Contemporary Indigenous and environmentalist scholars are also deeply involved in rethinking the axes of differentiation (Gal 1991) that legitimized colonialism, calling into question the binaries of human versus nature and reason versus emotion that have led to the destruction of people, places, and indeed all living things (Kohn 2013; McGregor 2015; L. Simpson 2011, 2014; Wohlleben 2015).

Mignolo (2015, 119) notes that for Sylvia Wynter every history is a *history-for*. Throughout this book, we think about what conventional histories of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology do. Wynter concludes that we can move beyond *homo economicus* with its focus on distinctive human skills; she calls for a new "Science of the Word," where humans are not confined to their present analytic categories, but are verbs, living relationally. She rethinks being human as praxis, in order not just to describe how people are, but to imagine what they might be.

Let's end this section with an attempt to see what else is going on in the place from which we write, and to which we came in the context of the very genealogies we try to unpack here. This is, also, our third approach to thinking about walking backward into the future. We write from the watershed of the Great Lakes, a series of interconnected freshwater lakes in the centre-east portion of North America, that contain approximately 20 per cent of the world's surface freshwater. As we understand it, Indigenous perspectives on this place ask us to recognize that even as we move around, we are always drinking the water somewhere, living on the land somewhere. They ask us therefore to think about what it means to be in a place, and to acknowledge a wider range of agents and forms of communication than our usual way of placing something called "humans" at the centre. Humans, in this view, are people, but so too are fish, and water (McGregor 2015; Todd 2014).

We learn also that Indigenous perspectives on the place we write from situate us in a long story of movement and migration. Potawatomi biologist Robin Wall Zimmerer (2013) describes a seven-fire prophecy that predicted, as it now describes, the migration history of the Anishinaabe people, up the St. Lawrence and around the Great Lakes.<sup>2</sup> The route prophesied, and taken,

2 We draw only on published accounts of this prophecy by Indigenous scholars of the Great Lakes. We recognize there may be further meanings and histories attached to these accounts, to which, as nonindigenous scholars, we are not privy.

goes from the Atlantic Ocean to Montréal (first fire), then to the shores of Lake Huron near what is now Detroit (second fire), then to Manitoulin Island and other places with wild rice (third fire), marks the arrival of the *zaaganaash* (the offshore, or light-skinned people) in what first appeared to be brotherhood (fourth fire), laments the arrival of black robes and books preaching salvation but severing connections with the sacred (fifth fire), and records the attempt to eliminate Anishinaabe people and teachings through separation from homelands, parents, languages, and culture (sixth fire).

In Wall Zimmerer's interpretation, it is now the moment of the seventh fire, and "the people of the Seventh Fire do not yet walk forward; rather, they are told to turn around and retrace the steps of the ones who brought us here. Their sacred purpose is to walk back along the red road of our ancestors' path and to gather up all the fragments that lay scattered along the trail. Fragments of land, tatters of language, bits of songs, stories, sacred teachings—all that was dropped along the way" (368–69). The task of the moment, says Wall Zimmerer, is "to find the tools that allow us to walk into the future," tools that we can find so long as the land and water endure and we try to regenerate people who have humility and the ability to listen and learn (370). Those tools are needed for lighting the eighth fire, according to Anishinaabe scholar, musician, poet, and storyteller Leanne Simpson (2008, 14). That fire is an everlasting fire of peace that can be lit by all humans, but that depends on our actions today. Learning to regenerate people will ultimately mean transforming our ideas about what language is or can do. In accord with this attention to the import of eight, in the following section we offer an overview of the eight chapters of this book, which have helped shape what is possible, and needed, today.

## Knotted Histories: Following the Threads through the Book

Our account begins in the fifteenth century because this is the moment when "[t]he several continents would be drawn into one worldwide system of connections" (Wolf [1982] 1997, 129). From that point on, actions in one part of the world would have repercussions for all of the others. Lowe (2015) has called this "the intimacies of four continents" (Lowe counts the Americas as one continent). Mignolo (2015) argues that the year 1492 is a turning point in the history of the world, a bifurcation of history in which what it means to be human is changed, with particularly compelling implications for Africans who were enslaved or killed, Indigenous people who were displaced or changed or killed, and Spanish Jews who were converted, expelled, or killed. We would add

that it is a moment at which the meaning of Islam also changes, as Muslims are driven from the Iberian peninsula. 1492 is the date, Mignolo writes,

that marked the expulsion from paradise, it is the date that prompted the advent and the formation of coloniality or the colonial matrix of power and modern/colonial racism and contemporary articulations of race and racism, and it is the date through which the invention of the modern/colonial Other ascended. (2015, 111)

We will return in Chapter 2 to thinking more about Lowe's notion of "intimacy," as well as a lengthier consideration of why the fifteenth century was the moment at which these connections occurred, since, for a long time, Europe was not of much account in the affairs of the wider world (Wolf [1982] 1997, 71). Here, we will simply sketch how the book unfolds from this moment.

