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Introduction to Special Issue: Decolonizing Spiritualities

Rafael Vizcaíno

OVER THE LAST couple of decades, the “decolonial turn” has powerfully challenged established methods, approaches, and theories across fields and disciplines (Maldonado-Torres 2011). While the decolonial turn has been rich in its scope and depth, one area of inquiry that continues to be understudied within this paradigm is the question of religion and spirituality more generally, in the related processes of colonization and decolonization. Because religious and spiritual practices have served as central tools of colonization, particularly in the form of an imperialist and racist missionary Christianity, the question of the decolonizing potential of religion and spirituality has often (if implicitly) thought to be closed and settled with a negative answer. A tacit secularism which assumes that the proper space of decolonization is the political sphere cleansed of any religious and spiritual mechanisms frequently hides behind such dismissal of a spiritual element to decolonization (Vizcaíno 2021). This special issue, therefore, seeks to contribute to exploring the relevance of spirituality to decolonization against such implicit secularist assumptions within some currents of the decolonial turn.

Accordingly, this special issue builds on the pioneering work of several scholars, writers, and practitioners who have paid attention in various ways to the significance of spirituality in the process of decolonization. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2022) has recently put it, “neither the critique of secularism and the concern with understanding the relevance of spirituality for decolonization, nor the effort to decolonize philosophy and religious studies as fields of study are new.” Consequently, some of the influences that have shaped this special issue are: 1) Latin American liberation theologians (Gutiérrez 1973; Petrella 2005; Fernández Albán 2013; Tamayo 2017); 2) U.S. women of color and Third World feminists (Anzaldúa 2007; Alexander 2005; Lara 2005; Pérez 2007; Facio and Lara 2014; Lockward 2017),

3) religious studies scholars that have embraced the analysis of coloniality (Isasi-Diaz and Mendieta 2011, Slabodsky 2015, Rivera 2015, An 2017); 4) Latin American liberation philosophers (Dussel 1980, 2003, Scannone 2009; Maldonado-Torres 2008, 2017); and 5) critical theorists interested in breaking away from the secularist Eurocentrism of mainstream theory (Braidotti 2008; Taylor 2011; Cornell and Seely 2016). This list is not exhaustive but signals some of the genealogical and geographic threads that link the concerns addressed in the essays gathered in this issue.

As with all efforts, there is a concrete institutional context to the emergence of this special issue. The idea for this project was first sparked during the discussions held by a New York City-based study group active between the years of 2017 and 2020, which was composed of students, teachers, and organizers—many of whom were also members of the Caribbean Philosophical Association. Hosted by the feminist legal scholar and philosopher Drucilla Cornell, the purpose of this study group was to evaluate the status of theory and critique in the era of the Trump administration. From our readings of classics such as Aimé Césaire, Ernst Bloch, and CLR James, and of contemporaries such as Lewis Gordon, Paget Henry, and Cornell herself, it soon became evident that our analyses were coalescing into a singular trajectory: the need to comprehend the effects of racial capitalism (Robinson 2000) at a level that, for lack of a better term, was understood to be “spiritual.”

Especially influenced by the then recent publication of Cornell’s and Stephen Seely’s book *The Spirit of Revolution* (2016), the study group discussions increasingly focused on problematizing the secularity of radical and critical theory, especially in some currents of the decolonial turn. In response to the limitation of such secularist approaches, we sought to put on the table the revolutionary and decolonizing potential of spiritual praxis. Paget Henry, a co-founder of the Caribbean Philosophical Association and editor in chief of *The CLR James Journal*, generously took part in some of these discussions and, along with Cornell, convinced me of the importance of producing a volume in the spirit of these discussions. This is how the idea for this special issue was first conceived.

In early 2018, I began to plan the earliest stages of this special issue. At the time, I was also in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation on decolonial critiques of secularism, under the supervision of Nelson Maldonado-Torres. A decolonial scholar of religion and ethics (and another co-founder, and former president, of the Caribbean Philosophical Association), Maldonado-Torres shared with me at the time the remarkable coincidence that 15 years prior, he had co-organized a panel with Shelley Wiley for the 2003 Annual Conference of the American Academy of Religion pointedly titled “Decolonizing Spiritualities.” At the time of conceiving this special issue, I had no prior knowledge of this intellectual inheritance.

A testament to how the question of spiritual decolonization has remained relatively understudied in the last fifteen years is the fact that three of the participants in that 2003 AAR panel appear in the present special issue: Mark Lewis Taylor and Eduardo Mendieta as contributors; and Paget Henry, as the editorial sponsor of this project. It is my hope that this special issue can return to some of the conversations started in 2003 while also advancing new questions emerging from our more immediate historical conjuncture.

This special issue accordingly starts with an intervention, or perhaps a manifesto, from Cornell and Seely, who build on their aforementioned *The Spirit of Revolution* to restate the importance of “political spirituality” as “our only hope of building a new radical democratic praxis of being human together in a decolonized, socialist world before the unholy alliance of global warming and the resurgence of fascism makes it too late” (27). Cornell and Seely retrace their genealogical roots (from Foucault, Spinoza, Hegel, Derrida, Irigaray, and the South African philosophy of *ubuntu*) to defend the value of “transindividuality” as the ontological ethico-political relationality that can challenge neoliberalism’s denial of all human collectivity. As they so forcefully put it (echoing Heidegger): “Only political spirituality can save us now” (36).

The second essay in this issue is from the critical theorist/liberationist theologian Mark Lewis Taylor, who offers a “critique of Western Christian guild theology and its colonizing production of knowledge,” with the aim of advancing a “political theology of liberation” (40). Following the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cornell and Seely, and Paget Henry, Taylor develops the notion of an “earth politics” to challenge the binary oppositions of modern/colonial ways of talking about spirituality. In this way, Taylor’s intervention responds to specific aspects of the call for a political spirituality advanced by Cornell and Seely, such as the “drama of consciousness” entailed in the revolutionary project. The last section of Taylor’s analysis intriguingly shifts gears to present a close-reading analysis of Sister Dianna Ortiz’s struggle for “re-existence” amidst torture by U.S.-backed military personnel in Guatemala. This exercise gives us a glimpse into the extensive scope of what “an earth politics working the spiritual ground toward liberation” seeks to address (53).

The third essay is from the feminist cultural anthropologist Sylvia Marcos, who presents an overview of recent developments in the Zapatista struggle for autonomy and liberation in Southeast Mexico as it pertains to the question of spirituality. Like Taylor’s reflections against binary oppositions in the interest of “re-existing,” Marcos argues that in order to understand the spirituality behind ongoing indigenous struggles, it is “necessary to go beyond historical and ethnographic methodologies to incorporate the philosophical domain in which these religious and gender configurations are based” (69). Such a philosophical domain encompasses the equilibrium of

opposites, a fluid duality that “show us where the decolonizing efforts of this new spirituality are at work and how the indigenous peoples of the Americas are deconstructing centuries old captivities in the ‘spiritual’ religious domain. A domain deeply embedded, bound, and interdependent within their political struggles for social justice” (69). Echoing Cornell and Seely’s concern for “transindividuality,” Marcos concludes that “the interconnectedness of everyone and everything in the universe” is at the core of the political struggles of contemporary indigenous women in Mexico.

The fourth essay, from the ethnographer of religion Natalie Avalos, represents the next generation of decolonial scholarship at the intersection of Indigenous studies and religious studies. Avalos’s essay specifically puts decolonial thinking in conversation with North American “Indigenous articulations of decolonization and religious life to illustrate what Indigenous decolonial futures may look like” (82). Resonating with many of the concerns brought together in the preceding interventions by Cornell and Seely, Taylor, and Marcos, Avalos looks at how a “return” to ceremonial life in Indigenous transnational or “urban” contexts entails a decolonial healing at the metaphysical level—that is, against the “ontological dispossession” of the colonality of being. Avalos’s work concretely exemplifies a praxis-oriented understanding of decolonial spirituality.

The fifth essay is from the Latin American philosopher of liberation/critical theorist Eduardo Mendieta, who thinks with the anthropologist Serge Gruzinski and the eminent Black liberation theologian James Cone to theorize the intersections between spiritual colonization and the “imposition of a *racial imaginary*” in the modern/colonial world (103). Mendieta’s essay blends autobiographical reflection (as a student of Cone) and close readings of Cone’s texts to claim that “racism in the U.S., at the very least, has been accompanied by religious endorsement, condoning, and urging, but also the religious resistance, insubordination and vibrant dignifying celebration of Blackness” (105). Indeed, Cone’s black theology of liberation is, in the eyes of Mendieta, “both a decolonization of theology and a decolonization of blackness”—highlighting again the interstices between spiritual colonization and processes of racialization (115).

The sixth and last essay in this special issue is from the interdisciplinary scholar of sexuality and spirituality Carlos Decena, who stages a theoretical dialogue between the Argentine liberation philosopher Rodolfo Kusch, the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, and the Dominican scholar/musician/healer Irka Mateo. Focusing on what Decena calls “practices of re-membling” (136), this intervention aims to challenge theories of acculturation by asking how “we might continue to be ‘stewards’ of ancestral knowledges that we might not remember” (137). The “practices of re-membling” speak to the relevance of indigenous conceptual frameworks and cultural practices, especially in regard to their transformational

persistence in the midst of colonization and anti-indigenous projects of nationalist (Latin American) modernization.

Taken together, the contributions gathered in this special issue add analytical depth and empirical concreteness to the intersection between spirituality and decolonizing processes and movements. Bridging traditions and geographies, though nonetheless consciously rooted in a “trans-American” world-systems perspective (Saldívar 2011), these essays open entryways to take seriously the role of spirituality in resisting the negative impacts of colonization beyond secularist assumptions of its irrelevance. Of course, further work is needed to expand this question beyond the Americas, to properly conceive of a “South-South” (Dussel 2013) planetary dialogue that can counter our increasing technological disenchantment, politico-economic disenfranchisement, and the ever-increasing risk of a planetary existential catastrophe caused by the latest manifestations of modernity/coloniality. As Sylvia Wynter has put it, only by going beyond the “aporia of the secular” (Wynter 2015, 189) would we be able to develop the “ecumenical” humanism truly made “to the measure of the world” (Césaire 2000).¹

NOTES

- 1 I am currently developing such proposal to go “beyond” the secular in a manuscript tentatively titled *Decolonizing the Postsecular*.

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Why Political? Why Spirituality? Why Now?

Drucilla Cornell and Stephen D. Seely

ABSTRACT: In this essay, we revisit the concept of “political spirituality” that we developed in our book *The Spirit of Revolution: Beyond the Dead Ends of Man* (2016) in light of the profound political upheavals that have happened since its publication. We begin with theories about the breakdown of neoliberalism and the “return of politics” with the rise of so-called populist movements. We argue that notions of the “demos” and the “people” miss the dimension of transindividuality central to our thinking of political spirituality. The second aspect of political spirituality missing from current critical theory is transcendence, or the desire to go beyond the limits of who and what we are. We capture both these dimensions through a notion of “relational finitude,” demonstrating both the poverty of European philosophy in this respect, and celebrating the contribution of feminism, decolonial theory, and African philosophy toward a new praxis of being human.

KEYWORDS: political spirituality, transindividuality, ubuntu, neoliberalism, socialism.

LET US TAKE the last question first. Although it may not immediately seem so, neoliberalism is actually losing its hegemony. Indeed, all over the world the Thatcherist delirium that “there is no alternative” to the neoliberal world order is melting as rapidly as the polar ice caps as we are engaged in a planetary struggle for new ways of living—if not for survival itself. One would be right to think that the loosening of neoliberalism’s forty-year reign over the political imagination—of leftist parties as well as those on the right—creates an opening for a renewed Left not seen since the 1970s. And yet, the Left is failing more spectacularly than perhaps ever before, as in country after country, progressive and even radical social and economic policies are rejected and right-wing demagogues are swept into

power, largely on the backs of white working-class voters. In this essay, we will revisit the concept of “political spirituality” that we developed in our book *The Spirit of Revolution: Beyond the Dead Ends of Man* to clarify why we believe that a new political spirituality is the greatest hope we have for a renewal of radical politics capable of dealing with the challenges confronting us in our global present.¹ In that book, written in 2015, we sought primarily to counter a so-called post-humanist turn in U.S. feminist and queer theory that effectively renounced human transformative agency as a necessary reaction to the “Anthropocene” demonstrating the catastrophic effects of the post-Enlightenment humanist delirium that sees “Man” as the maker and lord of the world.² Rather than dismissing revolutionary struggles as nostalgic humanist fantasies or forms of “cruel optimism,”³ we argued that the anthropogenic climatological collapse brought on by centuries of colonialist and capitalist globalization calls for a more urgent linkage of feminist challenges to masculine planetary domination with decolonial struggles against what Sylvia Wynter famously calls the overrepresentation of white European “Man” as synonymous with humanity itself.⁴ But we also argued, drawing on a long history of revolutionary feminism from Alexandra Kollontai to Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa, that erotic transformation is indispensable to any revolutionary praxis of being human. For us, these two elements—the struggle for another way of living together on the planet we share and erotic transformation—are linked through the concept of “political spirituality,” which we offered as a distinct alternative to the “scientific materialism” of traditional Marxist theory as well as to the various forms of “new materialism” that have dominated Euro-American critical theory for the past decade.⁵

In this essay, we will work to further distinguish the concept of political spirituality from forms of political theology and religion by clarifying what we mean by both “politics” and “spirituality” and in particular by returning to the notion of *transindividuality* that, for us, is at the heart of political spirituality. From revolutionary Islam in the Iranian Revolution and the Arab Spring to the Afro-Caribbean traditions of Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou forged in conditions of enslavement, from liberation theology animating decolonial movements in Latin America to the mobilization of Indigenous cosmologies in ecological resistance to extractivism, spirituality has long been the most powerful resource for surviving and struggling against the brutalities of colonialism and globalized racial capitalism for millions throughout the world.⁶ And yet, as Michel Foucault put it, “political spirituality” is a possibility that has been long forgotten in the so-called west—not least by revolutionary politics—particularly with the rise of scientific materialism and the obliteration of most forms of collective practice and belonging by neoliberal capitalism.⁷ However, what the present conjuncture—defined by a challenge to the hegemony of both the neoliberal

consensus and the scientific worldview—makes all too clear is just how ill-equipped the Euro-American political imaginary is to confront these crises and to build a more just future. We thus want to strongly argue that political spirituality is our only hope of building a new radical democratic praxis of being human together in a decolonized, socialist world before the unholy alliance of global warming and the resurgence of fascism makes it too late.

Neoliberalism in Crisis; or, the “Return” of Politics

Certainly, “neoliberalism” is an overdetermined term in political theory and we should begin by clarifying that we are not referring to an economic philosophy or a set of governance policies.⁸ (And it should go without saying that we do not mean to imply that *capitalism* is losing its power!) Rather, we are speaking of neoliberalism as an *ethos*—as a way of being-in-the-world, both individually and collectively, as a conjunction between an “ontology” and an “ethics.” As Foucault famously noted in his 1979 lectures at the Collège de France, at the centre of the neoliberal ethos is a renewed conception of *homo oeconomicus*—of economic man understood not as a “partner of exchange” (as in classical liberalism) but as an “*entrepreneur of himself*, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself a source of earnings.”⁹ As neoliberal policies have gradually transformed every domain of life into a market, we must therefore act like good little entrepreneurs—competitive risk managers and profit maximisers—in everything we do. In neoliberalism, as Wendy Brown nicely captures it:

We are only and everywhere *homo oeconomicus*, which itself has a historically specific form. Far from Adam Smith’s creature propelled by a natural urge to “truck, barter, and exchange,” today’s *homo oeconomicus* is an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio across all of its endeavours and venues. These are also the mandates, and hence the orientations, contouring the projects of neoliberalized states, large corporations, small businesses, nonprofits, schools, consultancies, museums, countries, scholars, performers, public agencies, students, websites, athletes, sports teams, graduate programs, health providers, banks, and global legal and financial institutions.¹⁰

Poverty, unemployment, low quality education, depression, anxiety, stress, physical disability: these are all signs of *personal* failure, of poor investment of the “human capital” that we all are.¹¹

Fundamental to neoliberal rationality is the idea that, as entrepreneurs, we are guided primarily by rational self-interest. The apparent incontestability of this tenet is why ostensibly left-leaning parties, such as the U.S. Democrats and the U.K. Labour Party, are having such a difficult time com-

ing to terms with why so many working-class people are actively voting for parties and policies that seem so obviously against their interest in every possible way. This confusion, we think, stems from a failure to grapple with the ways that the neoliberal ethos has been radically transformed in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. In the winner-takes-all world of “casino capitalism”¹²—a capitalism in which capital is completely dislocated from productive labour in favour of speculation, where the most conspicuous models of wealth accumulation are forms of betting, where high risk/high reward endeavours are incentivized over rational long-term investments, where even the feigned reverence for the noble “small business owner” has been displaced by state protection of the financial sector—*homo oeconomicus* in his entrepreneurial form has been replaced by *the gambler* as the predominant mode of being-in-the-world. But once the rational entrepreneur gives way to the gambler, for whom winning and winning alone matters—and the riskier the bet the better, rationality be damned!—we have reached the end of being able to count on people acting predictably according to interest. (Our sincerest apologies to game theory). In its place, a new ethos of ruthless, short-term gain is unleashed among working people who have long been made to feel like nothing but hopeless losers, like their condition is their fault for being “bad” investors. This is why, we submit, supporters of Trump, Brexit, and other disruptions to the (neo)liberal status quo take such a delight in their upsetting “victories”—why “We won, you lost, get over it!” has become their mantra. And it is also why the liberal commentariat continuing to enumerate all of the ways that these projects are against the interests of their working-class supporters only makes these supporters that much more determined. Let us be clear: this does not mean that people are voting *against* their interest. It means that *they are not acting in terms of “interest” at all*. Indeed, to the degree that they continue to frame the political horizon in terms of “interest,” it is *liberals* who remain the guardians of a neoliberal ethos that even the right-wing has largely abandoned.

In recent years, Euro-American political theorists have amply demonstrated the corrosive effects that decades of neoliberal hegemony have had on Left politics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the subversion of decolonization through the “structural adjustment” of the Global South, and the crushing of labour unions, many liberals have long accepted neoliberalism as the only game in town. Through the promotion of what Anthony Giddens called the “third way,”¹³ once-leftist parties facilitated the reduction of “politics” to a technocratic management of elite interests, of “democracy” to a form of shopping between options preselected and funded by corporations, of the “state” to a contractor of privately-outsourced goods and services, of “law” to the protection of private property rights. For many years, this consensus at the centre was interpreted—with triumph and despair alike—as the “end of politics,” placing any radical transformation of

political and economic institutions out of the realm of possibility. Indeed, one need not look any further than the utterly ludicrous debates within both Labour and the Democrats about whether billionaires “are people too” and need to be “respected” to see how profoundly the hegemony of neoliberalism has shifted the terms of political debate.¹⁴ And yet, as Chantal Mouffe has argued, the extreme polarization emerging from the breakdown of the neoliberal consensus amounts to a “return of the political.”¹⁵ As we know, for Mouffe, politics always involves transposing social antagonisms into *agonisms* between a “we” and a “them” that can be democratically contested and negotiated (without being dissolved).¹⁶ In her view, the long reign of neoliberalism effectively shifted politics to a *moral* register, displacing the Left/Right antagonism to a battle between “good” and “evil”—as seen most clearly in the war against Islam as the absolute enemy of liberal democracy—and closing off any space from which to contest the hegemonic order. Since the 2008 financial crisis, however, the precarious contingency of the neoliberal order has been exposed, leading to what Mouffe calls a “populist moment” when the very meaning of “we, the people” becomes open to rearticulation and collectives can once again assume properly *political* positions.¹⁷ And according to Mouffe, so far it is the right wing that has best captured this moment, successfully mobilizing “we, the people” against the “establishment,” while liberals cling to the hegemonic status quo.

We certainly appreciate the cautious optimism of Mouffe’s argument that the “populist moment” constitutes a profound opportunity for the Left rather than cause for resignation and pessimism. We also appreciate her insistence that Left politics is not simply about “disruption” but must take the form of a struggle to install a radical democratic hegemony. Indeed, we would emphasize more strongly than Mouffe’s recent work that this is a struggle for *socialism*.¹⁸ But we also think our divergences from Mouffe’s theorization of the present conjuncture offers an opportunity to clarify what we mean by both “politics” and “spirituality.” For us, what Mouffe’s analysis misses is the question of *who and what “we” are* that is at the heart of any political formation, and this question is precisely what we try to capture with the phrase “political spirituality.” Indeed, the creation of “we, the people” is never merely a rhetorical or symbolic construction of a political agonism against a “them.” And the reason it has become so powerful now, we contend, is less about the designation of enemies than that the breakdown of neoliberal hegemony offers a profound opportunity to construct a new *ethos*—that is, to posit a new answer to the question of who and what “we” are, of what it means to be human in the world today beyond what Sylvia Wynter calls the “biogenetic *homo oeconomicus*.”¹⁹ In eliding this dimension, we also think that Mouffe and Brown, like other Euro-American theorists, are not fully capable of grasping the profoundly destructive effects that neoliberal capitalism has had not only on “the political,” not only on

“the *demos*,” but on our very personhood at the deepest levels. In this sense, it is perhaps not surprising that Achille Mbembe, writing from one of the “antipodes” or “undersides” of the global order, is better able to capture this in his own diagnosis of our moment:

Neoliberal capitalism has left in its wake a multitude of destroyed subjects, many of whom are deeply convinced that their immediate future will be one of continuous exposure to violence and existential threat. They genuinely long for a return to some sense of certainty, the sacred, hierarchy, religion, and tradition. They believe that nations have become akin to swamps that need to be drained and the world as it is should be brought to its end. For this to happen, everything should be cleansed. They are convinced that they can be saved only in a violent struggle to restore their masculinity, the loss of which they unfortunately attribute to the weaker among them, to the weak they do not want to become. In this context, the most successful political entrepreneurs will be those who convincingly speak to the losers, to the destroyed men and women of globalization and to their ruined identities. In the street fight that politics will become, reason will not matter. Nor will facts. Politics will resort to brutal survivalism in an ultracompetitive environment.²⁰

Our Concept of Political Spirituality

In *The Spirit of Revolution*, we situated political spirituality at the intersection of Paget Henry’s distinction between a “horizontal” and a “vertical” revolution. If the “horizontal” dimension names the “dramas of nationalism, proletarian liberation, and societal reorganization”—in short, *struggles for hegemony* (i.e., “politics” as such) in Mouffe’s sense—the “vertical” dimension refers to the “dramas of consciousness”—the transformations in the very resources of our individual and collective imagination, or, we will dare the word: *spirit*.²¹ It is this vertical—*spiritual*—dimension that has been and continues to be neglected in Euro-American theory; but, as we will argue, without this dimension the Left can arrive at neither a critical theory nor praxis sufficient for the present moment. In other words, if the so-called populist moment is an occasion for the “return” of politics, insofar as it offers a chance to articulate a new “we, the people” against the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, it also demands an attention to the spiritual transformations that would be necessary for us to even be able to live in the world in a different way. Indeed, in our view, which takes us closer to that of Mbembe, the success of the populist movements among poor and working-class people demonstrates a profound longing for transcendence and a sense of belonging to something meaningful. By “transcendence,” we mean that power that human beings have to transcend—to think, to imagine, to hope, to dream, to strive, to reach *beyond*—the limits of our own finitude, beyond the horizon of possibility that defines who and what we are at any given time. People long

to transcend the limits of a life that seems more and more meaningless, more and more heartless, more and more ruthless. In our isolation and fragmentation, we want to touch and to be touched by something beyond ourselves. To be sure, Foucault, who first used the phrase “political spirituality”—in his editorials on the Iranian Revolution written the same year as his lectures on neoliberalism in what is doubtfully a coincidence—did not articulate it in terms of “transcendence.” Rather, he defined it as “the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false.”²² But through his late reformulations of the Kantian critical-transcendental project, we can understand political spirituality as what he calls “the *ethos* . . . in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”²³ And this dimension of political spirituality, as we argued in *The Spirit of Revolution*, aligns the Foucauldian project of critical ontology with all the decolonial, feminist, antiracist struggles to be human differently beyond the brutal reign of Man.

The other key part of our thinking about political spirituality, one not emphasized by Foucault, is what we call *transindividuality*. By this, we mean that we are never simply individuals, that who and what we are is always made in and through our relations with others—and with the more-than-human worlds around us. Although nearly all of the world’s cosmologies, as well as contemporary physics, acknowledges our transindividual condition, in the neoliberal world radical individualism is simply an ontological assumption. Collectivities are understood as amalgamations of individual interests for a short period of time. Fellow humans are either competitors, sources of exploitation from which we can profit, or risks to be avoided. And, of course, “nature” is simply *there* to be dominated. This radical denial, if not *annihilation*, of our fundamental transindividual condition is why we seem to be retreating into a delusional sense of individualistic impotence when our global problems have never required a greater endeavour of the collective human spirit. And the deep desire to experience this transindividual dimension, for us, once again explains the success of the right wing in mobilizing “populist” movements to fill the void that the neoliberal ethos has created. Let us be clear: transindividuality is a *basic ontological reality*, but it is also something that must be cultivated in the social order through ethical and political relations with others. The so-called western philosophical canon is relatively impoverished in helping us conceptualize transindividuality. As we have argued elsewhere, within European thought, Spinoza is the greatest thinker of the transindividual.²⁴ For Spinoza, our fundamental transindividual condition means that our actions can either enhance others (and thus ourselves) through joyful affects or diminish others (and thus ourselves) through the sad affects. For us, this transindividuality is the *ethico-ontological basis* of any rhetorical or symbolic creation of a politi-

cal “demos” or “people,” which are therefore never simply aggregations of individuals. While neoliberalism constitutes the most thoroughgoing denial of transindividuality, there is a longing to experience it that is at the heart of the fascist rallies which cannot be interpreted merely as the assertion of a “we, the people” against the enemy, but involve an *affective affirmation of transindividual connection*.

Spirit and Relational Finitude in European Philosophy

Throughout “western” Antiquity, as Foucault tells us in his lectures on the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the practice of philosophy as a search for the truth was fundamentally indissociable from the practices of self-transformation necessary to have access to the truth—practices of care for the self and others that Foucault names “spirituality.”²⁵ With philosophical modernity, the advent of which Foucault calls the “Cartesian moment,” truth is guaranteed only by mathematical certainty and thus the practices of spirituality as the subject’s ongoing transformative labor are “disqualified” in favor of subjectivity as the ground of reason.²⁶ It was precisely the attempt to reconcile reason and spirit that became a theme of German idealism, reaching its metaphysical pinnacle in Hegel’s master work, *The Science of Logic*. Hegel’s account of the march of reason through history is a chronicle of the transformations the subject must undergo in order to reach absolute knowledge where he recognizes himself as part of a broader Spirit that encompasses all that is and that can be both rationally thought and lived in a state of right (*Rechtsstaat*). Much later on, it is this metaphysical capture of spirit by Hegel (and Marx) that Jacques Derrida challenges through his notion of the “spectre” as the *hauntological* limit to any closed ontological system.²⁷ For Derrida, spirit cannot be dialectically subsumed in absolute knowledge; rather, spirit *remains* precisely as what cannot be *known* and perhaps not even articulated, but only listened to as a call from the beyond of any order of cognition. In other words, *the limit of positive knowledge is where spirit calls to us*. And, for Derrida, it does so particularly through the ghosts of those who have died in the great struggles for emancipation, which leads Derrida to his call for a New International, a collective political spirituality that responds to our debt to the dead through a planetary struggle for a justice to come.

Following Derrida’s ethical philosophy of the limit, a philosophy of political spirituality can take the form neither of a systematic integration of spirit into absolute rationality nor techniques of the self (though the latter have their place). Instead, it is through the cultivation of what we would call *relational finitude*. Spirituality, in other words, is *an experience at the subject’s limits where a relation with an otherness that will always remain beyond becomes possible*. Such a notion of relational finitude is at the heart of the feminism of sexual difference, particularly Luce Irigaray, who as we argued

in *The Spirit of Revolution* remains absolutely indispensable to thinking the erotic dimensions of any praxis of political spirituality. In her own engagement with Hegel's metaphysics of spirit, Irigaray recasts the negative not as a motor of sublation but as a generative "interval" that keeps open any possibility of relation-in-difference. As she puts it, "My use of the negative serves to maintain irreducibility of the you with respect to the I, that is, the insuperable and unknowable existence, being, and truth of the other."²⁸ In her later work, Irigaray thinks the irreducible interval as a constitutive relational limit that operates on two axes: the *vertical*—as the limit provided by the maternal body—and the *horizontal*—as the limit provided by the sexuate other(s).²⁹ These limits, for Irigaray, offer an alternative understanding of finitude from that of so-called western metaphysics which is oriented toward nothingness, Non-Being, or death as well as a thinking of transcendence beyond a solitary longing for an Absolute (either God or the Other). Rather, finding our limits—our conditions of possibility—in the mother and the sexuate other(s) provides us with what Irigaray calls a "*sensible transcendental*," which takes us out of ourselves not toward an ineffable beyond but into an embodied relational finitude into which we are (re)born. To think transcendence through Irigaray's philosophy of relational finitude, then, is where *spirituality* becomes inseparable from *desire*, *love*, and the *erotic*.

