

The Politics of Knowledge: Epistemic Violence and Colonial Subjugation in the USA and Philippines

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This thesis examines how the United States, in both the Philippines' classic colonial project and the United States settler colonial project, has worked to erase Indigenous epistemologies. Using a decolonial lens, I explore how education, language suppression, and other forms of control were used not only to dominate but to reshape the identities of Indigenous peoples. Drawing from different decolonial theorists, I examine how colonial systems devalued Indigenous knowledge. However, this is also a story of resistance. Through case studies such as the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project and the Lumad STEM curriculum in the Philippines, I highlight how Indigenous communities reclaim knowledge, identity, and self-determination on their terms. This project asserts that knowledge and education can be both a stage of oppression and a powerful tool of resistance.

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Introduction:

In recent years, attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the United States have escalated through legislative, judicial, and executive efforts. From military institutions to classrooms, the removal of any content related to DEI has accelerated. At the beginning of 2025, for example, 381 books were removed from the U.S. Naval Academy's Nimitz Library due to DEI-related content. (Ismay 2025). Among these books are "Memorializing the Holocaust," Janet Jacobs's examination of depictions of women in the Holocaust; "How Racism Takes Place," by George Lipsitz; "The Myth of Equality," by Ken Wytsma; studies of the Ku Klux Klan; the history of lynching in America; and May Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (Ismay 2025). While supporters of anti-DEI policies argue that these aim to reverse violations of free speech, break anti-discrimination laws, and stop the misuse of money (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2025). I argue that they are a part of a broader issue of suppressing important historical narratives and perspectives that address topics such as systemic inequalities, white supremacy, racism, etc. Regardless of the administration's reasoning for DEI attacks, the erasure of marginalized knowledge and experiences exposes the prevalence of knowledge suppression in the United States.

From the words of Sydney J. Harris, "History repeats itself, but in such cunning disguise that we never detect the resemblance until the damage is done" (Black, Heath, and Swanson 2025). These efforts echo the longstanding colonial tools of epistemic erasure in line with the United States' colonialism in the Philippines during the early 1900s and the U.S. settler colonial project, which is the central focus of my thesis. As colonialism manifests in many different forms of domination and control, therefore, it is essential to understand the different methods that

the United States has exercised. The colonial education system was a key aspect of United States colonialism in both projects, which played a central role in shaping US colonial relationships and reinforcing racial hierarchies.

In the early 1600s, British colonization began in the United States, establishing settlements linked to their parent state (Saito 2020, 42). From its conception, it was centered around territorial acquisition and the goal to destroy and replace (Saito 2020, 43; Saranillo 2015, 284). While classic colonialism, on the other hand, involves the subjugation of one people to another (Kohn 2006) mainly through the manipulation and transformation according to the needs and interests of the colonizer (Saito 2020, 43), settler colonialism differs through settlement and the erasure or replacement of Indigenous peoples. Both systems aim to attain control over land, resources, and people.

A hallmark of European and later United States colonialism has also been civilizing missions (Saito 2020, 28), which served as justification for the subjugation and erasure of Indigenous peoples. Epistemic, another central aspect, deals with the role of power, institutions, and practices in the production and erasure of knowledge and how knowledge is mobilized and controlled (James 2024). In other words, the struggle over how knowledge is produced, what knowledge is considered valid, and what knowledge will be recognized and remembered is a deeply political process. In both colonial projects, Western or Eurocentric knowledge and perspective were viewed as legitimate by the colonizers, while Indigenous knowledge and ways of life were labeled as inferior, backwards, etc. Through the treatment of Native Americans and later the Philippine Natives, the United States exemplified racist ideologies that manifested in colonial education systems (Tuck and Yang 2012). As I will argue in my later chapters, epistemic

politics was an important mechanism of colonialism and therefore necessitates epistemic disobedience and decolonization to overturn these colonial systems (Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird 2012).

As colonialism focuses on civilizing through destroying and replacing the knowledge and culture of indigenous societies, a decolonial lens to delink from colonial knowledge is vital. Decolonial theory is critical to understanding U.S. colonialism, as it focuses on different aspects, such as the effects of colonialism, including identity formation and resistance. By analyzing the history of colonial practices in both the U.S. and the Philippines, I will explore their impacts on Indigenous knowledge systems, identity formation, and resistance methods. Therefore, in the following chapters, I will answer this question: How has epistemic genocide shaped U.S. colonial relations through the classic colonial project in the Philippines and the settler colonial project in the U.S.? How have these projects shaped Indigenous identity, and if they parallel one another, how might they inform contemporary resistance methods? To answer this question, I will examine both U.S. colonial projects through a decolonial lens to challenge dominant Western epistemology and the narratives that have historically silenced or erased marginalized voices. A decolonial lens is central to this project because it allows me to critically analyze the unique challenges faced by Indigenous peoples.

In chapter one, I will present my analytical framework of decolonial theory guiding this thesis and the concepts I will focus on in my later chapters based on this framework. I will also present my methodological commitments and roadmap for my next chapters. In chapter two, I will provide a historical overview of the beginning of U.S. colonialism in both colonial projects

to provide a historical foundation for the rest of the thesis and examine the contextual differences while highlighting similar colonial and racial logic underlying both projects. Decolonial theorists such as Walter D. Mignolo and Santiago Castro-Gómez, for example, critically inform chapter three as I examine epistemic genocide and epistemicide as a central aspect of U.S. colonialism. Their work guides my examination of the dominant Western and Eurocentric epistemologies, which were imposed through different methods.

Chapter four will then focus on identity formation through a decolonial lens, drawing on scholars such as Frantz Fanon and his theory of internalized inferiority and the colonial gaze, as well as Glen Coulthard's critique of recognition politics and Anibal Quijano's coloniality of power. These thinkers help examine how colonial projects not only erased Indigenous epistemologies but also deeply affected Indigenous identities. Finally, chapter five focuses on Indigenous resistance, utilizing Coulthard's theory of grounded normativity and Renato Constantino's call for Filipino-centered education as a form of epistemic resistance. Their work shapes my analysis as they reject seeking validation or recognition from the colonial power but focus on land-based practices and educational recollection.

The structure of this thesis as a comparative analysis of both colonial projects is also rooted in my decolonial commitment to recognizing the distinct historical and cultural aspects of each colonial context and analyzing shared logics, patterns, and consequences of U.S. colonialism. I will also utilize historical texts and archives and case studies like the Luman community school system and the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project to center the lived experiences and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples.

My thesis, therefore, examines how epistemic genocide shaped U.S. colonial relations by analyzing the U.S.-Philippines colonial project and the U.S.-Native American settler-colonial project through a decolonial lens. By comparing both colonial projects, this thesis examines the role of racist ideologies and epistemic genocide in these civilizing missions, as the U.S.-Philippines classic colonial project echoed the ideology and methods behind the U.S. settler colonial project.

