DECOLONIAL RESPONSES TO SECULARISM FROM THE UNDERSIDE OF MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Decolonial Responses to Secularism from the Underside of Modernity

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This dissertation investigates the relationship between secularism and colonization as theorized by contemporary Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx thinkers. Contrary to the customary understanding that secularism is an intra-European phenomenon that separated modernity from the dogmas of religion, this dissertation argues that secularism is a global phenomenon that expands the coloniality of religion initiated in the Christian conquest of the Americas. Accordingly, this dissertation pays attention to the intellectual production of the Americas to make visible the colonialist legacy inherent in both religious and secular discourses.

The principal contribution of this dissertation is to reframe the key terms of the “postsecular debate” across the humanities and social sciences, which contests the long-held assumptions about the relation between religion and secularism in modernity. This debate has problematized, on the one hand, the conventional hypothesis that modernization is a teleological process of secularization, and on the other, the widespread idea that the space of the secular is mutually exclusive of the religious. However, this debate has yet to explicitly articulate the extensive historical and normative consequences of colonization on the edification of modernity, secularization, and secularism. My dissertation addresses
this gap. With this intervention, this dissertation reconceptualizes the very notion of “the postsecular” from an internal self-reflexivity of Western secular modernity to a global project that strives for the decolonization of secular modernity.

Chapter One traces the emergence of liberation theology and liberation philosophy to interrogate the work that secularization does as a disciplinary division, challenging the common supposition that liberation philosophy puts liberation theology on “secular grounds.” Chapter Two examines the work of the Afro-Caribbean critic Sylvia Wynter, who unearths the colonialist assumptions in the secular humanisms of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in order to critically re-write the meaning of secularity from the perspectives of those subjects historically colonized in the name of secular humanisms. Chapter Three analyzes the deployment of spirituality in the works of the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa and the Afro-Caribbean scholar M. Jacqui Alexander as an alternative mode of knowing that circumvents the coloniality of both religious and secular discourses. Finally, Chapter Four looks at how aesthetics informs each of the previous three chapters as a creative site for the critical response to the modern/colonial secular/religious divide.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is not the culmination of just six years of doctoral study but the result of a series of life circumstances that have made me who I am. Every person named below owns a piece of this dissertation and my overall life project.

Fifteen years ago, like many other migrants, I was forced to leave a home, family, and friends, in search for a better life. I entered the public education system in the United States as just another undocumented Mexican in the suburbs of Chicago, on the bilingual track and in remedial math. I was never assessed for math placement before my first day of classes because all students on the bilingual track were simply placed in remedial courses. At the time I didn’t care and all I wanted was to return to Mexico. I still reminisce about how my father taught me multiplication before entering elementary school. The town’s math professor, my father was the valedictorian of his university class, an achievement which awarded him the opportunity to teach in Italy. A life that could have been. His sudden death was the first trigger culminating in our diasporic journey.

The first year was hard. I soon resigned any hopes of returning to Mexico and turned my attention to making a new life. It was a time to play catch up. I joined the cross-country team. I was dead last the first day of practice, and Coach Sinnott told me to give it two weeks before deciding to stay on the team. I also requested to leave the bilingual track and began doing the coursework necessary to leave the remedial track. The first person I need to thank here is my remedial geometry teacher, Ms. Richardson, who realized my circumstance and let me sit in the back of the room to catch up. It would take me ten minutes to do what my classmates barely managed in fifty (for lack of trying), which allowed me to spend the rest of the time on the regular algebra assignment for the class
where I would have been had I been tested. When I still finished early, Ms. Richardson let me tutor my classmates in geometry. This soon led to my first formal job in the United States: study-hall tutor. I still have my W2s. (My first informal job of course, had already been one reserved for the recently arrived migrant: gardener. A Hundred dollars for my uncle’s neighbor’s yard. My uncle, who was in the landscaping business, kept half of my wage – as commission and to teach me a lesson.) Ms. Richardson saw in me the academic potential that no other teacher or administrator saw at the time. It is also no coincidence that she was the only Black teacher throughout my entire high school experience.

Many others facilitated my learning in high school once I caught up to the regular track in my junior year and the AP track in my senior year. Mr. Stern was there throughout these three transitional years, and I do not think he knows the extent of his impact on me. Just before graduation, he conferred with me that he envisioned me accumulating many academic degrees in the future. I am pleased to have fulfilled that vision. The only teacher with a doctoral degree at my high school, Mr. Stern saw this potential and encouraged me in ways others hadn’t. I also thank the cross-country team, which I credit as reviving in me the discipline and rigor that began to go dormant in my father’s absence. I did give it two weeks and much more. I took running religiously, even on Sundays, running on my own. This physical regimen has complemented my path of intellectual advancement. Two years later, my consistent training paid off: I was the #3 man and captain of the varsity team. Throughout my high school years, my teammates gave me a glimpse of the American way of life that I had grown up watching on TV. I learnt a lot from them. It was a smart bunch, top 3 of all the school’s sport teams in terms of GPA. I distinctly remember one meet taking part on the campus of the local community college. That was the first time I ever set foot
in an American college campus. I was still on the bilingual track, though my English had improved a great deal by then. A fellow teammate, who was to be the valedictorian of his class, must have seen me mesmerized looking at the school buildings. These buildings reminded me of the university where my dad used to teach in Mexico. My teammate asked me if I was interested in going to college. “Yes,” I affirmed, “will you attend this school?” I asked him in return. “Oh no, I am too smart to go to this school,” he responded. I was mind-blown. In my migrant community, going to community college was implicitly an unachievable goal not even worth considering. And here was a guy who I thought was going places! My teammates were the positive influence that I needed to take academics as something that is both valuable and fun. I thank them for their friendship during those foundational years. I even thank those that gave me a glimpse of the darker side of American life, by once telling me, “we don’t like your kind around here.” This is a phrase that I constantly think about, now that I have the conceptual tools to understand where it comes from. I remain and hope to always be a lifelong runner, a habit that has kept me disciplined and healthy in body and mind.

The full story of my first-generation migrant college-bound experience will have to be told another time. But only four years after having crossed the border accompanied by a stranger, I now found myself at one of the most elite institution of higher learning on a full-ride scholarship, with an insatiable hunger for knowledge and for proving myself intellectually. In hindsight, my years at Northwestern have without a doubt been most formative to who I have become. I received the privileged space, time, and resources to inquire on any topic of my choosing, in the company of like-minded students. This was
nothing short of a dream come true. I will always be grateful to Northwestern for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime.

I went to Northwestern with the intention of majoring in math and economics to enable social mobility for me and my family. Philosophy, which I had discovered my last year in high school, was a leisurely hobby at the time. It all changed when I took a small seminar with Jennifer Lackey the winter quarter of freshman year. The bug had infected me, as Sandy Goldberg once put it. I sought the advice of a math professor I had good rapport with, as I felt philosophy’s calling but was unsure of abandoning my pragmatic plans so suddenly. His honest reflections about his own life regrets sealed the deal for me, and I quickly declared philosophy as my major and poured myself into it.

There are many at Northwestern that I must thank for giving me the tools for doctoral studies. First is Mark Alznauer, who despite a rocky first year I had at Northwestern, supported me in pursuing a summer of research opportunity under his mentorship that would “set in stone” (as I put it at the time in an interview with the Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences Magazine) my plans to become a professor of philosophy. Thanks are also due to the Posner Summer Fellowship program for this arrangement and for introducing me to the kind of life that I never thought would be possible to pursue. In a proper dialectical fashion, I concluded my undergraduate research three years later under Alznauer’s supervision. I also thank Gerry Cadava for selecting me as a Leopold Fellow in my second year, for my first archival fieldwork research experience, and for also encouraging me to apply to the Mellon Mays program. Gerry has been nothing short of a role model to me and his continuous mentorship and feedback have been vital to my success. I acknowledge the Mellon Mays program at Northwestern and its role in
providing me with the skills to enter graduate school that are rarely part of the curriculum. Charles W. Mills took me under his wing for another round of summer research and has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. I also send many thanks as well to Penny Deutscher, for giving me the assurance that I had things to contribute to critical thought. Under her mentorship, we became “honorary grad students” (in the words of Amy Allen), yet another experience key in my transition to doctoral study. I thank Benjamin Lewis Robinson for organizing the critical theory minor undergraduates into a reading group that would be the seed for the Critical Theory Workshop – which inspired the Decoloniality Workshop that I founded at Rutgers four years later. Other professors that impacted me are Brodyn Fischer, Sarah Osten, and Bonnie Honig, all of whom persuaded me to pursue doctoral studies. Alexander Weheliye was also crucial in my transition to graduate school, and his advice at important junctures over the last few years has been incredibly accurate. The late Ernesto Laclau gave me the cipher to read Hegel and invited me to study with him in Argentina after my graduation. He helped me concretize my own contribution to the world of ideas. His sudden death left a deep void in contemporary critical thought. His Latin American friendship, however, left me and Annabel with beautiful memories that we cherish and reminisce. Finally, my good friend Zach Joachim, the first philosophy major I became acquainted with, with whom I lived “the legendary idealism of youth” (as he puts it) and since then has been a partner in the corruption of the youth. We will not settle for anything less than the Absolute.