The core of this book is organized in a point/counterpoint structure, with three chapters (2, 4, and 6) laying out the making of difference, and inequality in imperial mercantile capitalism, national and colonial industrial capitalism, and the Cold War welfare state, and the chapters that follow each of them showing key critiques of those productions. The notion of reading *contrapuntally* comes from Said's (1993) book *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he argues for an approach that can bring together experiences that have been taken to be discrepant, with separate agendas, internal structures, and external histories as a way of acknowledging "the massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences—of women, of Westerners, of Blacks, of national states and cultures" (32) elaborated in colonial histories, and that need to be understood for decolonial ones. In these chapters, we explore how certain critiques attempt to undo certain kinds of inequities, but others sometimes extend or deepen or transform them. The final chapter is itself contrapuntal: it looks at ideas about language, social difference, and inequality under neoliberalizing finance capitalism, but also key challenges to these.

In the first pair of chapters (2 and 3), we consider *Language, Intimacy, and Empire*. We start with colonial expansion in the sixteenth century and some of the ideologies of hierarchical intimacy and affinity associated with early contacts, ideologies that were challenged as imperial control developed a more formal political structure in the nineteenth century and evolutionary ideologies supported hardened racial boundaries. Chapter 2 offers an insight into how language was dramatically reconceived, and at moments restructured, at two imperial moments shaped by mercantile capitalism (in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and the heyday of formal imperialism (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). It uses the figure and work of Edward Said to

frame its attempt to hold the metropole and the periphery—the West and the "other" it created—in the same frame. Both of the imperial moments studied here used structures of feeling—of Christian love or familial relationship—to manage understandings of colonial intimacy and hierarchy.

The first case study focuses mainly on how missionary linguists from sixteenth-century Spain debated whether to use Indigenous languages or not in the New World and in the Philippines to accomplish conversion. The decision to use them required shaping both Spanish and Indigenous languages in ways that would make conversion possible. Since at the core of the issue was the Latin text of the Bible, these discussions were closely linked to debates about how to understand orality and literacy, alphabetic writing and other forms of writing, and debates about the role of Latin in shaping accurate grammars of Indigenous language.

The second case looks at the rise of comparative philology in the context of the relationship between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India and Britain, in particular the work of British colonial administrators and linguists influenced by the encounter with the linguistic tradition of Pāṇini. It examines the senses of intimacy and hierarchy created through analyses of written languages carried out by such scholars as Sir William Jones, a British colonial administrator, grouping them into what were understood as language families. It shows us the central techniques of linguistic regimentation of the period. These include the makings of comparative word lists, tree diagrams and grammars in a project that was at once one of commensuration and boundary-making. Tree diagrams in particular allowed for a secularization of biblical lines of descent, in parallel with the shift from the divine authority that legitimized royalty to the rise of the bourgeoisie. Languages and peoples needed to be understood in the same frame for governance and conversion to be possible, that is, mappable using the same techniques.

Chapter 3 serves as a counterpoint to Chapter 2 by examining three different kinds of challenges to comparative philology. The first extends from the notion of the family tree, but embeds it in evolutionary theory, a radically different understanding of language change. Evolutionary understandings of language privileged biological difference over and against notions of similarity and affinity, using such differences to hierarchically rank groups of speakers along scales of progress. The hardening of notions about racial difference meant that sites of purported mixture were of particular interest—as a sign of degeneracy to some, as a challenge to evolutionary and genetic ideas for others. The second case, the start of the study of pidgins and creoles, is thus a direct challenge to notions of family trees since these languages were understood as "mixed" languages not legible within genealogical or genetic relationships—and thus inherently threatening to rule legitimized on the basis of racial and

linguistic hierarchies of civilization, progress, and modernity. The third challenge is early-twentieth-century critiques of racism and evolutionary accounts by anthropologist Franz Boas and his students. While Boas mounted direct attacks on both, his work nonetheless was based on a notion of time that distinguished the pre-modern from the modern, and on a notion of linguistics that privileged the scientific approach over speakers' understandings. Both resulted in a separation of language from race in ways that inscribed Indigenous peoples in a timeless past destined to disappear, and African Americans in a White, middle-class understanding of civilization. All of these are articulated alongside the rise of industrial capitalism and the intensification, extension, and elaboration of imperial rule. The work of Benjamin Whorf on linguistic relativity elaborates a spiritual, rational, and romantic challenge to some of the forms of alienation experienced under these conditions.