Here, however, is where it is most important to distinguish what we are calling political spirituality from neoliberal forms of extreme individualism in which freedom is understood as unhindered libidinal release. This is what Irigaray has called a "nihilist amorous attitude in the name of a so-called respect for the freedom of the other or of oneself."³⁰ We have argued elsewhere that the so-called freedom from the constraints of desire through an "anything goes" sexuality is another denial of finitude: that is, the freedom to do whatever you want is not only neoliberal ideology, it is a fantasy that denies our humility as finite relational beings. Indeed, we would argue that these individualistic fantasies of free-reigning desire are actually compensatory for the transcendence and transindividuality of the political spirituality that we are calling for. This political spirituality is a way of life, a practice of living, that recognizes the deep and profound vulnerability that comes with being born into a transindividual web of relations but also comes to terms with the fact that precarity is not an equally-shared, ontological fact of human being but an unequally distributed effect of neoliberal capitalism that promotes the most grotesque forms of wealth inequality that the planet has probably ever seen. Within neoliberal capitalism, the other side of "anything goes" sexuality is desperate poverty, the refugee crisis, and starvation. We acknowledge that in many parts of the world, practices of collectively undertaking a new way of being human seem to be almost foreclosed, making individualized practices of desire or spirituality seem to be the only route of transforming who and what we are under neoliberal capitalism. And yet,

not only do we believe that political spirituality is necessarily a collective praxis, but as we have argued above, *spirit* understood as relational finitude is precisely what prevents such collective practices from *ever* being foreclosed on the basis of some kind of positive knowledge. Pessimism is a political faith, not an ontology. As writers and thinkers, perhaps the best we can do is to keep this space open through a relentless deconstruction of any attempt to *exorcise* the specters of those who have gone before or of a justice to come, but this is a task we have taken on and will continue to defend. That is indeed what we have called *the Spirit of Revolution*.

Shifting the Geographies of Reason

But, as we argued in that book, a reconfiguration of the political imagination appropriate to our global present demands shifting the “geographies of reason”—to borrow the Caribbean Philosophical Association’s telling phrase—beyond Eurocentric epistemic coloniality. As such, our theorization of political spirituality is shaped by a profound recognition that African ontology, ethics, and politics are deeply rooted in a notion of transindividuality. In the South African philosophy of *ubuntu*, for instance, the ontological dimension is captured in the famous maxim: *umuntu ngamuntu nga bantu* (“a person is only a person through other people”). *Ubuntu* teaches us that we are born into an affective web through which anything we do affects us and the world around us. And yet, this ontological condition can either be brought into being through activity that enhances individual and collective harmony or denied through behaviour that destroys the field of social relations. Each person thus has the responsibility to actually *become human* in such a way that enhances the humanity of others. Because of this, *ubuntu* demands a struggle against *all* forms of dehumanization through what Sylvia Wynter would call an individual and collective praxis of *being human*, which is why philosopher Mogobe Ramose refers to it as a “philopraxis.”³¹ If, as Fanon tells us in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the essence of colonialism is the violence of denying the humanity of the Black population—damning them to the “zone of non-being”—then their fight to claim humanity through a transformation of what it means to be human is the very heart of what it means to “decolonize.”³² It is thus no wonder that Ramose has argued for *ubuntu* as a philopraxis of decolonization and, in his most recent work, has powerfully asked what it means that *ubuntu* continues to be largely ignored as a political philosophy—even amidst a supposed “decolonial turn”—despite its foundational role in one of the most thoroughgoing struggles to transform humanity in history, namely the struggle against apartheid.³³ This is one of the reasons that, for us, the concept of “decolonization” often does not adequately describe the grand sweep and splendour of the struggle against dehumanization, and the active process of *worldmaking* involved in a new collective praxis of being human.³⁴

In sum, political spirituality names all those attempts to transcend the limits of what “we” are at any given time through an individual and collective praxis of being human as part of a struggle against all forms of dehumanization. In its critique and transcendence of the limits that have constituted us at any given historical present, in its rejection of any ontotheology of human being in the name of an open-ended praxis of being human, political spirituality is the opposite of political theology. As we know, critics of political theology argued that the grounding of politics in faith rather than rationality would lead to ideologies closing in on themselves—which is indeed something we see all too frequently throughout the world today. And yet, an ethical and political cultivation of our transindividual reality would prevent any such enclosure by pulling us beyond ourselves into the open affective field that constitutes us and takes us towards ever-new possibilities. But this in no way requires a rejection of “religion” in the name of secular rationalism. In his most famous quote, Marx named religion the “opium of the people.” But the rest of the sentence is often forgotten: “It is the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of spiritless conditions.” Consider the immense appeal of evangelical movements in Africa and Latin America. Consider, also, the success of Islamist movements in recruiting members not only from the Middle East but from the very heart of Europe. What these movements all share is a desire for transcendence, for belonging to something other—something *more*—than the heartless, spiritless world that neoliberal capitalism has created, to be reached in our transindividuality through a collective sense of belonging. We can even see this desire for transcendence and transindividuality in the success of demagogues like Trump, as well as in the messianic cult of QAnon. What these offer is both a racist, nationalist sense of belonging that provides payback to impoverished white voters as well as the assertion of phallic power. Psychoanalysis has taught us well about the seductions of phallic power, as a power that transcends the “law of castration” that defines our finite existence.³⁵ Needless to say, these are particularly ugly forms of striving for transcendence and belonging, but until we understand what it is that religious and fascist movements are actually reaching in people, we will not understand why they are so much more successful than even the most progressive economic policy. And until the Left can counter this with its own *political spirituality*, we will not be successful in defeating them.

Let us be clear that we are not downplaying the need for forging political struggles for a radical democratic hegemony beyond neoliberalism in the name of some sort of mysticism or individualist practice of “self-work.” Nor, to stress it again, are we arguing against economic transformation: as committed socialists, we believe in the urgent necessity for an alternative to capitalism. But, for us, a socialist world will not be possible without radical transformations in who and what we are, both individually and collectively.

Instead of seeing socialism as primarily an economic transformation, we must see it as only the beginning of something much larger: as the complete transformation of who and what we are in the name of a collective praxis of being human. This calls for a vertical revolution as profound as any horizontal one so that we could become beings who are even capable of living together in a world beyond the horrific brutality of globalized neoliberal capitalism. And as much as socialism is shrouded in what Rosa Luxemburg called the hazy “mists of the future,” so is the human being that we could be in a socialist world and this means that we must vigilantly reject any pessimistic philosophical anthropologies.³⁶ And yet, because the Euro-American political imaginary is so deeply limited in its ability to guide us in this hazy mist, we must look to beacons such as Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Léopold Senghor who rooted the struggle for socialism in the praxis of a building not only a “demos” or a “people,” but a *new humanity and a new world*. Such an endeavour demands that we challenge everything we think we know about who and what we are so that we might go beyond the horizon that shapes our imagination of what is possible. And such a reimagination can only be *transindividual*, arising from our collective belonging to the world with all its inhabitants. The survival, let alone the flourishing, of our species—and so many others—now depends on nothing less. Only political spirituality can save us now.

NOTES

1. Drucilla Cornell and Stephen D. Seely, *The Spirit of Revolution: Beyond the Dead Ends of Man* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).
2. See, e.g., Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
3. See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
4. Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 257–337.
5. See Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2012).
6. For instance, see respectively: Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2008); M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A*

- Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); and Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
7. Michel Foucault, "What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?," in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, eds. Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 209.
 8. For these latter aspects, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
 9. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 226.
 10. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015), 10.
 11. See Gary Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
 12. See Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).
 13. Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).
 14. See Lloyd Russell-Moyle, "I Never Expected to Go Viral Just for Saying Billionaires Shouldn't Exist," *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/01/viral-billionaires-super-rich-exist>.
 15. See Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (New York: Verso, 2019).
 16. See Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2006).
 17. Mouffe, *Left Populism*, 11.
 18. See Drucilla Cornell, "Socialism or Radical Democratic Politics: On Laclau and Mouffe," in *Law and Revolution in South Africa: uBuntu, Dignity, and the Struggle for Constitutional Transformation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 34–44.
 19. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom."
 20. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 115–116.
 21. See Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 121. This is different than the horizontal/vertical distinction made by Mouffe, when she argues that her own "left populist strategy requires interventions at the 'vertical' and the 'horizontal' level," using "horizontal" to refer to social movements and "vertical" in reference to institutional, hegemonic struggles (2019, 67).
 22. Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext[e], 1996), 282.
 23. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 50.

24. See chapter four of *The Spirit of Revolution* as well as Drucilla Cornell and Stephen D. Seely, “What Has Happened to the Public Imagination and Why?,” in *On Public Imagination: A Political and Ethical Imperative*, ed. Victor Faessel et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 11–13. Besides Spinoza, see Gilbert Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).
25. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981–82*, ed. Frédéric Gros, and trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 15.
26. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 17.
27. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).
28. Luce Irigaray, *Conversations* (London: Continuum, 2008), 127.
29. See, e.g., Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London: Continuum, 2008). See also Emma R. Jones, “Finding/Founding Our Place: Thinking Luce Irigaray’s Ontology and Ethics of Sexuate Difference as a Relational Limit,” in *Building a New World*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 15–30.
30. Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 60.
31. Mogobe Ramose, “The Philosophy of *uBuntu* and *uBuntu* as Philosophy,” in *The African Philosophy Reader*, ed. P. H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (London: Routledge, 2003), 279.
32. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004). The phrase “zone of non-being” is from *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xii.
33. See Mogobe Ramose, “An African Perspective on Justice and Race,” *Polylog*, <https://them.polylog.org/3/frm-en.htm>; and Mogobe Ramose, “On Finding the Cinerarium for Uncremated *Ubuntu*: On the Street Wisdom of Philosophy,” in Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses, *Knowledges Born of Struggle: Constructing the Epistemologies of the Global South* (New York: Routledge, 2019).
34. See Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
35. See Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, and trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985).
36. Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings* (Minneapolis, NY: Dover, 2006), 215.

Earth Politics of the Spiritual Ground: Toward Decolonizing Imperio-Coloniality's Torture State

Mark Lewis Taylor

ABSTRACT: Amid the coloniality of power, earth politics is a political spirituality. It fosters decolonizing practices that create what Colombian anthropologist Albán Achinte terms “re-existence”—a “redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity.” Earth politics’ spirituality can be read across the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Drucilla Cornell/Stephen Seely, and Paget Henry. Earth politics, in Henry’s words, is a “drama of consciousness” with a “spiritual ground,” a consciousness that is both “vertical” and “horizontal”—better, a spherical and ambient consciousness “grounding” an earthy awareness that is historical and poetic, local and planetary. Earth politics infused with such consciousness can become a force against even imperio-colonial practices of torture against colonized peoples. U.S. activist Sister Dianna Ortiz, embodies this counter-force of earth politics in her “life after torture,” in her collective struggle against the neo-imperialist torture-state that is the United States.

KEYWORDS: decoloniality, imperialism, earth politics, spirituality, torture, Anzaldúa

WRITE FROM A major U.S. Christian theological institution in the global North, Princeton Theological Seminary. It provides education in theological and religious studies to a number of international students, but it is mainly a training center for leaders and scholars in U.S. Christian communities, churches and institutions. Judith Butler once described Christianity’s hegemonic function in the U.S. as that of a “legitimate religion.” Even amidst the poly-religiosity and secularity of U.S. society, what Butler meant was that this religion’s “legitimacy” endures by providing certain “cultural pre-conditions of the public.” Unlike phenomena named Buddhism, Hinduism,

Islam and other spiritual or religious traditions, the communities named “Christian” long have offered to U.S. public life “symbols circulating freely within the public.” This is in contrast to public limits placed on “other” symbols and traditions “that are considered to threaten the foundation of secular life” or that often are “considered ostentatious or threatening to democracy itself.”¹

It is not clear that a “spiritual option” that decolonizes religion, as Walter Mignolo puts it,² can easily be developed from within such a setting of institutionalized U.S. Christian religion. My own past attempts to “liberate spirituality” from such a hegemonic religion have drawn from my participation in collective movement work against U.S. covert and overt wars, and from resistance to U.S. mass incarceration and its carceral state. My research has been in the U.S. and abroad (mainly in Central America and Mexico) drawing on history and theory, constructing imagery and aesthetic forms for a theological or spiritual vision. I learn from others’ similar work, which both prods and criticizes me, as I seek constructive moves in my own teaching, movement work and published writings to offer a “political theology of liberation.”³ This has necessitated at times my rigorous critique of Western Christian guild theology and its colonizing production of knowledge.⁴ None of this learning nor the constructive moves have been easy or smooth. Unlearning has been necessary, and confusion and missteps persist; but so also do my occasional senses of belonging to “another possible world,” one crafted, primarily, by subjugated peoples’ own dreams, critical thought and struggle.

My argument in this essay is that an “earth politics” is a decolonizing formation that resists and fosters a dignified “re-existence” even in the face of imperio-coloniality’s deployment of state torture. This earth politics is a consciousness-in-action, a “drama of consciousness” with a “spiritual ground,” these latter phrases drawn from Paget Henry’s *Caliban’s Reason*. This spiritual ground, I will further argue, entails a consciousness that is “spherical” in nature, more fluid and expansive than what many discourses on “spirituality” describe as vertical and/or horizontal. In fact, as I will show in this essay the notion of “spirituality,” whether used as noun or process, easily drifts into the binaries of coloniality’s modern episteme when it seeks to speak of the vertical and the horizontal.

The argument for a decolonizing earth politics begins with a first section on the meaning of “decolonizing,” showing why I give here special emphasis to it as a formation to contest coloniality’s imperialism, its “imposition” of power, the commandeering imperial. The second major section of the paper develops the notion of earth politics by following a thread of claims about “spirituality” through the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Drucilla Cornell and Stephen Seely, and then Paget Henry. The final section of the paper will show how an earth politics might challenge coloniality’s torture state by an-

alyzing Sister Dianna Ortiz's personal narrative of torture and re-existence after being tortured in Guatemala City in 2004.

Earth Politics and What it Means "To Decolonize"

What might it mean "to decolonize?" An "earth politics of the spiritual ground" can be identified as a decolonizing formation or option against the background of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's work and those in decolonial theory who engage his work. Mignolo proposes that "to decolonize" is to "de-link" from what Quijano termed the multiple ambits or spheres in a "colonial matrix of power," from in brief "the coloniality of power."⁵ As developed further in recent work of Catherine Walsh and Mignolo, to decolonize is also to "re-link" in some manner to practices and thinking that are "otherwise"—alternative to the coloniality of power. Walsh and Mignolo, following the perspectives of Colombian artist, anthropologist and journalist, Adolfo Albán Achinte insist that this is to craft nothing short of "re-existence," by which Albán meant "the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity."⁶

In order to focus more specifically my approach to decolonizing work, I want to go to what I take to be the heart of coloniality *as power*, its being an "imposition." Quijano has stressed this often and in multiple ways, but perhaps nowhere more strikingly than in an oft-cited passage by Quijano on the coloniality of power.

Coloniality is one of the constitutive and specific elements of the global pattern of capitalist power. It is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world population as cornerstone of such a pattern of power, and it operates materially and subjectively on each of the planes, spheres and dimensions of quotidian existence and at the social level.⁷

The earth politics of spiritual ground that I highlight in this essay is decolonizing in that it seeks to de-link from coloniality as "imposition," as the imposition "of a racial/ethnic classification" that is the "cornerstone of such a pattern of power." It is certainly clear, even from this one long sentence from Quijano that the imposition follows no singular line. As Quijano also notes coloniality works materially and subjectively on multiple "planes, spheres and dimensions of quotidian existence." To stress complexity in relations of power is a commonplace, in the academy especially. But what I want to not overlook is that amidst the multirelational process, there is an imposition. There is force. There is an antagonistic power pervading the coloniality of power that itself needs naming and studying, for the sake of both resistance and re-existence. I will name this dimension of imposition here, "the commandeering imperial."

With this notion I do not mean only imperial power, as it moves out from

empowered metropolises where there is what historical Patrick Wolfe termed a “preaccumulation” of power, that enables a subsequent “global reach,” and that then concentrates the power of the metropole among “other” peoples and lands.⁸ I want also, especially with the term “commandeering,” to foreground the elements of force and imposition that are part of this whole complex process of the imperial at work in the coloniality of power. “To commandeer” is a term that connotes an exercising of control by an official, usually for military purposes, but also suggests more broadly, a seizing of that control for one’s own purposes. However faceless imperial domination can seem, there are, for example, the commandeering directives of field officers and generals, presidents, corporation CEOs, as well as more second-level and local officials and leaders of many sorts—all of whom apply and approve of the imposition and the application of commandeering force on behalf of the metropole and colonizers. Torture which is examined in this essay’s culminating section is a key example in which the commandeering function of a particular agent, the torturer, commandeers a body toward pain, a living death. Any decolonizing formation, including the earth politics proposed here, will need to “de-link” from the commandeering imperial force that traverses coloniality’s many linkages.⁹ This delinking from the commandeering imperial in coloniality of power in an “earth politics” will require not only a critique of “biopower” (Foucault) and of “necropower” (Mbembe), but also of “geontopower” (Povinelli), this latter referring to “modes of human sociality” in today’s late liberal settler colonialism that continue to exert “malignant force on the meteorological, geological, and biological dimension of the earth.”¹⁰

Mignolo’s exploration of imperial power, of imperio-coloniality examines it both as a multiplicity of relations and as imposed force. He explores these multiple relations most fully in a chapter of *On Decoloniality*, entitled “Colonial/Imperial Differences.”¹¹ Earlier in the same book, however, Mignolo had reminded readers that “Coloniality is shorthand for *coloniality of power*. The expression suggests that what is imprinted in colonial cultures is the effect of the *imperiality of power*.”¹² I read Mignolo to again be highlighting the importance of imposition that in the Quijano passage referenced above is so important.

I want to direct earth politics as a decolonizing formation toward engagement with this imposition. In the essay’s last section, a case of torture will be my reference for studying this imposition of power against colonized bodies. Indeed, torture, dramatically focused on a body or bodies, is one case of the multiple practices of the commandeering imperial. Recall, though, how in Frantz Fanon, what is imposed upon particular bodies in the “colonized’s sector” becomes emblematic of the whole plight of colonial repression. “The colonized’s sector,” he writes, “is a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate.”¹³ This is a picture

of the colonized as tortured individual body, but rendered in a way that evokes the whole violence at work in the colonized sector.

Decolonizing formations must deal with this outcome of coloniality's imposed power, the leaving of bodies prone, on our knees, crouching, prostrate. How does one decolonize, de-link from the commandeering imperial, or realize any "re-existence" when the colonized sector includes the torture room? How *have* colonized peoples resisted the torturer's concentration of power.¹⁴ It is to respond to such questions that this essay, and particularly its conclusion about earth politics and torture, is offered.

Perhaps a further word is needed to clarify why this essay culminates in its final section on torture among other forms of oppression. As brutal as it is, torture should not be interpreted only as an exceptional ruthless display against the individual body. It is that, but it is also a quotidian force in the colonial imposition, in imperial coloniality. My reference above to the surplus of meanings generated by Fanon's description of the colonized's body in pain already has suggested this. Austrian essayist Jean Améry, who was himself tortured by the Gestapo as a result of his participation in resistance to Nazism considered torture not only to be "the most horrible event a human being can retain within himself." It was also the essence of systems of sovereignty like Nazism. Torture is also a part of a larger realization of sovereignty.¹⁵ Améry shows acutely how a torturer realizes "his own total sovereignty." He writes: "He has control over the other's scream of pain and death; he is master over flesh and spirit, life and death. In this way "torture becomes the total inversion of the social world . . . in the world of torture man exists only by ruining the other person who stands before him."¹⁶ Améry described its sovereignty: "A slight pressure by the tool-wielding hand is enough to turn the other—along with his head, in which are perhaps stored Kant and Hegel, and all nine symphonies, and the World as Will and Representation—into a shrilly squealing piglet at slaughter."¹⁷ Torture as this kind of commandeering imposition is the material of nightmare and terror; alas it is also the reality for thousands in over 141 countries today.¹⁸

Améry's linkage of the tortured body in pain to systems of control reminds us of the larger point. As Jasbir Puar has noted when writing on U.S. torture at Abu-Ghraib during its occupation of Iraq, "torture is a fundamental modality of citizen production," still part of the practical logic of the U.S. nation-state's "war on terror."¹⁹ We might call torture an important mode of "statecraft." To clarify torture as statecraft, Darius Rejali deploys a "civic discipline model, tracing many of today's U.S. interrogation/torture tactics to traditions of U.S. slavery and forced labor practices, often further honed in U.S. police and prison institutions."²⁰ Torture in its everyday mode, at least as threat buried somewhere in citizen consciousness, works thusly:

Whether one can go here or there without fear of being beaten, whether one can travel in one's car without being pulled over or electrified, these are experiences constitutive of citizenship. Citizenship, after all, is not merely holding a passport, but understanding what treatment is due to one in daily life. . . . Some people expect torture, while others would be shocked to know it was "happening here." . . . In these cases, torture is not merely following pre-established legal understanding of who is or is not a citizen, falling solely on foreigners. It is conferring identities, shaping a finely graded civic order. *It reminds lesser citizens who they are and where they belong. . . . [We] live in a world in which torture is returning to a role it had in ancient Greece, inducing civic discipline and shaping civic order in liberal democracies?*²¹

Whether in an Algeria or Ireland, India, Palestine, Syria, Guatemala, Egypt, Honduras or El Salvador,²² on U.S. city streets, or in U.S. police precinct stations where Chicago blacks were tortured into confession²³—torture works as integral to Euroamerican imperio-coloniality.²⁴ Thus, torture is not just one of many oppressions. Its practice is a part of the commandeering imperial of the coloniality of power. We can speak, as in this essay's title of the "torture state." We must consider, then, what kind of spirituality enables re-existence?

Theorizing "Spirituality" for Decolonizing Formation

In this section I engage three attempts by contributors to decolonial theory to sort out issues pertaining to "spirituality." First, I engage one of Gloria Anzaldúa's editors and interviewers, AnaLouise Keating, and her conversations with Anzaldúa about the nature of spirit's and spirituality's relation to the borders or to "borderlands/*Las Fronteras*." Second, I take up the complex ways in which Drucilla Cornell and Stephen Seely render Anzaldúa's spiritual force for our current revolutionary aspirations as they deploy also Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic. This enables them to bridge, as they write following Lorde, between the political and the spiritual, indeed to reinvigorate Foucault's notion of a "political spirituality." Third, and largely because Cornell and Seely interpret erotic bridging as a transformation that Paget Henry terms a "vertical drama of consciousness," I will examine briefly the way the notions of vertical and horizontal transformation interact in Paget Henry's book, *Caliban's Reason* in relation to his notion of a "spiritual ground."

In interaction with these three sites of decolonial theorists refiguring of spirituality—those by Anzaldúa/Keating, by Cornell/Seely and by Paget Henry—I will attempt to show that all three are wrestling with binaries that the coloniality of power imposes and which they are moving beyond in their own distinctive ways. My argument for an earth politics of spiritual ground seeks to show a different form of transformational drama of consciousness in the face of the coloniality of power. This earth politics points in

many ways beyond the adequacy of the two-fold categorization of vertical or horizontal. Nor is it sufficient to locate earth politics only in relation to “boundaries.” Earth politics of the spiritual ground learns from all of these, but then envelopes them, I suggest, with “dramas of consciousness” more spherical or ambiental.

1. Anzaldúa’s Spirituality as “More Dangerous Metaphysical Dimension”

Gloria Anzaldúa’s work remains important because of the persistence of her influence in decolonial theory, as can be seen, for just one example, in the recent works of Laura Pérez.²⁵ I am particularly interested in an intervention brought to light in one of AnaLouise Keating’s interactions with Anzaldúa in her edited collection *Gloria Anzaldúa: Interviews/Entrevistas*. Keating calls attention to a complaint made by Anzaldúa about how many readers of her *Borderlands/Las Fronteras* book seem to miss the core spirituality abiding in her work.²⁶ Keating explores this as part of her own coming to grips with Anzaldúa’s spirituality.

My interest here begins with one of Anzaldúa’s assessments of the widespread use of her work in *Borderlands/Las Fronteras*. She makes a distinction between “the safe elements” of her work often selected by scholars and then a “more dangerous metaphysical dimension.” The safe element is evident when readers of her spirituality keep their interpretations “theoretical and about history, about borders,” and of this she says “that’s fine.” Indeed, as Keating and others have noted it is impossible really to separate her notion of spirituality from borders—borderlands, border-thinking and so on. What is missed though, Anzaldúa emphasizes, is her notion of “*Nepantla* as a border between the spirit, the psyche, and the mind, *as a process*.” At this point Anzaldúa observes this about her readers—“they resist.”²⁷ It is important to ask what precisely Anzaldúa sees as being resisted. My response would be that what is resisted is the distinctive process by which bodies are inspirited, by which matter is so bordered by psyche, mind and spirit that its forces are described as “divine.”²⁸ In this way, spirit attains a kind of countervailing force against the imposition that makes of the border a wound. This would of course apply directly to the border become “colonial wound” as emphasized in Mignolo’s decolonial theory,²⁹ which he develops from Anzaldúa’s oft-quoted line that “the U.S./Mexican border *es una herida abierta* (an open wound) where the third world grates against the first and bleeds.”³⁰ The safer elements of Anzaldúa’s work tend to identify spirituality with liminal suspension, “betwixt-and-between.” Such a space of liminal suspension may feature clashes of differences, overlapping and multiple consciousnesses, a proliferation of hybrid cultures and practices, and so on. When the border is also understood as a site of wounding, however, then the spirit called forth in the border region cannot only be one highlighted as liminal between-ness. It must become that and something more, as it does

for Anzaldúa. That something more is the “more dangerous element” that she says has a “metaphysical dimension.” I interpret this as a challenging force of spirit, which rises both amid borders and also against the wounds of bordering that imperialism imposes. The academy has a kind of fetish for being in the boundaries, liminality, the complexities of differential flux, and so on. To emphasize only this in Anzaldúa’s spirituality of the border(s), however, would be to miss the concreteness and force of the border dwelling that Anzaldúa explores as a *decolonial*, even as an *anti-colonial* writer/activist.

With this understanding, the question emerges: What kind of force is this spirit? To call it “metaphysical” no doubt intensifies the worries of many of our agnostic even atheistic secular thinkers and activists. I share the concern. The notion of the metaphysical often functions as a reduction of the complexity of politics, of life, and of nature. As Anzaldúa wields the term, though, I suggest she is referencing not an anti-material world nor a supernatural world separable from nature, but a force that energizes the natural and the material.

Claiming her spirituality has a “metaphysical dimension” is not to move her notion of spirit “above” the borderlands or world, to some outside (“Our spirituality does not come from outside ourselves”³¹). The “meta” here—if I could graft it onto another English term—references the *metabolizing* of material life for needed change; it is not above the physical, it is *in* the physical and the material for transformation, metabolizing them for transformation. The force as *Nepantla*, seems to mean that a *nepantlera*, being an “in-betweenner,” is indeed defining of spirit. What is even more crucial, though, is the force arising from such in-betweenness, spirit as a power metabolizing a “metaphysics of interconnectedness.”³² This will be a crucial perspective for understanding the “earth politics” of spiritual ground that I foreground below.

2. Cornell and Seely’s Spirit as “Vertical” Revolution

It is precisely here, regarding Anzaldúa’s spirituality as relational force, that Cornell and Seely make a critical intervention. They engage Anzaldúa’s notion of spirituality toward the end of their discussion of erotic transformation across numerous thinkers in Freudo-Marxian theories (Reich, Marcuse and others), queer and “New French feminism” (Irigaray and others) and also Deleuze and Guattari. Anzaldúa, along with “visionary radical black women,” is particularly important for Cornell and Seely because of Anzaldúa’s insistence on the unique and unitive force that spirituality brings. She helps make possible the “political spirituality” that Cornell and Seely develop from Foucault’s usage of that term. They use Audre Lorde’s notion of the erotic to clarify Anzaldúa’s spirituality of relational force for a political spirituality. Lorde’s notion of the erotic enables Cornell and Seely to bridge between two sides of a “false” dichotomy in the “episteme of man”

(Sylvia Wynter), i.e., between the spiritual and the political. They quote Lorde as follows:

For the bridge which connects them [the spiritual and the political] is formed by the erotic—the sensual—those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.³³

Still following Lorde, this erotic is emphasized by Cornell and Seely as a “life force” or a “creative energy,” one that they claim “must be reclaimed and cultivated in all areas of life.”³⁴ With the erotic bridging between politics and spirituality Cornell and Seely foreground the basic dynamic of their “spirit of revolution” as the book title states, or more accurately as they put it later, a “revolutionary decolonial politics” that requires an “inextricable” link to the erotic.³⁵

The erotic transformation of the revolutionary political spirituality that Cornell and Seely propose is even more fully developed by their engagement with the global South’s thinkers and literatures, particularly its Afro-Caribbean philosophers. Their rich discussions of several of these philosophers culminate in a chapter devoted to Sylvia Wynter whose insistence that “a ceremony must be found” leads them to trace new “material-spiritual ceremonies and practices” that power the revolutionary decolonial “political spirituality” they seek. Cornell and Seely examine such ceremonial practices by turning to Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and Edward Glissant’s *The Fourth Century*. These two sources enable them to deepen Foucault’s political spirituality, showing how it “has actually been practiced in revolutionary movements throughout the global South. Silko and Glissant also are cited to resist the idea that spirituality and ritual practices are apolitical, or even counterrevolutionary opiates for the masses.”³⁶ With these literary works they complete the vision of a political spirituality that they announced at the outset, one that names, first, “the ceremonial practices involved in revolutionary movements,” and second, “the different forms of individual and collective conduct these practices make possible.”³⁷

I want to highlight a question that remains curiously unaddressed in Cornell and Seely’s work. The question concerns the meaning of “spirituality” and the way they position it in relation to the “vertical” and “horizontal” distinction that they take from Paget Henry’s thought about vertical and horizontal “dramas of consciousness.” The ambiguity begins to form as Cornell and Seely, in dialogue with Anzaldúa, propose that erotic transformation mediates or bridges between the political and the spiritual. The ambiguity grows if we ask: but before the bridge was considered by either Lorde or Cornell and Seely, was the meaning of “the spiritual” clear? Did it have some meaning before it was given Lorde’s erotic bridge to the political? Another way to ask the question: as we read through their book, *The Spirit*

of *Revolution* and encounter such rich combinatory phrases as “political spirituality” (Foucault) and “corporeal-spiritual” or “material-spiritual,” what precisely does the “spiritual” add to the preceding terms? Is “spirituality” anything more than what the erotic brings to the political or to the material and to the corporeal? I may seem to be quibbling, but consider: the erotic is rendered as “lifeforce” or “creative energy,” and then quickly Cornell and Seely begin to write, as they do elsewhere in the book of the importance of “political and erotic spirituality.”³⁸ Would this latter phrase mean that “spirituality” is what you have when you combine erotic with political transformation in multiple ways? If so, why not speak simply of eroticized politics, the politics of eros, erotic materialization, corporeal healing and energy, and so on? Whence the need to name living materiality or erotic transformation “spirituality?”