I arrived at Rutgers with the desire to grow, both intellectually and professionally, and to prepare myself to contribute to the transformation of the academy. The first person that I must thank is Michael Levine, for believing in my project and recruiting me to the
Program in Comparative Literature, a disciplinary move that worried me given my philosophical background. Levine convinced me that I could be a philosopher in Comparative Literature. Not only was he right, but now I believe that my transition to comparative literature set the conditions for a truly transdisciplinary “decolonization” of philosophy that I would not have been able to accomplish at the time in a department of philosophy. I also thank all those that functioned as program officers during my years at Rutgers, especially Andy Parker and Jorge Marcone, for their generous support of my research and all other related endeavors. Nelson Maldonado-Torres was the primary reason I wanted to study at Rutgers, under whom I have been able to undertake a decolonial turn. He has outlined the principles for decolonial thinking and doing, which I aspire to practice for the rest of my life. Drucilla Cornell showed me how to be a revolutionary scholar and provided a community for students to develop as intellectual equals. Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel taught me how to read closely, and her mentorship and feedback have been vital to my professional progress. Carlos Decena sparked my religious turn, which ended up becoming the core of my dissertation project, and his constructive criticisms have kept me honest. The Grad Fund office provided me with structure and precious feedback that made the exercise of grant writing intellectually productive. I also had wonderful colleagues and peer role models at Rutgers: Carolyn Ureña, Enmanuel Martínez, Max Hantel, and Donovan Ramon.

Essential to my graduate intellectual life has been two communities that nurtured and trained me. First is the Caribbean Philosophical Association, whose model of scholarship has been the oxygen to my professional survival. I hope to continue to shift the geography of reason. Similarly, the Latin American Philosophy of Education Society,
whose members welcomed me in New York at what was a transitional moment for me: a few months after my departure from Northwestern and in the process of applying to graduate school. The project continues to flourish, and I am enthusiastic to keep envisioning alternative ways of studying collectively.

Over the last few years, I have had the privilege and honor to be in conversation with many intellectual figures whose works have greatly influenced my own work and thought. I thank them for their camaraderie and support. These are Eduardo Mendieta, Lewis Gordon, Jane Gordon, Paget Henry, Michael Monahan, Neil Roberts, Ramon Grosfoguel, Mariana Ortega, Catherine Walsh, and Marisa Belasteguigoitia. I want to emphasize my indebtedness to the maestro Enrique Dussel, who has been the light that has illuminated the path for generations of Latin American philosophers, and whose intellectual generosity and encouragement fueled me to do the work that I am now doing. I want to thank Linda Alcoff also in this very spirit. From our first encounter, she has been one of my biggest supporters. Linda is the best example of the well-rounded scholar that I hope to become.

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This last year, I gathered a cadre of fantastic mentors who have helped me transition to the professoriate. Jeffrey Coleman and Shatha Almutawa fell from the sky when I needed them most while on the job market. Shanna Benjamin and Santiago Slabodsky offered help
in the last stages. Chris Tirres should be thanked more than once. I had the delight to meet Chris after sharing a panel on Anzaldúa in her very own hometown, and his friendship immediately struck me as unique. I came home excited to have made an acquaintance whose research was so close to mine, and soon his book arrived in my mailbox with a dedication. His mentorship has been extraordinarily generous, and now I have the distinction to be his colleague.

The Social Science Research Council programming for Mellon Mays fellows provided the constant professionalizing infrastructure and social atmosphere needed for me to thrive in graduate school and on the job market. Mellon Fellows are now to me what my cross-country teammates were in high school: a source of positive peer pressure. The individual success of each one of us is in large part due to our collectivity, which raises the bar for everyone to achieve more. When we soar, we soar together. Similarly, the Ford Foundation introduced me to yet another high achieving network of scholars invested in transforming higher education. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation is likewise to be thanked for its generosity and assistance.

My students have been a reminder that scholarship must serve a pedagogical purpose. I thank them for their patience and their critical insights. They are already changing the world in amazing ways that I could never do.

Mi familia, especially mi madre, is to be thanked for the hard work that made it possible for me to fully focus on my high school studies without having to work like nearly all my other migrant peers. This made a huge difference that eventually allowed me to be college-bound, unlike many of my classmates who were routed either into the prison pipeline or into the cycle of undocumented labor and fear of deportation. All my success
depends on this fact. Similarly, my mother’s naturalization process soon took me out of a legal blackhole and facilitated my transition to university. My tios cured me when I was sick, provided me with a roof when I didn’t have one, and invited me to spend the holidays with them. My high school and college years would not have been possible without them.

Lastly, I want to thank my other half, my life partner, Jeong Eun Annabel We, who radically changed my life since the very first day we met in 2010. We have grown together ever since, and everything that I have done and experienced has been infinitely better because of her. Without her, I would not even approximate half of what I am today.

This dissertation is dedicated to Ramón Rubio Alfaro (1933-2016) and Roberto Rubio Mandujano (1965-2016), in honor of their generous lives. They would have been the proudest of this accomplishment, and I hope they still are.

Small portions of Chapter Four, section two, were previously published in the journal Political Theology, volume 19, issue 4. They are included and revised in this dissertation a per my rights retained as author, outlined in my Publishing Agreement with Taylor & Francis Group, paragraph 4, section viii.
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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Resignifying the Postsecular: The Coloniality of Secularism and Epistemic Decolonization

“This aporia I define as that of the secular – that is as one whose humanly emancipatory process on the one hand, and humanly subjugating processes on the other, are each nevertheless the lawlike condition of the enacting of the other.”
-Sylvia Wynter

“If secularism opposed itself to religion it was not because religion was imperial, but simply because it was just not imperial enough.”
-Nelson Maldonado-Torres

“If we have never been secular, to paraphrase Latour on modernity, we can also never become postsecular enough.”
-Justin Beaumont, Klaus Eder, and Eduardo Mendieta

“Since the academy operates through its own brand of colonialism and imperialism, this unfinished project of decolonization is as urgent within these intellectual projects as within the relationships among intellectuals who continue to make theory out of studied myopia.”
-M. Jacqui Alexander

0.0 Prolegomenon

Starting with the Enlightenment, but most systematically since Max Weber’s analysis of the rise of capitalism out of the Northern European “protestant ethic” (Weber 2002), it has been assumed across the disciplines of the university that modernity is among many things a process of secularization wherein “religion” loses authority as a given society undergoes the process of modernization (Schultz 2006). Moreover, it was assumed that the world was, in fact, becoming more and more modern, and therefore, more and more secular. A sign of religiosity in the world was taken to be not a rejection of this theory of

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1. Take, for instance, Immanuel Kant’s theorizing of the Enlightenment as a process of maturation, where universal reason outgrows the particularities of religious faith (Kant 1993). For Kant, the use of reason leaves behind the infantile dogmas of religious faith in a disenchancing process of growth where secularity becomes the condition of rational thinking.
modernity but a proof that such context was not properly modern yet. Secular modernity thus remained the unquestioned ground for all thought for most of the 20th century, until global political events, such as the Islamic Iranian Revolution of 1978 and the 2001 September 11 attacks in the United States mainland, put into question the supposed anticipated insignificance of religion in the era of globalization, the latest stage of modernity. This perceived “return” of religion, as many scholars have called this phenomenon (Alcoff and Caputo 2011, Staudigl and Alvis 2016), has become a crucial intellectual debate in the first couple of decades of the 21st century, contributing to the reconceptualization of modernity away from the model of modernity as a univocal teleological process of secularization. While positions on this question vary across methodological and political orientations, they share the conviction that the meaning of both religion and secularization must be rethought to better reflect contemporary dynamics around the world.