**Chapter One: Decolonizing Knowledge -
Theoretical and Methodological
Foundations:**

In chapter one, I establish the theoretical and methodological framework for the rest of this thesis by introducing the core political theory concepts that guide my analysis of knowledge erasure and its role in shaping indigenous identity and resistance. In this chapter, I argue that a true understanding of the erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing within both the United States settler colonial project and the classical colonial project requires a decolonial lens. Through this lens, I analyze how knowledge erasure, identity formation, and resistance are interconnected and how epistemic defiance is critical. I draw on theorists such as Franz Fanon, Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, and Santos Castro Gomez, whose crucial concepts, such as colonial identity and zero-point epistemology, for example, demonstrate how colonial systems have dominated and erased Indigenous epistemologies. I reconstruct these concepts to build the foundation of my analytical framework that guides the following chapters. Each section of this chapter introduces a core theoretical concept that will guide the analysis in one of the following chapters. I will then outline my methodological commitments, including my choices in political artifacts and the voices I choose to center. I will show how these different concepts and commitments fit together

in my analytical framework and reinforce epistemic defiance, a central aspect driving this project. Ultimately, this chapter provides a clear roadmap for how theory and methodological commitments shape my thesis.

*Section 1: Decolonial Theory and
Epistemic Violence:*

As colonizers have always controlled knowledge production, decolonial theory focuses on challenging Western epistemology and the narratives that perpetuate colonial ideologies.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that investigates and distinguishes “belief from opinion” (Million 2015, 339) or, in other words, what knowledge and truth are accepted and perpetuated. The Western notion of epistemology is rooted in the foundational belief of superior knowledge that denies other societies the act of creation and interpretation (Million 2015, 339). This notion is rooted in superiority, which is based on racial superiority and is therefore prevalent throughout both colonial projects, whose foundation rests on the supposed superiority of American knowledge, politics, and ways of life. Epistemology is inherently political because power structures and social institutions have always shaped knowledge.

As Charles Mills accounts in *The Racial Contract*, “the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and...continue to rule over non-white people” (Mills 1997, 1) is inherently political. He also highlights how the racial contract is epistemological as it “requires its own peculiar moral and empirical epistemology, its norms and procedures for determining what counts as moral and factual knowledge of the world” (Mills 1997, 17). Because epistemology is central to this social system of domination, systematic knowledge erasure was central to the colonial domination that surpassed physical domination. Historically, power structures, socioeconomic privileges, benefits, rights, etc.,

are rooted in racism and racial domination that have structured our societies. Part of the racial contact refers to the societal agreements, informal and formal, that explain the creation of society and the establishment of the state, as well as how individuals have been reconstituted. Mills illustrates non-white members of society, whose categorized inferiority and subordinate civil standing denied them the privileges of white members, such as the recognition of their epistemology (Mills 1997, 9), which is my central focus.

This flawed logic is rooted in ideas such as a superior single universal reality, defined by Santiago Castro Gomez as the “zero point” epistemology (Gomez 2011, 20) that does not exist because this belief would exclude all other perspectives and knowledge. This logic is rooted in the white supremacy foundational belief in the superiority of European and Western races and, as a result, knowledge (Gomez 2011, 20). As a result of colonialism and Western epistemology being deemed superior, Indigenous identity and knowledge have been heavily impacted. Western perspectives and powers decided what knowledge would be devalued or celebrated, as articulated by Argentine professor and decolonial thinker Walter Dignolo (Dignolo 2009, 176). This has also shaped our understanding of race, as colonial perspectives have historically asserted that certain bodies were inferior to others and that inferior bodies carried inferior intelligence (Dignolo 2009, 178). This logic is reflected in the methods of the United States as the settler and classic colonial actor who controlled knowledge production through epistemic genocide.

Epistemic genocide and epistemicide are both forms of colonial violence that accompanied United States colonialism and seek to erase Indigenous knowledge. I distinguish both terms as epistemic genocide coincides with the genocide of a people as defined by scholar José Cossa

in *Comparative and International Education: Reflecting on Extractivismo, Epistemic Genocide, and Theoretical Colonialism*, who links “the genos and the epistemic because the erasing of the epistemic is intrinsically linked to the erasing of a people” (Cossa 2023, 75). Epistemicide, on the other hand, is not inherently synonymous with violence but refers to knowledge erasure as “knowledge is exalted at the expense of local or indigenous knowledge systems, leading to the demise of such knowledge systems” (Sonkqayi 2022). While the classic colonial project in the Philippines was not inherently violent, it applied assimilation and soft power tactics, the settler colonial project in the U.S. was, as it was synonymous with genocide and abuse within the education system. However, for this thesis, I will use epistemic genocide to refer to the process of knowledge erasure, as both colonial projects were grounded in a similar logic of destroying Indigenous epistemologies.

Epistemic genocide, “the process of exterminating cultural traditions and ways of knowing” (Sleeter and Zavala 2020, 3), is based on the logic of “backward” races who stood in the way of Euro-American progress in need of enlightenment and civilizing (Ells 1995, 609). This theme of impediment of progress and enlightenment is relevant as it drove epistemic genocide in settler and classic colonial projects. Epistemic genocide manifested in “forced assimilation into the dominant culture, language, and traditions” (Sleeter and Zavala 2020, 3) through boarding schools and other institutions, for example, promoting Eurocentric ideologies, religion, and curriculum. In the case of the settler colonial project, these institutions attempted to “convince the surviving native American Indians to disregard their traditional cultures and integrate themselves into white society” (Ells 1995, 609) and often used extreme methods of cultural erasure.

Epistemic genocide manifested differently in the classic colonial project in the Philippines, although it is still an example of cultural and epistemic genocide, reflecting a different approach of “benevolent assimilation” and Americanization rather than “destroy to replace. Epistemic violence is also a key aspect of domination and the process of epistemic genocide, as it refers to the “forced delegitimization, sanctioning, and repression” (Garbe 2013) of other possibilities of knowledge and is accomplished through the same process of epistemic genocide, such as “the construction of epistemic frameworks that legitimize and enshrine those practices of domination” (Enrique Galván-Álvarez 2010, 12). The frameworks have historically manifested in residential native boarding schools, for example, that forced assimilation and cultural erasure or implementation of English as the only language of educational instruction. Epistemic violence in the form of repression of indigenous epistemology or frameworks that perpetuate systems of domination and hierarchies is a precursor to epistemic genocide.

I present this aspect of epistemic genocide because erasure of indigenous knowledge systems can also be accomplished through nonacademic forms. Removing native inhabitants from their land and taking control, such as the Indian removal process and the establishment of reservations, creates “immeasurable disruption and erasure of local systems of meaning that guide the ownership and use of land” (Simatei 2005, 86). In the settler colonial case, Indigenous peoples did not view land as a commodity to be owned in terms of private ownership, similar to the inability to own air or the sun (Smithsonian Institution 2025). By controlling how land is used and owned, disrupting their relationship with the land while simultaneously dispossessing

them of it, Natives were forced to conform to a Eurocentric system that permanently disrupted their understanding and ways of life.