Without Cornell and Seely’s meaning of spirituality made clearer, another tendency enters and makes matters still more ambiguous. Left free of greater specificity, the meaning of spirituality drifts in a way that reinforces an aspect of the very binary thinking in the “episteme of Man” from which these authors mean to free their readers. By this I mean that the notion of political spirituality as spirituality seems to be most closely identified by them with a strengthened “vertical” drama of consciousness. To be sure, they insist that the vertical drama though “independent from” is also “necessary to” what Paget Henry terms “the horizontal . . . dramas of nationalism, proletarian liberation, and societal organization.”³⁹ If we look throughout the book, the vertical tends to be both a key mark—if not *the* key mark—of the spiritual and one most discernible in dramas of the self. For Cornell and Seely, especially disclosive I think is a formulation in their first chapter: “The ‘vertical’ revolution . . . involves the deep transformation in the psyche that would enable one to live and engage differently with others in a world beyond colonialism, capitalism and as we are arguing here, phallogocentric heterosexism.”⁴⁰ Note, the vertical is “deep.” It is “in the psyche.” It “would enable *one* to engage differently with *others*.” The problem, I sense, is that as relational as the self is for Cornell and Seely, and as inextricably linked as the vertical is said to be with the horizontal, the primary valence of the vertical, so important to their spirituality, has to do with the self as deepened for being with others. How different is this from many other versions of binaries in “the episteme of man,” in which verticality is associated with a vitally transformed self and then connected to the world of others?

3. Paget Henry’s “Spiritual Ground:” A Spherical Drama of Consciousness-in-Action.

To gain greater clarity about the vertical and horizontal transformations, we need to turn to Cornell and Seely’s source, Henry’s *Caliban’s Reason*. We will find that the distinctiveness of the vertical in Henry is somewhat differently

struck vis-à-vis the horizontal. This distinctiveness, slight as it may seem to be, tends in the direction of what I develop as an “earth politics.” In this earth politics, the “spiritual” emerges as marked not so much by either vertical or horizontal dramas, but by an earth-centered, “grounded” spherical consciousness-in-action.

Consider first Henry’s mode of distinguishing his vertical drama of consciousness from that of Sylvia Wynter’s. He asks about the adequacy of “Wynter’s push for a science of mythopoetic processes.” Henry by the end of *Caliban’s Reason* is working with a dialectic of historicist and poet-icist traditions in Afro-Caribbean philosophy and he questions Wynter’s mythopoetic process through that dialectical lens. Henry argues that Wynter’s work would have “the hearing her work deserves” by being more fully situated in relation to a poet-icist/historicist milieu shaped especially by Derek Walcott’s “formative sea that invades the ego with tidal waves of creation and destruction.” Is there in Wynter’s mythopoesis “room enough for that sea?” Henry asks.⁴¹ His answer would seem to be “No,” because he soon argues that Walcott and Wynter feature “very different dramas of consciousness”—and as I read him, these are very different *vertical* dramas of consciousness.⁴² Henry also references Wilson Harris to ask whether Wynter’s vision can cover “the specific kind of ego integration and correction” prompted by Harris’ vertical drama of consciousness wherein the ego is situated in an expansive “world of consciousness” known beyond the ego in archetypal practice.⁴³ This is the ego’s “larger unity”⁴⁴ and an “action-orienting potential of poetics” that opens the ego to historical action and to a set of “quantum connections” at work in archetypal action.⁴⁵

Cornell’s and Seely’s political spirituality, informed as it is by Wynter, may be subject to the critique that Henry directs toward Wynter. To be sure, Cornell and Seely at points share Henry’s respect for Wilson’s archetypal “world of consciousness,” as when they write in the penultimate sentence of *The Spirit of Revolution*: “The revolutionary *undertaking* of Man thus requires us to develop ceremonies that heretically breach the symbolic divides of the episteme—including that between animals and humans, and humans and nature—ceremonies that would inaugurate new collective, body engagements beyond what we can presently imagine.”⁴⁶ Cornell and Seely’s interest in the “breach” of “symbolic divides” comes on the same page as their final declaration again of how “we need both a horizontal and vertical revolution.” Note, though, that this entire final section of their book is entitled, “Finding the Ceremonies: the Vertical Revolution.” Again, spirituality without a more carefully specified meaning tends to drift toward a default primacy of the vertical, even while claiming that “political spirituality” entails both the vertical and horizontal.

Henry’s *Caliban’s Reason* can be read as bringing greater clarity to political spirituality, freer from the language of the vertical and horizontal. In fact,

Henry may have been pointing his readers toward a complex consciousness that bends—perhaps to the breaking point—the adequacy of his own usage of the vertical and horizontal as markers of the transformation dramas that decolonizing practice and thought require. By the conclusion of Henry's text he seems to be breaking free from the two-step process of reflection—one, thinking the vertical and the horizontal and then, two, relating them. What emerges instead in Henry's reconstructive thought are new ways of thinking, speaking and conjuring totalities, "totalizing" practices and strategies marked especially by his reconstructing a new historicism open to poeticism. In what seems Henry's final usage in the book of the horizontal/vertical distinction he references Caribbean cultural systems that "don't evoke horizontal images, but rather vertical ones," but he then quickly turns to exploring the multiple differences that spring up around "vertical differences between Afro-Caribbean philosophers" that obscure their "deeper connections and common origins." Exploring his more complex totalizing consciousness, Henry aims to "depolarize identity constituting oppositions" so that these "vertical divisions will only be eliminated by processes of personal growth as wider and more inclusive affirmations of ourselves replace earlier and narrower ones."⁴⁷ In other words, the aim is not just depth of a self, which might be located at the base of a vertical axis whose opposite is height. Rather the aim is what he often invokes, a "deep unity" in which the ego abides but not along a vertical axis that later requires horizontal life with others. Henry seems to push for a new meaning of "subjectivity" that only exists in a wider connectional matrix that exceeds human selves and others. With this kind of vision the very notion of the vertical drama begins to blend, by way of his dialectical opening of historicism to poeticism, with the horizontal dramas. Recall Henry's citation of Harris's language about the quantum connections of archetypal life:

Thus on the ego level, a rose is a rose is a rose. From the perspective of consciousness, 'a rose is a particle is a wave.' Or, from the point of view of the ego, a table is an object we put books on. But from the quantum perspective, a table becomes a tree, the tree becomes the forest and the forest "is the lungs of the globe and the lungs of the globe breathe on the stars."⁴⁸

As I read Henry's reconstruction across his final chapter and into the Conclusion, meanings of the spiritual become less attached, primarily, to the vertical. Nor does he write, as do Cornell and Seely of the vertical as "independent from but necessary to the horizontal."⁴⁹ Instead, Henry largely moves away from the two-step reflection of the vertical and the horizontal; ego is spread out into a greater totality, a totality of earth, of planet and of a grand matrix of concrete connections, quantum ones, wherein a breathing pervades all, from rose petal to star. The spiritual for Henry, then, I suggest best attaches to this expansive "ground"—in fact, what he terms a "spiritual

ground" within which both constituted egos and historical subjects are ever more comprehensively active.⁵⁰

4. Earth Politics as Decolonizing "Spiritual Ground."

With the vertical now always bent to the horizontal, and vice versa, rather than added to it as an axis oft-neglected by the secularism of Western coloniality/modernity, I believe we can write with Bolivian historian Waskar Ari of "earth politics."⁵¹ Here I want to develop the notion of earth politics in relation to Henry's "spiritual ground." To start with, "earth politics with a spiritual ground" names the kind of consciousness-in-action that we saw in the Wilson quote so valued by Henry. With the notion of "spiritual ground" we name a drama of consciousness-in-action that names an earthy spherical awareness. Spiritual ground is an awareness that englobes vertical, horizontal and other directionalities too—especially those that indigenous peoples have marked as the "four directions," often by four winds. Spiritual ground is a locus where bodies sense the curvature of earth, its animating and re-materializing powers. As humans standing and spread upon the curvature of earth, earth's rough roundness is inscribed in many more englobing and enveloping matrices. Spiritual ground(-ing) suggests human participation in the ambiental, the environmental, humans thus being-with one another through earth, land and tree in an interactive ecology and attuned especially to movements of breath and wind. We breathe into this whole. And here indeed we connect the notion of "spirit" and "spiritual" not just to ground, but also to one of its frequent meanings in several languages' etymologies wherein breath or wind are integral to what is also designated spirit—*ruach* (Hebrew), *spiritus* (Latin), *Geist* (German) perhaps also *ankh* (Egyptian), and especially indigenous traditions' *nilchi* (Diné or Navajo). In Diné there is one wind, the "Holy Wind," but then also many other winds of earth and air, including "the wind within one."⁵² In the many ways of showing respect to this spirit, indigenous Lakota reverence holy wind and air—all the winds of earth's many places and within all its peoples,

the four winds are the four quarters of the circle and mankind [sic] knows not where they may be or whence they may come and the [peace] pipe should be offered directly toward them. The four quarters embrace all that are in the world and all that are in the sky. Therefore, by circling the pipe, the offering is made to all the gods. The circle is the symbol of time, for the day time, the night time, and the moon times are circles above the world, and the year time is a circle around the border of the world. Therefore the lighted pipe moved in a complete circle is an offering to all the times.⁵³

Here is an indigenous openness to totality, a totalizing ceremony respecting the winds' multiplicity, revering it, modulating the winds within, one's breath, with a collective earth-placed and spaced breathing. To summarize

such an earth politics, a politics by the many winds of earth, we do well to recall Waskar Ari's summary of "earth politics" integral to Bolivian indigenous leaders' activism,

Earth politics, unlike other philosophies or political frames, incorporated the worship of nature and Pachamama. The AMP [*Alcaldes Mayores Particulares*, a large network of indigenous activists who promoted indigenous legal and political formations] linked ideas about Pachamama, the Achachilas [ancestors] and the worship of qixuqixu (lightning) and uma kankaña (water) to fighting the colonial structures that imposed dehumanization on many indigenous people in mid-twentieth century Bolivia.⁵⁴

An earth politics is a mode of human proactivity animated by the earth, with earth as protagonist in history.⁵⁵ As such, earth in its enveloping matrix, from rose to star is generative of life. This generativity includes a politics, a vibrant state of things that includes new formations of the state. To fully understand earth politics as politically and socially transformative, in the fullest sense, we would need discourses that I cannot engage in this paper, those that anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli points to as new earth sciences, geologies and other theories and evidence—yielding a "stranger geography"—which collate natural and social sciences for critical theory.⁵⁶

Cornell and Seely brilliantly trace how ceremonies to break the "chokehold of Man" against all life are evident in the literature of Silko's *Ceremony* and Glissant's *The Fourth Century*. An earth politics of the spiritual ground, however, must also forthrightly work in and for social movements in history.⁵⁷ In the final section of this essay, therefore I will seek to show earth politics at work within an individual's struggle and within the building of political movements against the commandeering imperial of the torture state.

Earth Politics from the Spiritual Ground—Decolonizing the Torture State

Torture is not only an exercise in rule over a body, but is part of the torture state. It is not applied to each body among the ruled. It need only be applied occasionally and to some. States usually apply torture while balancing its invisibility with its visibility. This generates sufficient fear. In matters of rule, Hobbes noted, "the passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear."⁵⁸ "In the last analysis, a politics of torture," writes philosopher Donatella Di Cesare, "is a politics of terror. Once it is unleashed," she continues while commenting on Kafka's brilliant story, *The Penal Colony*, "the presence of sovereign power is printed on the tortured body."⁵⁹ Philosopher and feminist Adriana Cavarero describes torture as a mode of "horrorism," i.e., not just a brutality worked upon the generally vulnerable, but more specifically against "the helpless" in ways that are intentional and planned. It is a form of violence, she writes that also "exceeds death."⁶⁰ As such a mobilization of extreme fear, torture is one of the most formidable of weapons in the arsenal of coloniality's com-

mandeering imperial. So how might the kind of decolonial spirituality, the earth politics of the spiritual ground enable a delinking from this fearsome and formidable weapon?

I turn here to key moments in the struggle for re-existence by Sister Dianna Ortiz in the wake of her torture by U.S.-backed military personnel in Guatemala of 2004. Can there be a “re-existence” that de-links from the coloniality of power when the commandeering imperial takes so brutal an aim at a body in the torture room? My purpose in this final section is to foreground the collective strategies for re-existence, developed by Ortiz and by those around her, as she wrestled with her experience of torture. These collective strategies can be named “four conjurations and critical movements” of an earth politics working the spiritual ground toward liberation amid the torture state’s rule.

In taking these as “conjurations” and “movements,” I am retrieving philosopher of religion Theophus Smith’s notion of “conjuring culture.” This includes “ritually patterned behavior and uses of language and symbols” that also are involved in “conveying a pharmacopeic healing/harming intent.”⁶¹ In Ortiz’s case as a U.S. Latinx woman in Guatemala, these two dimensions of conjuring culture—ritual patterning and pharmacopeic intent—intersect as a kind of “magic,” another dimension of “conjure” explicated by Smith as an ability “to craft concrete signs that embody an inner power of will.”⁶² It is important to note, though, that in the earth politics explored here, this “power and will” abide not only in the individual Ortiz, but also in her supporters, and within the collective they together reconfigured experiences, symbols and sensibilities for social and political movements of resistance and re-existence. This collective involved women’s groups, *campesino* activists, journalists, legal activists and others, and now many from other nations. These fuse in earth politics as a collective power of spiritual ground, a process of realizing at least in part an “action-orienting potential of poetics” (Henry) as a countervailing decolonial force amid the apparatus of late modern state torture.⁶³

I am distilling the four conjurations and critical movements of an earth politics, here, from my own close reading of Ortiz’s personal narrative, *The Blindfold’s Eyes*.⁶⁴ These four movements display the multiple modes of interplay that can occur within the spherical consciousness-in-action of an earth politics that resists and re-exists in the wake of torture. I do not claim that an earth politics always must work in these four ways; the four are exemplary of the frequent insurgence of earth politics in its sphericity.

There is, first, a *somatic performing by the wounded body*, a continuous conjuration and critical movement in any decolonizing earth politics. Any re-existence for and by the tortured requires some recuperation of the body, of the “soma” in the psycho-somatic trauma that torture is. The commandeering imperial of the coloniality of power imposes itself on the colonized

through the horrorist attack on the body, an attempt to establish sovereignty over it. With trembling voice and resolute intent on confronting the whole political matrix of torture, Ortiz has described her torturers' acts against her body and against other bodies (quite literally the bodies of men and women, young and old, her U.S. body among Central American bodies, living and dying bodies):

I have told you that I was burned with cigarettes (111 burns). I was gang raped. I was also lowered into an open pit filled with human bodies—bodies of children, women and men—some decapitated, some caked with blood, some dead, some alive. Beyond this, I was forced to participate in the torture of another human being. I was also subjected to other forms of torture that I will not describe here. Worse than the physical torture, was hearing the screams of the others being tortured. Can you hear the screams? I can.⁶⁵

Thus subjugated in the *Politecnica* building for military and police training in Guatemala City, Ortiz's body is set upon as *woman's* body, as body alongside *children's* bodies, among *other(ed)* bodies in various stages of dying. She was forced to participate in bodily actions that made more torturous the death of others, particularly for one she terms, "the Woman," this latter being one whose cries were particularly haunting, she writes, because Ortiz had her hands physically molded around a machete to wield against this woman.⁶⁶

How does one "re-exist" after all this? After similar experiences many others do not. Suicide is a frequent outcome. Ortiz, though, has put aside her razor blade. After several books and accounts on the nature of torture, Améry took his life years later. His writings, like Ortiz's *The Blindfold's Eyes*, are literary works of re-existence. But before these proactive narrations, there are the immediately reactive, reflexive somatic movements. In Ortiz's case, there were frequent moves to water for cleansing, comfort, to restore measured breath, often desperately seeking some salve for so brutal a bodily assault.⁶⁷ Earth politics of the spiritual ground(-ing) here is evident as the kind of corporeal healing, "forms of bodily touching meant to heal" that Cornell and Seely note in their "political spirituality."⁶⁸ Whether reactive as a frail body's reflexive try at living or, as for Ortiz later in her more planned efforts of hunger striking, press conferencing, book-writing, court-testifying, Ortiz's wounded body was notable in performative utterance and action. All these are part of an earth politics' re-animation of an imperially assaulted body. Recuperation of the body may be too easy to claim in the wake of torture, but the tortured body must re-exist somehow, not only as the particular brutalized body and being it was/is, but also as that body that with all bodies has so often been rendered the "merely material," as non-spirit, but now re-animated by an earth politics of spiritual ground.

Necessary also is a second conjuration and critical movement of a de-colonizing earth politics, the *forging of anamnestic solidarity*. “Anamnestic solidarity” has been referenced often in political and liberation theologies of the global North and South,⁶⁹ but it is anchored in the strategies of those like Ortiz fighting to re-exist in the wake of brutalization by coloniality’s commandeering imperial. Ortiz had to experience a forging of collective solidarity for re-existence from among the remembered dying she was forced to be among, those others in the torture pit of the *Politecnica*. There was, she writes, an elusive but real solidarity even with “the Woman” whose screams mingled with hers and other dying bodies in the pit. They became parts of a circle of the dead, and they resonated for her also with certain other contemporaries, i.e., the subjugated Maya of Guatemala and Central America. Even these indigenous dead and dying became part of the collectivity crafted from a kind of ritual necromancy⁷⁰ against the commandeering culture of the U.S./Guatemalan imperial nexus, one part of “the U.S./Latin American interstate regime.”⁷¹ Modes of remembrance traversed the horrifically entangled bodies of those in the torture pit, worked their way in Ortiz’s consciousness after her torture, and then joined with the circles of women and activists who tended her body, heart and mind. Such a “solidarity” is far from solid. It is better described with a neologism coined by activist and anthropologist, Diane Nelson: “fluidarity.” In earth politics there is even something watery, even “airy” about solidarity, its bonds elusive and always changing, in need of forging and re-forging amid the continuous, atomizing assaults of imperio-coloniality. Indeed, as between Ortiz and others, there can arise an oft-undreamed concrete closeness amid political struggle. This might even include the comrade in struggle who challenges any claims of easy “solidarity” with her. This is earth politics’ fluidarity.⁷²

For Ortiz, this kind of solidarity/fluidarity became a power of resistance and re-existence in the wake of torture, one that came to challenge the U.S. imperial state and its support of torture throughout the Americas.⁷³ That anamnestic relation was a source of the strengthening “re-memory” of Toni Morrison’s terminology,⁷⁴ which Avery Gordon develops as resources for producing an “animated worldliness.” This, Gordon suggests, is not just “the hard ground of infrastructural matters, but the shadowy grip of ghostly matters . . . that shadowy basis for the production of material life.”⁷⁵ Working from resources of this kind, Ortiz was drawn into actions of political organizing to find and hold accountable her torturers, to support activist networks against torture throughout the world, and also to found the still-functioning organization, Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC). TASSC now supports hundreds of torture survivors as it and other organizations work against the torture persisting in more than 144 countries.⁷⁶ TASSC continues its global work in spite of Ortiz’s untimely death from cancer on February 19, 2021. The anamnestic solidarity that was

a resource for her was a painfully forged but finally resilient organized remembrance of the dead and dying. Such is a crucial part of earth politics, within the haunting sphericity of its spiritual ground.

There is a third conjuration and critical movement of earth politics' spiritual ground: an *emerging revitalized naturalism*. It is reminiscent of, almost certainly descendant from, South Andes and other indigenous peoples' notions of "Mother Nature," of their awareness of the matrix of Earth and its powers of regeneration in many dimensions of human life.⁷⁷ Western notions of "nature" as dominatable "other," often need to be called into question in light of this indigenous tradition.⁷⁸ But I will speak of a kind of renewing power that Ortiz experienced by invoking forms of natural presence, at least as she reports this in her narrative, *The Blindfold's Eyes*. The social worlds of anamnestic solidarity that developed in the wake of her torture and that enveloped her supportively were nurtured by her several imaginative and political sojourns into the depths of earth and planet, wherein she found herself in what she terms an "Otherworld." Here is where Theophus Smith's notion of "conjuring culture" is particularly pertinent. Reading throughout her narrative, it is clear that this "Otherworld" is a realm full of watery places especially, wherein she claims to find "her animal," a dolphin who visited her in dreams, seeming to be a presence from nature to help navigate her journeys through the social and the political.

Is this also not an entrance into that "world of consciousness" or that expansive spherical drama of consciousness that Paget Henry's poetivist and historicist dialectics anticipate? As Ortiz writes in more summary fashion: "The warmth, the fields, the light—nature itself was a healing source" for her tortured politically active body.⁷⁹ Her solidarities with the dead for activist work were further enlivened, perhaps paradoxically, when the dolphin was cast in silver for wearing around her neck to "let warmth travel through me." It became a near spectral element enabling her post-torture voice and body to become ever more confrontive—"spectral" as threatening to the commandeering imperial of coloniality's power.⁸⁰ Her "Otherworld" was also spectral in the sense of being heavy with promise of worlds "otherwise" to imperio-coloniality. In another magical twist (in Theophus Smith's sense of "magical"), the dolphin could take-on female form for her and link Ortiz's consciousness to a collective one within women's circles of support and activism, galvanizing a solidarity that extended across U.S. Latina, Anglo, and Maya sufferers of torture and counter-torture organizing.

This solidarity was reinforced when Ortiz began also to carry a piece of bone once pressed into her palm by a Maya mother, who had lost her son to torture and who had been impressed by Ortiz's struggle for truth about her own torturers. The Guatemalan mother informed Ortiz that the bone-piece was one of the few bodily remains of her also-tortured son. Later, another family member among Guatemala's tortured dead gave her a small carved

wooden cross, one crafted from yet another victim's bone, the bone of another Guatemalan man, Raúl. "It sounds corny, maybe even sick—part of someone's body who was probably tortured to death brought me peace. But it was true. A peace or energy—maybe simple gratitude—was flowing through me." Later in her narrative Ortiz clarifies: "Since November 1989, I have never seen a cross as anything other than an instrument of torture. So, I wore it as a symbol of the torture Raúl and other Guatemalans had suffered."⁸¹ Here through a kind of revitalizing materialism, earth politics' decolonizing necromancy wields earth's powers of dolphin, bone and cross. In this way, earth politics' spiritual ground, its revitalizing naturalism resonates in Guatemala with what Antonio Benítez-Rojo studied in Haiti. Benítez-Rojo sought permission from his readers to term it a "magico-militarism," in order to convey the special powers in nature that vodou conveyed to revolutionary slaves in their war of liberation from France.⁸²

A fourth and final conjuration and critical move of Ortiz's decolonizing earth politics involves an *emergence of a grotesque transcendentalism*. I write here of a grotesque transcendence following Ortiz's own reference to what she called her own "grotesque resurrection," wherein "by some cruel irony the now-dead God still existed to force upon me a *grotesque resurrection* and return to unwanted life."⁸³ Her first torturer, a police officer, had taunted her: "Your God is dead." She testified afterward, that indeed for her "God died in that clandestine prison." I have argued elsewhere that the transcendence that matters in decolonizing struggle for re-existence amid the commandeering imperial can be neither the projection of the transcendental Other ("God") of so many religions of the Christian West, nor a thoroughly secularized radical immanence against that "Big Other."⁸⁴ Instead, what pervades the power of earth politics, as in Ortiz's struggle, is more a grotesque transcendence, a perduring and unexpected form of re-existence. At times such re-existing may, in fact, invoke God concepts. These may range all the way from—in seeming contradiction perhaps but often consonant with decolonizing struggle—a supernatural Other (a Creator, or outside Power) to invoking a very naturalized earthy and political co-inspiring of powers. Such I believe is what I think Paget Henry urges the Western scholar not to explain away and malign, since some such invocation of countervailing powers seems crucial to decolonial struggle, especially in what he references in his analysis of Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a "creative agency" involving an "unmanifested spiritual world."⁸⁵

In Ortiz's case, the grotesque transcendence can reference her own counter-intuitive earth politics and its always, sometimes strange and unsettling congealing of forces, seeking ways to survive and rival imperio-coloniality. For Ortiz earth politics' grotesque transcendence even included some strategic connections with church figures, those working with her in activist circles. Ortiz's experience of a grotesque transcendence limns a refigured

“God” of earth politics’ sphericity — not a God on high or coming in the future, nor even of the depths. So, to what directionality do grotesque conjures belong? Maybe it doesn’t matter how we answer that question, save that the grotesquery materializes some strange dignity of re-existence come from multiple directions, as many as there are breaths and winds. Ortiz’s revitalizing naturalist vision persists and mediates this refigured “God” as a source for sustaining her conjuring expression and for her critical movement work, as in her organization, TASSC. Both the conjuring and the movement work were practices providing her a new expansive matrix of intersubjectivity, a web for re-existence. Ortiz explicates this matrix often by deploying sensory images of light, voice and river. These images returned when she even distilled what was for her a new figuring of “God,” one grasped through a song used in an experimental Catholic mass, one she seemed to feel was strangely consonant with her unwanted post-torture life:

The song defines God as our light, greater than grieving, more than our death, and says we can hear a nameless voice, crying within our hearts. And God is that nameless voice, and God is the name of the nameless voice, the name that no one calls alone, which the world will hear, deep in the night, when the river will rise. Peace will flow like a river and the river will rise.⁸⁶

Such invocations of a transcendental grotesquery, rendered artfully here but poignantly with the empire’s torture pit ever in her memory, is exemplary of the conjurations and critical movements so intrinsic to earth politics’ decolonizing of the torture state. In such a way an earth politics of the spiritual ground seeks powers of re-existence amid and against the force of the commandeering imperial to impose and maintain the coloniality of power.

NOTES

1. Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness as a Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 114–115. On Islam made to play roles as the “illegitimate” religion by a colonizing Christian biblical commonwealth America and also in the early U.S. American republic, see “The United States and the Specter of Islam,” in Richard Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 35–60.
2. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 34, 62–65.
3. Mark Lewis Taylor, “Political Theology: Reflecting on the Arts of a Liberating Politics,” in *Public Intellectuals for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Ada

María Isasi-Díaz, Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Rosemary Carbine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 83–97.

4. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), especially 49–66 on “Theology’s Imperio-Colonial Sense.”
5. Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, eds. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (Routledge, 2010), 22–32, page 25. These ambits or spheres are variously delineated depending upon the decolonial theorist referenced. I here view them as what Mendieta describes as a “distinct episteme or grid of intelligibility” the sectors of which were described in the 2012 edition of Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton University Press, 2000, 2017), 17. Compare Eduardo Mendieta, “Toward a Decolonial Feminist Imaginary: Decolonizing Futurity,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8.1–2 (2020): 255. For my own interpreting of the decolonial episteme’s ambits, see Mark Lewis Taylor, “Decolonizing Mass Incarceration: ‘Flesh Will Wear Out Chains,’” *Journal of Culture, Religion and Theology* 13.1 (Winter 2013): 121–142, esp. 126–127.

Quijano’s complex notion of the coloniality of power shares many traits with Foucault’s biopower and biopolitics and also with Achille Mbembe’s “necropolitics.” But Quijano’s “coloniality of power” enables us to position Foucault’s and Mbembe’s biopolitics and necropolitics, respectively, within a more multi-leveled critique of Euroamerican domination, and within the *longue durée* of a historical period from the fifteenth century European colonialism through to current Euroamerican reconfigurations of the coloniality of power. On biopolitics, see Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. Trans. David Macey (Picador, 2003), 254–255. On “necropolitics” see Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 92.

6. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 3.
7. Anibal Quijano, *Cuestiones y Horizontes. Antología Esencial: De la dependencia Histórico-Estructural a la Colonialidad/Descolonialidad del Poder*, ed. Danilo Assis Clímaco (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2014), 285. The above translation is by Eduardo Mendieta, in Mendieta, “Critique of Decolonial Reason: On the Philosophy of the Calibans,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophical Journal* 41.1.
8. Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (New York: Verso, 2016), 19–24.
9. On the decolonial option as requiring one “to extricate oneself from the linkages . . .,” see Anibal Quijano, “Globalization and the Decolonial Option” in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, eds., Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (Routledge, 2010), 31.
10. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 5, 9, 16. Povinelli’s notion of “geontopower”

brings into emerging critical theory the insights of geology and biology, along with the kind of interdisciplinarity we see in fields like socio-biology and in “new synthetic natural sciences such as biogeochemistry” (Povinelli, 14). A full treatment of “earth politics” proposed in this essay will require all of these, even if, of course, this paper and the limits of my expertise do not allow treatment of their needed perspectives here.