In the humanities and social sciences, this debate has emerged as an occasion to revise inherited conceptual dynamics of major categorical frameworks in fields such as anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, and critical social theory. Rethinking the fundamental meaning of secularization in modernity, this debate has come to be known as the “postsecular debate,” alluding to a new epistemic horizon through which to understand the aforementioned social and cultural changes (Gorski et al. 2012, Furani 2015, Molendijk 2015, Beaumont 2019). At its most fruitful, this debate has debunked the epistemic and political pretensions of innovation and neutrality in modern secular discourse,

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Religiosity in the Third World is an example. I use the term “Third World” to connote the communities that were the recipients of colonization. Other terms that I use interchangeably in this dissertation are “the colonial world” and “the underside of modernity,” which I borrow from Enrique Dussel (1996).
demonstrating its non-secular roots and political investments (Asad 2003). At the level of method, the postsecular debate has usefully probed the role of secularity as the setting in which scholarship takes place in the university. These reconsiderations have led to divergent explorations concerning the practice of scholarship in a postsecular age when secularity no longer means what it once did in the modern university (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2008). The question here becomes: what would it mean to engage in a postsecular scholarly praxis? This dissertation enters the postsecular debate as a possible response to this question.

In its examination of the discursive and epistemic effects of secularity, the postsecular debate overlaps with another intellectual constellation of the global academy: the decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres 2011b). Also spanning the humanities and social sciences, and similarly developing since the end of the 20th century, the decolonial turn has fundamentally questioned the normative content of modernity, from a position liminal or external to that of the “rhetoric of modernity” itself (Mignolo 2007). Grounded primarily in Latin America and the Caribbean, decolonial thinkers have unmasked the “myth of modernity” (Dussel 1995a) for having hidden its co-constitutive “darker side” (Mignolo 2011a): coloniality. From such perspective, the myth of secularity is not a novel proposition but a long-standing scheme in the colonial dynamics of Western modernity inaugurated by the Christian colonization of the Americas (Maldonado-Torres 2008b). The decolonial turn is thus concerned with the ways in which institutions, discourses, and practices conspire to continuously reproduce modernity’s project of colonization throughout the world. This is a question of the “coloniality of power” at the level of political and economic institutions (Quijano 2000) and the “coloniality of knowledge” at the level of subjectivity and
epistemology (Lander 2000). These two wings of the modern/colonial system are credited with the global imposition of Western ways of knowing and modes of being over the past five hundred years, as well as with the discrediting and suppression of any local alternatives (Mignolo 2012, Santos 2016).

Despite a broad expansion across many fields of study, the postsecular debate has for the most part had very little to say regarding the connection between processes of secularization and modernity’s colonial project (Furani 2015, 20).³ This dissertation argues that this lack of theorization of coloniality in the postsecular debate is symptomatic of Eurocentrism, and addresses this gap by putting the postsecular debate in conversation with the decolonial turn. Following Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx thinkers, I theorize the connections between secularity and coloniality to reframe the key terms of the postsecular debate beyond its symptomatically Eurocentric conceptual framing. Rather than diagnosing the contemporary “return” of religion to the global political arena in terms of the failure of secularization in modernity, I argue that these dynamics are primarily a consequence of overlooking modernity’s colonial structure. With this intervention, I seek to reconceptualize the very notion of the postsecular from an internal self-reflexivity of Western secular modernity to a liminal project that strives for the decolonization of secular modernity from outside its own rhetoric. In other words, I aspire to articulate the decolonizing potential of a certain notion of the postsecular.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will expand on both the postsecular debate and the decolonial turn. This literary review will ground the theoretical contribution of this dissertation, to which each of the four chapters and the conclusion that compose this

³ The exceptions to this rule are foundational to this study and therefore will be analyzed in the next section of this introduction.
dissertation will return. I then offer a brief note on my transdisciplinary ambitions and end with brief descriptions of the four chapters and the conclusion that lie ahead.

0.1 A Decolonial Intervention into the Postsecular Debate

The postsecular debate is a rich constellation of discussions that span the arenas of literary theory, intellectual history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, theology, feminist theory, among other fields. A survey of this debate reveals many divergent positions on the very meaning of the end of secularity. This is a task that has been initiated by James A. Beckford, who groups contemporary usages of the postsecular into six different categories: (i) secularization deniers and doubters, especially sociological critics of the “secularization thesis;” (ii) building on the secular, like the postmodern theology of John D. Caputo; (iii) seeking the reenchantment of culture, such as the religious turn in literary studies; (iv) studying the public resurgence of religion, especially in urban studies and international studies; (v) the new intersections between politics, philosophy, and theology, principally found in the works of Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor; and (vi) those critical of this term (Beckford 2012). For Beckford, this plurality of meanings, some apparently contradictory (such as the first two groups), is a negative trait that signals the limited analytic value inherent in the notion of the postsecular. As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, such characterization is uncharitable as it is unable to distinguish the different levels of abstraction at which each cluster makes its own intervention. No doubt an arbitrary exposition, for the purposes of introduction I will maintain Beckford’s typology as I elaborate on those parties that this dissertation identifies as its theoretical
interlocutors. It will appear that while internally diverse, the notion of the postsecular is of analytic value, especially for those interested in the critique of coloniality.

While it engages all six groups articulated by Beckford, this dissertation is primarily in dialogue with the cluster of new intersections between politics, philosophy, and theology (group v), those writers theorizing the question of reenchantment (group iii), and those that seek to build on the legacies of the secular (group ii). Here, the work of Habermas is paradigmatic as it is unmistakably the most influential deployment of the notion of the postsecular across the humanities and social sciences (Calhoun, Mendieta, and VanAntwerpen 2013b). The work of the anthropologist Talal Asad is also crucial given its contextualization of the secular/religious divide in the West’s colonial project. Lastly, an array of recent interventions, especially those at the intersections of postcolonial theory (Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey 2015) and the religious turn in literary studies (Branch 2016), will be most useful as I convey the position of my own intervention as formulated through Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx decolonial thinkers.

Habermas’s intervention into the postsecular debate can be traced to his response to the September 11 attacks in the United States, famously enunciated in 2001 in his acceptance speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. In this speech, Habermas connects the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism to a process of secularization that was “not bound up with the promise of compensation for the pain suffered through the disintegration of traditional forms of life” (2005, 328). A violent return of religion to the public sphere thus leads Habermas to ponder the significance of secularization in modernity. In Europe,

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4 An earlier, though much less developed, typology is given by James K. Smith in his introduction to the anthology After Modernity? (Smith 2008). More recently, Arie L Molendijk has offered a useful critical revision of Beckford’s typology (Molendijk 2015).
he argues, this was a process that has taken a very long time and, in fact, is one that continues to be contested. This point began a revision of the role of secularization in modernity, which for a long time was thought to be completed but no longer seemed so. Thus, in the interests of properly diagnosing and responding to this most recent iteration in the perpetual “dialectics of secularization” (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006) i.e. the latest “return” of religion, Habermas claims, one must first realize “what secularization means in our own postsecular societies” (2005, 328, my emphasis). At its core, postsecularity is for Habermas this newfound relationship between religion and secularization in societies that were once thought to be secular.\footnote{For an account of Habermas’s shifting views on religion throughout his lengthy career, see Eduardo Mendieta’s appendix to Habermas and Religion (Mendieta 2013).} For Habermas, postsecularity entails a learning process that, upon the continuous presence of religion in the public sphere, avoids the secularist dismissal and instead aspires towards understanding these new religious formations in the contexts of a pluralist democratic dialogue.

In the course of the subsequent years, Habermas has continued developing this notion of postsecularity to reflect the latest dynamics of religion in the now postsecular public sphere. This has entailed revising some of his earlier work, especially his theory of modernity and his theory of deliberative democracy (Habermas 2017). These adjustments have been some of the most influential developments within the postsecular debate, in part due to their policy implications and their theoretically revisionist trickle-down effect across the disciplines. For instance, building on the notion of translation as a “mode for nondestructive secularization,” as first put forth in his 2001 speech (2005, 336), Habermas now defends a postsecular account of public politics where religious individuals or groups would no longer need to translate their views into secular language to be taken as political
agents (Habermas 2008). This is a radical contrast to another towering figure in political philosophy such as John Rawls, who maintains a secular conception of the public sphere. Still, Habermas’s view does not imply a theocratic return of religion to the state, for the state nevertheless remains “secular” in Habermas’s account. Instead, the implication is that translation as a “mode for nondestructive secularization” is now the mediator between the public sphere and the state. Postsecularity as a learning process is what will “avoid a clash of civilizations,” allowing one in this position to “be far-sighted in our response to the risks involved in a secularization miscarrying in other parts of the world” (Habermas 2005, 328).