Epistemic de-linking from this zero point of epistemology is therefore central to decolonization because it is the process of de-linking from what knowledge has historically been considered “real and true” and resisting what knowledge is recognized and, similarly, understanding what knowledge has been suppressed through the process of colonialism. This process is also known as decoloniality or “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo 2009, 159). As Mignolo argues, it is vital to work towards more non-imperial democratic societies. Decoloniality and decolonial theory are therefore involved with the de-linking from colonial structures and epistemology through committing to different ways of thinking, believing, and living, for example.

Decolonization, however, refers to the “political shift of power between colonizing powers and their soon-to-be-former subjects” (American University 2025).. This is an important distinction because there have been many failures in the past “Decolonization Era” of the 60s and 70s, as articulated by Saito in her *Settler Colonialism, Race, and the Law: Why Structural Racism Persists*. Post-era World War II came with drastic changes in international law, aiming to facilitate the global process of decolonization for many communities (Saito 2020, 41). However, previously subjugated territories still maintained many constraints under international law. For example, states were granted independent statehood without further change, many colonial-era international laws remained, and existing colonial boundaries became state borders (Saito 2020, 188). Although granted legal independence, formerly colonized territories remained deprived of their resources, wealth, and culture due to past colonial exploitation. Decolonial theory, therefore,

therefore, targets not only legal and physical colonialism but also works to de-link from colonial structures and epistemology through committing to different ways of thinking.

Indigenous Identity Formation:

Identity formation, another key aspect of decolonial theory, investigates how colonialism has shaped the identities of subjugated peoples and, similarly, the dominating colonial groups. Identity formation also highlights the colonial legacies that remain prevalent in ongoing societies and how they affect identities today. Identity formation is one of the strongest examples of how colonial legacies continue in society. While the issues of settler colonialism and classic colonial projects have manifested differently, identity formation affects colonized groups alike in that their identity and existence have been shaped by the external, prejudiced world. I draw on numerous scholars' takes on the different facets of identity formation as they offer critical insights. Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, for example, interrogates how colonialism shapes identity and produces internalized inferiority through a psychological analysis rooted in his experience as a Black man from a French colony in the Caribbean. He illustrates core concepts of internalized inferiority, double narcissism, and the colonial gaze, which leads to what he defines as the zone of nonbeing.

He asserts that the inferiority complex of colonized people is a part of a double process, "primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization-or, better, the epidermalization--of this inferiority" (Fanon 1986, 13). The racial hierarchies and, therefore, material oppression and economic inferiority created by colonial systems of exploitation become internalized within colonized peoples. As it begins with economic inferiority, their senses of self are built upon their social conditions that set up their psychological state.

The internalized inferiority is also rooted in the objectification from what Fanon calls the colonial gaze. The colonial gaze refers to the fractured sense of self in which the colonized are seen as "an object amid other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood" (Fanon 1986, 109). Within the colonial gaze, the colonized are reduced to mere objects and stripped of any humanity. Fanon further illustrates these dehumanizing effects as he writes how the black man "is not a man," but "a black man is a black man" (Fanon 1986, 10). Their skin color is what defines and identifies them and traps them into this imposed objecthood, where they are denied recognition of their true humanity and reduced to a slave to their appearance. This idea is reflected in what Fanon explains as being overdetermined from the outside as he was "the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my appearance" (Fanon 1986, 116) and was forced to have his existence defined by external judgment as he was "dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes" (Fanon 1986, 116). This connects back to the internalized inferiority as the colonized are forced to experience themselves through the dehumanizing image imposed on them with no recognition at all.

The lack of recognition forces the colonizer into what he classifies as "a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity" (Fanon 1986, 10). This arid and sterile zone symbolizes the relational state of the colonized to the colonizer in which the colonized not only experiences a fractured self-identity but is stripped of subjectivity and humanness. They only exist in this zone because they have been put there by the colonizer. Further illustrating how his worth and humanness are dictated by the recognition of colonizers, he writes that it "is on that other being, on recognition by that other being" that his human worth and reality depend (Fanon 1986, 217). However, not only does Fanon argue that the colonized identity is dependent on the colonizer,

but he also presents the idea of dual narcissism, where the colonizer's identity is also dependent on their relationship to the colonized. He asserts that,

“The Black man wants to be white. The white man's slaves to reach a human level... The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness... this dual narcissism... White men consider themselves superior to black men... Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought and the equal value of their intellect.” (Fanon 1986, 11).

Fanon highlights how the colonial system traps both the colonizer and the colonized into

Rigid identities of whiteness and blackness, in which the colonizer's sense of superiority depends on the subjugation of the colonized, and the colonized strive for validation and humanness from the colonizer. Identity formation within this system requires recognition for both groups. Not only is colonialism present in the form of violence and sustained through land dispossession, for example, or systemic inequalities, but the colonized or Indigenous identity and worth are measured by colonial standards and viewpoints. Fanon's analysis of recognition eventually rejects the reliance on colonial recognition and efforts to turn the internalized inferiority into self-empowerment and reclamation. As I will argue in chapter four, self-recognition, as Glen Coulthard explains in his key takeaways from Fanon, is “a means but not an end” to decolonization and ultimately insufficient (Coulthard, 2014:153).

Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin White Masks* critiques the politics of recognition, specifically in the Canadian settler state, as he argues that gaining recognition from the settler state reinforces the colonial structure that Indigenous peoples aim to overturn.

Coulthard's theory of recognition asserts that the relations of recognition are “constitutive of subjectivity: one becomes an individual subject only in virtue of recognizing and being recognized by another subject” (Coulthard 2014, 28). Coulthard builds on Hegel's theories of self-consciousness, which assert that self-consciousness exists for others and can only exist by being acknowledged (Coulthard 2014, 28). Similar to Fanon's theory of dual narcissism, this relationship dynamic can be mutual, as the colonizer depends on the colonized for the internalization of their dominance. Drawing from Charles Taylor's *The Politics of Recognition*, Coulthard also highlights the harm in the absence or “misrecognition of others” (Coulthard 2014, 20) as “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; it can be a form of oppression, imprisoning one in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (Coulthard 2014, 30). Disparaging forms of recognition, such as the classification of indigenous peoples as uncivilized and in need of uplifting and civilizing (McKinley 1900) or in need of modernity, are considered another form of oppression by Taylor. Coulthard's assertion that recognition politics leaves the colonized trapped within colonial frameworks lies in the ability of the colonial system to,

“Not depend solely on the exercise of state violence, its reproduction rests on the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to identify, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of recognition either imposed or granted to them by the settler state and society” (Coulthard 2014, 25).