11. Mignolo, “Colonial/Imperial Differences,” in Mignolo and Walsh, 177–193.
12. Mignolo and Walsh, 140.
13. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*. French 1961. With a new translation by Richard Philcox, a Foreword by Homi K. Bhabha and a Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2–6.
14. For a brilliant case-study and theorization of such resistance by tortured Palestinians facing Israeli interrogators, see Lena Meari, “Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 113.3 (Summer 2014): 547–578.
15. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 22.
16. Ibid. 35. Philosopher Di Cesare also writes “Once it [torture] is unleashed, the presence of sovereign power is printed on the tortured body.” Donatella Di Cesare, *Torture* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016), 9.
17. Ibid.
18. Amnesty International, “Stop Torture,” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/stop-torture/>, accessed June 7, 2020.
19. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 100.
20. Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 22, 41, 56–57.
21. Rejali, 58, 59. Italics added.
22. Jennifer K. Harbury, *Truth, Torture and the American Way: The History and Consequences of U.S. Involvement in Torture* (Boston, MA: Beacon Books, 2005), 28–55.
23. Flint Taylor, *The Torture Machine: Racism and Police Violence in Chicago* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2019), 35–51.
24. On display of tortured bodies in colonialism in the Caribbean, see Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 130–131.
25. See especially Pérez’s tribute to Anzaldúa in Laura E. Pérez, “The Performance of Spirituality and Visionary Politics in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa,” in *Eros Ideologies: Writings on Art, Spirituality and the Decolonial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 133–146.

26. AnaLouise Keating, ed., *Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Interviews/Entrevistas* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5–15 (italics added).
27. Keating, 7 (italics added).
28. Ibid. 103.
29. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), xii, 8, 155–156.
30. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/Las Fronteras: The New Mestiza*. Third edition. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), 25.
31. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision,” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Morraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983), 195.
32. Keating, “From Borderlands and New Mestizas to Nepantlas and Nepantleras,” 13.
33. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 56. Cited in Cornell and Seely, 50.
34. Cornell and Seely, 50.
35. Ibid., 113.
36. Ibid., 161.
37. Ibid., 10.
38. Ibid., 50.
39. Cornell and Seely, 16, citing Paget Henry, *Caliban’s Reason: An Introduction to Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 121.
40. Cornell and Seely, 16.
41. Henry, 142–143.
42. Ibid., 143.
43. Ibid., 113.
44. Ibid., 105.
45. Ibid., 104.
46. Cornell and Seely, 158.
47. Henry, 250.
48. Henry, 96, here citing Wilson Harris, *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks*, eds. Alan Riach and Mark Williams (Liege, Belgium: Liege Language and Literature, 1992), 72.
49. Cornell and Seely, 16.
50. On the “spiritual ground,” see Henry, 16, 99, 185, 186, 191, 257, 259, 261.
51. Waskar Ari, *Earth Politics: Religion, Decolonization, and Bolivia’s Indigenous Intellectuals* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
52. James Kale McNeley, *Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 17, 33, 38, 39, 43, 50.

53. Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock, *Teaching from the American Earth* (New York: Liveright, 1975), 217–218.
54. Ari, 173–174, on the AMP, see 226.
55. “The land,” instructs Leslie Marmon Silko to Frederick Turner in an interview, “is the protagonist,” in Frederick Turner, *Spirit of Place: The Making of an American Literary Landscape* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1989), 348.
56. On resources for a “stranger geography,” see Povinelli, 168–177. Also, “earth politics of a spiritual ground” will also need studies on the “spiritualized vernacular landscapes” alive with “the persistent vitality of the numinous within modernity,” as excavated in Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 17, 62. Also crucial are exemplary forms of activist scholarship, as evident in Naomi Klein, who grafts meticulous environmental studies, to popular communication skills for political mobilizing of “blockadia” against corporate industries’ evisceration of human and environmental geontologies. See Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 293–336.
57. Another of Silko’s novels builds in a strong revolutionary political movement dimension. See Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead. A novel* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 527–530, complete even with a listing of historic indigenous rebellions.
58. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. 1651 (London: Penguin, 1968), 200.
59. Di Cesare, 9.
60. Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 31.
61. Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 6. Smith also adds that biblical imaging is part of U.S. black conjuration.
62. Ibid. 10.
63. For one description of this apparatus, see international law and human rights attorney, Jennifer K. Harbury, *Truth, Torture and the American Way: The History and Consequences of U.S. Involvement in Torture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).
64. Sister Dianna Ortiz and Patricia Davis, *The Blindfold’s Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007). In my earlier work, these four were “dimensions of spectral practice.” See Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 199–220.
65. Dianna Ortiz, “A Survivor’s View of Torture,” in *Torture Is a Moral Issue: Christians, Jews, Muslims and People of Conscience Speak Out*, ed., George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 22–26, page 23. Read and presented also by Ortiz at Princeton Theological Seminary, January 2006.
66. Ortiz, 213.
67. Ibid. 56, 193, 196, 201–201.

68. Cornell and Seely, 144.
69. Christian Lenhardt, "Anamnestic Solidarity: The Proletariat and its *Manes*," *Telos* 25 (Sept. 1975): 133–134.
70. Brown, 130–131.
71. Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodríguez, *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005): 3–27.
72. For more on fluidarity, see Diane Nelson, *Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quintecentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 37.
73. Harbury, 183–189, and Flint Taylor, 35–51.
74. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. A novel (Knopf, 1987), 35.
75. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 165–166.
76. Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC)'s website at <https://www.tassc.org/>.
77. Waskar Ari, *Earth Politics: Religion, Decolonization, and Bolivia's Indigenous Intellectuals* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 1–4, 73–77.
78. Wael Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 93–94, and Mignolo and Walsh, 158–164.
79. Ortiz, *The Blindfold's Eye*, 444.
80. Ortiz, 212, 216, 196.
81. Ortiz, *The Blindfold's Eye*, 201.
82. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 161, 162–163.
83. Ortiz, "A Survivor's View of Torture," 24.
84. Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 10–11, 117.
85. Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, 25–26.
86. Ortiz, *The Blindfold's Eyes*, 391.

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Reshaping Spirituality: Indigenous Decolonial Struggles for Justice in Mexico

Sylvia Marcos

ABSTRACT: Departing from Christian spiritualities, even those emerging from feminist theologians and Latin American eco feminist liberation theologies, the indigenous women's movements started to propose their own "indigenous spirituality." In some key meetings like the "First Summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas" and at other later meetings, their basic documents, final declarations, collective proposals have a spiritual component that departs from the influences of the largely Christian Catholic background of the country. Their discourses, demands, and live presentations have also expressed this religious background. Through several years of interactions and sharing with women in the indigenous worlds of Mexico, the author has systematized a series of characteristics that emanate from a particular cosmovision and cosmogony. These religious references to an indigenous spirituality are inspired on ancestral references re-created today as the women struggle for social justice. The inspiration for their social justice fight is often anchored in these beliefs and practices. It is a reference to worlds of ritual, liturgy, and collective worship that—although being often attired in Catholic and Christian imagery—reveal a deep disjuncture with Christianity and affirm their epistemic particularity. Working from these "cracks of epistemic differences" (Mignolo 2006) the author presents them as a de-colonial effort. Women are actively proposing to recapture ancestral spiritualities to decolonize both the religious universes they were forced to adopt during the historical colonial invasion as well as from the influences of a neo-colonial feminist frame for gender equality.

KEY WORDS: Decolonial spiritual practices, ancestral spiritualities, indigenous women, epistemic particularities, recapture Mesoamerican references

"... sad the world would always be standing in the before and never reaching the after afterwards. . .

*as was told many years ago by wise old Antonio. . . and it was dancing
that the first gods, those that gave birth to the world, set time in motion
and thus was born the after. . .
to which you always have to walk to, by returning to the before in order
to move forward”*
Subcomandante Marcos, “La historia de los caminos y los caminadores,”
in *El Viejo Antonio* (2012).¹

IN HER OPENING discourse at the *Segundo Encuentro Internacional de Mujeres que Luchan*, in the Zapatista Caracol of Morelia, on the 27th of December 2019, Comandanta Amada explained: “*ya ves que para nuestro pensamiento como zapatistas que somos, no sirve que todas somos iguales . . . pensamos que la diferencia no es debilidad . . . pensamos que la diferencia es fuerza poderosa.*” (As you know for our zapatista thought, as women that we are, it is not worth considering that we are all equal . . . for us difference is not weakness, we think that it is a powerful force”).

For Mesoamerican Mayan peoples, the whole cosmos is conceived of elements that balance against each other through their differences, and thus, create a permanently shifting equilibrium. The maintenance and preservation of this equilibrium (Lopez Austin 1988) is basic for their cosmic fusion/interpenetration as well as for communal interpersonal active relatedness. Repeatedly, these last years, the political struggles of indigenous peoples in Mexico have brought forth and expressed perceptions and proposals for concepts of a spirituality that embodies their multiple quests. Their claims urge us to reconsider the conceptual cosmogonic (cosmogony) background that informs not only their demands but also how they are expressed and lived through their symbolic universes.

“Queremos que sea reconocida nuestra forma de vestir, de hablar, de gobernar, de organizar, de rezar, de curar, nuestra forma de trabajar en colectivos, de respetar la tierra y de entender la vida, que es la naturaleza que somos parte de ella.” [We want recognition for our ways of dressing, of talking, of governing, of organizing, of praying, of healing, of working collectively, of respecting earth, of understanding nature as something which we are part of] (*Perfil de La Jornada* 2001, March 29, IV).

The second woman to address Mexico’s Congress that day (March 28, 2001) was Maria de Jesus Patricio, “*Marichuy*,” representing the CNI, which is the largest network of indigenous political groups. She has since been elected to compete as a possible candidate for the presidency of Mexico in the 2018 elections. Then, in her 2001 speech, she stated firmly and repeatedly that it is not only in the indigenous communities that women’s rights are not respected. Applause came from the floor. “[. . . *Que si los usos y costumbres lesionan a las mujeres indígenas en los pueblos, en las comunidades, pensamos que es un problema no solamente de los pueblos indígenas, no es de ahí, es de toda la*

sociedad civil también. Dicen que si se aprueba esta iniciativa de la Cocopa, va a lesionar a las mujeres. Nosotras decimos que no." [if customary traditions injure indigenous women's rights in our communities, we think that this is a problem not only for indigenous people. It is not only there; it also belongs to the whole society.] With the eloquence of her oral tradition, she started to list the positive "*usos y costumbres*," such as collective collaboration for communal tasks, spiritual leadership of women in rituals, political representation as service to the community rather than as means of acquiring power and wealth, respect for the wisdom of elders, and consensus decision-making. Then she mentioned some of the influences of the hegemonic legal system and religious institutions that surrounds them, which have had a negative impact on the situation of indigenous women.

The final declaration of the First Summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas (in December 2002) demands:

That the States accept, respect and promote in their public policies our cosmovision, especially ritual ceremonies and sacred places. . . . We demand from different churches and religions to respect the beliefs and cultures of Indigenous peoples without imposing on us religious practices that conflict with our spirituality. (MEMORIA 2003)

Mesoamerican peoples are preserving and recreating ancient traditions through the socio-political changes in which they are immersed. For millennia, the indigenous peoples of the Americas had created and lived within a civilization with their own parameters for comprehending, organizing and revering the world (cosmovision). They defended it throughout the catastrophes of the Conquest, and today, they claim their rights to their own way of interpreting their symbolic and religious universes. To review this new spirituality in its historical context it is necessary to go beyond historical and ethnographic methodologies to incorporate the philosophical domain in which these religious and gender configurations are based. This will illuminate how Mesoamerican peoples have perceived and constructed their cosmos and based it on the feminine-masculine duality. I argue that comprehending the particularities of local ways of knowing reveals hidden aspects of indigenous peoples' current struggles to resist even when they are adapting to contemporary situations. This apparent paradox can only be deeply understood when one recognizes the "Otherness" of an epistemic universe not based on binary mutually exclusive categories (Marcos 1998). For the indigenous subjects, the merging of opposites is a fact they regard as coherent. Deciphering the deep intricacies of "indigenous spirituality" and gender duality show us where the decolonizing efforts of this new spirituality are at work and how the indigenous peoples of the Americas are deconstructing centuries old captivities in the "spiritual" religious domain. A domain deeply embedded, bound, and interdependent within their political struggles for social justice.

In his groundbreaking book “South and Mesoamerican Native Spirituality” Gary Gosseu defined his understanding of the concept: “the key word spirituality seeks to make available—via translation—the inner states, worldview and cosmology of (indigenous) practitioners and believers” (17). Some years later, in December 2002, a multiheaded network of indigenous women’s groups congregated at the First Summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas incorporated the term spirituality for themselves now without the need for translation. Using this word, they are challenging both the way their religious traditions and practices have been depicted (as ignorant and backward if not superstitious) and at the same time they demand a respect for their own beliefs (“spirituality”) expressed through their cosmology and worldview. In the remaining of this essay, I will review some basic tenants of Mesoamerican cosmology as they shape today’s indigenous women’s struggle for justice and a right to their own education and spirituality.

Parity or Equality—Duality

Inheritors of a philosophical ancestry where women and men are conceived as an inseparable pair, indigenous women often claim *la paridad*. “*Queremos caminar parejo hombres y mujeres*,” said an old wise woman (Palomo 1999, 450). In their own search for the expression that suits their cosmological background they settled on *la paridad*: parity. “*Queremos caminar a la par que ellos*” or “*aprediendo a caminar juntos*.” Learning to walk together.

In ancient Mexico, the feminine-masculine dual unity was fundamental to the creation of the cosmos, its (re)generation, and sustenance. The fusion of feminine and masculine in one bi-polar principle is a recurring feature of Mesoamerican thinking. This principle, both singular and dual, is manifested by representations of pairs of gods and goddesses, beginning with Ometéotl, the supreme creator whose name means “double god” or dual divinity. Dwelling beyond the thirteen heavens, Ometéotl was thought of as a feminine-masculine pair. Born of this supreme pair, other dual deities, in their turn, incarnated natural phenomena. Thompson (1975), for example, speaks of Itsam Na and his partner Ix Chebel Yax in the Mayan region. Las Casas (1967) mentions the pair, Izona and his wife; and Diego de Landa (1966) refers to Itzam Na and Ixchel as the god and goddess of medicine. For the inhabitants of the Michoacan area, the creator pair was Curicuauert and Cuerauahperi.

Omecihuatl and Ometecuhli are the feminine and masculine halves of the divine duality Ometéotl. According to an ancient Nahua myth, they had a fight during which they broke dishes, and from every shard that hit the ground a new dual divinity sprang up. While some scholars have inferred that this legend explains the multiplicity of gods, it also illustrates how the prime duality in its turn engenders dualities. Perhaps, then, gender itself—

the primordial, all-pervasive duality—could be viewed as “engendering” the multiple specific dualities for all phenomena.

The life/death duality pervading the Mesoamerican world is but two aspects of the same dual reality. This is dramatically expressed by a type of figurine from Tlatilco with a human head that is half a living face and half skull. On the level of the cosmos, the sun and moon are regarded as a dynamic masculine-feminine complementarity (Baez-Jorge 1988). Likewise, during the ritual bathing of newborns, feminine and masculine waters are invoked (Sahagun 1969, 1989). Cosmic duality is also reflected in the fact that corn was in turn feminine (Xilonen-Chicomecoatl) and masculine (Cinteotl-Itztlacoliuhqui).

Duality as the essential ordering force of the cosmos was reflected in the organization of time. Time was kept by two calendars: one was a ritual calendar of 260 days (13×20) which some regard as linked to the human gestation cycle (Furst 1986), while the other was an agricultural calendar of 360 days (18×20), (Olmos 1973). Five days were added to adjust it to the astronomical calendar. As Candida Jimenez—a woman from the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (CNMI) said, “La dualidad se da.” We live within duality; it is there in the rituals, the processions, in our common life.

Both Frances Karttunen and Gary Gossen describe Mesoamerican duality as dynamic (Karttunen 1986; Gossen 1986). To the polar ordering of opposites, other authors add a complementarity that gives duality a certain “reversibility” of terms or movement to the concept. Fluidity deepens the scope of bi-polarity by giving a permanently shifting nature to feminine and masculine. With fluidity, femininity is always in transit to masculinity and vice-versa.

Fluid Reality

In a cosmos so constructed, there would be little space for pyramid-like “hierarchical” ordering and stratification. In the various Nahua narratives, whether we look at the *ilamatlatolli* (discourses of the wise old women), the *heuhuetlatolli* (speeches of the old men) or review sources that speak of pairs of deities, we can never infer any categorizing of one pole as “superior” to the other. Instead, a sustaining characteristic of this conceptual universe seems to be the unfolding of dualities. This elaboration of dualities manifests on all levels of heaven, earth and below earth as well as the four corners of the universe. The continuous unfolding is always in a state of flux and is never rigidly stratified or fixed. Thus, duality permeated the entire cosmos, leaving its imprint on every object, situation, deity, and body.

When the concept of women’s rights arrived in Chiapas after the EZLN emerged on the national scene, the indigenous women were constantly hearing the term equality. Equality, as demanded by those helpful women

who came to support their process, did not make sense to them. As we see above, Comandanta Amada, at the opening of the December 2019 Encuentro in Zapatista territory, stressed that “equality” is not useful for their Zapatista thought. Within the Mesoamerican cosmovision, there is nowhere a concept of equality. The whole cosmos is conceived of elements that balance against each other—through their differences—and thus create an equilibrium (Lopez Austin 1984). This balance is constantly shifting (Marcos 1998). “Equality” sounds like stasis, like something that does not move. Furthermore, no two beings are equal in the sense of being *identical*. With the concept of duality anchoring their daily lives and rituals, equality will not be something they strive for (Marcos 1998, Lopez Austin 1984). Those of us closely related to the indigenous movement have understood that “*caminar parejo*” (walking together) is the metaphor indigenous women use in working towards a just relationship with their men. The concept of equilibrium starts to appear as an alternative to equality.

Our Mother Earth/Sacred Earth: A Spirituality

Frequently, we hear the indigenous peoples’ demand for their land, their *tierra*, earth, their territories. It seems that this demand is the central claim of all the indigenous peoples all over the world. “The survival of native peoples is inextricably linked to land” (Smith 1998). But what do demands for earth and for land mean? For indigenous women, there are multiple meanings that can be read into their relationship to the earth. The symbolism of earth as mother ties women to it. They are earth’s incarnations and reproducers. Comandanta Esther, addressing Congress, expressed it in the following way: “*Queremos que sea reconocida nuestra forma de respetar la tierra y de entender la vida, que es la naturaleza que somos parte de ella.*” [We want our way of respecting earth and understanding life to be recognized; that it is nature and we are part of her] (Comandanta 2001). In her idiosyncratic Spanish, a very complex concept of earth came through. First, earth is a person. At the National Congress of Indigenous Peoples (2002) in the city of Nurio, Michoacan, an indigenous woman spoke like this: “*Todavía nuestro río, nuestro árbol, nuestra tierra, están como están . . . todavía están vivas.*” [All our rivers, all our trees, our earth are as they are . . . they are still alive] (Vera 2001, 4). Earth is alive; we must respect her as we respect other beings. Earth is a person.

Some contemporary studies on the “more than human” beings that inhabit the worldviews of the indigenous peoples in the Americas give background to this interpretation (Morrison 2000; Appfel 2001). In much of the Mesoamerican mythology, the earth appears as a sacred place (Marcos 1995). She is a bountiful deity. It is also a place where danger and evil could befall humans who inhabited it. Earth is also a slippery, perilous place (Burckhart 1989). It is conceived within the classic duality of good and evil.

As a supernatural being, she could harm or benefit, depending on your deeds or other contextual situations. Marcos, the EZLN spokesperson, expresses it this way: “*Y estos indigenas vienen a decir que la tierra es la madre, es la depositaria de la cultura, que ahí vive la historia y que ahí viven los muertos.*” [These indigenous peoples come to say that this earth is the mother, she is the cultural matrix, in her lives history and in her live the dead.] (Subcomandante Marcos 2001, 30).

The indigenous perspective on the earth is an unstable moral one and the moral prescription is that one must act very carefully in all circumstances. Manuel Gutierrez E (1993), speaking of contemporary indigenous Christians expresses: “*as inheritors of ancient . . . spirituality . . . [they] have developed a vigilant spirituality, characterized more by cautious expectancy than by messianic hope. . . .*” (277).

The veneration and spirituality that earth elicits from the indigenous women is seldom taken into consideration in several women’s rights demands. It is usually reduced to the right to own the land or the right to inherit it. It is translated as if “land” meant only a commodity. It is in today’s world, where you can own a piece of land, that indigenous women want to own or inherit a piece of land. In a society that has deprived the indigenous populations of the right to collective ownership, this demand is understandable and indispensable.

But the indigenous women demand the right to earth as a place of origins, as a sacred place, as a symbol that fuses with their identity. At the Summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas (2003), the declaration of the Indigenous women read: “We request that governments respect the value of our Mother Earth and the spiritual relation that indigenous peoples have with their ancestral lands” (78).

***Mandar Obedeciendo* [Leading We Obey]**

What does this phrase really mean? From which cultural influences was it coined? Lenkersdorf (1999) says it was not created by the *Zapatistas*. This phrase is a common expression of the Tojolabal Mayan Indians in Chiapas, and occurs in the Tojolabal-Español-Tojolabal dictionary, which was composed during the 1970s. Obviously the phrase pre-dates this dictionary. According to Lenkersdorf, this phrase is an example of the way the *Zapatistas* incorporate wise ancestral Maya ideas and expressions—especially ancient sayings of the Tojolabal group—into the national political debate.

But, to return to the expression *mandar obedeciendo*, does it really imply that one commands over another, or that one subjects another, as some critics claim? Lenkersdorf continues decoding the deep meaning of this phrase (Ceceña 1999). The translation from the original Mayan phrase is: “Our authorities receive orders.” The collective communal “we” is the one that gives

orders. This “we” is the ultimate authority. Another level of meaning is “in the community it is we who control our authorities.” Governing, in *Tojolabal*, means “work”: those who govern are “those who work.” Sometimes, the phrase changes slightly, and it literally means: “the authorities-workers of the community.” Everyone has a function in this communitarian “we.” It is a horizontal collectivity, but not everyone has the same function. Those who govern are not on a superior level to those who are governed. They work like everyone else. They are executors of the decisions of the communitarian “we.” There are presidents of the chapels, catechists, the municipal representatives. Everyone has her/his specific task, under the control of the communitarian “we,” which is the supreme authority. The *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* in Zapatista territory are governed today in this manner.

As we see, the concept of *mandar* (command) is a totally different concept in these communities. This collective “we” as maximum authority may choose some people to speak in its name. The problem, Lendersdorf says, is that the (Mexican) dominant society, fully ignorant of the ways of the Mayans, mistakes these spokespersons for leaders. These are not leaders, they are only the spokes persons chosen by the communitarian “we.” Maria de Jesus Patricio, was then chosen in 2018, as *spokesperson* for the CNI-EZLN to compete as a candidate for the Presidency of Mexico.

If the already known spokespersons do not talk, it does not mean that the communitarian “we” is silent. For example, in the twenty-seven years since Zapatismo emerged on the national scene, we have listened to several different spokeswomen. Ramona was for a certain period the one chosen. Ana Maria was also visible for a time, then came Comandanta Trini, as well as innumerable other women who appear and disappear. Now we hear Comandantas Fidelia, Yolanda. And we heard Comandanta Amada at the opening of the Segundo Encuentro Internacional de Mujeres que Luchan. Just last year we heard Insurgenta Erika and Comandanta Myriam. One would think that with the acceptance each of them has gathered, they should continue appearing, leading, directing, but this is not the basis of their presence. At Mexico’s National Congress, we heard two women who had not previously caught our attention: Comandanta Esther and Maria de Jesus Patricio, who is now the spokesperson (“Vocera”) of the Congreso Nacional Indígena.

It is in the communal level of organization that we can identify several structures . . . organizing for creation and re-creation of knowledge—including spiritual life. The communitarian “we” elects its spokeswomen. Esther, in her presentation when addressing the Federal Chamber of Deputies, in March 28, 2001, expressed it this way: “*Nosotras somos las comandantas, las que mandamos en común, las que mandamos obedeciendo a nuestros pueblos*” [We are the commanders, those that command communally, those that command obeying our peoples] (Comandanta 2001).

Thinking With Our Heart

If there is a word that is central in the indigenous women's demands it is *corazón*, "heart." The heart (*teyolía* according to Lopez Austin 1984a), is the seat of the highest intellectual activities. Memory and reason reside in it. The heart is not a reference to feelings and love; it is the origin of life. A classical ethnography of the highland Maya in Chiapas, *Perils of the Soul* by Calixta Guiteras-Holmes, is very clear on what the heart meant to the peoples of the region. The heart has all wisdom, is the seat of memory and knowledge, "through it perception takes place" (1961, 246–247).

In the First National Indigenous Women's Congress in Oaxaca in 1997, the approximately five hundred indigenous women echoed each other: "*Grabar en nuestros corazones*" [imprint in our hearts]. They were keeping in this seat of memory all they were learning about their rights as women and as indigenous people (Marcos 1997). In 1995, Comandanta Ramona sent a message from the CCRI, Comandancia General del Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional: "I am speaking to the Mexican people, to the women of Mexico, to everyone in our country." At the closing of her message, she said: "I want all women to arise and sow (*sembrar*) in their hearts the need to get organized to be able to construct the free and just Mexico that we all dream of" (Ramona 1995). Obviously, the heart is the seat of work and organization. Feelings and emotions alone do not do the organizing. One of the main characteristics of the arts in Tojolabal, says Lendersdorf, is that they "manifest that which the heart thinks" (1996, 166). Again, the heart—and not the head—is referred to as the seat of thinking.

Let's refer now to Comandante Esther's address to the federal Chamber of Deputies on March 28, 2001. She said: "They [the legislators] have been able to open their space, their ears, and their hearts to a world that has reason on its side." The heart opens itself to reason. We could be missing the deep implications of the concept "heart" when the women use it. It is the center of life for them, of reason, of memory. Let's not sentimentalize, colonize, or reduce the references to the heart in their discourse as merely emotional, however lovingly we might translate it. This could involuntarily lead to ethnocentric interpretations. When they get together to organize themselves, they say: "*Se siente fuerte nuestro corazon*," "our heart feels strengthened" (personal communication).

At the Summit one of the documents states: "We propose ourselves to reconstruct our own identity reserving the ancient knowledge of the heart listening to the voices of our ancestors as well as our spiritual voices . . ." (60).

Interconnectedness of all Beings: Mode of Being in the World

The world, for the Mesoamericans was not "out there," established outside of and apart from them. It was within them and even "through" them. Ac-

tions and their circumstances were much more imbricated than is the case in Western thought where the “I” can be analytically abstracted from its surroundings. Further, the body’s porosity reflects an essential porosity of the cosmos, a permeability of the entire “material” world that defines an order of existence characterized by continuous transit between the material and the immaterial. The cosmos emerges literally, in this conceptualization, as the complementarity of a permeable corporality. Klor de Alva writes: “the Nahuas imagined their multidimensional being as an integral part of their body and of the physical and spiritual world around them” (1988). He adds that the “conceptual being” of the Nahua was much less limited than that of Christians at the time of the Conquest and more inclined toward forming “a physical and conceptual continuum with others, with the body and with the world beyond it” (ibid.).

In the words of Comandanta Esther, earth is life, is nature, and we are all part of it. This simple phrase refers to the interconnectedness of all beings in the Mesoamerican cosmos (Lopez Austin 1984). Beings are not separable from each other. This basic principle has been found consistently within contemporary indigenous medical systems and also in the first historical primary sources (Lopez Austin 1984). This principle creates a very particular form of human collectivity, with hardly any individuation (Klor de Alva 1988). The “I” cannot be abstracted from its surroundings. There is a permanent transit between the inside and the outside (Marcos 1998). Lenkersdorf (1999), interprets an expression of the Tojolabal language: “*Lajan, lajan aytik*” that can mean “*estamos parejos*,” meaning “we are all subjects.” According to Lenkersdorf, this expresses the “intersubjectivity” basic to Tojolabal culture. This also brings us back to the preferred term of the indigenous women mentioned above. Their insistence on parity (*caminar parejos*, *la paridad*) and not on equality means that they are drawing from their common heritage alternative concepts for gender equity that fit better within their cosmovision.

Looking over these few pervasive spiritual and cosmological references, reproduced anew by the indigenous women in the political struggles of contemporary Mesoamerica, it is this one that seems to be at the core: the interconnectedness of everyone and everything in the universe. “Earth does not belong to us, it is we that belong to earth” a Zapatista said recently. The intersubjective nature of men and women interconnected with the earth, sky, plants, and planets. How else can we understand the defense of earth “that gives us life, that is the nature that we are” of Comandanta Esther facing the legislators? How else to interpret that *mandar obedeciendo* is not an imposition of one over another? That the “we” is also “I”? That communities, as collective subjects, reflect a unity?

Final Reflections

Indigenous women's initiatives to recover their ancestral spiritual legacy are a decolonizing effort. Through a deconstruction of previous captivities, they recreate a horizon of ancestrally inspired spirituality. They lay claim to an ethics of recovery while rejecting the violence of subjugation suffered by their ancestors within the spiritual and cultural domain.