In the second pair of chapters, *The Contradictions of Language in Industrial Capitalism*, we move to the development of nation-states understood as modern in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as attending to fascist, communist, and universalist responses to the inequities and contradictions such nations created. Chapter 4 examines industrial capitalism and European imperialism from a different angle than Chapter 3, by discussing the rise of bourgeois nationalism and various language technologies for making nations as markets. It describes the tension between two ideologies used to legitimize nation-states: ideologies of the Enlightenment, with a focus on reason, and Romanticism, with a focus on soul and essence. Technologies discussed include the rise of censuses, language standardization, dictionaries, grammars, and literary canons, and conventions of interaction in schooling, as well as the study of linguistic variation across time and space as a problem to be controlled through scientific investigation. It examines the erasures and silencing, especially of women, through the putatively universal notions of fraternal citizenship associated with liberal democracy in nationalism in Europe, as well as the dilemmas of gender in national challenges to colonialism in Asia. It tracks the rise of the construction of "language" as an empirically observable object of scientific investigation, with new foci on spoken language, universal "natural" laws, and linguistic structure. Its major case study is the French Revolution and its aftermath, with consideration of other European nation-states as they emerged mainly in the nineteenth century.

Chapter 5 serves as the counterpoint to Chapter 4 by looking at three kinds of challenges to bourgeois nationalism. The first is a focus on internationalism, linked to the elaboration of international auxiliary languages, a project central to the work of many prominent linguists, though often now dismissed from discussions of their work and marginalized as amateurish. The second is linguistics elaborated in the making of the Soviet Union, in the search for a

science of language that would engage with Marxist theory and lay the foundations for international communism within an understanding of modernity as technological progress. Here we will see challenges to comparative philology, understood as bourgeois, but also a complex navigation of nationalism, internationalism, and imperialism. The third challenge to bourgeois nationalism is fascism, as an attempt to purify the equation between language, nation, and race, a move that is understandable as both the nadir and apotheosis of nationalism, and as a sharp reaction to the contradictions of mixing and perceived contamination associated with colonialism.

In the third pair of chapters, *Brave New Worlds: Language as Technology, Language as Technique*, we turn to the effects of World War II and the Cold War that followed it as an explicit battle between capitalist and communist ideologies, continued but also challenged by a shift to decolonization and national and international development in the 1960s, and by complex and frequently contradictory attempts to struggle for equality in the context of liberal democracy, the welfare state, and decolonization. Chapter 6 investigates the elaboration of universalist understandings of language by structuralists and generativists, in part as a challenge to the radical racist relativism of fascism. Such ideologies, however, coincided neatly with post-World War II interests in developing strategies for machine translation, the era's form of artificial language, and helped to fuel the rapid growth of linguistics departments. The chapter considers the silencing of certain scholars who either were, or were seen as, communist, anti-racist, or pro-Indigenous, and the interrogation of others whose affinities were suspect because of their knowledge of languages spoken in communist countries. It considers the rise of new speech technologies for persuasion and propaganda, understood sometimes as tools for democracy-building. As formal colonization was challenged, new ways of dividing up and understanding the world arose under the rubric of area studies, with new ways of understanding language, culture, and society associated with each. This chapter focuses largely on the United States in the late 1940s and 1950s as we see centres of scholarship shifting from Europe (especially Germany) to the United States. It considers the emergence of a focus on syntax and on the tree diagram as a tool for analyzing sentence structure. The separation of language from society depoliticized linguistic study, in some ways that were ironic given that linguistic study of this kind was meant to celebrate universal humanity over and against fascist hierarchies, and because key figures such as Zellig Harris and Noam Chomsky were both astute and active political theorists involved in a number of communist and anarchist movements. The chapter concludes with a study of ideas about language in the work of George Orwell, the British writer whose books *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* were used as ideological super-weapons in the battle for minds during the Cold War. His career

included colonial service, socialist conversion, a fight against fascists and then communists, and thus traversed all of the key social movements we have studied thus far.