As I will argue in chapter four, Coulthard strongly rejects this dimension of recognition politics where it is “granted” to a subaltern group by a dominant group (Coulthard 2014, 30).

His insights on recognition remain relevant because he critiques the harm of the imposed colonial identity on indigenous peoples and, as recognized by Fanon, highlights how colonialism is prevalent in the construction of indigenous identity, which is constructed and controlled by colonial frameworks. Overall, Coulthard and Fanon illustrate how the colonized are imprisoned by the externally devalued views of themselves and their being.

Anibal Quijano, renowned sociologist and theorist, offers insights into how our social relations are founded on the categories of race produced in America and the coloniality of power. In his *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America*. He analyzes how globalization began with the colonization of the Americas, with a key feature being the classification of people by race, which continues to shape global power today (Quijano 2000). The imposition of racialized categories stripped away indigenous identity and reconstructed it within colonial frameworks. He asserts that “race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social classification” and “In America, the idea of race was a way of granting legitimacy to the relations of domination imposed by the conquest” (Quijano 2000, 534). He illustrates how in South and Central America, for example, although there were many different indigenous groups with unique histories, languages, cultures, and identities, through colonization from the Iberians, they,

Had become merged into a single identity: Indians. This new identity was racial, colonial, and negative... The same happened with the people forcefully brought from Africa as slaves: Ashantis, Yorubas, Nèpantla Zulus, Congos, Bantus, and others. In the span of three hundred years, all of them were Negroes or blacks (Quijano 2000, 551).

These new racial identities not only came at the expense of oppression, subjugation, erasure, and exploitation through colonization, but their identity became rooted in the supposed inferiority of their race. Their ways of life are classified as primitive. Quijano’s analysis of the coloniality of power highlights how the racial identities imposed during colonization shaped systems of dominance and reinforced racial hierarchies. Similar to Fanon and Coulthard, he emphasizes how colonization affected the identities of colonized peoples, as their pre-colonial identities were reduced to racialized categories defined by the colonial, Eurocentric, and Western perspective.

Indigenous Resistance:

Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin White Masks* offers numerous insights into how indigenous peoples within a settler state can decolonize on their terms, to not continuing the colonial structures that demand dependency. His focus is on the Canadian indigenous colonialism; however, it remains relevant within the context of the U.S. indigenous context because both countries were formed through the imposition of settler colonialism, and indigenous peoples in both countries face similar challenges of the occupation of a settler state, which remains today. He calls for a reorientation of attempts to transform “the colonial outside into a flourishing of the Indigenous inside” to decolonize “on our terms, without sanction, permission, or engagement of the state, western theory, or the opinions of the Canadians” (Coulthard 2014, 154). Rather than focus on recognition from the colonizer and the granting or sanctioning of rights, agency, etc., he calls for indigenous peoples to invest in themselves and focus on “reinvesting in our ways of being” (Coulthard 2014, 155). He ultimately argues that true decolonization occurs through Indigenous communities themselves through the revival of land-based practices, cultural traditions, and collective ways of knowing.

This approach reframes resistance as a process of inward reclamation rather than outward appeal, challenging Indigenous peoples to reject dependency and reclaim their futures on their terms.

He offers solutions such as regeneration of political and legal traditions, language learning, using artistic and performance-based traditions, and overall reclaiming their traditional practices and ways of life (Coulthard 2014, 155). This theory and reorientation of resistance is Coulthard's grounded normativity, which is what Coulthard calls "grounded normativity... the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with humans and nonhumans over time" (Coulthard 2014, 13). This decolonial framework situates decolonial resistance as proactive and rooted in Indigenous values, relationships, and lifestyles that exist beyond the settler state. Coulthard focuses on the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the settler state through the experience of land dispossession, which shapes the relationship and informs "the dominant modes of Indigenous resistance and critique that this relationship has provoked" (Coulthard 2014, 13). In essence, the struggle for resistance in the settler state is heavily oriented around the struggle for land; however, it is not only the material land but also the destruction of Indigenous ways of life that were informed by their relationship to and understandings of land. One important aspect of the epistemic genocide experienced during U.S. colonialism was the destruction of Indigenous ways of knowing in regards to land, as land was not something to be bought, sold, or owned for profit or individual gain within Indigenous societies before colonization.

This land dispossession within settler colonialism is the main aspect that differentiates it from classic colonialism, as Indigenous resistance is not rooted in land dispossession, as I will expand on later in this chapter. Coulthard also maintains that colonialism did not end with the violent dispossession of land and unconcealed structures of domination, but it transformed to a "colonial governmentality that works through the limited freedoms afforded by state recognition and accommodation" (Coulthard 2014, 16). Therefore, he criticizes the politics of recognition as it is based on a liberal framework and analyzes how certain methods of Indigenous resistance have failed to "significantly modify, let alone transcend, the breadth of power at play in colonial relationships" (Coulthard 2014, 31). While he agrees that reciprocal recognition may enable Indigenous peoples to gain status as distinct self-determining actors, the logic of recognition "as something that is ultimately granted or accorded a subaltern group or entity by a dominant group" (Coulthard 2014, 30) continues the cycle and structures of colonial domination.

He uses the phrase "politics of recognition" to refer to recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to "reconcile" indigenous assertions of nationhood and independence concerning settler state sovereignty by accommodating Indigenous identity claims in the form of a renewed legal and political relationship (Coulthard 2014, 3). Ultimately, true reconciliation or assertions of nationhood are an impossible reality while the settler state still exists. Recognition maintains the oppressive colonial structures that Indigenous people seek to transcend. He also calls on Fanon's insights concerning the double process of colonialism—psychological and sociodiagnostic—to argue that changes in social structures "may not do anything to undercut the debilitating forms of unfreedom related to misrecognition in the traditional sense" (Coulthard 2014, 37).

For Coulthard, true decolonial resistance must move past inclusion and changes in a social structure that remains colonial but centers indigenous resurgence through methods of grounded normativity. While he emphasizes land-based resurgence, Renato Constantino shifts the focus to education, arguing that reclaiming nationalism and identity through Filipino schooling is equally vital in resisting colonial domination.