NOTES

- 1 Translated by Sylvia Marcos and Rafael Vizcaíno. The original is as follows: "... triste iba a estar el mundo siempre parado en el antes y nunca llegando al después. . . / según contó hace ya muchos años el viejo Antonio. . . y fue danzando que los dioses primeros, / los que nacieron el mundo, pusieron el tiempo en movimiento, y así nació el después, al que / hay que caminar siempre regresando al antes para poder avanzar."

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The Metaphysics of Decolonization: Healing Historical Trauma and Indigenous Liberation

Natalie Avalos

ABSTRACT: Decolonization is synonymous with liberation. It is invoked in multiple overlapping geopolitical projects that demand both the undoing of imperial-colonial structures and the amelioration of their effects. In his essay “Decolonizing Western Epistemology/ Building Decolonial Options,” Walter Mignolo describes decoloniality as a double-faced concept. Decolonization is a geopolitical project while decoloniality is an epistemological, political, and ethical process that enables decolonial futures (Mignolo 2011, 20). In this way, decoloniality is an analytical that critiques coloniality but also a generative utopian project that relies on decolonial epistemologies to materialize these futures. Like settler colonialism, coloniality is a structure that exceeds colonization and capitalism, expressing itself as modernity. It is the epistemic and hermeneutical processes of decoloniality that reveal ways of living and being—what Mignolo calls “living in harmony and reciprocity”—that ultimately build a nonimperial, noncapitalist world (Mignolo 2011, 25). In this article I put decolonial theory in conversation with Indigenous articulations of decolonization and religious life to illustrate what Indigenous decolonial futures may look like. I argue that reclamations of Indigenous metaphysical life regenerate Indigenous ontologies (intersubjective personhood) in ways that not only secure decolonial futures but also heal historical trauma, which can be understood as ontological dispossession.

KEYWORDS: decolonization, healing historical trauma, Indigenous religious traditions, metaphysics, decolonial futures

Intro–Decolonization

DECOLONIZATION IS SYNONYMOUS with liberation. It is invoked in multiple overlapping geopolitical projects that demand both the undoing

of imperial-colonial structures and the amelioration of their effects. In his essay “Decolonizing Western Epistemology/Building Decolonial Options,” Walter D. Mignolo describes decoloniality as a double-faced concept. Decolonization is a geopolitical project while decoloniality is an epistemological, political, and ethical process that enable decolonial futures (Mignolo 2011, 20). In this way, decoloniality is an analytical that critiques coloniality but also a generative utopian project that relies on decolonial epistemologies to materialize these futures. Like settler colonialism, coloniality is a structure that exceeds colonization and capitalism, expressing itself as modernity. It is the epistemic and hermeneutical processes of decoloniality that reveal ways of living and being—what Mignolo calls “living in harmony and reciprocity”—that ultimately build a nonimperial, noncapitalist world (Mignolo 2011, 25). In this article I put decolonial theory in conversation with Indigenous articulations of decolonization and religious life to illustrate what Indigenous decolonial futures may look like.

While Indigenous movements are generally driven by the material, geopolitical goals of decolonization (land back), decoloniality as a process is also present, particularly within the purview of religious/cultural reclamation. Contemporary discourse on decolonization in a Native and Indigenous context describes it as a geopolitical project necessitating structural change, specifically Native sovereignty, and the return of Native lands to Native peoples (Tuck and Yang 2012). Decolonization is understood here as a project that dismantles empire in its many forms, requiring a large-scale mobilization of the dispossessed. While decolonization is not a metaphor, its praxis includes the transformation of institutions and ideologies that enable Indigenous liberation (Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird 2005). Thus, it entails processes: renaming, claiming, and discarding. In this way, Indigenous decolonial praxis is resonant with what Mignolo theorizes as decoloniality.

While decolonization has been discussed as an epistemological project in an Indigenous context, it is more often articulated as necessitating a shift in worldview, or rather a return to an Indigenous one (Deloria 1994). Indigenous decolonization is structural, psychological, ethical, but also metaphysical. In this sense, liberation relies on a transformed experience and comprehension of oneself in relation to a greater reality. In this article I explore how the immaterial dimension of decolonization is negotiated through the regeneration of Indigenous metaphysical worlds. I argue that these reclamations of Indigenous metaphysical life regenerate Indigenous ontologies (intersubjective personhood) in ways that secure decolonial futures. In addition, I argue that the return to ceremonial life can heal historical trauma, which can be understood as the ontological dispossession wrought by coloniality.

Settler Colonialism, Coloniality, and Decolonial Praxis

According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith the assertion that Native peoples were primitive in contrast to the ‘civilized’ West provided the rationale for imperial projects in Oceania and beyond (Smith 2012). In this sense, the imperial move to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands, resources, and labor operates materially but also at the level of epistemology. In the U.S. colonial order, epistemic violence initially expressed itself through theological claims that Native religious worlds were heathen, even evil. The first settlers were Christians who theorized that Indigenous peoples had no religion, no legitimate metaphysic from which they could justify their politics and claims to land (Maldonado Torres 2014a). As the colonial project developed into the modern one through the age of Enlightenment, reason became the primary factor in evaluating not only social and political differences, but also human capacity (subjectivity). European definitions of humanity contingent on the ability to reason birthed contemporary forms of racialization. “To refer to the indigenous as subjects without religion removes them from the category of the human. Religion is universal among humans, but the alleged lack of it among natives is not initially taken to indicate the falseness of this statement, but rather the opposite: that there exist subjects in the world who are not fully human” (Maldonado-Torres 2014b, 641). This perceived lack of subjectivity or humanness is the central justification for the settling of the Americas and the exploitation and subjugation of its peoples. As the enlightenment project developed, an anthropological logic replaced a religious one, the perception of Native peoples morphed from being ungodly pagans to primitive expressions of the human (Maldonado Torres 2014a).

Like settler colonialism, coloniality is a structure not an event; it exerts its power through politics but also persons—through racial grammars that define entire peoples and reshape their self-perceptions (Wolfe 2006; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Fanon 1967). The colonized, as subjects of empire, become estranged from their own cultural forms, which have either been destroyed or are reviled. The civilizing projects imposed on Native peoples, forced education and missionization, aggressively disrupted their relationships to sacred worlds and their attendant ontologies. Lakota scholar, Vine Deloria, Jr., understands this metaphysical estrangement as the primary cause of social disempowerment saying:

Believing in nothing, we have preempted the role of the higher spiritual forces, by acknowledging no greater good than what we can feel and touch. The change of living conditions experienced by Indian people in the last century also has a great deal to do with the erosion of our spiritual powers. Wrenched from a free life where the natural order had to be understood and obeyed, confined within a foreign educational

system where memorization and recital substitute for learning and knowledge, each generation of Indians has been moved farther and farther away from the substance of the spiritual energy that once directed our lives. (Deloria 2006, xviii)

Settler colonialism has produced a de-sacralized world; one devoid of any coherent morality, where only material life and its consumption matters. Western materialism and its attendant derision of the immaterial, not just in spiritual power but in all forms of respect for the numinous, has left Native peoples existentially estranged from one another and the spirit world. Native peoples in the Americas generally understand the universe as alive and sentient—all phenomena in it are understood to be a distinct expression of life force, or spirit. Human and other-than-human persons, such as plants, animals, rivers, winds and mountains, are material expressions of spirit. In this sense, material life is not inert, it is teeming with life, conscious awareness and thus, intersubjective (having a shared consciousness). This spiritual dimension of the universe is often referred to in a U.S. Native context as the spirit world.

This existential estrangement produces a collective ontological wound, but also a socio-political one. Ceremonial life exists for multiple purposes, healing but also deep communion with the spirit world, who is understood to guide and advise its peoples. In this context, medicine persons developed spiritual insights through these experiences to benefit others in the tribe. Ceremonial life was the experiential field for all human inquiry but also the primary vehicle for human and social development. Deloria understands this loss as a deep socio-political setback: “We no longer depend on the presence and wisdom of elders who can consult with the spirits and give us their counsel when making important decisions” (Deloria 2006, xviii). The erosion or in some case total loss of ceremonial life has left many Native peoples philosophically adrift without the community directives that the immaterial world can provide. The ontological impacts of this estrangement are described by Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred as a “lack of conscience and consciousness,” that result in a “deep pool of internal suffering,” which at its root “is alienation—separation from our heritage and from ourselves” (Alfred 1999, 12). While he concedes that the diversity among Indigenous peoples is great, he argues that they share a common value, “a commitment to a profoundly respectful way of governing based on a world view that values autonomy but also recognizes a universal interdependency and promotes peaceful coexistence among all the elements of creation” (Alfred 1999, 14).

These observations resonate with what decolonial scholar, Nelson Maldonado-Torres calls the coloniality of being—the lived experience of coloniality. Coloniality can be understood as a system of global capitalism and political domination operationalized through race. It is not just economic dispossession but “a logic, metaphysics, ontology, and a matrix of power

that can continue existing after formal independence and desegregation” endemic to “Western civilization” and “Western modernity” (Maldonado-Torres 2016, 10). The colonial relation is ontological; it reshapes the subjectivities of both the colonized and the colonizer (Fanon 1967; Césaire 2000). Colonial subjects are perceived to have no ontological capacity (to reason or feel), their metaphysical systems obliterated by the civilizing project (Fanon 1967, 110). Thus, the struggle for liberation is hampered by an ontological double bind in which both access to traditional lifeways and normative social acceptance through assimilation are foreclosed.

This double bind results in internalized racism, feelings of inferiority, and other forms of internalized and interpersonal violence—what researchers have come to understand as historical trauma (DeBruyn and Brave Heart 1998). Thus, the struggle for decolonization must be waged on the psychological/spiritual and ontological levels as well. Anticolonial scholar, Frantz Fanon, argues that the colonized must recognize their own value, their own self-worth on their own terms (Fanon 1967, 229). They cannot expect that the colonial powers that be will ever recognize or grant them full humanity. They must rediscover their own agency, identities and make themselves anew by their own community logics. We can understand decolonial praxis in this context as the capacity to reclaim individual/community power and determine one’s future. In this way, decoloniality is a living praxis, a way of being in the world. Echoing Mignolo and Fanon, it is a generative project, a making anew. Indigenous liberation has been theorized by Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson as a project of resurgence, entailing reclamations of language, lifeways, and relations (Simpson 2001). Alfred argues Native nationhood can be secured through the praxis of peaceful co-existence with settler states. However, this can only be achieved through *regeneration*—what he calls a “self-conscious traditionalism”—or a traditionalism that is consciously re-constructed to embrace Indigenous concepts of what is right and just, such as a respect for land and all relations, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Alfred 1999, 16).

The study of religion has often alluded to religion’s role in world making—how one orients oneself in relation to the cosmos. In this article, I discuss Native world-making through reclamations of ceremony in transnational or ‘urban’ contexts. I understand these reclamations of religious life as a deep reorienting of self/community to the spirit world and the web of relationships that come with it. This praxis not only facilitates human development, in the sense of existential purpose or teleology, but restores right relations with the larger social body of human and other than human persons. Moreover, the return to ceremonial life articulates an intersubjective teleology that is agential and healing, contributing to a larger metaphysical process of decolonization that can transform the relations of power of our social world. When we think of decolonization in these terms, as not

just material but instead mediated by the immaterial, the possibilities for healing and resurgence are exponential. In this context, if we think of decolonization as mediated by the immaterial then maybe we should think in terms of metaphysical sovereignty as well—a kind of sovereignty that is not just geopolitical but is rooted in intersubjective relationships to others, land, cosmos.

For Native people, decolonization requires cultural recovery wherein one reconnects to their place in the world, enabling one to know one's self in relation to others and ultimately understand what one's purpose and responsibilities are. Native resurgence necessitates a journey similar to the one traditionally pursued in conversation with the spirit world for spiritual wellbeing and personal growth.

Native Metaphysics

In a Western philosophical context, Martin Heidegger theorized the nature of being as a corrective to the privileging of epistemology after the Cartesian turn, which linked subjectivity to rationality. While Heidegger sought to retrieve an ontology that had become overshadowed by the godhead or ontotheology, Maldonado-Torres argues that he ignored the colonial relations of power that shaped the lived experiences of the colonized/racialized, foreclosing their subjectivity: "The absence of rationality is articulated in modernity with the idea of the absence of Being in others. Misanthropic skepticism and racism work together with ontological exclusion" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 252–253). Thus, the coloniality of being can be understood as the underside of Being or the suppressed existence of those exploited through colonial relations of power. Maldonado-Torres links this state of coloniality to Frantz Fanon's concept of the *damné* or the lived experience of the colonized who have no "ontological resistance or ontological weight in the eyes of the white" in an anti-black world (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 253). In the context of coloniality, the *damnés* are those deemed inherently 'killable' or prone to/deserving of violence since they're perceived to lack legitimate subjectivity. For Maldonado-Torres, the real problem of being is the degree to which the experience of coloniality of being is not only ignored but also naturalized.

A singular Native philosophical view cannot be explicated because cosmologies are specific to Indigenous peoples and places. However, Native scholars and communities have described a dynamic metaphysical field to understand the nature of these lifeworlds, which provide a general framework for one. Unlike Western theoretical models, which often posit society or culture as independent from the natural world, Native peoples recognize no such separation (Ingold 1996). Apache philosopher, Viola Cordova described this lifeworld as a matrix of related concepts (Cordova 2007, 61) or

a collection of intersubjective phenomena. A central feature of this matrix is that there is “something rather than nothing” (Cordova 2007, 103) meaning the world may have been understood to be amorphous or “a blackness” initially but it was not empty. Its primary substance was a life-giving force that materialized the world, “For the Eastern Apache one of the indefinite contents of ‘the blackness’ is energy, which is depicted by lightning. It is the action of the lightning on the rest of the blackness that brings distinct things into being” (Cordova 2007, 103). This life-force is referred to as *usen* among the Apache and is understood to respond to human propitiation. Cordova asserts, “this mysterious *something* precedes everything else; it serves at the same time as the *ground* of things and the manifestation of itself” (Cordova 2007, 107). In this sense, this mysterious something, or *power* is the primary substance or animating principle that catalyzes material life.

Deloria describes Native worlds as having “a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything had the possibility of intimately knowing relationships because, ultimately, everything was related” (Deloria and Wildcat 2001, 2). The intersubjective relationships between plants, animals, the greater cosmos are possible because they are all expressions of the same essential life force, or spiritual power. In a Lakota context, this life force is immanent in all of creation and referred to as *wakan tanka*, or great mystery, meaning its nature exists beyond human comprehension (Martínez 2004). It is this numinous quality that makes it revered and respected. Deloria asks us to consider the world as a “spiritual universe that has taken on a physical form” instead of a material one that has “accidently produced personality,” contending, like Cordova, that the immaterial world *is* the fundamental ground of reality from which all other life extends (Deloria and Wildcat 2001, 23) In this sense, the material world could be understood as both an expression and conduit for spiritual power. Deloria wrote about ceremonial life for Native peoples to consider its ethical value but also its metaphysical veracity. Spiritual power not only animates the material world, but it is also sentient; it acts as a greater source of intelligence and guidance.

In Indigenous worlds, the ontological question is contingent on relationships, specifically honoring relationships with localized spiritual power. Humans “understood that their task was to fit in to the physical world in the most constructive manner and to establish relationships with the higher powers . . . that created and sustained the universe” (Deloria 2006, xxv). Humans needed to become acquainted with these personas, or spiritual powers expressing itself in specific places to learn what kind of behavior is appropriate and even expected in such places (Deloria and Wildcat 2001). Spiritual power provides peoples with first instructions, which include ceremonies that support human wellness and flourishing but also those that nourish and protect places and their inhabitants, the land more largely. Here, we come to understand the nature of Indigenous ontology but also

epistemology. The journey of knowing the world is a fundamentally spiritual but also an intellectual one; the former provides the ground for the latter. Native peoples discerned an orderly process through empirical observation of the natural world and its expression of spiritual power. Birds, animals, and stones came to people in dreams to offer friendship and advice (Deloria 2006). Medicine people developed spiritual insights through these experiences that would ultimately benefit others in the tribe.

Ceremonies were the institutions in which this knowledge was sought after in a more formalized way. Humans learned how to navigate their own spiritual agency and develop pragmatic knowledge for living dialogically. It is through the guidance of spiritual powers and other beings that people survive and thrive. Cherokee scholar Brian Yazzie Burkhart characterizes Native knowledge as phenomenological in the sense that it is primarily experiential but also relational; knowledge is produced in and through communication with other beings (Burkhart 2004). The Western characterization of the lone philosopher struggling for meaning in isolated contemplation do not apply here. While the anomie of coloniality heavily impacts the colonized, Burkhart urges them to take heart, “we must maintain our relations, and never abandon them in search of understanding, but rather find understanding *through* them” (Burkhart 2004, 21). Individual and collective meaning are made apparent through these relationships. Cordova contextualizes this process of learning as a natural extension of one’s deep orientation in the greater world saying, “In a Native American sense the individual is always part of something greater than himself, a family, a clan, a tribe, a place. He or she can be ‘located’ in a ‘larger whole’ offering him or her ‘a sense of belonging’” (Cordova 2007, 149). In this sense, persons are operating with an enlarged sense of self situated “in an *interrelationship* rather than a mere *relationship* with the ‘other’” (Cordova 2007, 149). Again, we can understand this intersubjective ontology to provide the ground for knowledge production or epistemology.

While an intersubjective metaphysic is generally shared among Native peoples, it is the differences between them, such as *place* and relationships to the beings in that place (possible sources of *power*), which make them unique. For Deloria, the development of a functional social world depends on individual and collective efforts to honor the needs of the land and the spiritual power immanent within it. These efforts call for ethical praxis driven by what he called the completion of relationship (Deloria and Wildcat 2001), in short, the commitment to care for others, generally through the context of ceremonial life. Again, ontology here is relational and intersubjective. Personhood is understood to be co-extensive with the larger social body of human and other than human persons. It is through the experience of living in an interdependent world that Native peoples understand other beings, mountains, rocks, animals and plants as not only relatives, hence

the often-heard phrase ‘all my relations’ but also co-constitutive of one’s self. Thus, individual and collective identity is mediated by carrying out and honoring one’s responsibilities to the collective, which includes the spirit world. In this sense, personhood is actualized by living out this ethic of stewardship. As persons remain accountable to this commitment, they live out their individual and collective purpose, what we can think of as a Native teleology.

Given these two frameworks, a spiritual something or *power* and shared heritage specific to place, we can understand how Native subjectivity is shaped through ceremonial/religious life. Ceremonies served to mediate life transitions, for instance puberty ceremonies, and so offered new opportunities for knowledge and insight over time. For, Deloria time was more than mere chronology, it provided the possibility for human maturity (Deloria and Wildcat 2001, 25). In short, it is these intersubjective relationships that provide the ground for human and other than human becoming. Ceremony is not a finite and bounded concept, nor experience. It is an experiential field one enters with humility due to a deep recognition that through it time, space, and substance could be altered—ideally, on your behalf. In this way, it is the ultimate expression of human agency. The experience of intersubjective power makes this greater purpose of stewardship experientially clear. In it, one comes to *know* that they *are* (a material expression of) the universe, ontologically. This teleology has no chronology but is instead driven by a sense of perennial mutuality. The ethics of this telos are intrinsic and come to be known primarily through the body in sacred or ceremonial contexts. The understanding that one’s very existence is dependent on the health and wellbeing of the land is *realized* on a cellular level.

Native Religious Life and Healing Historical Trauma

In this section, I return to the concept of world-making as a return to sacred living that takes place in ‘urban’ spaces and expresses itself not only symbolically and materially, but also metaphysically. Native scholars and people have defined their religious traditions as dynamic, changing over time based on the needs of the society (Deloria 1994; Cajete 2000). Indigenous peoples operationalize religious action as an expression of survivance but also refusal—a refusal to give up their lifeways and claims to their lands in the face of ongoing settler colonialism (Simpson 2014). This refusal is most powerfully expressed when Indigenous populations defy racialized characterizations of their lifeways and continue to live and act in ways that accord with the ethics and realities embedded in their respective metaphysical worlds. These refusals affirm their humanity in the face of colonial dispossession but also reorient them to an intersubjective metaphysic (and teleology). Indigenous metaphysical worlds are a critical source of personal and collective power.

They also act as a generative site for decolonial possibility in Native and Indigenous life. Directed acts of propitiation are understood to transform material conditions, in this way they could be understood as decolonial praxis. When we think of decolonization in these terms, as not just material but instead mediated by the immaterial, we can understand the value of religious refusal.

The state of Indigenous religious life on turtle island varies widely. The existential estrangement from an intersubjective ground has been catastrophic for many Native peoples; it forecloses opportunities for inner knowing, but also the actualization of teleological goals. In many major metro areas urban Indian life is generally thriving. When you consider that nearly seventy percent of Native peoples in the U.S. live in ‘urban’ spaces the question of identity and nationhood becomes fraught. Urban Indian centers were created to meet the social, physical, and spiritual needs of these people, as well as advocate for them in the face of continued racism and other forms of violence. These spaces nurtured what some of my interlocutors called “Indian way” family, knitting together “kin” for those who may be estranged from their immediate families and/or living far from their home nations. Community leaders that came of age during the civil rights and then Red Power activism of the 1960s and 70s understood the immediate needs of urban Indians and helped build the Indian services that exist today. In my ethnographic work with urban Indians in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico I met a handful of people who were inspired to do this kind of work. One of my consultants, Gregory Gomez (Mescalero and Lipan Apache) was a Vietnam vet, social worker, and one such community leader who now lives in Albuquerque. He says:

Coming to the early part of the 1940s a lot of the Indian men go to war, they come back home and all of the sudden they’re not willing to put up with the bullshit of the racism and bigotry that they grew up with because they went off to war. They had been willing to lay their lives down and all of a sudden same old same old.

When I started working for the federal civil service in ‘75, I could go to Boston and call the police department and ask, “Where’s the Indian center?” I already knew where the center was but I asked. So, an Indian person can leave home and not even know anybody in Dallas or Boston and know there was going to be an Indian center and an Indian community somewhere, an Indian bar and maybe an Indian church. [S]o you have a lot of Indian people in, I’ll say Dallas because that’s where I was mostly involved in the Indian community, you have 240 different tribes represented that come together for some of those activities that I’m talking about. That’s when we would all support each other as family.¹

City life sometimes only exacerbated issues created by coloniality: poverty,

insecure employment/housing, discrimination, incarceration, and historical trauma. While there were still tensions over their differences, there was a concerted effort by community leaders to build Native spaces to support one another. These efforts were driven by shared religious values that recognize a sense of responsibility to others and bridged the differences between them.

Native scholars and tribal origin stories note complex histories of migration, the birth of new traditions, as well as their dynamic survival over the millennia. Shawnee/Sac and Fox/Muscogee Creek/Seminole historian, Donald Fixico describes the structural upheavals directed at Native peoples that produced new cultural forms and associations in cities:

During the postwar years, the pressures of the urban mainstream forced many Indians to rely on survival skills and basic traditional values. Like their ancestors who had learned to function in communities on the plains, in the woodlands, and other environments, Indians formed enclaves in the cities. . . . Survival schools, church activities, dance clubs, arts and crafts associations, and athletic teams exemplified urban Indian organizations that fostered a form of pan-Indianism. (Fixico 2000, 5–6)

Native religious life thrives in urban spaces due to an internal cultural logic of community building born out of dynamic adaption. Sacred spaces in the city are cultivated through powwows, backyard sweat lodges, or even collectives strategize around Indian rights and land protections. These city-centered Native social networks have been theorized as “hubs” (Ramirez 2007). These networks not only support the retention of Indian identity but also tribal connection to home communities on reservations. In other words, there is no discrete separation in urban and reservation communities in the U.S. but instead two-way cultural flows through hubs, which offer a locus of community in cities with spokes stretching out to multiple tribal homelands. Native identity is maintained through these social hubs but also through the reprise of religious life in its inter-tribal expression (Kelley 2015).

In my experience doing ethnographic fieldwork with urban Indians in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, what constitutes ceremonial or religious life is quite diverse—the common denominator: they all entail a deep intersubjective communion with the human and/or the other than human community. Transnational inter-tribal spaces meet personal needs to connect with others who share a similar worldview, values, and experiences, but also a sense of solidarity. Native Americans represent roughly two percent of the U.S. population. Urban Indian inter-tribal spaces assert to the greater world that they are still here, despite their social/political marginalization, and that they will honor their own Native-specific lifeways, even if their presence is illegible to the majority population. Transnational spaces cultivate what Winnebago scholar Renya Ramirez calls transnational spirituality, where peoples from

diverse backgrounds acknowledge and grieve the violence of colonialism wrought upon Indigenous peoples, particularly women. Including spirituality in group spaces is understood as a decolonial move “restoring and recovering Native spiritual practices becomes central to Indians’ assertion of our right to maintain our own cultures, identities, and tribal nations” (Ramirez 2004, 112). Healing from this trauma as a community empowers Native women to, “potentially become politicized and begin to change the world around them.” As Kelley notes, Native American resistance is endemic to urban identity and survival (Kelley 2015). Their existence is a testament to not only resistance but a larger cultural shift towards decolonization that expands further through their refusal to give up their religious lifeways.

Native American religious traditions do not center on churches or a written text and associated dogma from which to teach its adherents. They are based on relationships to land and spiritual power as well as origin stories and the myriad narratives that have developed over time within a particular tribe or community. These traditions are recognized as lifeways passed down for generations that can often only be understood over the course of one’s life, unfolding through experiential interpretation. Native American religious practice thrives in urban/transnational spaces like Albuquerque, due to an increasingly hemispheric inter-tribal identity that unites urban Indians from diverse backgrounds (from both North and South of the U.S./Mexico border) in their struggle to resist cultural erasure. In these spaces, those with more religious knowledge often share this knowledge with others who may have less. For urban Indians who reside outside of an individual Native nation yet continue to abide by or re-orienting themselves to an intersubjective metaphysic, a return to or reclamation of ceremonial life is sometimes framed as intentionally decolonial as Ramirez notes above. It is these religious expressions that exemplify the collective right to exist *as Native peoples* that Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls resurgence—the generative culture making that takes place when Indigenous peoples carve out a space to honor and celebrate themselves in ways that also signal their sovereignty (Simpson 2011).

Among my Native American consultants, the regeneration of religious practice, such as smudging, the use of sweat lodges or participation in the Sun Dance, was often framed as a form of decolonization itself. Many cited how a return to Native lifeways had a healing effect in their lives, tethering them to a larger force of creation and kept them grounded in the face of devastating loss and social marginalization. Some urban Indians have no tie to reservations and have been living as refugees from their people for two or more generations. While some of these folks grew up in a ceremonial context, others did not and experienced a period of striving to reconnect both to community and sacred worlds. Ceremonial life may or may not be accessible to these people. Despite this, many have built a relationship to

an intersubjective reality through inter-tribal ceremonial religious spaces, such as a Lakota-style sweat lodge shared by an inter-tribal Native veterans' group or attending 'Big Tipi' (Native American Church) ceremonies outside of the city limits. For instance, Broderick Wood (Diné) a carpenter living in Santa Fe grew up attending 'Big Tipi' ceremonies, also known as 'peyote meetings' on the Navajo reservation but has been living in urban contexts his entire adult life. These meetings are a relatively new expression of Indigenous religion, north of the U.S./Mexico border. He explains that our deep connection to all of creation is innate and can be accessed anywhere one lives. We need not *learn* to be spiritual because we are born with this connection. It is just a matter of recognizing what this feeling is and calling it forth when necessary.

For those that had been estranged from ceremonial life, it may also look like making yearly pilgrimages to a queer women of color Sun Dance, being a water protector, making clay pottery, or even tending to the variegated life of your garden. This is the case for Solis Lujan who is Chicana/Mescalero-Chiricahua Apache/Taos Pueblo. She lives in Santa Fe but was raised in East Los Angeles by a Zapotecan grandmother, mestizo grandfather, Chicano mother, and a Taos Pueblo/Mescalero-Chiricahua Apache father. She tried unsuccessfully for years to gain tribal enrollment at Taos Pueblo. While she was disappointed that she and her sister Mitra could not make a 'home' in this Native nation, she came to realize that the earth and the spiritual power immanent within it were her 'home.' In the 70's, Solis joined a spiritual community that used 'plant medicine, such as ayahuasca and other entheogens to further explore the nature of reality. It was through the use of these medicines she became the "most spiritually connected" and aware of "this thing called God that I see is the essence of the creation of our known universe . . . that was God to me."² The groundwork for her religious life was her grandparent's "love of nature, their love of plants, animals, the dirt, the planet . . . their love of outer space. . . . And a spirit of giving, my grandmother gave and gave and gave to those that needed it." Her grandmother was a curandera—a traditional Indigenous medicine person—who had a large community following, and her grandfather, a devoted Catholic, assisted in her curings.