Another important figure in this discussion is the anthropologist Talal Asad. Asad’s work has contributed to the postsecular debate by historicizing the secular/religious divide. He has shown this binary’s historical specificities rooted in Latin Christendom, its subsequent conceptual arbitrariness in an ever-shifting flux of meanings, as well as its claims to solidity through a series of political maneuvers (Asad 1993, 2003). Asad points out the historical irony that the secular is originally “part of a theological discourse,” referring at some point to the divide in priesthood status between “monastic communities” and “non-monastic orders,” and later to “the transfer of ecclesiastical real property to laypersons” during the Reformation (Asad 2003, 39, 192). A genealogy of the secular/religious divide quickly demonstrates the impracticality of deploying these

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6 This brief illustration of Habermas’s work shows how his work can encompass not one but at least four of the groups as outline by Beckford: the public resurgence of religion (iv) leads to a questioning of the “secularization thesis” (i), but in a way that seeks to reconstruct the original meaning of the secular (ii), all from the trenches of philosophy (v). Beckford’s typology thus erroneously assumes that these arbitrary groupings are in contradiction when in fact they operate at different planes of abstraction.

7 The root of the concept goes back to its ancient Roman usage to refer to an era or age, as in the phrase “unto the ages of ages” (in saecula saeculorum). Charles Taylor has offered a thorough history of the secular in his A Secular Age (2007).
categories as if they were universal, ahistorical constructs. The secular, Asad argues, “is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred)” (Asad 2003, 25). Asad thus elucidates the mutual constitution of the secular/religious binary to show the discursive effects and material procedures of this divide.

Unlike Habermas, Asad’s work puts the Western European colonial enterprise at the center as a chief mechanism through which the secular is constituted: “new theorizations of the sacred were connected with European encounters with the non-European world, in the enlightened space and time that witnessed the construction of ‘religion’ and ‘nature’ as universal categories” (Asad 2003, 35). In other words, the colonial encounter essentializes a certain definition of religion as the other to the secular. In doing so, Asad breaks new ground by analyzing the dialectics of secularization via the theoretical lens of postcoloniality. On these lines, Peter van der Veer has followed Asad in order to trace the imperial entanglements between religion and secularism in Britain’s colonization of India. For van der Veer, one of the pitfalls of the secularization thesis was its tendency to subsume “divergent genealogies of secular modernity in one narrative of secularization” (Veer 2001, 14). Asad’s genealogical study of secularization thus makes it possible for van der Veer to speak of multiple secularities (alongside multiple religiosities). This is a move that echoes attempts in the theory of modernity to decenter the once teleological narrative of Western enlightened modernity by similarly speaking of “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt 2000). Habermas himself has recently approximated this proposal

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8 A figure that has continued this line in postcolonial literary studies is Manav Ratti (2013).
to rewrite his earlier theory of modernity so as to better capture what he thinks is the exceptional character of European modernity.⁹

I take Asad’s genealogical work as a point of departure to embark on an analysis of the dialectics of secularization from yet another geopolitical perspective, that of Latin America and the Caribbean. This move challenges not only Eurocentric understandings of secularity, but also of postsecularity, for it is my argument that the notion of the postsecular has a specific analytic value beyond the one prescribed by Habermas to refer to a certain self-reflexivity in those societies that were once deemed to be secular. If it is commendable that Habermas is theorizing the significance of Europe’s open-ended secularization, these efforts will continue to be Eurocentric as long as the theory of modernity fails to account for the also open-ended dialectics of modernity in the rest of the world, particularly concerning the relation among religion, secularization, and colonization. This dissertation therefore seeks to advance such global understanding of the dialectics of modernity and secularization by primarily engaging with the thinkers who uphold a different theory of modernity in which colonization has a more central role. From this perspective, not only was secularity never a fait accompli, but it is also possible to be(come) postsecular; such connotation, however, has very different theoretical and political implications from those outlined in the account of postsecularity that presupposes a certain passage through the secular.¹⁰

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⁹ For an analysis of the multiple modernities paradigm and the postsecular turn, see Massimo Rosati’s and Kristina Stoeckl’s *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies* (2012). In the Conclusion to this dissertation, I briefly return to this point vis-à-vis Enrique Dussel’s proposal of transmodernity.

¹⁰ I agree with Nandini Deo who points to the limiting understanding of postsecularity outlined by Habermas to claim that a postsecular society is “any society in which the state had advanced the secular project and now is willing to rethink it” (Deo 2018a, 10). I will reiterate this point in the Conclusion to this dissertation.
An alternative theory of modernity has been under construction since the 1960’s in Latin America and the Caribbean. Recuperating the writings of anti-colonial writers of the Caribbean such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Walter Rodney, as well as the contributions of dependency theorists and world-systems theory, this theory has been most explicitly developed by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000), the Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel (2012b), and the Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo (2011a). Their works encompass the core of the decolonial turn, supplying a much-needed alternative to the Eurocentrism of standard narratives of modernity (and postmodernity) that are part of the theoretical architectonic of most fields in the university. The theory of modernity that emerges from this collective body of work can be summed up in the following formulation: European modernity is not a product of the intellectual advancements of the Enlightenment, but of the material profits facilitated by the colonial project since 1492. Mignolo therefore speaks of coloniality as the “darker side” to Enlightened modernity. The argument here is not that coloniality is the precondition for the emergence of modernity but that (in Dussel’s formulation) coloniality is the “underside of modernity” (Dussel 1996). Modernity and coloniality are therefore co-constitutive elements of the same process in which one cannot exist without the other. The theoretical advantages of this theory of modernity are immediately evident: the spatial and temporal scope of modernity is expanded (back to the Americas in the late 15th century) and dynamics that were supposed to have been overcome by modernity are made visible again (coloniality lives on in modernity after the formal end of colonialism).

It is out of such decolonial theory of modernity that most of the thinkers that this dissertation analyzes go on to interpret and resignify historical and contemporary dynamics.
of religion and secularism in modernity. Such theoretical revisionism is part of the defining feature of the decolonial turn, which involves the task of epistemic decolonization. This task entails radically confronting the validity of inherited conceptual frameworks, especially those that were universalized through the colonialist imposition of modern thought, and either complementing or overcoming them with epistemic alternatives that better reflect the given context at hand (Mignolo 2007). This is one of the most important ways in which decolonial approaches differ from postcolonial approaches. While postcolonial approaches have found success in confronting the validity of certain Eurocentric conceptual frameworks, decolonial thinkers argue that postcolonial approaches often do not do enough to challenge the structural kernel of modern thought and affirm suppressed knowledges (Grosfoguel 2013). Here Asad’s own example is perhaps significant, for despite his impressive unmasking of the secular/religious divide, his study is explicitly bound by a Wittgensteinian “grammar of concepts” (Asad 2003, 25). The effect of this limit for the postsecular debate is seen in William Arnal and Russel T. McCutcheon’s echoing of Asad to argue that there simply is “no ‘beyond’ to secularism” besides an awareness of the historicity of concepts as “empty signifiers” (Arnal and McCutcheon 2012, 118).11 The decolonial turn recognizes the importance of postcolonial scholarship, but takes a further step by attaching scholarly praxis to the broader ethos of decolonization. As Vincent Lloyd has put it, echoing the work of the Caribbean intellectual Sylvia Wynter (whose work is the subject of Chapter Two of this dissertation), “revealing

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11 Commenting on the criticism of these categories, Arie L. Molendijk echoes this collapse in milder terms: “We may be slightly reluctant to do so, out of scepticism about the analytical value of these dichotomies, but, on the other hand, it is hard to see how we could do without this terminology that is so deeply ingrained in our Western understanding of the world” (Molendijk 2015, 103).
the contingency of the present is not enough,” and what one needs are “traditions of imagining otherwise” (Lloyd 2016, 15).