Filipino historian Renato Constantino's *The Miseducation of the Filipino* focuses on colonial education as a tool of cultural subjugation and identity loss and on using education and reclaiming Filipino identity as a form of resistance. His work argues that education is a "weapon of a people striving for economic emancipation, political independence, and cultural renaissance. We are such a people" (Constantino 1970, 1). Constantino had seen an uprising in Filipino First policies that called for economic emancipation from the U.S. and more appreciation for Filipino culture; however, there was little campaigning for the promotion of nationalism in education. While attempts to address the inequity of the past have continued, he recognizes how many educational leaders who are proud of the philosophy and educational system "were valid only within the framework of American colonialism. The educational system ...was designed to correspond to the economic and political reality of American conquest." (Constantino 1970, 1). As argued in chapter two, molding the minds of the colonized through education was intentional and a part of the broader project of colonialism. At the core of colonial education was the "overriding factor of preserving and expanding American control. To achieve this, all separatist tendencies were discouraged" (Constantino 1970, 3). Despite the noble American goals of uplifting and civilizing, as stated in McKinley's Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation,

as Constantino argues, a Filipino culture and identity cannot prevail if they remain suffocated by Western cultural materials and education (Constantino 1970, 12). Not only through education and cultural suppression but also through the transplanting of American political institutions based on American democracy, which ignored Indigenous institutions, "which could have led to the evolution of native democratic ideas and institutions, were disregarded" (Constantino 1970, 5). This reflects the broader strategy of epistemic domination through the erasure of Filipino governance and frameworks, which is where Constantinos' modes of resistance are rooted.

The imposition of English, which impeded thought through the added challenge of learning a foreign language, is another variable behind Constantinos' modes of resistance. Not only was there "cultural stagnation" (Constantino 1970, 10), but he argues that educators who are weary of readopting the national language as the mode of instruction in education are indicative of our colonial mentality. Our educators do not see any opposition to the use of a foreign language but fear opposition to the use of the national language just because it is based on one of the main dialects" (Constantino 1970, 10). As illustrated by Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, this idea of the colonial mentality reveals how the preference for the colonizer's language over one's own reflects a form of internalized inferiority. The context provided above provides the structure of Constantinos' argument for a Filipino education, his main method of resistance. He argues that education,

"Must be based on the needs of the nation and the goals of the nation. The object is not merely to produce men and women who can read and write or who can add and subtract. The primary objective is to produce a citizenry that appreciates and is conscious of its nationhood and has

national goals for the betterment of the community, and not an anarchic mass of people who know how to take care of themselves only (Constantino 1970, 12)

Constantino views education as a tool for cultivating a national consciousness, situating resistance as a collective issue rather than solely individual. Educating Filipinos to create or learn a shared identity rooted in their history, language, and goals will work to dismantle colonial structures and legacies. He argues that the objective of education in the Philippines should not be “merely to produce men and women who can read and write” but to “assure national survival” (Constantino 1970, 12). This may be achieved through an education that equips Filipinos with the attitudes and knowledge to implement goals and policies beneficial to Filipino nationhood and cultural and epistemic resurgence. Rather than a colonial education that “saw to it that the Filipino mind was subservient to that of the master,” which created “a distorted opinion of the foreign masters and also of themselves” (Constantino 1970, 12), Constantino argues that education must focus inward towards the Filipino salvation and future. At the end of his paper, he exhibits his understanding of the views from the Western colonial powers as he states, “unless we prepare the minds of the young for this endeavor, we shall always be a pathetic people with no definite goals and no assurance of preservation” (Constantino 1970, 12). His approach differs from that of Coulthard as he focuses on the effects of epistemicide and resistance methods based on redirecting the educational frameworks in the Philippines. By looking inward and reclaiming epistemic agency, he argues that they can dismantle the colonial legacies and structures that remain.

Methodological Reflection:

This thesis is grounded in a decolonial analytical framework that centers concepts

of epistemic genocide, Indigenous identity formation, and Indigenous resistance. This analytical framework is central to my methodological commitments of centering indigenous voices and lived experiences, challenging dominant Western and Eurocentric narratives, and engaging in epistemic defiance. As this thesis rejects the idea of a universal epistemology, my methodological commitments in themselves act as a form of resistance to colonial narratives and have shaped my choices of political artifacts that shape this thesis. I will include political theory texts such as Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*; Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks*; Anibal Quijano’s *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America*; and Walter Dignolo’s *Theory, Culture & Society*, to name a few. As my project is epistemologically defiant, I utilize these scholars as they critically analyze colonial power structures, identity formation, and knowledge production, working to dismantle colonial structures and legacies. They also offer alternative ways of thinking rooted in Indigenous perspectives, which align with the central aspects of this thesis.

I also include numerous historical texts and archives, such as documents from the 1919 Philippine Independence Mission, government reports on Native boarding schools, and official American education policies in the Philippines, to provide evidence and historical context. Similarly, I use specific case studies such as the school system in the Indigenous Luman communities and the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project. By using these case studies, I can uplift the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples within these communities and share their stories and perspectives. Other artifacts I utilize include online news stories, government websites, and organizational websites such as the Chinook Nation online exhibit, which exposes the colonial legacies that are prevalent today.

I also include dedicated sections to analyze the U.S. settler colonial project and the U.S. classic colonial project in the Philippines in each chapter. This allows me to examine and highlight the distinct historical and cultural contexts that shaped both colonial projects, while allowing me to analyze the shared logics and methods that underscored both projects.

Thesis Roadmap:

As I focus on epistemic genocide, Indigenous identity formation, and Indigenous resistance, each of these core theoretical concepts guides my chapters. Chapter two provides a historical overview of U.S. colonialism in both projects, focusing on military, economic, and land control as well as genocide within the U.S. settler colonial context. The historical overview provides essential background to understand the context of both colonial projects, allowing me to emphasize the distinct historical and structural mechanisms of both projects. At the same time, this chapter reveals how each project, despite its differences, was shaped by the shared logic of racist ideology and broader American colonial goals.

Chapter three focuses on epistemic genocide within U.S. colonialism through the education system. I first examine the settler colonial project in the U.S., exploring the ideology of “destroy to replace” that underscored this project. I look critically at different policies, forced assimilation, school curricula, and the generational trauma as a result of the separation of Native children from their families. Next, I focus on the classic colonial project in the Philippines, as the U.S. implemented a different approach of benevolent assimilation, although it was underscored by parallel colonial logics. I examine the English educational instruction, school curriculum, and attempts to Americanize Filipino youth and suppress Indigenous epistemologies. In this chapter, I compare how both colonial projects,

despite the different methods and colonial structures, were rooted in educational systems that erased Indigenous knowledge. I also reflect on how epistemic genocide laid the foundation for the disruption of Indigenous identity.

In chapter four, I analyze how U.S. colonialism shaped Indigenous identity formation in both the U.S. settler and classic colonial projects. I focus on Frantz Fanon, Glen Coulthard, and Anibal Quijano to outline how colonialism worked to racialize, devalue, and reconstruct Indigenous identities. I focus on two case studies within the U.S. settler colonial project: William Carson’s analysis of blood quantum laws and David Perley’s narrative of his experience in the colonial education system. These case studies illustrate the disruption of Native identity and mental health. I then focus on the classic colonial project in the Philippines to examine how American colonial education affected Filipino identity. I draw on the experiences of Resil Mojares and Allyson Tintiango-Cubales to explore Filipino resistance to Americanization and the internalization of colonial inferiority. I expose how identity formation under colonial rule is complex and doesn’t reflect complete rejection. This chapter then lays the foundation for chapter five, which focuses on decolonial resistance movements.