Among the Native peoples I got to know in the practice of research, many were motivated to reconnect with ceremonial or some form of religious life by a deep need for healing and community. Developing a deep relationship with this sacred world is dire for the bulk of those I spoke to, particularly those who struggled with alienation. For those that do not have close ties to family or reservation networks, finding where they fit in a world they could never really assimilate to was fraught. Many, particularly boarding school survivors, relocation participants, and veterans were living with layers of trauma. Some pursued ceremonial life to specifically ameliorate the

effects of historical trauma—an aggrieved form of PTSD that is compounded by continued forms of structural violence (Brave Heart 1998). Gregory Gomez, mentioned above, participated in an all-Native Veterans talking circle that was initially developed in the 1990s. He is often invited to give talks to VA administrators outlining the specific needs of Native vets. The talking circle has ultimately been an integral part of his healing and recovery, not only from the PTSD incurred in war, but also from the historical trauma he knows has been passed down for generations. Gregory took advantage of the various forms of therapy offered by the VA for his PTSD. He found the talking circle most helpful:

The talking circle group was, is, and continues to be and will be my favorite. We can sit and talk. We can sit in silence. And we have a commonality of Indian people who walk the walk. It became a band of brothers who had cultural similarities, even though we're from different tribes. But we had the commonality of culture, of dealing with the system. And then our spirituality. I would say 99.9% of the men, if not 100%, who were there from the very beginning were very spiritual people, medicine people. We all have had elders who are medicine people in their own way, recognized that way, so when I go to a talking circle even today, there's a sense of I can come in and rest. I don't have to watch my back.³

They, like other urban Indian groups, formed a family through this hub that related through their shared experience of being veterans with PTSD. Their shared religious ethics, a sense of spiritual integrity and social reciprocity enabled them to form an inter-tribal space of healing and solidarity.

While some researchers have framed historical trauma as a response to a 'big event' for instance, an act of physical genocide, such as massacres of hundreds of its citizens by U.S. troops, researchers working with Native peoples found that trauma resulted from both the 'big event,' but also the enduring forces of structural violence that have remained for centuries (Gone 2009). In the U.S. and Canada, federal Indian policy enacted both extermination and assimilation policies, in essence genocide and ethnocide, to permanently subjugate and eliminate Native Americans as a political threat (DeBruyn and Brave Heart 1998). Historical trauma provides a framework for understanding the ways these policies, such as forced removal from their lands, compulsory boarding schools, and coerced conversion through missionization put Native peoples at higher intergenerational risk for poor mental health. Native researchers, who worked with Native peoples in a clinical context, recognized Native and Indigenous descendent peoples did not respond well to traditional forms of Western therapy because it failed to consider their *experience* as peoples who are inherently connected to all creation (Duran 2006). They began to understand how colonization has engendered an epidemic of domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide

and depression within Native America (Brave Heart 1998). The work of these pioneering researchers, like psychologist Eduardo Duran and Lakota clinical social worker Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, recognized that traditional methods of healing and ceremony in addition to the re-emergence of other Native religious/traditional practices ameliorates or even eradicates the symptoms of historical trauma.

One Native community center attributes the decrease in violent crimes in their Albuquerque neighborhood to the creation and use of a community sweat lodge. La Plazita Institute is a grassroots organization that serves the local Native and Chicanx community by holding community meetings and workshops, connecting residents with local services, running several large community gardens and mentoring youth, particularly former gang members and the formerly incarcerated. Some of these men and women had spent decades in and out of the system and struggled to find social and economic stability. La Plazita is located in the South Valley, an unincorporated area that borders Albuquerque's southwest side. This neighborhood was initially settled in the 18th and 19th c. by Diné (Navajo) *genízaros*, a Spanish colonial caste of detribalized enslaved peoples (Magnaghi 1990). These peoples became farmers, and many properties still sit on vast lots with large gardens or small crops. Their director, Albino Garcia who is Chicanx/Apache, was inspired to open the institute after he was released from a long stint of incarceration and became a Sun Dancer. At that time, he was also apprenticed into the Lakota sweat lodge tradition by Lakota religious leader Leonard Crow Dog. The primary objective of La Plazita is providing a spiritual, social, and economic base for the surrounding urban Indian and Chicanx peoples. They hold weekly sweat lodges and host a group of curanderas monthly, who provide spiritual cleanses.

La Plazita runs several farming spaces throughout the South Valley where participants are taught to care for and work with the land—in essence, to become its stewards. They sell the resulting produce at local farmers markets and direct the monies to La Plazita's cultural works. Several participants I spoke with attested to the transformative quality of working with the land, reconnecting with their Indigenous identities, and redefining themselves as stewards of their community. They were profoundly changed by the mentoring provided, seeing the ways the facilitators waged power and sought to empower them and others there. Several of these men were most impacted by the sweat lodge. This was the case for Tomas Martinez, who went through the program at La Plazita after decades of dealing drugs, heroin addiction, and periodic incarceration. He now works as one of its facilitators. He initially struggled to see himself as someone who could help others. Once he started to participate in the sweat lodge, his transformation began:

So, I came, and I sat down, and I talked to Albino. I knew I was a Chicano and an Indio, but I had never really got into my roots. I mean I had never really gone back to 'em and done anything with it. So, when I started working here through work study and started working with these youth . . . and I did the sweat lodge. That thing saved my life. It changed me completely. You know, cleansing myself inside the mother's womb. Something I always tell everybody, 'You know what? You have to find a spiritual—something, it's gonna change you, because we can't do it alone.' You know, ex-convicts, addicts cannot do it alone. I don't care who you are, I'm saying you have to find something that's gonna help you. And that helped me. It changed me; it changed me for the better.⁴

He began to recognize that a greater power was there to help and support him. He said that after all the damage he had done—the “evil” he had visited upon his community—he should be dead. Yet, he was not. La Plazita has given him a new purpose in life. He sees himself as a warrior. Not by fighting the law or rivals but fighting for his people, as their steward and protector.

Historical trauma is a relational wound. It results from the unjust use of power, such as acts of genocide but also from the ontological ruptures of epistemic and social dispossession. Thankfully, healing historical trauma is also relational. Since Native peoples understand themselves as members of a larger social body, Native clinical researchers have generally treated it through the restoration of healthy relationships to self and others, human and other-than-human (Brave Heart 1998). Researchers built modules of wellness that focused on reconnection to one's traditional practices and metaphysical conceptualizations, which have proven to be effective in healing this kind of trauma. Indigenous definitions of healing speak of coming back into balance, or the restoration of self-identity that exists in proper relationship within spatial, human, and ecological communities (Crawford O'Brien 2008). For the urban Indians described above, spiritual, emotional and physical survival is made possible through the restoration to an intersubjective metaphysic. When Native peoples, urban or reservations, revitalize relationships with one another, the land, and spiritual power, they are exercising a decolonial praxis that heals by reorienting them to a greater intersubjective world. They are making themselves anew, by remembering who they really are as intersubjective persons.

Conclusion

While the internal logic of Native religious life is to function in right relationship with the greater community through shared ceremonial cycles, Native peoples in urban and transnational spaces take refuge in the spirit world in unique ways. Their religious praxis both refuses the epistemic and ontolog-

ical dispossession of coloniality but also acts as a generative force, healing ontological wounds and cultivating metaphysical liberation. For centuries, Native peoples have organically refused coloniality by returning to their intersubjective metaphysical lifeways. These refusals affirm their humanity but also act as a decolonial praxis that operates through the immaterial realms to restore the material one. The return of personhood brings strength and healing but also the call to steward—to act as responsible citizenship in one's own community. As Native peoples regain the equilibrium that comes through religious praxis, the social world regains its equilibrium as well. Religious praxis ameliorates the alienation of living transnationally but also redirects collective power to the regeneration of shared sacred directives, teleological goals that have exponential, if not unknown, material outcomes. In this way, the restoration of an intersubjective metaphysic enables urban Indians to refuse cultural loss and act in solidarity with other Native peoples to generate a decolonial future.

NOTES

- 1 Interview with Gregory Gomez, January 24, 2013.
- 2 Interview with Solis Lujan, April 12, 2012.
- 3 Interview with Gregory Gomez and Will Naranjo, September 28, 2012.
- 4 Interview with Tomas Martinez, September 9, 2012.

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Decolonizing Blackness, Decolonizing Theology: On James Cone's Black Theology of Liberation¹

Eduardo Mendieta

ABSTRACT: James H. Cone is without question the most important Black Theologian of the last century in U.S. theology. This essay is an engagement with his work, focusing in particular on the shifts from European theology, in his *Black Theology & Black Power*, to Black Aesthetic Religious production, in *The Spirituals & The Blues*, to *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. The core theme of this essay is the entanglement of spiritual/religious colonization with production/invention of racial hierarchies that then became the crucibles for the forging of racist imaginaries that entailed, authorized, enshrined, and sacralized white supremacy. The Janus face of this alchemy, however, was the production of a black religion of liberation that entailed decolonizing the “blackness” invented by the modern project of religious racist colonization. The essay considers how Cone’s works empowers us to think through the analogies between the process of the colonization of the indigenous peoples of the so-called “New World” and the “enslavement” of African peoples. The similarities have to do with the coupling of the colonization of imaginaries with the imposition of racial imaginaries, i.e. religious conquest is also a racial conquest, and conversely, racial conquest is also a religious conquest.

KEYWORDS: James H. Cone, Black Theology, Black Power, Colonization of Race and Blackness, Slavery, Liberation Theology

I. The Spiritual Colonization of Blackness

THE FRENCH ANTHROPOLOGIST Serge Gruzinski has provided us with some of the most important, judiciously researched, and generative studies of what he called already in his doctoral dissertation from 1986, *the*

colonization of the imaginary. When this pioneering dissertation was translated into English, the original title of *La colonisation de l'imaginaire*, became *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16–18th Centuries*.² The English title may, approximately, be more informative about the contents of the book, for the book deals precisely with the central valley of Mexico, and the Spanish conquest of the indigenous populations in that region. Conquest in contrast to colonization, furthermore, implies a *fait accompli*, rather than a process, and as a putatively accomplished conquest of Mexico, the territory, it insinuates that a life-world ceased to exist and another was imposed. Yet, the erasure of the original “colonization” of the “imaginary” betrays one of the key arguments of the book: that the conquest of the indigenous populations, and Gruzinski is meticulous in noting the diversity of indigenous groups, require a “colonization” of already existing “imaginaries” that were never vanquished, entirely assimilated, and that instead a process of (mis)translation, appropriations, acculturation, and re-semanticizations took place. This process is what we call either syncretization or *bricolage*.

Two important chapters in *La colonisation de l'imaginaire* are chapters five and six, dealing with “The Christianization of the *imaginaire*” and “Capturing the Christian Supernatural,” respectively. Thus, as we read Gruzinski, we come to realize that the colonization of the imaginary is a Christianization of the indigenous imaginary. This means that the colonization of the imaginary is a spiritual conquest, for what we call the spiritual and the religious are part of the “imaginary.” Where there is power, there is either resistance or compliance. What chapter six, and seven as well, show is that the indigenous populations of the central valley of Mexico did was engage in a process of appropriation and (mis)translation of key elements of the Christian imaginary. We may be justified in saying that the indigenous populations engaged in a counter-colonization of the Christian imaginary by forging a new, Nahua-Christian spiritual world, with its own saints, gods, iconography, and transcendent powers. The construction of this new Indigenous-Christian imaginary has not ceased. It is noteworthy that a later book by Gruzinski is titled *La guerre de images de Christophe Colomb à “Blade Runner”* (1492–2019) deals not with a conquest, but an ongoing “war of images,”³ what we can also call a war of icons, an *eikonomachia*. It is important to note that any colonization of any imaginary is also a spiritual colonization, one that is carried out through a ceaseless war of images and icons.

An important, although not fully elaborated, aspect of Gruzinski’s work is to link this ongoing spiritual colonization with the emergence of the “colonial caste system” (*castas*) in the valley of central Mexico, and eventually in what would be called “nueva España.” This caste system aimed to hierarchize the different races/ethnicities that emerged from the processes of colonial *mestizaje*: i.e., mestizos, mulatos, creoles, etc. What Gruzinski fore-

grounds is that the colonization of the indigenous imaginary was part and parcel of the construction of racial/ethnic hierarchies, in which certain race/ethnicities aligned with religious belief, faithfulness, and religious purity. Religious purity, orthodoxy, was pegged to racial purity, to blood purity. Inchoate in Gruzinski's work is the recognition that part and parcel of the colonization of the indigenous imaginary was the imposition of a *racial imaginary*, which most importantly, was emergent in the sixteenth century. Succinctly put, the imposition of a Christian imaginary, i.e., the spiritual colonization of indigenous peoples, went hand in hand, with the imposition of a racial imaginary, i.e., the imposition of a caste hierarchy that chained religion to race/ethnicity. The spiritual colonization of indigenous peoples was also a racial colonization via the invention and imposition of racial/ethnic matrix. *Homo religiosus* was now to be chained to *homo racialis*, to speak along with J. Kameron Carter.⁴ Thus, just as spiritual colonization turned into an *eikonomachia*, racial colonization turned into a war of the representation of race, i.e., what in New Spain were called *castas*. It is not unsurprising that one of the iconographic genres of the colonial period was the representation of the caste system (*pinturas de castas*), and what is peculiar and revealing about these paintings and images is their ironic and Rabelaisian character.⁵

Gruzinski, in other words, allows us to begin to theorize spiritual colonization as being entangled with racial colonization, or more precisely with the invention of a racial imaginary that would have a religious and spiritual underwriting. There is no modern institution that exemplified this most vividly and explicitly than the American institution of slavery. The institution of slavery had its precursors in the *Encomienda* and the *Repartimiento*, Spanish colonial institutions that exploited the labor and bodies of indigenous peoples, using the rhetoric of evangelization, education, and civilizing.⁶ The slave plantation became the stage on which spiritual colonization took place and thus, one in which also a racial imaginary was forged, but now as a racist imaginary. The metastasizing of racial into racist imaginary was enabled, in large part, by the Christianization (and Europeanization) of the imaginaries during the colonial period. This process, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. But just as indigenous peoples resisted and countered their spiritual colonization with their syncretisms and bricolage, slaves in plantations resisted, countered and created their own Black and Christian religion. James H. Cone, like very few theologians of the U.S. and the American in the last half a century, has studied this process of the production of a religion and theology of resistance and liberation out of the experience of slavery and relentless dehumanization. I have used Gruzinski's work as a means to set a stage in which the main protagonist will be Cone, not simply because he was the most important Black Theology in the U.S. of the last century, but also because his work captured something that is not addressed by Gruzinski, namely how enslaved Africans countered their own spiritual and

racist colonization, thus giving birth to a new “Christianity,” a prophetic, liberating, and anti-racist Christianity of the cross as the lynching tree.

This, then, will be the core theme of this essay, namely the process of spiritual/religious colonization as the twin of the production/invention of racial hierarchies that then were weaponized into racist imaginaries that entailed, authorized, enshrined, and sacralized white supremacy. The Janus face of this process, however, was the production of a black religion, and above all spirituality, of liberation that entailed decolonizing the “blackness” invented by the modern project of religious racist colonization.

Thus far I have been glossing Gruzinski’s work in order to argue that there are analogies between the process of the colonization of the indigenous peoples of the so-called “New World” and the “enslavement” of African peoples. The analogies or similarities have to do with the coupling of the colonization of imaginaries with the imposition of racial imaginaries, i.e., religious conquest is also a racial conquest, and conversely, racial conquest is also a religious conquest. The analogies and similarities also extend to the counter and resistance movements by both indigenous and black peoples. If the former produced syncretic, indigenous, religions, the latter produced their own unique brand of black religion(s). Spiritual and racial conquest is also religiogenesis and what we may call a *theomachia* (theomachy), a war of gods: the gods of degradation, coercion and exploitation versus the gods of liberation, hope and sacralizing dignity.

James H. Cone wrote in an important set of essays on “Black Religious Thought in American History” the following, which will provide the guiding thread of this essay: “Black Religious thought in North America achieved its distinctive theological identity in the context of the European enslavement of African people. Unlike Europeans who came to North America in search of freedom in religion and other aspects of life, Africans came on slave ships and were forced to carve out some sense of meaning in the environment of the auction block and the whip.”⁷ Cone is quick to note that slaveholders did not allow slaves to practice their African religions, which they associated with slave insurrectionism; nor did they, at first, allow the Christianization of their slaves, and when they did it was in a highly monitored and curtailed fashion (i.e., slaves could not learn to read, and their religious services had to be monitored closely by whites). Slaves retained, as acts of resistance, some of their African religions, while also noting that the Christianity that they had been colonized with and by, was a slave society serving religion. Thus, as Cone writes: “Black religious thought is neither exclusively Christian (when the latter is defined by the dominant theologies of the West) nor primarily African (when compared with past or contemporary African beliefs). It is both—but reinterpreted for and adapted to the life-situation of black people’s struggle for justice in a nation whose social, political, and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology.”⁸ It is this

neither/nor that has become metonymic in the conjunction of two names: Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, which stand in for the tension between on the one hand appropriation and assimilation, and on the other, rejection and resistance.⁹

In short, the key themes of this essay are colonization and decolonization, imposition and resistance, oppression and liberation, as they are refracted through the unique prism of religion/race or race as religion and religion as race. These themes have been at the core of my education and my scholarship. They have been very existential, i.e., autobiographical, themes, questions, challenges and areas of research. In order to develop my themes and theses, I will first offer a brief sketch of how it was that I came to study at Union Theological Seminary, where James H. Cone became my teacher. I will then discuss the impact his teaching had on me and my work, and in particular, I will rely on a particular experience that in my view exemplified Cone's scholarship and pedagogy, what today we would call a decolonial pedagogy. Then, I will turn to Cone's works of the seventies as exemplars of what I call "decolonizing theology." I will do so in three steps: I will consider Cone's 1970's *Black Theology and Black Power*, then I will turn to his 1972 text, *The Spirituals and The Blues*, which carries forward the project of decolonizing theology as a decolonization of Black spirituality and aesthetics.¹⁰ I should note that I would urge us to take this amazing text as manifesto of a *black aesthetics* of resistance. In a third step, I turn to one of Cone's last books, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, from 2011.¹¹ As I noted above, in Cone's work Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X are treated as metonyms for two "religious" tendencies within Black religious experience and thinking. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* focuses on two synecdoches of black religious experience and thinking: suffering and redemption, on the one hand, and violence and subordination, on the other. I want to end on this note, because I take it that one of the most profound lessons we can learn from the work of James H. Cone, in particular, but also other black religious thinkers, is that racism in the U.S., at the very least, has been accompanied by religious endorsement, condoning, and urging, but also the religious and spiritual resistance, insubordination and vibrant dignifying celebration of Blackness. Just as the spiritual colonization of blackness continues, so does its decolonizing resistance in Black Lives Matter and the Black Church. A note of clarification is in order. Throughout my text I will use "religion" and "spirituality" seemingly interchangeably when referring to Cone's Black Theology of Liberation and its sources because he himself uses the terms interchangeably. Evidently, religion does not exhaust spirituality and spirituality manifests itself in institutional form in the religious music, narratives, poetry, institutions, and rituals that authorities grant and generate. Religion without spirituality is empty and blind, but spirituality without religion (i.e., its social-political-economic institutionalization) is

toothless and solipsistic. In Cone's work, as it will become evident, spirituality is higher than religion and it is the spiritual experience of Africans who were enslaved, and the Blacks that were their children, that nourished their religious creativity and fervor.

II. Coming to Union Theological Seminary

The decade of the Eighties, when I was an undergraduate at Rutgers University, was also a decade of intense activism. We had been militant on behalf of divestment from South Africa. In fact, we pushed Rutgers University to pass several resolutions on divestment, and eventually to divest all of its assets from Apartheid South Africa. We were also active in CISPES (i.e., The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), and the Peace Center, which organized regular teach-ins on the Nicaraguan revolution and the Contra War. We were active in the anti-Nuke movement, also coordinated by the Peace Center. We often organized buses to go down to Washington for Nuclear Freeze demonstrations. We were also active on pushing for changes to the way the campus police dealt with violence against women. We were instrumental in having the university establish a rape helpline and to change the way reporting of rapes was handled by the police. We also made the university secure the dorms, which did not have bars on the windows of first floors (several female students had been raped after their assailant entered their rooms through unsecured windows). These were the years of the Reagan presidency and the United States' involvement in counter-guerilla wars against the Nicaraguan people, the support of the para-military and Contra forces that wreaked havoc on the Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, and Costa Rican peoples, in what eventually was called the Iran-Contra Scandal. While I had some very charismatic teachers, I have to admit that most of my education came from all of this activism, and my college buddies, with whom we did sit-ins, took over buildings, marched down the streets of New Brunswick, New York, and Washington, and with whom I took road trips to visit other universities, to meet other school activists.

By the end of my undergraduate studies, and after a year hiatus dedicated to activism, I decided to attend Union Theological Seminary, at first to study with Cornel West, but then to study with James H. Cone. My involvement with CISPES and my moonlighting studies on the Central American revolutions, led me to recognize that one of the most original, unique, and revolutionary social, religious, intellectual and theological movements to emerge from Latin America during the twentieth century was liberation theology. Here I want to underscore that "theology of liberation" is a metonym, a place holder, for at least three things: a social movement from below, rooted in the Christian Base Communities; a political movement that sought political-economic changes by transforming the Church and its insti-

tutions and at times, as in Nicaragua and El Salvador through intervention in the government, and finally, a theological reformation that began with the motto “orthopraxis before orthodoxy,” or the more legible one: interpret the world and the Gospel through giving priority to the poor. In any event, there was only one place in the United States where one could study “liberation theology,” and that was Union Theological Seminary. This was the famous seminary where Dietrich Bonhoeffer had studied (I had studied his *Letters and Papers from Prison* in college without knowing he had spent time in the U.S., but he was one of my intellectual heroes and a hero of the resistance against Hitler),¹² Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr had taught, and where at the end of the eighties, early nineties, James Cone, James M. Washington, Cornel West, Beverly Harris, taught and where there was a rotating visiting chair, which Gustavo Gutierrez, Enrique Dussel, Edmund Arens, and others had occupied. I was fortunate that I got accepted to study at Union and that at the same time I fortuitously got hired to work in the seminary’s bookstore.

III. James H. Cone: My Teacher

The year I arrived at Union was also the year that Cornel West departed for Yale, to then leave for Harvard. Nonetheless, I was electrified at the possibility of studying with Cone, Washington, Beverley Harrison, James Forbes (professor of homiletics), and later with Enrique Dussel and Edmund Arens, who came to Union as visiting professors. Since my interests were on liberation theology, I focused my studies on what is called “systematic theology,” or what can be called more generally, “philosophical theology.” Of course, I got to study with Cone, and I took two seminars with him. One of the great perks of being at Union is that I could take for credit courses at Columbia University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the New School, and the New York Theological Seminary. And I availed myself of this perk prodigiously.

I should note that while I had attended New Jersey’s largest and flagship State University, Rutgers, I never have had a Black Teacher until I went to Union. There, I was fortunate to develop a nice relationship with Prof. Washington, who was like a walking encyclopedia. He was a church historian and also the editor of Martin Luther King’s indispensable *A Testament of Hope*, an extensive anthology of King’s major writings.¹³ He was a great mentor and friend. Being in Cone’s seminars was electrifying. His seminars were really lectures and public events. I think people from outside the seminar attended his lectures, as there were faces that I only saw on the afternoons when he lectured. Cone’s voice was unique and unforgettable: high pitched, intense, energetic, the pitch rising when he got excited or when he wanted to underscore a point. It was a pallet of tones and affect simultaneously. I think of Cone’s voice as a Van Gogh painting: full of accents, vibrancy, and

urgency. He looked a young ageless. Even decades later, when I got to see him again because we were together on a dissertation committee, he had not changed at all. I heard that he was an avid runner, although I never saw him on a run, and despite the fact that I lived for a couple of years across the Union Quad, where he had his apartment.

I can say with absolutely honesty and without exaggeration that Cone was the most influential teacher in my graduate studies, and second only to a special mentor I had during my undergraduate studies, Stephen Bronner. Cone challenged me to “decolonize my mind.” And in many ways, the work that I went on to do as a scholar has been to follow on the path that Cone sent me on along. Here is how this took place. I had early on decided that my thesis director would be James Cone. I asked him whether he would direct my MA thesis and he agreed. He asked me to write a prospectus, with an annotated bibliography. So, I sat down to this task. I thought I had a great project and a very original idea. I had been studying Foucault since my undergraduate days. In fact, I had reviewed volumes two and three of the *History of Sexuality* for my college newspaper. I also had read in Spanish Foucault’s *Society Must be Defended*, his Collège de France lectures from 1975–1976.¹⁴ This is before there was any project of publishing the courses, and before they began to appear in English translation. I had the idea that I wanted to develop a biopolitical analysis of U.S. Racism; more precisely, I wanted to use Foucault’s idea of biopolitics in order to develop an understanding of U.S. racial hierarchy and white supremacy. I wrote the proposal, included my annotated bibliography, and left it in his mailbox to discuss it in person during his office hours. I remember arriving at his office anticipating with anxiety Cone’s enthusiasm and endorsement. My anticipation was shattered. Without beating around the bush, as the expression goes, Cone said to me, even before I sat down: “Why do you want to write about a white European who has so little to say about your people’s struggles and their own creative accomplishments.” And, then, so that I did not misunderstand him, he said “I certainly don’t have any interest in reading on a French philosopher.” Then, he said, “Why don’t you look into your people’s own intellectual creativity, their own way of analyzing these problems you want to study?”¹⁵

At first, I was stunned and speechless, but almost immediately, a bomb went off in my head, and I saw and understood what Cone meant. I told him I understood and that I would re-write my prospectus. I already had been thinking about a related theme: the concept of the human in Black Theology. At the time, I was interested in the relationship between philosophical anthropology and theology because I had been reading Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel, and in particular their early work from the mid-seventies, when both were working on what they called *Erkenntnis-anthropologie* (knowledge anthropology), which was elaborated in Habermas’s

still important *Knowledge and Human Interest*.¹⁶ In fact, I was of the opinion that every theology is a philosophical anthropology in disguise, not a novel idea considering that this was what Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx also thought. Even when theologians begin their systematic theologies with the doctrine of god, this is really a prologue to the doctrine of the human. I thus wrote my MA thesis under Cone's directorship on "The Concept of Man in Black Theology." Writing this thesis was one of the most exciting and eventually both intellectual and spiritual experiences. I studied W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Chester Himes, Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Morrison, Howard Thurman, Richard Wright but also John Hope Franklin, Eugene D. Genovese, Charles H. Long, Cornel West, Gayraud Wilmore, and many other writers that I had been unfortunate not to have been exposed to as an undergraduate. In the thesis I argued that the anthropology that is implicit in black religious thinking is a negative anthropology, one that matches its negative theology. Positive anthropology and theology belong to a normalizing, regimenting, and policing form of thinking and religion that then sanctions racial hierarchy and racial supremacy. Negative philosophical anthropology, a corollary of negative theology, challenges, questions, and demystified this view of both God and the human. In today's language, I would say that "we have never been human," meaning that our humanity is a project and not a given, especially when certain conceptions of the "human" have been deployed to expel some from the realm of humanity. This is how Cone challenged me to decolonize my mind and shaped the kind of work I did after my graduate studies.

IV. Black Theology as decolonial/decolonizing Theology

Recently, in preparation for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of its publication in 1969, I re-read *Black Theology and Black Power*.¹⁷ The book made some new impressions. The book's urgency, clarity, eloquence and rage remain as relevant as when the book was first written, in the late sixties, and this in many ways is a sad story. I re-read Cone as if he were speaking to me, today, in the twenty-first century, when #BlackLivesMatter is the twin to Black Power. However, there are *three* aspects of the book that struck me in distinct and revealing ways. *First*, I was struck by how "colonized" Cone's text appeared or seemed to read. By this I mean that Cone's theological interlocutors were primarily European Theologians. Here is a partial list of the theologians Cone cites, in many cases, repeatedly, and more often than black writers and sources: Oscar Cullmann, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfgang Pannenberg, Helmut Thielicke, Paul Tillich, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Among the few black writers he quotes are James Baldwin, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Richard Wright. In fact, Camus is cited more often than these three Black Writers. And, as Cone acknowledges himself,

there are no citations of any black women writers. Yes, there are citations to Fanon and Malcolm X. I would say that they are the true interlocutors of this classic text, but they are in this text as if standing in the back of the lecture hall. Cone closes the book by riffing on Fanon, and we now know because of Cone's own 1989 preface to the twentieth anniversary edition that Malcolm X had been the voice in his head challenging him to provide a theological justification for why Blacks should continue to remain Christians, even when Christians and Christendom had, since their arrival to America in slave ships and in iron shackles, betrayed them. Nonetheless, what is thus also noteworthy is how few voices from Latin America and Africa are to be heard in Cone's revolutionary text, a text that is distinctly of the late sixties, when Latin America was also undergoing major revolutionary upheavals.

I want to briefly comment on what I called the "colonized" character of Cone's text. Cone had published in 1968 in an anthology edited by C. Eric Lincoln, the great black sociologist of black religiosity, an essay titled "Christianity and Black Power" (now included in James Cone's *Risks of Faith*).¹⁸ This essay is not simply the precursor of *Black Theology and Black Power*, it is, I would argue, the book's essence distilled into its most lucid and brief articulation. It is as if Cone had said: okay, how do I make this explosive message that I pressurized into a manifesto-like essay both digestible to the academic establishment that needs to hear this message, and that furthermore, will tenure me, and how do I make it intelligible as theology? The fact is that Cone's key issue was expressed and articulated independently of all the European theologians that he marshaled in the book in order to make it "presentable" to the theological establishment. In that sense, then, I do not think that Cone's text was colonized. He already had a decolonial theological agenda that then was dressed in European theological robes. There is, however, one theologian who is neither aleatory nor subservient to Cone's decolonial theological agenda, and that is Karl Barth. I think Barth's resolute, unwavering, uncompromising, loud and clear response to Hitler and to any apologetic tendencies within theology at the time, became his inspiration. Barth's response to the Nazis model for the young Cone how U.S. white supremacy and anti-Black violence had to be resisted, called out, and named for what it was.