Chapter 7 is a counterpoint to Chapter 6, in that it considers the period generally understood as the “rise” of sociolinguistics in the 1960s and early 1970s in which scholars worked to challenge, in some ways, universalist ideas with more attention to culture, class, race, and gender. Decolonization led to the elaboration of disciplines of language policy and planning for a new group of postcolonial nations. With decolonization, a new set of ideologies of improvement called *development* replaced, and continued, colonial efforts at uplift. The work discussed here also argued for understanding language as social practice and for focussing on spoken interaction in the here-and-now as the proper site for investigation of the workings of power. Here we will look at the experience of a number of key U.S.-based scholars in international development projects, and the ways in which many were shaped by wartime experiences and encounters with gender, racial, and class inequality at home. We will look at the role of foundations, especially the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, in providing a basis for their work. We will discuss the rise of feminist linguistics. We review the importance of work on African American and Caribbean language, increasingly by African, African American, and Caribbean scholars, for developing a more critical and conflict-based approach to language inequalities. This chapter also examines the institutionalization of sociolinguistics in Europe, partly in response to postwar migration and to the mobilization of European “linguistic minorities” in such areas as Catalonia, the Basque country, Brittany, Occitanie, and Wales, partly linked to Marxist concerns for working-class groups in the welfare state.

Chapter 8 is contrapuntal within itself, describing both the capitalist and colonial discourses of the moment, as well as challenges to these. This chapter tracks the period since the 1980s, broadly understood as the end of the welfare state in countries of the Global North and, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the end of the Cold War. We follow the ways in which the intensification and extension of the globalized economy, facilitated by neoliberalism, shifted an interest in languages in a number of directions. One theme is the development of debates about how to understand linguistic value and ideology as notions of markets and commodities changed rapidly. Notions of added value and skill are key tropes of neoliberal social organization, pointing to new forms of audit and evaluation, equally discussed as discursive procedures. We see states increasingly concerned about security and the return of Cold War-inspired forms of surveillance and censorship. Eligibility for citizenship is ever more closely tied to labour, and more and more things are commodified. Authenticity is rendered valuable by contrast, though this can quickly shade

into nativism, linked in part to feelings of economic precarity. We consider the way increasing disparities of wealth are tied to exactly the forms of difference with which language has long been intertwined, producing pronounced attention to linguistic aspects of problems of race, gender, and sexuality as modes of making inequality. Indeed, in 1951, Hannah Arendt predicted that the unravelling of ravenous capitalism would take place around race:

if it should prove to be true that we are imprisoned in Hobbes's endless process of power accumulation, then the organization of the mob will inevitably take the form of transformation of nations into races, for there is under the conditions of an accumulating society, no other unifying bond available between individuals who in the very process of power accumulation and expansion are losing all natural connections with their fellow-men. Racism may indeed carry out the doom of the Western world and, for that matter, of the whole of human civilization.... For no matter what learned scientists may say, race is, politically speaking, not the beginning of humanity but its end, not the origin of peoples but their decay, not the natural birth of man but his unnatural death. ([1951] 1968, 157)

This is an apocalyptic view of the future. It orients us to a consideration of how the fractured lives created by late capitalism are linked to the resurgence of White supremacist, nativist, and dictatorial regimes.

However, we also look for sources of hope, movements, ideas, and people who use language to challenge capitalist and colonial logics and imagine different futures. We consider how increased commodification of language and authenticity, often linked to place, is challenged by an eco-linguistics intent to preserve or create an environmental commons. We consider different strategies for challenging racism, including redress, refusal, and reclamation. We consider attempts to redress former harms to minoritized, racialized, or colonized groups as political economic conditions increasingly destabilize the nation-state as a major mode of political and economic organization. These come precisely from former peripheries and the formerly colonized as they seek an alternative to the modes of domination and forms of hegemony from which they have suffered. We also consider refusal (A. Simpson 2007; Tuck and Yang 2014) to respect the heavily policed boundaries among languages that so many missionaries, administrators, teachers, linguists, and anthropologists have devoted so much work to producing; a similar refusal to respect the conventions of standardized language; and above all a refusal to share linguistic resources with those who have failed to treat them with respect in the past and a refusal to permit problematic forms of knowledge production. We also consider new solidarities, new sovereignties, and new social movements.