Chapter five examines Indigenous resistance to U.S. colonialism, focusing on how Indigenous communities challenge colonial structures through grounded, Indigenous-rooted practices. I utilize Glen Coulthard and Renato Constantino, who argue that decolonial resistance must reject colonial recognition and center Indigenous resurgence, knowledge systems, and educational reclamation. As a part of my comparative analysis, I first explore resistance within the U.S. settler colonial context, focusing on the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project and the Chinook Nation’s struggle for recognition.

I then examine resistance within the classic colonial context of the Philippines, focusing on the Filipino Lumad community's decolonized educational curriculum and the 1919 Philippine Independence Mission. In all of these cases, I assess how Indigenous peoples have used different methods to assert agency as I reflect on methods that work towards true colonialism and those that fail to overturn colonial structures.

Chapter 2: Historical Overview:

In chapter two, I provide a historical overview of both the U.S. settler colonial project and the U.S. classic colonial project in the Philippines. The first section on settler colonialism focuses on ideologies like manifest destiny, combined with racist views of Indigenous peoples, which justified the dispossession, genocide, and erasure of Native Americans. The next section on classic colonialism in the Philippines turns to how the U.S. acquired the archipelago from Spain and established dominance through military force, economic exploitation, and assimilation. The use of education was critical in both projects, as it functions as a tool of control. Though there were different tactics, both projects were rooted in racist ideologies and imposing American hegemony. This chapter overall lays the foundation for how these colonial structures enabled epistemic genocide and how education became a primary tool of colonial power.

Defining Settler Colonialism in American: A Historical Overview:

Settler colonialism in the United States was rooted in ideas such as manifest destiny, the concept of divine and inevitable expansion into the United States ordained by God to cultivate the lands and use them to their full potential (Smithsonian Museum). This concept was often depicted in artwork such as the famous 1872 American Progress painting, depicting an allegorical heavenly female

figure leading pioneers westward (Library of Congress 1873). This idea can also be found throughout the media, such as the 1854 Southern Sentinel newspaper quoting a speech delivered in the House of Representatives, "it is the manifest destiny that is bearing the redman of our country westward upon a receding wave into the great ocean of annihilation" (Southern Sentinel 1854). This belief, which justified the colonization and dispossession of Native peoples, would later be codified into law. Although coined later, this idea was also central to the justification of the native genocide (Fixico 2023). Before the process of removal and assimilation of Native Americans, there were countless massacres. Between 1846 and 1873, there were more than 300 systematically state-sponsored massacres and killings of California natives (Madley, 2009). The 1782 Gnadenhutzen Massacre resulted in the deaths of 96 Christianized natives from Delaware who were beaten to death by militiamen. Although the natives in Delaware were the first to sign a treaty with the US and promoted peace and friendship, many treaties did not prevent the lands from being rapidly ceded to the US or the deaths of thousands of natives (Fixico 2023). Along with the hundreds of other massacres, these were the first steps towards the destruction of Native Americans.

The forced removal of Native Americans from their lands was another important step in the U.S. acts of settler colonialism. Founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson maintained that farming and agriculture would aid in "bringing together their and our settlements and in preparing them ultimately to participate in the benefits of our governments... we are acting for their greatest good" (Jefferson 1803). This idea is also reflected in a 1787 letter from Jefferson to Madison as he states that the United States and Native governments "will remain virtuous for many centuries; as long as they are chiefly agricultural;

and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America” (Jefferson 1787). The vacant lands that Jefferson refers to were occupied by thousands of Native Americans, composed of different tribes with unique languages and cultures. However, Indians were not recognized as equals, as reflected in their mass killings and forced removal from their homelands. They were also reduced to a color: red (Linnaeus 1758). Because human beings were now classified according to color, red had become a universal symbol of the natural savagery and violence of Indians (Dodge 7). The inferior view towards the natives is similarly reflected in the words of Mayflower passenger Robert Cushman from 1622, who wrote, “They run over the grass, as do also the foxes and wild beasts. They are not industrious, neither do they have art, science, skill, or faculty to use either the land or the commodities of it” (Madley 2009, 99). Not only did settlers equate natives with wild animals, but due to their lifestyles and lack of land cultivation, they were not considered worthy of the land they had inhabited for generations. However, unlike Europeans, Natives did not view land as a commodity to own or purchase (Smithsonian 2025), and their ways of life did not reflect a life so heavily rooted in the cultivation and ownership of land.

This idea, however, was a core concept of US expansionism and colonization. James Monroe demonstrates his intent not to assimilate the Indians but to remove them from their lands in his 1825 to, “not only shield them from impending ruin but also promote their welfare and happiness” because “it is impossible to incorporate them in such masses” and, without timely anticipation of a provision against the dangers to which they are exposed...their degradation and extermination will be inevitable” (Monroe 1825).

Many of our country's leaders believed that their removal and extinction were inevitable based on the threat they posed to American expansionism. Racist thought is also reflected in the words of Thomas Jefferson, who regarded the Indians as “merciless savages” in his grievances in the 1776 Declaration of Independence (Declaration of Independence 1776). This perception, along with the lack of recognition of Native Americans' rights to their land, led to the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which was a pivotal step in the process of destruction and erasure of Native Americans.

In regards to the Indian Removal Act, Andrew Jackson's State of the Union Address of 1830 states, “By persuasion and force, they have been made to retire... until some of the tribes have become extinct and others have left but remnants,” and, “this fate surely awaits them if they remain within the limits of the states” (Jackson 1830). This act, which authorized him to reserve land under the US government west of the Mississippi was further justified in the same speech, stating, “It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites...enable them to pursue happiness in their way... to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community” (Jackson 1830). As slavery persisted in the United States, it was accompanied by severe racist ideology, which was mirrored in the treatment of Native Americans.

This idea and the language of civilizing and Christianizing are relevant throughout the history of United States colonialism. In this case, although justification was framed as civilizing and Christianizing, the U.S. ultimately “felt justified in destroying - sometimes to the point of genocide - the 'backward' race that stood in their way.” (Ells 1995, 609) because of their destiny to spread their superior civilization across North America.

The forced removal and migration throughout the 1830s and 40s was later known as the Trail of Tears, as many tribes did not leave voluntarily, and many died from disease and starvation as they lost their homelands (Smithsonian Museum). Around 100,000 Indians were relocated (National Park Service 2023), and it is estimated that nearly $\frac{1}{2}$, over 4,000 of the Cherokee population, died, estimated by missionary doctor Elizur Butler, who traveled with them (National Park Service 2023). Some scholars also estimate the loss of the native population, "due to disease, war, and enslavement during the first half-century of English settlement, at about 60%," and by the end of the century, "around 5 percent of the original population" had survived (Sagall 2013, 111). This drastic decline in the native population highlights the true impact of settler colonialism in the U.S. and the reality of American expansion to the West.