The figures analyzed in the subsequent chapters represent distinct, though overlapping, “traditions of imagining otherwise.” In their works, the dialectics of secularization are analyzed and resignified from the perspective of epistemic decolonization. This entails looking at the dynamics between religion and secularism not through the rhetoric of a triumphalist secular modernity, but through its “darker side” i.e. the colonial world from which both religion and secularism register as Eurocentric and colonialist ideologies (Carrasco Miró 2019). From this perspective, both secularity and religion are functional extensions of what Dussel has called the “ego conquiso” – the subjectivity that substantiates European modernity already presupposed in its ego cogito (Dussel 2014). A decolonial intervention into the postsecular debate is therefore launched when decolonial thinkers ask what it means to go “beyond” secularism. This is no longer a question of the apparent stubbornness of religion to vanish from the supposedly secular public sphere, but a question of the coloniality of both religion and secularism and the need to engage in epistemic decolonization “beyond” the grammar of such concepts. This dissertation thus explores what it would mean to decolonize the secular and the religious, and consequently, what it would mean to conceive of the postsecular (and the “postreligious”) in decolonial terms (Maldonado-Torres 2008b, Viefhues-Bailey 2015).

This dissertation especially builds on the recent attempts to examine the “secular-modern-colonial conceptual knot,” as Vincent Lloyd and Ludger Viefhues-Bailey have put it. With the publication of their special issue “Is the Postcolonial Postsecular?,” Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey (2015) have set a strong standard for the intervention that this dissertation
aims to make. What Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey do to the discourse of the postsecular via postcolonial theory is analogous to what this dissertation intends to do via the decolonial turn. If for Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey “there is something about the postcolonial that is inherently postsecular” (2015, 14), I argue that there is also something “inherently postsecular” in the decolonial turn, but different from postcolonial theory’s engagement with this constellation. Like Lloyd’s and Viefhues-Bailey’s intervention, this dissertation is thus also a rejoinder to arguments that do not find the notion of postsecular useful for either postcolonial or decolonial critique.\textsuperscript{12} While I agree with many of these criticisms, especially those that call out the colonialist liberalism of postsecular accounts like Habermas’s (Bugyis 2015), I do not believe in throwing out the proverbial baby with the bath water. My argument is that epistemic decolonization can enhance the notion of the postsecular beyond its current Eurocentric limitations.\textsuperscript{13}

The notion of postsecularity that emerges here is one that therefore closely mirrors the dynamics of epistemic decolonization. In this sense, it may initially appear to be more illustrative to speak of “de-secularization” to refer to the precise ways in which

\textsuperscript{12} Lloyd’s and Viefhues-Bailey’s special issue explicitly responds to the 2013 special issue “Antinomies of the Postsecular” that was edited by Aamir R. Mufti for boundary 2. This special issue gathers for the first time several criticisms of the postsecular from a postcolonial perspective. I will return to some of these arguments in the conclusion of this dissertation. To be sure, Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey are not very clear in their differentiation between postcolonial and decolonial approaches, as seen, for instance, in their passing inclusion of Sylvia Wynter into the fold of postcolonial theory. In Chapter Two, I show how Wynter’s project exceeds the demands of postcolonial scholarship.

\textsuperscript{13} As part of Lloyd’s and Viefhues-Bailey’s special issue, Eric Bugyis offers a critique of two mainstream postsecular analyses, those of Habermas and Alasdair MacIntyre. For Bugyis, their postsecular discourse follows a “logic of colonial appropriation, definition, and postcolonial reappropriation” that in effect continues “colonialism by other means” (Bugyis 2015, 27). Bugyis ends his contribution by urging scholars to tell the history of modernity “otherwise by starting from the perspective of those who claim to have been excluded, regardless of their status as ‘religious’ or ‘secular’” (Bugyis 2015, 37). This is what the task of epistemic decolonization entails and is therefore where this dissertation continues the conversation. Ángela Iranzo Dosdad has made a similar critique at the intersection of postsecularity and phenomenological accounts of temporality (Iranzo Dosdad 2016).
postsecularity is decolonized, alluding to the conceptual disjunctions between decoloniality and postcoloniality at work in the prefixes “de” and “post.” Mignolo has in fact made this argument before, explicitly juxtaposing desecularization to postsecularity. For Mignolo, “De-secularization is another way of saying that the need is not to overcome secularism (like in post-secularism) but to decolonize it” (Mignolo 2011b).14 Justin Beaumont, Klaus Eder, and Eduardo Mendieta have recently made a similar argument, though adding conceptual clarity to the distinction between postsecularity and de-secularization: “when there is talk of decolonization, there is also talk of desecularization. We note this because there are resonances between the postsecular and de-secularization in the wake of processes of de-westernizing, or at least de-linking from the West” (Beaumont, Eder, and Mendieta 2018, 3). Unlike Mignolo’s position, then, Beaumont, Eder, and Mendieta do not juxtapose desecularization to postsecularity. Instead, they understand postsecularity as a form of reflexivity already akin to how decolonial thinkers “are interested in is precisely rescuing the reflexive dimension of decolonization” (2018, 10). In other words, for Beaumont, Eder, and Mendieta, the postsecular is to the secular what the decolonial is to the colonial; that is, the relationship between these concepts is one “about immanent, reflexive, critical postures that aim to elucidate the co-determination of the colonial/decolonial, secular/postsecular dialectical dyads” (2018, 10). In the pages that follow, I conceived of the decolonial critique of secularity under this rubric of postsecularity. I take Beaumont, Eder, and Mendieta to the task when they argue that “If we have never been secular, to

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14 This argument was made as a public lecture in the context of the 2011 World Public Forum, and it has not been further developed since in any of Mignolo’s publications. It is unclear the extent to which Mignolo is here engaging the late Peter Berger’s theoretical proposal of desecularization (Berger 1999). I return to this question in the Conclusion to this dissertation. Berger is the most well-known case of a secularization thesis defector.
paraphrase Latour on modernity, we can also never become postsecular enough” (2018, 10).\footnote{Most recently, Justin Beaumont has edited the *Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity* (2019), an anthology that will no doubt become the inaugural anthology of the postsecular debate. The article cited here co-written with Eder and Mendieta was included as the anthology’s afterword.}

In the chapters ahead, I therefore explore what exactly is at stake when it comes to a dialogue between the postsecular and the decolonial. Beaumont, Eder, and Mendieta conclude their intervention by calling for scholarship to “attend to the growing recognition of multiple postsecularisms, critical postsecular consciousness and moves to decolonize the secular” (2018, 15). This dissertation aspires to be a concrete response to such call.

0.2 On Fields and Methods

One of the principal arguments of this dissertation is that the coloniality of secularism is sedimented by the disciplinary division of labor that constitutes the modern university. The chapters that follow take such division as its object of critique. In this undertaking, however, there is a risk of falling into the trap of a performative contradiction if we do not clarify the extent to which this scholarly exercise (the scholarly critique of scholarship) disavows many of the protocols and presuppositions that give shape to our object of examination. In other words, a note must be pronounced concerning our methodologies and our institutional conditions of possibility in order to clarify the complexities of this enterprise.

This dissertation is the result of almost six years of study and research in a program in comparative literature at a public research U.S. university. And yet, this product is hardly comparative or literary, at least in the sense of associating two or more literary traditions.
that correspond to clearly demarcated nation-states – as the field has been traditionally understood. This apparent contradiction is perhaps only justified by the recent trends in the field of comparative literature to interrogate the form and content of what is taken to be both “comparative” and “literature.” This has resulted in the decentering of national traditions as units of analysis, the expansion of what is to be considered the genre of “literature,” and the incorporation of a vast array of interpretative methodologies beyond conventional literary theory and criticism (Mignolo 2013, Domínguez, Saussy, and Villanueva 2015). This dissertation is possible in part due to such meta-theoretical interdisciplinary opening within comparative literature to question the inheritance of its own conceptual foundations as a field. Thus, to the extent that this dissertation shares this new impetus, it could be said that it is a bona fide comparative literature dissertation after all. But it would certainly be a mistake to assume that its intervention rests solely within this field. Instead, though institutionally made possible by comparative literature’s meta-theoretical interdisciplinarity, it is the ambition of this work to contribute in substantive content to the fields and disciplines with which this dissertation is in conversation, especially philosophy, ethnic studies, and religious studies.