The *second* aspect of the book that jumped at me was the way in which the voice of Malcolm X was elided and muted by the metonymic "Black Power." In 1989 Cone wrote in his twentieth anniversary preface to *Black Theology and Black Power*: "It was the challenging and angry voice of Malcolm X that shook me out of my theological complacency. 'Christianity is the white man's religion,' he proclaimed, again and again, as he urged African-Americans to adopt a perspective on God that was derived from their own cultural history."¹⁹ Malcolm X was to Cone what Hume was to Kant, the inspiration for the development of a critical, revolutionary, decolonized,

fully Black theology of liberation. Perhaps, and this is my suggestion, it would be more appropriate to think of Malcolm X as being to Cone what Friedrich Nietzsche became for Christians in general: the philosopher who philosophized with an axe that cut all crosses down, and that demolished all pews, confessionals, and idols. Malcolm X was and remains dynamite. It is significant that it would take Cone more than two decades to come to terms with the significance of Malcolm X as a challenge to Black Christianity. His 1991 book, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or A Nightmare?* in part makes good on a promise that is clearly pulsating quietly throughout *Black Theology and Black Power*: how to respond not just to Black Power but to Malcolm X's prophetic challenge: why remain Christian, when Christianity was so implicated in Black enslavement and their continued dehumanization. Malcolm X had proclaimed something more cataclysmic than what Nietzsche had proclaimed in the nineteenth century. Not only that we had killed God, but that we had to, if we, in general, and Blacks, emphatically, were to be human or be worthy of their humanity.²⁰ As Cone put it: "If God is not for us, if God is not against white racists, then God is a murderer, and we had better kill God."²¹

The *third* and final aspect of the book that really struck me is related to the behind-the-scenes role that Malcolm X plays in *Black Theology and Black Power*, and that has to do with the Black Church. Chapter four begins with the thundering words: "The black church *was born* in slavery. Its existence symbolizes a people who were completely stripped of their African heritage as they were enslaved by "Christian" white man."²² But then, two paragraphs later, Cone thunders again: "The black church *was the creation* of a black people whose daily existence was an encounter with the overwhelming and brutalizing reality of white power. For the slaves it was the sole source of personal identity and the sense of community."²³ Between birth and creation lies the space of human creativity, the space between submission or revolt, enslavement or emancipation. This is the space of human agency, of humans making history, the natal space for the "realization of the eschatological *hope of justice*, the *humanizing* of man, the *socializing* of humanity."²⁴—to quote Cone again. Now, we cannot gloss over what Cone is acknowledging with these sentences. On the one hand, Cone is making explicit that the Black Church is the stigmata, the historical wound, of the stripping away of both Africa and the humanity of the Black African so that they could be turned into slaves, into no-things and no-bodies, as Cone puts it. The Black slave was made through their Christianization, which was the reverse side of their de-Africanization. But, then, blacks throughout the Americas, whether slaves or not, "created" a Black church that became the mark of their own humanity, and in the process they also created a Black Christianity, a truer Christianity that expressed in exalted way Christianity's core message: the inalienable and translucent divinity of every human. Cone argues in *Black*

Theology and Black Power that Black Power is essential to Christianity; in fact, it is the highest expression of its fundamental message: the quest for both freedom and justice. This is why Black Power and Black Theology are two sides of the same quest. In Cone's black theology of liberation, however, and more concretely, Black Theology is Christian Theology as such, at its most biblical and soteriological. The church that black slaves "created" in turn gave birth to a black religion and a black theology that in a feat of alchemy turned a religion of slavery into a religion of liberation. Cone's black theology of liberation is the pursuit of the decolonization of Christian theology and faith for the sake of human emancipation in the name of the *imago dei* of every human, especially of those who are the epiphany of the black Christ.

V. On the Spirituals and Being Blue: Theopoiesis as Anthropopoiesis

Black Theology and Black Power was quickly followed in 1970 by *A Black Theology of Power*, in which Cone set out to offer a "theological" account of black theology, this meant focusing on the distinct aspects of black religious experience that shaped and directed their interpretation of the Christian gospel. From this, perhaps Cone's most impactful books, I want to foreground two chapters that were distinctly important for the later development of black theology of liberation, chapter two ("The Source and Norm of Black Theology"), and chapter five ("The Human Being in Black Theology"). Chapter five is framed around the debate between Paul Tillich's theology of culture and Karl Barth's rejection of the focus on culture in favor of focusing on the kerygmatic dimension of Christianity, i.e., on the biblical proclamation of revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, a revelation that is at the same time the proclamation of salvation. Cone translates masterfully this debate into the debate between the sources for the interpretation of the Christian message and the norm(s) of interpretation of those sources. By talking about "sources" and "norms" Cone is able to demonstrate that the Tillich-Barth debate is about a false disjunction. The proclamation that is the *kerygma* of Christianity is always being interpreted in culture, but those interpretations are guided by a hermeneutical norm, a norm that allows us to distinguish which interpretation ought to be accepted and which to be rejected. Dissolving the false dichotomy between culture and kerygma, allows Cone to turn to what are the sources of black theology and what is its theological norm.

Among the sources of black theology are: black experience, black history, black culture, revelation, scripture, and tradition. Black experience, which is determined by, but not exhausted by white supremacy, is also how black peoples experience their world as a world that is partly of their own making. The black experience is the experience of the celebration of being black in the midst of dehumanization of blacks by a racist social system.

Black history is the history of both defeat and success, of relentless struggle for human dignity; black culture is the product of the interpretation of black experience across black history, which gives voice and expression to that historical experience. Among the names that Cone mentions as being representative of black culture are: LeRoi Jones, Larry Neal, Ed Bulling, as well as Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane. Cone then goes on to show how revelation, scripture and tradition, within black experience, history and culture are read, interpreted and lived through the Bible, as a text of both revelation and liberation, and the Christian tradition of struggle against regimes of oppression, exploitation and dehumanization. This liberating kerygma that speaks prophetically to the black community is succinctly captured in this formulation: "For Christian faith, revelation is an event, a happening in human history. It is God's self-revelation to the human race through a historical act of human liberation."

With regards to the "norm" or "hermeneutical key" of a black theology of liberation, Cone is explicit and clear:

The norm of black theology must take seriously two realities, actually two aspects of a single reality: the liberation of blacks and the revelation of Christ. With these two realities before us, what is the norm of black theology? *The norm of all God-Talk which seeks to be black-talk is the manifestation of Jesus as the black Christ who provides the necessary soul for black liberation.*²⁵

In a word, the hermeneutical key for making sense of both the Christian kerygma and scripture is how Jesus is the black Christ who proclaims black redemption and liberation.

Chapter five, which deals with the inchoate theological anthropology in black theology, takes us several steps farther into the radical and liberating message of the black theology of liberation. Now, it is not simply of deciding what are the sources and interpretative norms of a black theology of liberation, but of deciding on the relationship between theopoiesis and anthropoiesis, that is between god-talk and the building of the pedestal of human dignity, the praxis of humanization. Cone is quick to point out that for Christianity the human is fundamentally defined as free, but a freedom that must be achieved. In Christianity, freedom is the result of a praxis, namely the praxis of liberation from sin, but also the praxis of liberation from the societal conditions that perpetuate sin (where sin is to be understood as failed relationality to God through our relationality to others)²⁶. For Cone the being of the human being as the praxis of liberation to produce freedom is sublimely expressed in the dogma of the human being having being created in God's image, i.e., the dogma *imago Dei*. In the history of Christian theology there has been a lot of debate about what this doctrine means: what does it mean that we are created in the "likeness of God"?

Does it mean that humans share in God's being, or that we resemble God's being in some regards, by similitude or analogy? Here, Cone sides with Bonhoeffer's interpretation of this dogma, meaning that Cone takes it that *imago Dei* ought to be read not as *analogia entis* (God's being and our being are analogous), but as *analogia relationis* (that we relate to God's relation to God's creatures, as God's created creatures, who are related to God in and through their freedom). Cone put it this way: "If the image of God includes freedom [which is defined by Bonhoeffer as a 'God-given relation'] as is definitively implied in the divine-human encounter, then it must also include liberation."²⁷

If *Black Theology and Black Power* is both a manifesto and a prolegomena, then *A Black Theology of Liberation* is the systematic theological articulation of the message of the challenge that black power, resistance, and acts of insubordination present to Christian theology *tout court*. As I have noted above, at the core of *A Black Theology of Liberation* is an articulation of the sources and norm of black theology. One of the sources that Cone identifies is black culture, among which he identifies blues singers. Cone's next book, *The Spirituals and the Blues* from 1972, focuses on the spirituals and the blues as some of the most important cultural and artistic productions of blacks in the United States.²⁸ Following du Bois, Cone thinks that some of oldest and most important expressions of the creative spirit of "black folk" were their music, in particular their spiritual and blues.²⁹ Cone argued that the spirituals, as well as the blues, were a unity music that brings together joy and sorrow, celebration and disappointment, birth and death, subjugation and resistance. They were also a functional and practical music, namely, music that addresses the needs of a needy community. Black music was, and is, a music that is thus also an expression of immediately lived experience, and this means that it is existential music. Black music is also historical and social, for it is the means through which historical knowledge is passed on. Black music is also, and most relevantly, "theological," meaning that the spiritual and the blues are one of the primary ways in which slaves and then freed slaves make sense of their experience and relationship to Christianity.³⁰ It is one way in which blacks engaged in "god talk," what I have called here *theopoiesis*. Indeed, Cone sees both the spiritual and the blues as being profoundly theological, for it is through both that "divine liberation" of the oppressed is expressed; both, additionally, showed "the essence of black religion, that is, the experience of trying to be free in the midst of 'powerful lot of tribulation.'"³¹

There is a beautiful line in Cone's book: "*Black history is a spiritual!*" This line closes a paragraph that serves as a summary of his argument:

Black history then is the stuff out of which the black spirituals were created. But the "stuff" of black history includes more than the bare

historical facts of slavery. Black history is an experience, a soulful event. And to understand it is to know the being of a people who had to “feel their way along the course of American Slavery,” [here Cone is quoting Guy Johnson] enduring the stress and strains of human servitude but not without a song.³²

If the spirituals were the singing of slaves, the blues are the singing of ex-slaves who find themselves putatively free, yet under new conditions of degradation, exploitation, and dehumanization. The “blues” are the follow up, the counter-part, to the spirituals. Cone calls the blues “secular spirituals.” “They are *secular* in the sense that they confine their attention solely to the immediate and affirm the bodily expression of black soul, including its sexual manifestations. They are *spirituals* because they are impelled by the same search for the truth of black experience.”³³

I claimed that Cone’s black theology of liberation is both a decolonization of theology and a decolonization of blackness. I think that while Cone’s first two books engage the former task, *The Spirituals and the Blues* engage the latter, and yet they are inseparably linked in Cone’s entire *oeuvre*. To decolonize theology demands decolonizing blackness and decolonizing blackness demands decolonizing theology because Christianity, a certain version of it, and its gospel were used to justify slavery and to degrade blacks. And yet, as Cone says, black history cannot be simplistically reduced to what whites did to blacks. The turn to black music as possibly the primary way in which blacks under slavery and Jim Crow could poeticize and express their existential anguish and forlornness is to turn towards the locus of black religious generativity, resistance, and self-affirmation. The spiritual and the blues were the “cathedral of sound” to riff on a beautiful expression by Leonard Cohen, in which blacks engaged in the project of wresting and fashioning from a dehumanizing condition what Cone calls “somebodiness,” which meant that blacks were not property or things, but persons, a somebody with dignity, a worth without a price to use Kant’s expression.³⁴

Cone wrote in the preface to the 1986 edition of *A Black Theology of Liberation*, one of the most powerful set of sentences one can write about religion and theology: “Theology is not universal language about God. Rather, it is human speech informed by historical and theological traditions, and written for particular times and places. Theological is *contextual* language—that is, defined by the human situation that gives birth to it.”³⁵ What I have thus far argued is that Cone demonstrates how black music is human speech about God, i.e., theopoiesis, but also about being somebody, being a human being with dignity, i.e., anthropoiesis. More forcefully, Cone shows us how to engage in one is to engage in the other: to engage in God talk is to engage in Human talk, the speech about what it means to be human.

VI. The (Burning) Cross and the Lynching Tree

As a way to conclude, I want to turn to one of Cone's last books, which I want to argue is a sequel to *The Spirituals and the Blues*, namely *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* from 2011. I want to do so because this book continues the project of decolonizing theology as a way to decolonize blackness. To revert back to the language I used at the outset, I want to argue that Cone engages in an *Eikonomachia*, a war of images, which turns out to be a *Theomachia*, a war of gods. Returning to the spiritual and the blues, Cone demonstrates how the slaves and then former slaves interpreted their slavery and lynching as a cross, and, conversely, how Jesus's crucifixion, was a version of being hanged from a tree. The cross was a lynching tree.

According to the Equal Justice Initiative, which published in 2015 "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror" between 1877 and 1950 there were 4,400 lynchings.³⁶ The Equal Justice Initiative, led by Brian Stevenson, also lead the efforts to create the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which opened on April 26, 2018.³⁷ The museum is truly chilling, striking, and arresting. The part of the memorial that is dedicated to the lynchings is made of 800 six-foot metal boxes hanging from the ceiling, each one bearing a plaque inscribed with the name of the black victim, time, and location. To read the plaques, one has look up, to the bottom of the metal box. Lynching, in fact, was "extra-legal punishment sanctioned by the community."³⁸ It would be more accurate to say that lynching was one aspect of a regime of racial terror, which included segregation, treatment as a non-citizen, relentless and sanctioned verbal assault, and quotidian demeaning. In most cases, lynchings were not "extra-legal" as often the police were present. Lynching was essential to the imposition and preservation of a white racial supremacy biopolitical order of racial terror. It was part of a racial war conducted by legal and extralegal means. Indeed, the "lynching tree was the most horrifying symbol of white supremacy in black life. It was a shameful and painful way to die."³⁹ In some cases, lynchings included dismembering the body of the lynched person, and in some others, burnings, after the person had been hanged. In many cases, lynching turned into public events, where bystanders took pictures. Lynchings were public executions, which turned into festivals, worthy of the most horrifying and Goya-Foucault like representations and narrations.

Just as for Cone there is a dialectic between the spiritual and the blues, there is also a dialectic between the cross and the lynching tree, as we saw above. This dialectic is expressed in the following way: "If the God of Jesus's cross is found among the least, the crucified people of the world, then God is also found among those lynched in American history. . . . The final word about life is not death on a lynching tree but redemption in the cross."⁴⁰ Just as Jesus's cross, one of the most shameful ways of being pub-

licly executed during Roman times in Jerusalem, is turned into the glory of the Christ, the lynching tree turns into a cross that reverses the meaning of that shameful and painful way of being killed. One cannot not note that this is a cruel theodicy, for the cross is also the sign of the sacralization of divine violence, a violence nonetheless perpetuated by humans. This is why the cross remains a stumbling block, a paradox, a mystery. Be that as it may, the thrust of Cone's book is to re-center our religious and theological attention on the perpetuation of racial terror after the end of slavery in the U.S., a terror that one can justifiably argue has continued to our day with police violence against blacks and brown peoples.

I want to close by noting the following. There is a noteworthy silence in Cone's otherwise comprehensive treatment of the symbolic and historical meaning of lynching in America, and that is that along with the theater of terror around the lynching tree was also the burning cross of the Ku Klux Klan.⁴¹ White supremacy outfitted itself with a whole iconography of terror that included not just the burning cross but also what they called the blood drop cross (also known as MIOAK, the Mystic Insignia of a Klansman).⁴² Racial terror involves physical violence that is clothed in a semiology of mystification, signification, hate symbols and speech. White racial supremacy involved what I called above an *eikonomachia*: the metal, bleeding cross and the burning cross of the Klan, against the wooden and hanging tree of the black Christian. Analogously, white racial supremacy entailed a theology of racial domination. This white theology of racial supremacy was countered by a black theology of liberation, and this is what I have called here a *theomachia*. As Cone concludes: "The lynching tree is a metaphor for white America's crucifixion of black people. It is the window that best reveals the religious meaning of the cross in our land. . . . Yet, God took the evil of the cross and the lynching tree and transformed them both into the triumphant beauty of the divine."⁴³ But this same cross is the cross that still burns in some places in the US, and where hanging nooses appear in people's yards or the quads of colleges. Perhaps we should talk of the grotesque semiotics of racial hatred. Every *eikonomamchia* is also a *theomachia*.

NOTES

1. I want to thank Marlon Millner, Bennie Niles, Folahan Olowoyeye for their invitation to the "James Cone Conference" that was organized at Northwestern University and the Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary, October 31–November 2, 2019, for which I wrote a paper that I used as the foundation for this much longer essay. The conference was a celebration and look

back at Cone's work. The program of the conference can be found at: <https://jameshcone.northwestern.edu/schedule/>.

2. Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16–18th Centuries*, trans. Eileen Corrigan (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993).
3. Serge Gruzinski, *Images at War. Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner 1492–2019*, trans. Heather McLean (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
4. J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 44.
5. See Ilona Katzew, *Casta Paintings: Images of Race in Eighteenth Century Mexico* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004) and Ilona Katzew, ed., *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici* (Munich: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2017), especially the chapter titled "Paintings of the Land," 277–315.
6. See my essay "'Hacer Vivir y Dejar Morir': Foucault y la Genealogía del Racismo" *Tabula Rasa* 6 (Jan–June 2007): 137–152. Available online at: www.unicolmayor.edu.co/investigaciones/tabularasa.html.
7. James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 85.
8. Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, 86.
9. See *Speaking the Truth*, 103, as well as James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012).
10. James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).
11. James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).
12. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).
13. Martin Luther King, Jr. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches* (New York: HarperOne, 1991).
14. Michel Foucault, "Society Must be Defended" *Lecture at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003). I had picked up in Mexico the translation into Spanish from Italian, of this course, which appeared 1975–1976 with the amazing title *Genealogía del Racismo*. At the time, in the late eighties, the only things we knew of this pivotal course in Foucault's work was the first two lectures, which appeared in the collection *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), under the disarming titled "two lectures." At the time, I already had read Cornel West's brilliant book *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), and had been influenced in particular by chapter two, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" which engaged Foucault, but not Foucault's writing on race, which had yet to appear. There,

West wrote: “*The creative fusion of scientific investigation, Cartesian philosophy, Greek Ocular metaphors, and classical aesthetic and cultural ideals constitutes the essential elements of modern discourse in the West.*” 53. I could not agree more, but I also thought that a certain conception of Christianity was integral to the elements West identifies as being essential to the invention of modern racism.

15. Eventually I did get to write a long essay titled “The Race of Modernity and the Modernity of Race: On Foucault’s Genealogy of Racism” that I presented at the 2000 meeting of the Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy which, ironically, was held at Penn State University. At the time I was in the process of moving from the University of San Francisco to Stony Brook University, and forgot about this paper until I found it recently among my files. In this paper I argued that Foucault does a disservice to genealogy by neglecting entirely the *encomiendas* and *repartimientos* that the Spanish deployed to so-called evangelize the indigenous peoples of the Americas.
16. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
17. James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, NY: 2018).
18. James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 3–12.
19. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, xxv.
20. It is important to note that Cone was writing not only against white theologians, using white, and European theologians, but also and explicitly against the “Death of God” theology that was a furor in the late sixties.
21. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 28.
22. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 102. My italics.
23. Ibid., 103. My italics.
24. Ibid., 142. Italics in original.
25. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40.
26. The way Cone expresses this conception of sin, is thus: “Because sin is inseparable from revelation, and because revelation is an event that takes place in the moment of liberation from oppression, there can be no knowledge of the sinful condition except in the movement of an oppressed community claiming its freedom.” Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 113. Cone’s theodicy, then is not a theodicy of human sinfulness as a past event, but as a recurring and ongoing event. It is noteworthy, then, that freedom and sin are co-originary, i.e. to be free entails the possibility of sin, in part, by failing to be free in relationship to the freedom of others.
27. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 98. Italics in original.

28. See also Cone, "Black Spirituals: A *Theological Interpretation*" in *Risks of Faith*, ed. Cone, 13–27.
29. Cone, *The Spirituals and The Blues*, 12.
30. Ibid., 5–6.
31. Ibid., 29, 99.
32. Ibid., 31.
33. Ibid., 100.
34. Ibid., 16–7, where Cone writes: "The essence of ante-bellum black religion was the emphasis on the *somebodiness* of black slaves. The content of the black preacher's message stressed the essential worth of their person."
35. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xix.
36. The report can be found on line at: <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.
37. The memorial website is: <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>.
38. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 3.
39. Ibid., 15.
40. Ibid., 23.
41. See Michael Newton, *White Robes and Burning Crosses: A History of the Ku Klux Klan from 1866* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2014).
42. See the Anti-Defamation League's website for many more symbols: https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols?cat_id%5B150%5D=150.
43. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 166.

Kusch en el Trópico: Itinerant Fusions in the *Obra* of Irka Mateo

Carlos Decena

ABSTRACT: This article stages the imaginary “travel” of the ideas of the Argentine philosopher/anthropologist Rodolfo Kusch (1922–1979) to the Caribbean, in the service of sketching the work of feminist cultural producers in generational knowledge transmission. The first part elaborates a dialogue between Kusch’s concept of “fagocitación” (phagocytosis) with “transculturación” (transculturation), developed by the Cuban Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969). The second part of the article focuses on how Dominican diasporic composer, singer, and healer Irka Mateo enters this itinerary as a field researcher, an intellectual and expressive cultural producer. I suggest that Mateo’s notion that the “field” might inhabit her music captures a key dimension of her work as expressive and embodied cultural praxis, and that this inhabitation subtends how the artist envisions the preservation of cultural memory and links her work to Kusch and Ortiz. The final section of the article looks at the implications of forgetting to the transmission of ancestral knowledges to illustrate how Mateo’s work offers some clues that can help us better discern what re-membering means, which might be distinct and enrich how we remember.

KEYWORDS: Transculturation, Phagocytosis, South-South Theory, Desconocimiento

“**CÓMO LOGRAR QUE** el trabajo de campo habite la música” (How to make fieldwork inhabit the music?) That question emerged in my March 2018 interview in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic with folklorist, singer, and musician Irka Mateo. Listening to Irka’s words in interviews as well as to her music as it has evolved, and learning about her archival praxis has taught me to remain attentive to how what happens in the field where the ethnographic project gets carried out conjugates with sedimented histories to inflect how we say what we say. “Tu camino de conocimiento,”

writes Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, “requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you’ve programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades.”¹ Anzaldúa’s view of *conocimiento* presents it not so much as a point of arrival but as a path toward accessing one’s own normative habituations, which preclude a more holistic view of reality as well as one’s spiritual gifts. If I can “hear” the ancestors in Mateo’s work, then might those traces and others that my ear does not register, that it “avoids” or that it pretends not to know index transfers of knowledge viable yet not fully articulable to everyone?

Mateo’s *obra* is capacious. It includes musical compositions and performance, field research and interviews where she expounds on her artistic and intellectual pursuits. Most recently, it includes healing sessions via virtual conferencing during the COVID pandemic. An increasingly known and recognized figure in Caribbean music, Irka has been the voice, songwriter, and brains behind two CD productions: *Anacaona*, released in 2009, and the 2017 *Vamo a Gozá’*. But these are two recent achievements of someone whose musical record spans Spain, France, Brazil, Canada, the United States and her native Dominican Republic as well as the last three decades of the twentieth century. During the 1970s and 1980s, Mateo lived in Europe and became involved in the emerging world music scene. Upon her return in the late 1990s, she collaborated with influential musicians such as the late Luis Días and Xiomara Fortuna² while cultivating a style all her own. While working with rural Dominicans, Irka has been most interested in documenting Taino elements in contemporary Dominican culture. To this end, Mateo spent over one decade investigating the link of contemporary local musics, religious rituals, and Afro as well as indigenous musical traditions. Together with activist scholars such as the late E. Antonio De Moya, Fátima Portorreal and others, Irka was a founding member of Guabancex, Viento y Agua—a group of intellectuals pursuing the study and preservation of native indigenous culture. The work she has carried out among Dominican peasants was supported by the Grammy Foundation and resulted in an archive of more than thirteen genres of folkloric musical traditions of more than 33 hours in length. This archive was donated to the Dominican Archivo General de la Nación in 2013.³

What is at stake in hearing the Taino? To some, the focus on the Taino in Mateo’s work might appear politically problematic. The Taino, which we have been told to have been “disappeared” from the Caribbean within the first fifty years of contact with the Europeans, have been used symbolically in nation-state projects to obscure and deny black ancestry, particularly in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. Mateo’s work unsettles the status quo in nationalist histories of the region.⁴

What might a “South/South” dialogue on Caribbean indigeneity look like? This article sets the Argentinean anthropologist and philosopher Rodolfo Kusch (1922–1979) in conversation with Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969). To be precise, I focus on two concepts: Kusch’s “fagocitación” (phagocytosis) and Ortiz’s “transculturación” (transculturation), as historically and regionally-specific responses to North American and European theorizations of acculturation. The second part of the article describes how Mateo enters this dialogue, as an intellectual and expressive cultural producer. The notion that the field might “inhabit the music” might be best captured through an engagement with the embodied dimension of her cultural praxis. The final section of the article looks at the implications of forgetting to the transmission of ancestral knowledges. Part of what we see in the turn from Ortiz to Kusch, and in the crossing of Kusch’s “fagocitación” to Mateo’s project, is an insistence in building bridges, tracing and learning to read the signs on the path, and refusing the givenness of the apparent “truths” we have inherited either through colonial or nation-state projects. What and how are we taught to desconocer?

Transculturación and Fagocitación: Ortiz and Kusch on Culture Mixing in the Américas

Transculturación and *fagocitación* appear in books that cemented the reputations of their authors. “Transculturación” first appears in Ortiz’s analysis of Cuban economy and culture, *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar* (Cuban Counterpoint of Sugar and Tobacco). Published in 1940, with the endorsement and introduction of anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, *Cuban Counterpoint* paved Ortiz’s international reputation as a major theorist of culture mixing in the Caribbean. Ortiz’s *transculturación*, much like the concept of *fagocitación* that Rodolfo Kusch theorizes in his 1962 *América Profunda* (Deep America),⁵ provides an alternative to “acculturation” as the concept evolved in North America and in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. But unlike *transculturación*, which has been influential in Latin American and Latina/o Studies, Kusch’s *fagocitación* has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention (by scholars such as Walter Mignolo and the late Maria Lugones). Ortiz’s *Cuban Counterpoint* was translated and published in English (in 1947) while *América Profunda* has yet to have its first translation into English.⁶

In coining the neologism *transculturación*, Ortiz describes the term as a “vocablo más apropiado,” (a more fitting term) to describe the processes he associates with Cuban society.⁷ “Por *aculturación*,” writes Ortiz, “se quiere significar el proceso de tránsito de una cultura a otra,”⁸ which De Onís translates as “acculturation is used to describe the process of transition from one culture to another.”⁹ Ortiz rejects the telos of acculturation, or movement

between cultures as a one-way process. Transculturation suggests that there is multi-directionality to the processes at hand. As Ortiz describes it, *transculturación* captures the “los variadísimos fenómenos que se originan en Cuba por las complejísimas transmutaciones de culturas que aquí se verifican,”¹⁰ the “highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here.”¹¹ As he sees it in Cuba, “cada inmigrante como un desarraigado de su tierra nativa en doble trance de desajuste y de reajuste, de *desculturación* o *exculturación* y de *aculturación* o *inculturación*, y al fin de síntesis, de *transculturación*,”¹² “each of them torn from his native moorings, faced with the project of disadjustment and readjustment, of deculturation and acculturation—in a word, of transculturation.”¹³ Ortiz closes his definition by offering an analogy between cultural and sexual reproduction, “en todo abrazo de culturas sucede lo que en la copula genética de los individuos: la criatura siempre tiene algo de ambos progenitores, pero también siempre es distinta de cada uno de los dos,”¹⁴ “the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them.”¹⁵ The heteronormative and reproductive framing glosses over its problematic nature: the child is a new creature whose body is an amalgamation of influences framed as a “hug” between cultures, irrespective of the asymmetries of power conditioning cultural, physical, and sexual encounters under coloniality.

Ortiz’s view of time in *transculturación* reveals his understanding of indigenous American cultures. He first alludes to time when describing the rapidity of the processes that took place in Cuba. “Toda la escala cultural que Europa experimentó en más de cuatro milenios, en Cuba se pasó en menos de cuatro siglos,”¹⁶ “the whole gamut of culture run by Europe in a span of more than four milleniums (sic) took place in Cuba in less than four centuries.”¹⁷ After the settlement and evolution of what he calls the Neolithic culture of the Tainos, Ortiz writes that “un huracán de cultura; es Europa. . . . Y un vertigo revolucionario sacudió a los pueblos indios de Cuba. . . . Se saltó en un instante de las soñolientas edades de Piedra a la edad muy despertada del Renacimiento,”¹⁸ “then came a hurricane of culture: Europe. . . . A revolutionary upheaval shook the Indian peoples of Cuba . . . at one bound the bridge between the drowsing stone ages and the wide-awake Renaissance was spanned.”¹⁹ The acceleration and brusqueness of historical and cultural changes is important for Ortiz to the degree that it indexes the frenzied pace of settlement and cultural negotiations on American soil in contrast to the sending cultures of the peoples cohabitating and interacting on Cuban soil. But this description also holds on to the telos of acculturation, at least as far as indigenous populations are concerned.