Chapter 8 thus takes on the ideas of the eighth fire, which note that we are at a crossroads. The approaches we take will shape the future.

### The End of the Beginning

In the final paragraph of her book, Arendt writes, "But there remains also the truth that every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning: this beginning is the promise, the only 'message' that the end can ever produce. Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of [humans]; politically, it is identified with [human] freedom" ([1951] 1968, 479).<sup>3</sup> Writing this book has been a challenge and a pleasure. We have, each, been renewed and re-excited about studying language. We have found a range of works we have never read; we have read old texts with new eyes. We mostly agreed; when we didn't, we learned from that. Bonnie may still be more enraptured with the idea of hope than Monica; Monica notes her continuing wariness about the complexities and unintended consequences of social processes. The work is fully collaborative; our names are in alphabetical order.

Many of our conversations about this book were held in the café of the Royal Conservatory of Music at the University of Toronto. It has been an apt setting for the work we do here. It is a place of memory, but also a place of hope. The café opens off a sinuous path called Philosopher's Walk. The Walk starts on Bloor Street, a busy centre for Toronto's cultural institutions and the University of Toronto. There is a heavy stone gate marking the 1901 visit of Prince George, the Duke of Cornwall, and Mary, the Duchess of Cornwall, installed at the instigation of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire. The path winds down between the Royal Ontario Museum and the Royal Conservatory of Music. It follows the path of a river, Taddle Creek, which was buried as modern industrial infrastructures shaped the city. You can still see the meandering course of the river in the shape of the path and in the valleys in the landscape; some of the trees growing now existed when the creek still ran. Signs mark the way this river was once the site of fishing weirs built by Indigenous people. There is now a semicircular stone gathering place for outdoor teachings. An artist and student in Women and Gender Studies has buried small fish in bottles at various points along the course of the path; some of the sewer grids are now wrought-iron fish and butterflies.

3. We have chosen to replace her 'generic' masculines with forms more legible in our times.

The path goes through a grove of 14 trees. These trees are planted in honour and memory of 14 women, 14 students, killed in Montréal on December 6, 1989, by a gunman spewing hate about women in engineering and in universities. When Bonnie visited on December 6, 2016, others had been there before her. There were roses and rose petals lying at the foot of the trees. Bonnie also left something at each tree, remembering these women, 14 other women she knows, and the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. A large boulder in the middle of the grove has a plaque, which reads in part, "May commitment to the eradication of sexism and violence against women be likewise planted in the hearts and minds of you who stand here and all who come after. It is not enough to look back in pain. We must create a new future."

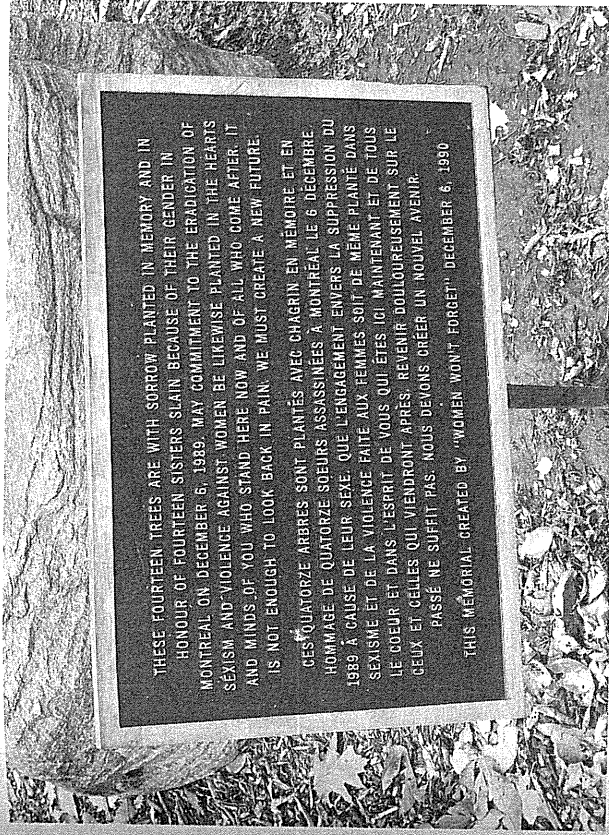


FIGURE 1.2: "We must create a new future." Philosopher's Walk/Taddle Creek, Toronto, 2016 (Photo: Bonnie McElhinny)