The Reservation Era after 1850 followed the removal of the Indians, in which the federal government restricted tribes to allocated lands called reservations. This allowed for westward expansion and led to the process of Americanization (Howard University 2023). Assimilation was a dark spot on our nation's history, as the government facilitated the dependence on the US government for food and used abusive boarding schools that led to the death and cultural erasure of thousands of Indians (Howard University 2023). The use of education and forced dependence on the United States parallels the approaches of the United States during the occupation of the Philippines, as "white Americans referred back to familiar perceptions of other nonwhite peoples and implemented time-tested policies and practices of racial control" (Ells 1995, 608). Although the U.S. occupation of the Philippines reflects different tactics and a different colonial structure,

racist ideology played a key role in both cases, and similar tools such as epistemic politics were used.

Section 2: Classic Colonialism - A historical Overview:

Classic colonialism consists of a colonial power militarily taking over a country and remaining there to dominate the people politically and in every sphere of their life and it involves a practice of domination involving the subjugation of one people to another in which a society is "manipulated and transformed according to the needs and interests of the colonial rulers" (Saito 2020, 46). In this case, the United States implemented military and political control, economic exploitation, and cultural imposition and assimilation. Often, economic exploitation continues even after a country gains formal independence, as it remains economically dependent on its colonizing state.

President McKinley's Benevolent Assimilation laid the foundation for the Americanization of the Philippines. This 1900 proclamation stated that it was the responsibility of the United States to "take them all and to educate the Filipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and, by God's grace, do the very best we could for them as our fellow men for whom Christ also died" (McKinley 1900). The idea of manifest destiny extended to colonialism in the Philippines, and U.S. colonialism in the archipelago began in 1898 when the US government formally acquired the Philippines from Spain through the Treaty of Paris. This treaty stated, "Spain cedes to the United States the archipelago known as the Philippine Islands," and in terms of access to Philippine ports, this treaty admitted, "Spanish ships and merchandise to the ports of the Philippine Islands on the same terms as ships and merchandise of the United States" (Treaty of Paris, 1898). This treaty, which included no say from the Philippine people or government, officially established U.S. control and hegemony in the archipelago.

Soon after the U.S. declared military rule, which was met by conflict when Filipino nationalist Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed independence and led a rebellion against the U.S. military in November of 1899 (University of Central Arkansas 2025). The fight for independence, however, began with earlier resistance to Spanish colonial rule. Still, their revolts and victories were short-lived as American hegemony was established in the Philippines after three years of conflict known as the Philippine-American War (Chapman 1946, 165).

During 1902, the U.S. military also established concentration camps, which resulted in the deaths of over 8,000 Filipinos, and by the end of the conflict, over 4,000 U.S. soldiers and around 20,000 Filipino soldiers were killed (University of Central Arkansas 2025). The U.S. government later gained control of the Philippines' military government, headed by William Howard Taft, on July 4th of 1902. The U.S. occupied many bases around the archipelago, and although the country gained independence in 1946, the 1947 military base agreement gave the United States the "rights, power, and authority" of the military bases, which included 16 and possible others as part of the process of Philippine independence (Military Base Agreement of 1947). The United States, therefore, still maintained military influence after the formal independence of the islands.

In terms of economic exploitation, numerous trade acts and policies were passed throughout the U.S. occupation, which disadvantaged the Philippines according to the needs and goals of the U.S. The 1909 Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act, for example, imposed free trade with the United States; however, by 1932, 74% of all Philippine foreign trade was with the U.S., and they shifted from being a food exporter to a food importer (Paniza 2024). This created a dependency that closely tied the Philippines' economy to that of the United States.

However, the Filipino people and their representatives protested it and adopted a joint resolution petitioning Congress not to establish free trade. In fear of this economic dependency, the petition stated, "Free trade between the United States and the Islands would in the future become highly prejudicial to the economic interests of the Philippine people and... might hinder the attainment of independence of the said people" (Chapman 1946, 166). Their fears were not without justification, as the high commissioner explained in this hearing that the United States was responsible for the sole dependency of the Philippines on the American market, as the business and statesmen allowed the islands to become a complete economic dependency of the United States to a great degree (Chapman 1946, 166).

To regulate and control land, the United States also implemented numerous land laws such as the Public Land Act of 1902, which gave the U.S. the power to govern "public lands" by classifying uncultivated and unoccupied lands, which covered many of the ancestral lands of indigenous peoples, as agricultural lands to be distributed to U.S. citizens (HURights Osaka 2010). Further restricting indigenous rights, numerous provisions of this law declared that any transfer of rights to land by the non-Christian natives, if they were authorized by either the previous Spanish colonial government or the U.S. colonial government, was null and void.

Later, the Bell Trade Act of 1946 allowed U.S. businesses special access to the Philippine economy, protecting American interests while limiting the country's economic sovereignty, although Filipinos did not have the same rights (Shaffer 2012, 241). Collier's Institute of Ethnic Affairs even published an analysis of the negative economic consequences of the Bell Act, arguing that strict quotas on Philippine exports with none on Philippine imports from the United States were "grossly unfair,"

maintaining economic colonialism even after they gained “independence” (Shaffer 2012, 256). This economic exploitation and dependence underscore the reality that true political independence was not a reality, although the U.S. promised to lead the Philippines to independence. American policies were also largely based on the conviction that American institutions were capable of solving Filipino problems (Koh 1965, 139). The aspiration to uplift the Filipino people through Americanization and education is also rooted in the American view of Filipinos as an inferior people.

Many Americans even denied that there was a Philippine culture at all, including Theodore Roosevelt, who labeled the entire archipelago's population as a “jumble of savage tribes” (Ells 199, 612). By characterizing the island's population as primitive, leaders like Roosevelt reinforced racist ideologies and the narrative that American control was necessary. Similar to the assimilation methods in the U.S., the use of education was vital not only for Americanization but for the preparation of “the people under our guidance and control for popular self-government” (McMahon 2011, 51). In the same year, the colonial government in the Philippines established a free, secular school system (Harrington 2015), beginning the process of Americanization as education was used to reinforce U.S. hegemony through institutions in the archipelago.

Shortly after William H. Taft became civil governor of the Philippines, the Philippine Bill of 1902, or the Philippine Organic Act, was passed, beginning the legal framework for the civilian government of the Philippines under U.S. rule (Philippine Bill of 1902). This bill was considered the prelude to Philippine independence and created the legislative body, the Philippine Commission, and other departments of government. It also granted the president of the United States the power to appoint political positions

and regulate and control trade relations and public lands within the islands, limiting land ownership for Filipinos. The bill also suggested the possibility of eventual self-government and maintained that its creation was only to provide a temporary administration. Overall, the commission “looked to overhaul and Americanize virtually every segment of Filipino life” (US House of Representatives 2025). In 1916, the Jones Law, or the Philippine Autonomy Act of 1916, was passed, which promised independence to the Philippines once Filipinos proved that they could govern themselves, stating, “It was never the intention of the people of the United States...to make it a war of conquest or for territorial aggrandizement... it has always been the purpose of the people of the United States ... to recognize their independence as soon as a stable government can be established” (Jones Law of 1916). Finally, the Philippines Independence Act of 1934, or the Tydings-McDuffie Act, was passed, designating a path to independence after a ten-year transition period (Hung 2023, 143).