I hope to contribute to these other institutional spaces with which I have been in conversation as an outsider during these past six years, to various degrees, by engaging their debates from the perspective of epistemic decolonization, doing so in a way that synthesizes what is being brought together under this dissertation. Here the jargon of comparativity remains lacking, for as Mignolo has recently argued, it presupposes imperial tools that have been central in the legitimation of the cultural and political project of the modern/colonial world (Mignolo 2013, 100-101). The praxis that I envision in this work is
not properly comparative, but following Stafford Beer and Edouard Glissant, it could be said to be a relational one where disciplinary and methodological hierarchization makes way to other ways of knowing and being (Weheliye 2014, 13, 30). Beer, the famous cyberneticist who, as I will argue in Chapter Two, is an understudied influence on the thought of Sylvia Wynter, has a particularly powerful formulation concerning the importance of relationality. Alongside the entire paradigm of cybernetics, Beer sought a new way to produce scholarship in a rapidly changing world that would break away from the notoriously slow changing tides of the modern university. For Beer, the modern university’s modus operandi of analysis-ad-infinitum is a blunder that causes knowledge to grow “by infinitesimals” while simultaneously “understanding of the world actually recedes, because the word really is an interacting system” (Beer 1980, 64). Against such analysis-ad-infinitum, Beer proposes the procedure of synthesis, which is ruled by relation and which aims at the big picture: the interacting system that is our ever-changing world. Such reframing of the big picture is how I foresee this “comparative literature” dissertation as contributing to debates in philosophy, ethnic studies, and religious studies.

Is this section a longwinded way of saying that this dissertation is an interdisciplinary project? The short answer to this question is “no,” for interdisciplinarity does not get at the root of the problem of the coloniality of knowledge, as the former continues to presuppose the latter. This is because interdisciplinarity attempts to solve the disciplinary game by supplementing an existing discipline with the tools of another, do so without questioning the formal modus operandi of each discipline and of scholarly practice.

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16 Weheliye specifically criticizes the method of comparativity in diaspora studies following Glissant’s notion of Relation, which I engage in Chapter Four. Within political theory, Juliet Hooker has also recently opposed comparativity for its pretensions of neutrality and for its constructing of the differences that it purports to analyze, such as race, nation, and culture (Hooker 2017, 11, 14).
in general. This is why Beer’s solution to this conundrum is one that “has got to be metasystemic, not merely interdisciplinary. We are not interested in forming a league of disciplinary paranoids, but (as Hegel could have told us) in a higher synthesis of disciplines” (Beer 1980, 65). In other words, the solution that Beer proposes is not the interrelation of disciplines, which may still operate within the logic of analysis-ad-infinitum, but their transcendence (Beer 1980, 65). What I aim to enact in this dissertation is therefore a transdisciplinary scholarly praxis that can create new knowledge that delinks from the coloniality of knowledge in scholarly practice. Greater than the sum of its parts, transdisciplinarity does not merely engage distinct disciplines alongside each other, but, as Lewis Gordon has put it, inflects each disciplinary formation “through each other” (Gordon 2014, 87).

Gordon’s own defense of transdisciplinarity is one that takes place from the perspective of epistemic decolonization and therefore targets what he contends is the modern university’s “disciplinary decadence” that fetishizes a stagnant method over a dynamic reality (Gordon 2014, 86). If for Beer, the disciplinary game produces an infinitesimal production of paranoid knowledge that misses the rapidly changing world, for Gordon, it solipsistically narrows such a world through a single methodological lens or disciplinary formation. Following Fanon’s critique of methods for being self-devouring (Fanon 2008), Gordon calls for the “suspension of method” as a strategy to evaluate coloniality at the methodological level (Gordon 2014, 85). This is not to throw rigor out the window but to bring a complex and dynamic reality into focus and to reconstruct the

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17 Why this dissertation has taken root in a program in comparative literature, and not in a philosophy, ethnic studies, or religious studies department, is a question that has to do with my own life trajectory and its relation to how these fields take up the task of epistemic decolonization.
critical production of knowledge away from fossilized methods and with new criteria. Nelson Maldonado-Torres has since built on Gordon’s critique of disciplinary decadence to spell out the bases for a decolonial approach to transdisciplinarity (Maldonado-Torres 2015). For Maldonado-Torres, this entails going beyond or transcending (as in the prefix “trans” in transdisciplinarity) the two lines of demarcation that solidify the modern Western university as a privileged space for the production of knowledge: the “secular line,” on the one hand, that emerges with the rise of humanist discourse during the European Renaissance and distinguishes the methodologies of reason and revelation; and the “color line,” on the other, that constructs the ethno-racial hierarchies implicit in secularization but remain concealed in the eyes of the liberal humanist scholar (Maldonado-Torres 2015, 2).

In bringing the postsecular debate in conversation with the decolonial turn, this dissertation thus seeks to renounce and overcome the secular and color lines as they are sedimented in the production of scholarly knowledge. This is not done with the intention of comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between the postsecular debate and the decolonial turn with a pretension of scholarly neutrality, but by inflecting each constellation with each other to a “higher” synthesis that can re-apprehend reality beyond the lens of a single perspective. My main objective is simply to offer an account of postsecularity that can be useful not just for the for the “unfinished project of decolonization” (Maldonado-Torres 2011a, 3, Alexander 2005, 271). M. Jacqui Alexander, whose work I study in Chapter Three, proposes that this unfinished project is as urgent within “intellectual projects as within the relationships among intellectuals who continue to make theory out of studied myopia” (Alexander 2005, 271). In the pages below, I aspire to adopt a scholarly practice that makes justice to this unfinished project.
0.3 Dissertation Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One starts with the intellectual production of Latin American thought. It traces the fine line between Latin American liberation theology and liberation philosophy in the work of Enrique Dussel (the leading exponent of liberation philosophy) in order to question the task of secularization as a methodological distinction. Against an existing understanding of liberation philosophy as the secularization of liberation theology, this chapter engages in a process of epistemic decolonization by rethinking the methodological foundations of both philosophy and theology as disciplinary modes of inquiry. I argue that the resulting understanding of the relation between liberation theology and liberation philosophy is best articulated with the notion of the postsecular, which necessitates going beyond an uncritical naturalization of secularity as the modus operandi of thought. This new relationality between liberation philosophy and liberation theology allows for the emergence of a postsecular philosophy and a postreligious theology, both of which are tied together by what Dussel calls an “ana-dialectics” of liberation (Dussel 1974a).

Because of the prominence of Habermas’s work in the postsecular debate, with whom Dussel established a dialogue in the 1990’s, this chapter can also be understood as calling for a second round of such North-South dialogue. In this sense, if the 1990’s debates between liberation philosophy and Frankfurt critical theory centered on the normativity of ethics and the contributions of the linguistic and pragmatic turns (Dussel 1996), I present this chapter as the beginning of another dialogue between both traditions, this time on the questions of secularization and postsecularity within a theory of modernity. While I believe that South-South dialogues should be the primary philosophical program of liberation philosophy and decolonial thought at large over the next decades to come, jumpstarting
this debate with Habermas will demonstrate the contributions that decolonial thinking can make on today’s issues of global relevance. I see this as one of the many tasks that the next generation of liberation philosophers will have to tackle.\textsuperscript{18}

Chapter Two “shifts the geography of reason” to the Caribbean, turning to Sylvia Wynter in order to articulate a critique of the coloniality of secular modernity.\textsuperscript{19} Wynter’s project emphatically defends the need to “un/write” our present “secular mode of the Subject” in the creation of new ways of knowing and alternative forms of life beyond our modern/colonial liberal-secular horizon (Wynter 1984, 22). This chapter thus teases out the postsecular impetus in Wynter’s work, challenging scholarly interpretations of Wynter’s critique of theocentric epistemes as implicitly endorsing secularism. While it is true that Wynter’s project assumes a secular conception of literature (Wynter 1984, 50), I show that such a presupposition does not directly conflict with a postsecular interpretation. In this regard, Wynter’s project offers a particular solution to one of the core points of contention in the postsecular debate: the extent to which secularity is to be dialectically subsumed by its critique. I examine two specific instances in Wynter’s work that demonstrate this solution: (i) the elaboration of a New Science of the Word that narrows the gap between the \textit{poietic} and the \textit{poetic}, and (ii) Wynter’s early novel \textit{The Hills of Hebron} as an illustration of the “ceremonies” that Wynter’s later theoretical work would call for in the overcoming of the secular mode of the subject.

\textsuperscript{18} This task would have to involve the organization of several face-to-face symposia. This was, in fact, one of the unique elements of the first round of dialogues between liberation philosophy and the Frankfurt School, which involved a series of meetings in Argentina, Germany, and Mexico. To be sure, in these dialogues, the most committed interlocutor from the Frankfurt School was not Habermas, but his own teacher, Karl-Otto Apel. Dussel and Apel gathered their dialogue in their co-authored \textit{Ética del discurso y ética de la liberación} (Apel and Dussel 2004).