Ortiz frames the transience of the groups that come together in Cuba on the assumption of an indigenous “transculturización fracasada,”²⁰

"transculturation that failed" (100). This might appear at first a perplexing feature of the author's definition of transculturation. If this mixture of cultures, this "hug," results in something altogether new and different which bears traces of the influences that preceded it, how could it be that one of these cultures cannot participate at all of this embrace? In fact, the playing field for the array of groups coming and going, interacting and adapting to proximity and cultural exchange with one another, assumes indigenous inadaptability. In other words, settler colonial time begins with the failure of indigenous populations to transculturate. "La verdadera historia de Cuba es la historia de sus intrincadísimas transculturaciones," he writes. "Primero la transculturación del indio paleolítico al neolítico y la desaparición de éste por no acomodarse al impacto de la nueva cultura castellana,"²¹ "the real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations. First came the transculturation of the paleolithic Indian to the Neolithic, and the disappearance of the latter because of his inability to adjust himself to the culture brought in by the Spaniards."²² Indigenous "failure to adapt" to the onslaught of European violence and cultural imposition from the first contact is part of what, during the historical period when Ortiz was writing and still at present, is considered received wisdom about what happened with the indigenous populations of the Caribbean. Culture mixing begins *after* the Tainos failed to adapt.

Kusch's *fagocitación* starts, like Ortiz, with a brief note on acculturation, to underline Kusch's own conceptual innovation. "Los técnicos de la filosofía de la cultura," (the theorists of the philosophy of culture), he notes, "ya han hallado el concepto de 'aculturación' para explicar el contacto entre culturas," (have already found the concept of 'acculturation' to explain the contact between cultures).²³ Kusch provides the following caveat:

Podemos afirmar que la aculturación se produce sólo en un plano material, como la arquitectura o la vestimenta, en cambio, en otros órdenes pudo haberse producido un proceso inverso, diríamos de *fagocitación* de lo blanco por lo indígena.²⁴

We can affirm that acculturation happens only on a material field, as in architecture or in the mode of dress. In other spheres what could have happened was a process working in an inverse fashion, what we might call the phagocytosis of the white by the indigenous.

Kusch locates phagocytosis beyond material culture, in a playing field that is hard to discern given what he calls "nuestros ideales de progresismo," (our ideals of progress).²⁵ Phagocytosis teases out those "residual" elements in contemporary cultures most associated with what "holds back" the Western Hemisphere from being fully European.

Kusch critiques of the intellectual projects of the liberal and Eurocentric nation-states promoted by Latin American post-independence as well

as early twentieth century intellectuals, pointing to their tendency to follow and imitate European social dynamics and innovations. Furthermore, he suggests that these projects and thinkers took as their starting point the units of analysis available within turn of nineteenth century liberalism, without accounting for what it means to situate these projects in the Western Hemisphere in the aftermath of the colonial encounter. Tellingly, he asks, “¿Se pensó en la Argentina de 1810, qué es el hombre, antes de ser un ciudadano comprometido con los objetos?” (Was the question, what is ‘man,’ asked before being a citizen committed to objects?)²⁶ Given the way in which all European American colonies were set up as economies for extraction, asking the question of being is a different undertaking in Europe than in the Americas. To ask questions of ontological being in the Americas, following the logic of liberal intellectuals of the nation-state, is to ignore the location of that query. As Kusch explains,

Quiere decir entonces, que fallaba uno de los puntos básicos de la dinámica del *ser*: esa tremenda y tensa búsqueda de inmutabilidad de occidente que forzosamente debía desembocar en la creación de objetos, o mejor, en una industria sólida. Al fin y al cabo aquí había una tensión ficticia, mantenida por una inmigración desplazada de occidente y, por esos mismo, doblemente empeñada en llevar adelante un juego europeo, pero por el lado de la imitación.²⁷

This means then that [in the Americas] you have a failure of a basic point for the dynamic of *being*: that great and tense search for Western immutability that by force had to result in the creation of objects, or better yet, in a solid industry. In the end, here we had a fictitious tension, sustained by immigration displaced from the West and for that same reason, twice as invested in moving forward an European game, but on the side of imitation.

For Kusch, imitation is vacuous when it uses form emptied of content; one fundamental mistake of elites is to pretend that transplantations of European economy, industry, social organization, and values are possible without wrestling with their location outside of Europe. This results in cultural dynamics and oppositions that can be appreciated with more of less extremity in countries such as Perú, Bolivia, or Argentina, where the transplantation of European norms and codes creates a sphere of apparent proximity between the urban Américas and Europe. Nevertheless, in these settings the indigenous elements constantly appear to undermine pretensions of similitude, signs of an ongoing cultural struggle “De ahí que tengamos países como Bolivia y Perú o zonas como el norte argentino donde, por debajo de la cultura dinámica, alienta el antiguo estrato a modo de quiste”²⁸ (From that point, we can see how we have countries such as Bolivia and Perú and areas like the north of Argentina where, under the dynamic culture, one can observe the breathing signs of the old strata as if it was a cyst). The framing

of residual indigeneity as something that “enquista,” becomes entrenched, and that survives as a “quiste,” or cyst in what is white, urban, metropolitan, and Europhillic in contemporary nationalist cultures points to a characteristic of being situated in the Americas that has important if underexplored power in Kusch. Like other Latin American intellectuals before him, Kusch casts indigeneity as part of what elites believe holds the people of the American continent back from a European project of the human—indexed in his characterization of indigeneity as illness in the body politic. Nevertheless, Kusch is emphatic that original definitions of what is American demand a reconceptualization of how it is that indigenous culture survived. One might object to the elite view of indigeneity as an affliction or a malady, be troubled by its being metaphorized as a cyst, or remain unclear about the degree to which Kusch himself subscribes to that characterization through slippage. Still, Kusch’s thinking turns tables on the pretensions of purity of the urban elite consciousness.

Later in *América Profunda*, Kusch contextualizes phagocytosis as formative of the situated ontology of the American subject. His American dialectic, as he explains, does not result in a Hegelian *Aufhebung*. “No cabe hablar de una *elevación* sino más bien . . . de una *distensión* o, mejor, *fagocitación* del *ser* por el *estar*, ante todo como un *ser* alguien, fagocitado por un *estar* aquí,”²⁹ (It is not adequate to speak of an *elevation* but instead. . . of a loosening or, better, a *phagocytosis* of *being* by the *being somewhere*, above all as a *being* someone, phagocytosed by a *being* here). Instead of a Hegelian “elevation” and synthesis, we have a tension and release: *ser* represents the tension and pretension of being based on the making of objects; *estar* is the point of release of the tension, the larger field of permanence and connection with nature in which *ser* folds.

An important dimension of the conceptual work that Kusch carries out in developing *fagocitación* are the gender dynamics associated with the two sides of the American dialectic: the *ser* which casts itself as immutable, absolute, and an invader of the world, Kusch views as masculine while the *estar* constitutes the larger field of life and nature and that seeks to maintain an equilibrium between order and chaos, is cast as feminine. “Desde el punto de vista indígena,” (from an indigenous point of view), Kusch writes, “es natural que se dé la fagocitación, ya que *ser* alguien es transitorio y de ningún modo inmutable y eterno. Por eso el *ser* alguien y el *estar* aquí mantienen una relación como de hijo y madre . . . la fagocitación es una ley primitiva que consiste en que sea natural que haya *distensión* y que la *tensión*, como la del *ser*, sea antinatural o circunstancial,” (it is natural to observe phagocytosis, since that *to be* someone is transient and in no way immutable and eternal. That is what the *to be* someone and the *to be* here sustain a relationship like that of mother and son . . . phagocytosis is a primitive law that says that it is natural for there to be a relaxation and that the tension, like that of *to be*, is

unnatural and circumstantial).³⁰ What Kusch achieves through this conceptualization is an explanation of how an indigenous vision of the relationship of the human species with the environment prevails despite metropolitan (and colonial) pretensions of mastery over nature. The achievement may be phrased as the failure of elites to excise indigeneity from the body politic, and this is where the contrast with Ortiz is clearest: the Cuban thinker assumes Taino disappearance and failure, while the Argentine insists that such a disappearance is not possible and that it is the Europhillic elites who fail in their genocidal ambitions to eradicate the indigenous traces in national culture.

In explaining transculturation and phagocytosis, Ortiz and Kusch offer analogies of family relations, which they resolve in different ways. While Ortiz leans on heterosexual reproduction to explain transculturation, Kusch explains ontological categories and their relationship to one another through the metaphor of the mother and child. In Kusch's view, *ser* cast as masculine, tense, and pretending to be immutable ultimately folds—"relaxes"—into the feminine field of *estar*, which ultimately absorbs it. While both thinkers agree in the view of the indigenous legacy as overwhelmed by the "hurricane" Europe in the aftermath of the colonial encounter, their diagnoses of where those cultural elements stay, resist, or persist are quite opposite to one another. Ortiz sees Taino failure as what clears the playing field post-Taino transculturations. Kusch also sees indigenous inability to come out a winner in culture wars against Europe, but he also notes that the indigenous as the residual elements of American being that secure that whatever being is in the Western Hemisphere, it is not Europe.

Ortiz and Kusch resist the easy discourses of synthesis—some versions of *créolité*, the "cosmic race," hybridity, etc.—and point to what is and continues to be turbulent and unresolved in cultural struggles in the American continent. Kusch's view of the impact of indigenous culture on the "collective unconscious" might give one pause. Some critics might also take issue with what sometimes appears to be Kusch's overly "romantic" view of indigenous culture and the invisibility of blackness in his work. Nevertheless, *fagocitación* helps revise *transculturación* to the degree that it reveals the primal moment of indigenous failure not as the moment of disappearance but as the repeating presence of the cultures spawned in the Western hemisphere, an inhabitation despite efforts at eradication. The pairing of concepts being staged here, Kusch's trip to the tropics, seeks to have *fagocitación* travel as a mechanism to explore the muted persistence of the indigenous where it has been imagined to be extinct.

This is important in the Dominican Republic, where complicated discussions of blackness and coloniality often assume the Taino have disappeared. If there is almost no space to discuss the heterogeneity and richness of Dominican blackness in light of the analytic myopia produced by Dominican

state and popular racisms and anti-Haitianism, how might the pursuit of Taino mappings of the present be pursued in a way that does not collude with black denial? In bringing Ortiz with Kusch in discussing Irka Mateo's artistic praxis, I seek to open space to continue to build bridges to our collective pasts in our present through a praxis capable of generating a space for multiple points of entry to allow the field to "inhabit" the work of the artist/practitioner/healer. Mateo has herself been assertive of hers as a quest for a return to indigenous ancestral lines that is in deep dialogue and coalition with black-affirmative work in the Dominican Republic, even as it charts its own distinctive map.

Enter the Feminist Ethnographer/Folklorist: Mateo's Music and the Inhabitation of Empiricism in Aesthetic Praxis

During our March 2018 interview, Irka stressed how invested she has been in the soundscape of world music. Her fieldwork, which she identifies more as folklore than anthropology, follows an important line of those inquiries in the Dominican Republic. One precedent in her case are not only musicians Luis Dias and Xiomara Fortuna, whose influence and mentorship shaped her own path. Irka casts her own trajectory as also shaped by the work of choreographer and folklorist Fradique Lizardo, whose scholarship had a public dimension in the choreography he developed and showcased in elite and popular venues. Irka's investment in making her research and art accessible to a general audience is consistent with Dominican traditions of public intellectual work.

Two examples drawn from Mateo's larger *obra* illustrate the artist's view of aesthetic and archival practices as ways to stage cross-generational dialogues and knowledge transfers. My methodological turn in this discussion is towards anecdotal and ephemeral elements in her work that she herself highlights to theorize how materials "in excess" of the empirical eye can elucidate the meeting point of transculturation and phagocytosis. The point is not so much to exhaust what these examples themselves offer us, but to highlight that ephemera may well be where the bridges and crossings in the passing of *conocimiento* take place.

The song "Vamo' a Gozá," [Let's Have Fun] from the similarly titled CD, tells the story of a musical and spiritual meeting: or Irka herself, after having gone to live in New York City, with her musician friends as well as with the guardians of the sacred sites of Liborismo in San Juan de la Maguana. Called "Liborismo" or "Olivorismo," this has been a messianic religious movement that developed and grew around the figure of healer Olivorio Mateo (Papá Liborio), a controversial figure and revolutionary leader persecuted and assassinated by the U.S. marines in 1922.³¹ San Juan de la Maguana, and the broader southwestern region of the Dominican Republic, are also associated

with long-standing Taino resistance. Irka has a decades-old relationship with the Liboristas, and the musical organization of the song captures the resulting track as part dialogue and part homage to all involved as well as to the elders and ancestors. The first 2/3 of the song switch back and forth between a tango and the chorus, presented as a bachata. As the song turns to its final section, a *jacana* (a local rhythmic genre) takes over as a coda to the song.

During our 2018 interview, Irka mentioned various elements of the song and their sources, suggesting that the tango section was her only original and individual contribution to the music. The bachata, she explained, was contributed by the young men with whom she collaborated, who make a living playing bachata. The closing *jacana*, she explained further, finishes the song with a tribute to the elders, since bachata is seen as music played and dance to, by younger people.

Vamo a Gozá'

Music and Lyrics by Irka Mateo

Coro	Chorus
Ay, ay, ay	Ay, ay ay
Nos vamos a bailar	We are going to dance
Ay, ay, ay	Ay, ay, ay
Nos vamos a gozá'	We are going to have fun
Se acerca el mes de Junio	The month of June is coming
Tamo listo pa la gira	We are ready for the tour
Que nos llevara a Bani	Which will take us to Baní
a la fiesta de San Juan	To the feast of San Juan
Hicimos un grupito	We made a little group
De amigos un buen corito	Of friends, a gang of pals
Hay alguien que me mira	There is one of them who looks at me
Y me hace ojo bonito	Winking and flirting

Coro

Chorus

Vamo a celebrar las fiestas
de Eudosia en Pueblo Nuevo
Confesor en la Vereda
y de Hilda en Fundación

We are celebrating the feasts
Of Eudosia in Pueblo Nuevo
Confesor in Vereda
And of Hilda in Fundación

A bailar la Sarandunga
La Bomba y la Jacana
También la Capitana
Y los Moranos en procesión

To dance the Sarandunga
The Bomba, the Jacana
Also the Capitana
And the procession of the
people in purple

Coro

Chorus

Vamo a ver a Luisín,
Alcapone a Bucavida,
La voz de Mantequilla
Los músico e Bani

We will see Luisín
Alcapone, Bucavida,
The voice of Mantequilla
The musicians of Bani

Que no tan esperando
Pa dano esos abrazos
Hace tiempo nos fuimos
A vivir a Nueva York

Who are waiting for us
To give us those big hugs
We left a long time
To live in New York

Coro

Chorus

[Hablado]
Republica Dominicana,
Bani

[Talked through section]
Dominican Republic
Bani

Que vivan Amancia Pérez	Long live Amancia Pérez
Y Pancho Romero	And Pancho Romero
[Canción folclórica de Jacana Tambores y cantado]	[Turn to Jacana, Drums and Singing]
Coro	Chorus
Oo se va oo ay se va	Oo it's leaving oo it's leaving
Dame la mano	Give me your hand
Oo se va oo ay se va	Oo it's leaving oo it's leaving
Continua verso y coro hasta el final	Verse continues with chorus to the end

Irka's is the guiding hand throughout this and other songs in the album, but her view of the dynamics in the making of the song illustrates practices, sources, and agendas that come together in the track itself. "Vamo a gozá" mobilizes musical genres to point to the different parties involved in the making of the song, as well as the audiences being hailed through rhythm and style. While the tango situates Irka herself and points to a cosmopolitan musical genre, the bachata has internal and external valences for the players as well as for national and transnational audiences of Dominican music; the jacana, as local music, is the most connected to ritual and with the older local generations. Because of how central Mateo's view of music as "healing" practice is in its consistency with Olivorio's own musical sensibility as healer and popular musician, "Vamo a gozá" might also be compellingly cast as a healing song, one that thematizes explicitly the "coming together" of actors separated from one another by distances and generations. An additional nuance of the healing work of the song might be discerned in the work that "gozá" performs here, as a Dominicanized locution of having fun that points to bodily pleasure in dance, even if Mateo's lyrics themselves hint at other kinds of flirtations.

Mateo's lyrics mention specific sacred journeys associated with music ("la fiesta de San Juan," a reference to the celebrations of St. John the Baptist in June, usually connected with the summer solstice). Irka mentions other regional genres such as the sarandunga, and she also names specific people who are either friends or known guardians of religious sites, as part of tracing the itinerary of the song's own journey. Thus, "Vamo' a gozá" operates as itself

a tribute to the different actors and audiences it brings together, as a musical travelogue chronicling her journey, and a musical and historical archive itself. As much of her work in general, “Vamo’ a gozá” leans on musical sources and resources to achieve a healing that has a strong connection to “fun” (goce) while becoming itself an artifact expressively “inhabited” by those histories. This illustrates how Mateo’s fieldwork “lives” in her musical output.

The second example from Mateo’s obra that is of interest to this discussion comes from a short YouTube video where she interviews a 74-year old woman regarding her ritual agricultural practices. Irka shared with me that she happened upon this particular woman through her daughter, who responded to a query from Irka regarding agricultural rituals saying that her mother prayed to a stone. During the interview with the woman, Mateo asks her to discuss the stone. It turns out that, as the woman explains, that part of the preparation to cultivate her plot of land involves praying to a stone figure for a good harvest. The participant further explains how the stone lives in two “temples” at different points of the year: one, a small cave near the cultivated plot of land and two, the altar before which lies the stone in water in a wood container, next to all of the saints and ancestors invoked there.

The short film, available via [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...), is called “Ritual Taino Milenario Vivo en la República Dominicana.”³²

Caridad [C]: [Esta piedra.] Tengo para hablarle de ella . . . usted, mi cosecha, yo le pido que me la de buena . . . ahí yo le hago mi petición para que ella me de milagros. Con mi piedrecita mi cosecha se dan buena: yuca, batata, plátano, guineo, y rulo, y mi matica de guandules. Ella todo me ayuda. Con todo mi cosecha me ayuda.

Irka [I]: Y ¿cómo usted utiliza la piedra? Dígame todo lo que usted hace con la piedra de que está aquí en su altar . . . esta

C: Yo voy pidiéndole y cuando llego allá a su templo de ella

I: ¿Cuál es su templo?

C: Su cuevita donde yo la voy a enterrar. Ahí yo le hago su petición. “Es para esto, y esto, y esto y mas esto.” Que me de mi cose-

[C]: [This stone.] I have to talk to you about it . . . for my crops, I ask it that my crops come out well . . . and I make my petitions there so the stone will give me miracles. With my little stone the crops come out well: yucca, sweet potato, plantain, bananas, and green peas. She helps me with everything. With all of my crops, the stone helps me.

[I]: And how do you use the stone? Tell me everything you do with the stone that’s here on your altar . . . this one

C: I ask it for the miracles when I go to her temple

I: What’s its temple?

C: The little cave where I will bury it. And there I make my plea. “It’s for this, and for this, and for this other thing.” That please for my

cha buena. Y ahí con el favor de Dios, ella me ayuda.”

I: Doña Caridad, y ¿de quién usted aprendió a enterrar esa pieza “a la Doña,” como usted le dice, en los conucos?

C: Por mi mamá, que yo la veía haciendo su labor para rendimiento de su cosecha. Yo no estaba presente al lado de ella para saber lo que ella le pedía y le decía, pero si yo estaba acompañada de ella ahí, mirando lo que ella estaba haciendo con la piedrecita. Esa piedrecita ella la enterraba. Cuando se acababa su cosecha, ella cogía su piedrecita, la lavaba y la ponía en su templo. Sí.

crop to come out well. And with God’s favor, it helps me.”

I: Doña Caridad: and who taught you to bury that stone “to the Lady,” as you call her, in the parcels of land [conucos]?

C: It was my mother. I would watch her carry out her work to ensure a good crop. I was not present next to her to know what she prayed for and said but I was with her near there, watching what she was doing with her small stone. That’s a stone that she would bury. When her crop timing was coming, she would grab her stone, she would wash it, and she would put it in its temple. Yes.

During this part of the interview between Irka and I, she explained that part of what interested her in the conversation with Doña Caridad was to appreciate how Dominican peasants held much retention of historical knowledge that could be traced to the Tainos. Some telling detail about the stone is captured by Irka’s own description on YouTube.

Yucahu Bagua Maorocoti es el Dios ó (sic) Espíritu de la Yuca, del Mar, que no tiene ancestro masculino. Desde la época de los conquistadores Españoles se ha documentado que los dioses de los taínos se llamaban Cemi y en este caso el cemi Yucahu era representado en una escultura de piedra en forma de triángulo. Yucahu solía enterrarse en los conucos donde se plantaba la yuca para auspiciar una cosecha sana y abundante. Más de quinientos años después de la llegada de Cristóbal Colón a este continente hemos rastreado y encontrado que esta practica ritual de agricultura esta viva hoy en

Yucahu Bagua Maorocoti is the God or Spirit of the Yucca, of the Sea, who has no male ancestor. From the time of the Spanish conquistadors, it has been documented that the Taino gods were called Cemi and in this case, the Yucahu cemi was represented by a stone sculpture in triangle shape. Yucahu used to be buried in the smallholdings in the places where yucca was planted to prompt a good and abundant harvest. More than five hundred years after Christopher Columbus’ arrival in this continent, we have been able to look for and find that this ritual practice is alive and well in Azua, Dominican Republic. Today, what are used are the

Azua, República Dominicana. Hoy se utilizan restos de alguna vasija con una "carita" Taina para pedir y obtener los mismos resultados. Esta práctica se ha pasado de generación en generación por cientos de años. Tuvimos la oportunidad de entrevistar brevemente a la señora Colasa Beltré quien nos habló sobre esta práctica ritual de agricultura. Al final de la entrevista le dejé saber que estaba perpetuando un ritual millenario y le regalé una representación en cerámica del cemi Taino Yucahu. Lo recibió con una gran emoción y le hizo una oración y peticiones de abundancia para sus cosechas y su salud. Cuando nos íbamos me pidió que la ayudara a colocarlo junto a su "carita" para que se acompañaran. Están juntos en su altar.

remains of a container with a Taino "little face" to pray and achieve the same results. This practice has been handed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years. We had the opportunity to conduct a short interview with Ms. Colasa Beltré, who talked to us about this ritual agricultural practice. At the end of the interview, I let her know that she was perpetuating a millenarian ritual and I gifted her a clay representation of the Taino cemi Yucahu. She received it with great warmth and said a prayer for abundance for her harvests and for her health. When we were about to leave, she asked me to help her next to her "little face" so they would keep one another company. They are together at her altar.

Irka's encounter with a Dominican peasant woman's conocimientos, realized as a short ethnographic film, gets "resolved" and "explained" in the artist's narrative in the discussion that succeeded the taped conversation, where Irka suggests the connection of Doña Caridad's practice with Taino worship of the Cemi. As emotionally powerful as it must have been for her interlocutor to see the connection between her individual practice and a history of Taino spiritualized engagement with the earth and agriculture, what interests me most about this scene is how Doña Caridad describes the knowledge transmission of the practice. She discusses learning to pray and burying the stones for a good harvest from watching her own mother do this, even if she never ever heard what her mother said to the stones. Could the strategy for the transmission of this conocimiento be precisely that it could be seen and articulated but not discussed? Is this in some way connected to how it is that some elements of Taino culture, like other indigenous traditions, have managed to survive despite the widespread commonsense view of their annihilation and disappearance? Mateo's "inhabitation" offers an alternative to what Kusch critiques as the elite view of residual indigenous cultures as a cyst in the body politic.

At first glance, we might think of this moment of encounter between Irka and Doña Caridad as a moment of bridge-building between different generations as well as differently positioned Dominican women. It is also

important to mark the distinct positions of them and their stark asymmetries of power, social legibility, and access to resources. This interpretation, together with exchanges and interactions that exceed the film itself, suggest not that Doña Caridad needs a “correction” on the transfer of a knowledge she had assimilated successfully from her mother. What this short film, the evidence shared by Doña Caridad herself, and the marginalia offered by Irka in her discussion of the exchange offer is an opportunity to better appreciate the process and articulation of expressive practices and how they are embedded in practices of re-membering—an impure coming together that traces the forgetting necessary to cultural survival. The project, in other words, is not only to correct a historical record. Apart from documentation, Irka’s aim is to offer evidence of the inhabitations of her archive, and of the continual processes through which the people with whom she works live with the legacies they have inherited.

Forgetting and Remembering: Decolonial Ambivalences in the Transmission of Ancestral Knowledge

The professor wakes up earlier than the rest of the delegation in the “Alternative Spring Break,” a social justice themed service learning trip. This year, the organizers teamed up with Irka Mateo to organize a trip to San Juan de la Maguana, “cuna del liborismo dominicano,” cradle of Dominican Liborism, enjoy a dinner, a party, and an overnight stay with liborista peasants and guardians of this tradition, and make a visit to the altars and to the fountain called “la agüita de Liborio,” Liborio’s water.

At 5:00 am, he notices that the owners of the conuco—their hosts—are themselves beginning to wake up, as are some of the farm animals. An isolated breeze brushes his skin as he sits on a rocking chair in the dark. The thought of Dios Liborio comes to him and he asks for Liborio’s blessing as the pores of his skin open.

The hostess says good morning to him and, shortly after hearing that he asks for coffee, she invites the professor to go to the kitchen with her, where she is already making it. She is already pouring boiling water in the colador, a pouch that holds ground coffee and into which she pours water that has boiled on the fogón made up of three large stones, burning charcoal, and cuava. Once the boiling water steeps in the coffee grounds, she lifts the colador (which holds the coffee grounds) and puts one or two spoons of sugar in the resulting coffee. He observes as she engages in this morning ritual, his mind only set on the dose of caffeine he will enjoy shortly. Before pouring a small dose of coffee into tin jarrito she hands over to him, the professor’s host pours a small amount of coffee on each of the three stones which helped her make the coffee. She follows these three “sips” with one of her own and it is only then that she hands her guest the cafecito.

"Gracias, doña," says the professor. "¿Le puedo hacer una pregunta?" Can I ask you a question?

"Claro. Dígame." Of course. Go ahead.

"¿Por qué le da usted de beber café primero a las piedras?" He asked. Why do you give the stones coffee first?

She thought about this for a few beats.

"Nunca había visto a alguien hacer eso. Por eso le pregunto," he added. I had never seen anyone do that. That's why I am asking.

"Le damos al Padre, Hijo y al Espíritu Santo," she responded, and then made the sign of the cross. We offer to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Like Irka with Doña Caridad, I could have searched for some historical antecedent or link to the act of giving coffee to stones in this morning exchange with my liborista hostess, but I return to the moment for how it flags the banality of crucial processes of knowledge transmission, easy enough to miss if my eyes had not been set on what my hostess was doing with the coffee before serving it to me. To me, this moment points to the density of knowledge transfers being effected, the traditions been to some degree projected into the present and future, despite whatever degree of competence or not we might have in seeing their operations. What makes Irka Mateo's ethnographic and folkloric praxis crucial to a decolonial spiritual project is the degree to which hers is an imbibing and a channeling of traditions as moving forces for the present and the future, forces coded in song, in the description of everyday practice, and in dance. Mateo turns Kusch's view of the force of Taino retention on its head: it is not a cyst keeping urban elites away from Europeanize modernity. Instead, traditions such as the Yucahu, or the jacana danced during the celebrations of St. John the Baptist, or the coffee gifting to stones make legible the relationships that human beings establish and sustain as they become stewards of the earth for sustenance, survival, and for enjoying and sense of liveness beyond the timescapes of productivity, development, or exchange value.

NOTES

1. Anzaldúa 2015, 118.
2. For an important consideration of the work of pioneering musical artist Xiomara Fortuna, see Quinn 2015.

3. For more information regarding the contents of the archive, see Mateo 2021.
4. An important recent study of the whole debate on Taino heritage, in the Puerto Rican and Nuyorican context, is described in Sherina Feliciano-Santos 2021.
5. All English-language translations of Kusch are mine.
6. Where necessary, I will be citing a Spanish language edition of Ortiz and an English language translation. Citations from the English language translation by Onís will be cited with scare quotes. For the Spanish, see Ortiz 2002. For the English, see Ortiz 1995. The first of Kusch's works to become available in English is *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*. See Kusch 2010. I will render all of my own translations of Mateo and of Kusch in parentheses.
7. Ortiz 2002, 254.
8. Ibid. Italics in the original.
9. Ortiz 1995, 98.
10. Ortiz 2002, 254.
11. Ortiz 1995, 98.
12. Ortiz 2002, 255; italics in original.
13. Ortiz 1995, 98; no italics in translation.
14. Ortiz 2002, 260.
15. Ortiz 1995, 102–103.
16. Ortiz 2002, 256.
17. Ortiz 1995, 99.
18. Ortiz 2002, 256–257.
19. Ortiz 1995, 99–100.
20. Ortiz 2002, 257.
21. Ibid., 254–255.
22. Ortiz 1995, 98.
23. Kusch 1999, 179.
24. Ibid., 180.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 186.
27. Ibid., 187.
28. Ibid., 188–189.
29. Ibid., 195.
30. Ibid., 200–201.
31. For book-length treatments of the Liborista movements, see Martínez 2003 and Lundius and Lundahl 2000.
32. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYq-zL1T_cg&t=8s

33. See the description and introduction to Irka's clip at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYq-zL1T_cgandt=8s; the translation is mine.

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