However, the inclusion of duty-free trade in this act led the Philippines to become overly attached to the U.S., ending true independence (Hung 2023, 179). Many critical internationalists view this as “a tarnished betrayal of American ideals” (Koh 1965, 259). The dependency of the Philippine economy on the U.S. and the heavily Americanized education system had lasting impacts on the Filipino people. Although both colonial projects are distinct, they share similar ideological foundations, and while there are many important facets of colonialism, I will focus on what I briefly mentioned in this chapter: the use of education as a tool of assimilation and its broader colonial impacts.

Chapter Three: Epistemic Genocide - Systematic Erasure of Knowledge:

This chapter focuses on epistemic genocide within both the settler and classic colonial projects as a part of my analysis of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines. Because epistemic genocide, the systematic erasure of knowledge, is a key strategy of both settler and classic colonialism, I will analyze how, although they are distinct in how they manifest in both projects, they represent a broader pattern in U.S. colonialism. Engaging with the complex ways epistemic genocide operates in both projects is in itself a reflection of the decolonial framework, as I acknowledge the different aspects of power, erasure, and colonial structures and use indigenous perspectives to uplift marginalized voices. While the similarities provide shared experiences and methods of resistance that can be used in a broader sense, these distinctions are important in understanding the different methods of resistance necessary for true decolonialism. For each colonial project, I will first focus on the ideology that served as the foundation and the establishment of the educational systems that fostered epistemic genocide. Next, I will focus on the methods and systematic steps taken to erase indigenous epistemology. The structure of both sections parallels one another so that I can compare both colonial projects and illustrate how the classic colonial project echoes the goals of the settler project. Although both colonial projects operated through different frameworks, the colonized groups navigated resembling forms of oppression and can work to develop intersecting methods of resistance. I also aim to highlight how epistemic control was such a central tool of U.S. colonialism and how these two case studies are a part of a broader system of oppression.

As demonstrated in chapter one, decolonial theory provides a framework necessary to understand how Western epistemology has historically situated itself as globally superior,

leading to the systematic erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems. Knowledge erasure operates through different mechanisms such as education, language suppression, land dispossession, etc., and is rooted in racialized epistemic hierarchies. Scholars such as Charles Mills, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Walter Dignolo, and Dian Million illustrate how colonialism constructs and perpetuates this epistemic hierarchy. Central to decolonial theory, epistemic de-linking critiques the zero-point of Western knowledge and reclaims and re-centers Indigenous ways of knowing. Chapter two will apply these concepts to the educational systems in both the United States' settler colonial and the Philippines' classic colonial project, revealing how education was weaponized to destroy Indigenous epistemologies and reinforce colonial power.

Section 1: The Settler Colonial Project

From boarding schools, forced assimilation, and cultural suppression, the U.S. government and Christian missionaries worked to erase Native religion, culture, and knowledge as a part of the settler colonial project. Native epistemology was systematically targeted as a result of the “destroy to replace” colonial ideology of settler colonialism (Saranillo 284). Native American boarding schools were first established during the 19th century during the Native American Assimilation era of the 19th century, based on the colonial goal “to assimilate Indigenous youth into mainstream American culture through education” (Mejia 2021). The 1819 Civilization Fund Act encouraged the enactment of American education for Indigenous societies as a part of the “civilization process” (Mejia 2021). This bill enacted “devastating policies and practices” to assimilate Native children, although the act intended to resolve what was referred to as the “Indian problem” (H. Con. Res. 53, 2, 2021).

This act not only marked the beginning of the Indian Boarding School era, lasting a little over a century, but it also reflects the larger narrative of racism.

The specific use of education as a tool of the “civilization process,” in this case, as a way to address the “Indian problem,” reflects how the Indigenous ways of life and their very being were something to be fixed or erased. The belief in manifest destiny, for example, was centered around progress and enlightenment. This idea was used by the colonizers to justify destroying the “backward” or “savage” race that impeded the “progress” of Euro-American civilization (Ells 1995, 609). Under the pretense of enlightenment and progress was erasure and destruction, where Natives were used as colonial subjects to reshape. “Kill the Indian, Save the Man,” coined by Richard Pratt, for example, became a commonly used phrase to justify the assimilation and boarding schools (National Park Service 2022). This idea reflects how Natives were not only viewed as inferior, but their identity was an obstacle to be removed to leave a subject to be shaped in the image of the colonizer. Education was therefore used as an intentional and violent tool of destruction rather than a tool for empowerment and liberation.

However, in this case, targeting children and separating families was a part of the broader U.S. policy focused on the territorial dispossession of Natives. The findings from the Federal Indian boarding school initiative are transparent in that the official objective of the U.S. “was to sever the cultural and economic connection between Indian Tribes... and their territories. The assimilation of Indian children” and the use of the boarding school system “was intentional and part of that broader goal of Indian territorial dispossession for the expansion of the United States” (Newland 2024, 94). What differentiates the logic and methods behind this project is land dispossession, as this colonial project was an example of settler colonialism.

The goal of the U.S. government to destroy Native identities and assimilate them into American society is similarly evident in the *Haaland v. Brackeen* case of 2023, which contended that to achieve the goals of the U.S. government in destroying tribal identities and assimilating the Natives, they used the “complete isolation of the Indian child from his savage antecedents” because the familial connections within the Native families were so strong (Newland 2024, 8). Unlike the Philippines' colonial education, more extreme and violent methods were used in this case to take more land for the U.S. and fulfill the goal of “destroy to replace.” The systematic erasure of Native identity and the imposition of a low-level, Euro-American-centered education were carried out through different methods, which will be examined in more detail in the following section.

The Methods of Epistemic Genocide:

This process began when children were taken forcibly or voluntarily, often despite consent from native parents, to boarding schools that housed over 60,000 native children during this period (Mejia 2021). The Federal Department of the Interior's 2022 investigative report on the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative found that 408 boarding schools were operating in the pursuit of cultural assimilation, coinciding with the territorial dispossession of Natives (Newland 2022). The first on-reservation boarding school at the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington was established after the creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1860 (Mejia 2021). The Carlisle Indian Industrial School later became the first federally run off-reservation school. The tombstones of children who died while attending this school sit in the Carlisle Indian Cemetery (Kliwer 2021). This school was the “operational model that set the standard for most boarding schools across the country” (Kliwer 2021). In an 1892 speech, founder Richard Pratt stated,