\textsuperscript{19} “Shifting the geography of reason” is the motto of the Caribbean Philosophical Association.
Wynter’s work is a stern response to Habermas’s Eurocentric account of postsecularity. Habermas does not see any epistemic value in the “religious movements” that he sees as having cut themselves off from what he takes to be the “cognitive achievements of modernity” (Habermas 2010, 78). Wynter’s position, however, shows how marginalized “religious movements,” such as those of the African diaspora, contain epistemic components that should be wedded to the so-called “cognitive achievements of modernity.” Her proposal is not predicated on a liberal politics of inclusion but on a decolonial politics that severs the “cognitive achievements of modernity” from their imperial roots. Wynter’s postsecularity, I argue, is a “demonic” secularity that un/writes hegemonic secularity into something else (Wynter 1990). Here the demonic is a self-conscious re-signification of what stands beyond (Christian and secular) Man: Fanon’s damnés de la terre (Fanon 2004).

In crucial moments of her argument, Wynter deploys the concept of “flesh” against both theocentric and biocentric conceptions of the human. This deployment and the demonic opening beyond Man that her work also connects Chapter Two to Chapter Three, in which I focus on yet another intellectual cluster from the Americas that puts forth a decolonial intervention in the critique of secularity with the concept of “flesh:” women of color feminism. While not a homogenous constellation, many women of color feminists share a straightforward critique of both religious and secular epistemologies as having facilitated the colonization of existing ways of knowing and being in the Americas. Figures like the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa and the Afro-Trinidadian scholar M. Jacqui Alexander, retrieve and utilize the notion of spirituality against both religious and secular epistemic frameworks and institutions (Facio and Lara 2014, Comas-Diaz 2008). This
chapter articulates how such deployment of spirituality can be conceived as a postsecular decolonial move.

The chapter thus seeks to recuperate women of color feminism into the fold of postsecular feminism (Braidotti 2008, Deo 2018b). Rosi Braidotti is credited with agglomerating this feminist cluster, in which she includes black feminist and critical theories as well as interventions in “postcolonial and critical race theories” such as the works of Saba Mahmood, bell hooks, Cornel West, Edouard Glissant, Patricia Hill Collins, and Drucilla Cornell (Braidotti 2008, 7-8). Braidotti is interested in how these postsecular currents make “manifest the notion that agency, or political subjectivity, can be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality” (Braidotti 2008, 2). In light of the revival of a racist and imperialist clash of civilizations paradigm between a supposedly “secular” West and a “religious” Muslim world, Braidotti argues that “feminists and queer activists cannot be simply secular, or be secular in a simple or self-evident sense” (Braidotti 2008, 4), hence the emergence of a postsecular feminism. Despite the promise of this claim, Braidotti’s proposal does not substantially follow any of the aforementioned thinkers and instead lapses into a Eurocentric canon of poststructuralist, posthumanist, and neo-vitalist tendencies that largely ignore the question of the colonial difference.

Chapter Three therefore turns to and builds on Drucilla Cornell’s and Stephen Seely’s *The Spirit of Revolution*, where they find inspiration in a women of color feminists praxis in which “spirituality has long been considered an invaluable resource for thinking through how one might get past the deep traumas imposed by colonization and capitalism, as well as by the struggle against them” (2016, 9). Close readings of Anzaldúa and
Alexander are here offered to strengthen how postsecular feminism engages gender, sexuality, and race to theorize embodiment, knowledge production, and spirituality. An examination of these dynamics shows how the material realities of coloniality incarnated in the flesh can become concrete tools for an alternative production of knowledge beyond the demands of secular disciplinarity. Moreover, a relational reading between these thinkers leads the chapter to delve into the potentialities opened by the confluences between both places from which Anzaldúa and Alexander launch their projects: The U.S-Mexico borderlands and the Caribbean waters. Facilitated by Moraga’s “theory-in-the-flesh” paradigm, this chapter deepens the postsecular autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh outlined via Wynter in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four systematizes the importance of aesthetics for the critique of secularity and the project of epistemic decolonization in general. Present throughout the previous three chapters, the aesthetic field is crucial for its privileged place in the elaboration of new symbolic orders that can counter the hegemony of modernity/coloniality. All figures analyzed in depth in this dissertation would agree that without the rewriting of the aesthetic field, no major transformation would take place in our theories and practices. The chapter thus revisits the figures previously analyzed through the question of postsecular aesthetics and ventures into the Caribbean and Latinx literary arena via analyses of Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting* and Junot Díaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. It embraces the discourse of “decolonial aesthetics” (Transnational Decolonial Institute 2011, Mignolo
and Vazquez 2013) in order to elucidate the role of aesthetics in the decolonization of the secular/religious divide.  

Echoing the contemporary aesthetic theory of Jacques Rancière, who has usefully theorized aesthetics as the field in which the sensible is distributed and redistributed (Rancière 2006), this chapter points towards a decolonial “redistribution of the sensible” wherein alternative forms of experience emerge as real possibilities to ground the transformation of thought and practice. I trace some of these themes in the writings of Caribbean intellectuals such as Edouard Glissant and Aimé Césaire, from which a decolonial theopoetic discourse begins to emerge that not only questions the secularization of sensibility in Western aesthetics (Lockward 2017), but also illuminates the spiritual elements in the redistribution of the sensible. The chapter thereby offers the project of decolonial aesthetics as yet another contributor to the ongoing theorizations of postsecularity that seek to understand the shifting dynamics of the secular/religious divide in our contemporary era.

In the conclusion, I tie in some of the loose ends that were left over from each of the previous four chapters and reaffirm the main thesis of this dissertation: decolonization resignifies the discourse of postsecularity from an intra-European narrative of self-reflexivity, to an analectical praxis of the affirmation of what escapes the modern/colonial secular/religious divide. Only through this maneuver can postsecularity and decolonization walk hand in hand towards a liberatory future.

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20 These literary examples are by no means exhaustive or representative of Caribbean and Latinx literature, and neither do these fields have a monopoly on decolonial poetics. Their selection has been contingent on my own limited trajectory within Latinx literary studies.
CHAPTER ONE

The Latin American Conflict of the Faculties: Thinking Liberation Beyond the Secular/Religious Divide

“Secularization [was] the false name of fetishism; and the atheism of the left was a first dialectical moment, whose second moment is the affirmation of the absolute as liberation.”

Enrique Dussel

“It would have thus passed from the necessary opposition between fundamentalist religion (as irrational and alienating myth) and secularism (Eurocentric, colonialist and dominant ideology), to a mature and healthy articulation between critical-liberating religion and the necessary secularity of political, and economic institutions, proper to the contemporary development of history in the age of globality.”

Enrique Dussel

1.0 Introduction

In Latin America, two intellectual currents committed to liberation share genealogical roots. The first is liberation theology, a movement that was initiated within the Latin American Christian Church but quickly became a global theological revolution critical of social, political, and economic domination grounded on local experiences of oppression united by a shared Global South experience of poverty and dependency (Tamayo 2017). Less known than liberation theology on a planetary scale, but still influential in Latin America, is liberation philosophy, a movement that is understood by many (especially in the United States) as having exported the methods and approaches of liberation theology into the philosophical arena, effectively putting liberation theology on secular grounds (Schuttle 1993, 174). Rarely are these two intellectual currents analyzed alongside each other, for they are kept apart by a secular/religious disciplinary divide that disconnects philosophy from theology. This chapter follows recent calls within both liberation theology (Mella 2016) and liberation philosophy (Dussel 2017) to engage in a
process of epistemic decolonization, in order to rethink the relationality between these two currents beyond the secular/religious disciplinary divide. It is my argument that tracing the relationalities between liberation theology and liberation philosophy with the purposes of engaging in epistemic decolonization will put into question the claim that liberation philosophy situates liberation theology *on secular grounds*.

Focusing primarily on the work of the Latin American thinker Enrique Dussel, whose work spans across both the theological and philosophical arenas, this chapter seeks to make a contribution to the ongoing rethinking of secularity that characterizes what has come to be known as the “postsecular debate” (Gorski et al. 2012). As I elaborated in the Introduction to this dissertation, this is a debate concerned with re-articulating the role of secularization in modernity in light of the continuous presence of religion in modern life. Led by the work of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 2008), the postsecular gestures to the self-reflexivity of a failed secularity to learn from its own mistakes. As a key figure of the “decolonial turn” (Maldonado-Torres 2011b, a), the ways in which Dussel theorizes secularization throughout his work will here form the foundation of a decolonial account of postsecularity that will continue to unfold in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation. Such theorization departs not from the perspective of an intra-European narrative, but from this narrative’s “darker side” *i.e.* from the colonial world (Mignolo 2011a). From this angle, it is not simply the stubborn presence of religion in what was once supposed to be a secular modernity that sparks the thinking of postsecularity, but it is instead the *coloniality of the secular* that stimulates such thinking, a maneuver that necessarily also resignifies what it means to go “beyond” the secular. As it will become clear, however, the decolonization of secularity, in particular of secularization as a
methodological separation that splits theology and philosophy apart, does not entails its simplistic rejection. What is called for as a substitute is rather a more complex account of what secularity entails.

Dussel provides a complex account of secularization by conceiving of it in terms of a critique of “fetishization,” the ossification and sacralization of institutions out of which domination emerges. As the first epigraph to this chapter indicates, at one point in history, a dialectical process of secularization becomes petrified in a way that becomes a “false name of fetishism.” This means that when the dialectics of secularization cease their movement, an ossification takes place that gives way to secularism as a new fetish i.e. “the atheism of the left.” To go beyond secularism therefore calls for the development of an anti-fetishist method that would jumpstart the dialectics of secularization anew. This is what Dussel refers to by “the affirmation of the absolute as liberation,” an enigmatic formulation that brings liberation philosophy close to liberation theology and warrants a rethinking of such relationality. It is my argument that in this resignification of secularity, liberation philosophy advances what could be called a postsecular way of understanding the relation between religion and philosophy. It is, in effect, the emergence of a new epistemic horizon where a fruitful exchange can take place between religion and secularity, theology and philosophy, that cannot simply be understood via the old secular/religious divide.

If Dussel and Habermas held a dialogue in the 1990’s that faced liberation philosophy and Frankfurt critical theory on the normativity of ethics and the contributions of the linguistic and pragmatic turns (Dussel 1996), the ambitions of this chapter are to contribute towards a second round of such North-South dialogue, but this time on the
question of secularization and postsecularity. To be sure, this is a dialogue that has been implicitly building in the work of scholars that navigate both liberation philosophy and Frankfurt critical theory traditions, such as Eduardo Mendieta, but is one that has not been explicitly thematized as a dialogue.\textsuperscript{21} Such new round, I argue, will demonstrate the extent to which contemporary theorizations of postsecularity rely on an Eurocentric account of modernity, and will likewise reveal the theoretical relevance of decolonial thought to one of the most pressing contemporary topics in the world.

The outline of this chapter is as follows: First, I offer a brief account of both Latin American liberation theology and liberation philosophy, and I define Dussel’s understanding of the relation between theology and philosophy in general. Second, I sketch Dussel’s analysis of how the dialectics of secularization in the West culminate in both a religious and a secular form of fundamentalism, as Eurocentric ideologies indebted to the project of colonization. Here, I also elucidate what Dussel takes to be liberation theology’s critique of such fundamentalisms. Third, I take an interpretative leap, \textit{pace} Dussel, and propose liberation philosophy as another distinct critique of the secular/religious fundamentalist binary. Focusing on Dussel’s trailblazing reading of Karl Marx in his \textit{Las metáforas teológicas de Marx} (1993b), I argue that a decolonial liberation philosophy must by necessity be a postsecular philosophy that disrupts the modern/colonial secular/religious divide. The postsecular Marx that emerges proves to be useful in the decolonial critique of modernity, challenging recent rejections of Marx’s work as a potential theoretical resource.

\textsuperscript{21} As I showed in the Introduction to this dissertation, Mendieta’s work is central to the intervention that I aim to make in this chapter. For not only is Mendieta the most well-known translator and editor of Dussel’s work, but, in his capacity as the editor of many major anthologies, he has also played an important role in the theorization of the turn to religion in critical theory, especially in Habermas’s own work (Mendieta 2005, Mendieta and VanAntwerpen 2011, Calhoun, Mendieta, and VanAntwerpen 2013b).
I conclude with brief remarks on epistemic decolonization.

1.1 Latin American Liberationist Thought and Methodological Separation

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a detailed account of the mutual emergence of liberation theology and liberation philosophy, I shall offer a brief outline that will allow us to understand their shared origins and their respective specificities. This brief account will be sufficient to contextualize their respective critiques of the dialectics of secularization and my own proposal for a decolonial (postsecular and postreligious) account of their relationality. In exploring the relation between liberation theology and liberation philosophy, I am also directly responding to Raúl Fornet-Betancourt’s outline for a more fruitful interaction between both intellectual movements (Fornet-Betancourt 2000). Fornet-Betancourt calls for a revision of the respective functions and forms of knowing of each movement, especially given their mutual reliance on a culturally determined organization of knowledge belonging to the Western university (Fornet-Betancourt 2000).

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22 See my critique of Amy Allen’s The End of Progress for a slightly expanded version of this argument (Vizcaino 2016).

23 An in-depth history of this mutuality has in fact yet to be written. In 1973, Julio Cesar Teran Dutari was the first to put on the table the potential methodological ramifications of the then nascent interaction between liberation philosophy and liberation theology (Terán Dutari 1974). Since then, the closest contribution to this issue can be found in the work of Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, available in German (Fornet-Betancourt 1987). A shorter essay, which I will engage below, summarizes the situation and does offer a rich bibliographic compendium to embark on this task (Fornet-Betancourt 2000).

24 In using the notion of the postreligious, I follow the work of Maldonado-Torres and Mark L. Taylor. First, Maldonado-Torres understands Dussel’s critique of modernity to encompass the modern/colonial modality of the secular/religious divide. So just as modern religion cannot exist without its mirror secular other (as I demonstrated in the Introduction to this dissertation), the category of the “postsecular” would also imply a certain “postreligious” intentionality (Maldonado-Torres 2008b, 383). Second, while not explicitly using the notion of the postreligious, Taylor an equivalent notion of the post-theological to theorize the politicality of theology (Taylor 2011, 3-4). I will develop this concept further in the Conclusion to this dissertation, but for now it should be clear that, unlike Eurocentric accounts of postsecularity, for me the mere presence of religion in modernity does not necessarily require the deployment of the notion of the postsecular.
Betancourt 2000, 696, my translation). In other words, their disciplinary division must be reconsidered today, “not to renounce their respective autonomies, nor to deny fields of specific competence, but to reconfigure disciplinary limits on the new basis of interaction” (Fornet-Betancourt 2000, 696, my translation). I believe this reconfiguration that Fornet-Betancourt calls for is already beginning to taking place with the project of epistemic decolonization. This chapter aims to direct this reconfiguration towards a critique of a modern/colonial understanding of the process of secularization.

1.1.1 Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, as a professional academic theology, emerges at a specific historical conjuncture when revolutionary theory and practice came together in Latin America after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The success of the Cuban Revolution showed that social and political struggle could overcome the neocolonial conditions that continued to plague most of Latin America despite having achieved formal independence from European colonial powers in the 19th century. An air of transformation permeated many sectors of Latin American society, especially the large rural and urban masses of working-class peoples. Among these were groups of Christians that entered the political arena demanding better living and working conditions. Because at this very same time the Christian Church had just come out of the transformative process that was the Second Vatican Council, some Latin American theologians wanted to support their flocks in these emerging social and political movements (Dussel 1995b, 82). The theological justification for this accompaniment is what became known as liberation theology. Against the reigning theological discourses of the time that saw in economic poverty the seed for a spiritual reward in the afterlife, liberation theology put forth a critical analysis of poverty that
included the categories of economic exploitation and political domination. The struggling poor and their demands for liberation against domination were now at the center of all theological inquiry. “It is from the praxis of these groups, and from their theory,” Dussel argues, “that the most important theological break in Latin American history will emerge since the fifteenth century” (Dussel 1995b, 83-84, my translation).

As the quote just cited indicates, however, liberation theology is itself not the first theological response to domination in Latin America as such. Figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas, Tupac Amaru, or Miguel Hidalgo abound in the past that have theologically justified moments in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism across the Americas (Dussel 1995b, 42). What makes liberation theology exceptional is its contextual engagement with social reality via its critical theorization of poverty and economic exploitation. This is a feat made possible by its methodological openness to what at the time was possibly the most original current of social science to originate from Latin America: dependency theory.25 Primarily an intervention into the field of economics, dependency theory elaborated a critique of neodevelopmentalist, modernization, and orthodox Marxist theories of production for failing to understand the structural and historical origins of the underdevelopment that besieged Latin America (Grosfoguel 2000, 357). Because the former theories were not grounded on the empirical realities of Latin America, their prescriptions for development presupposed the historical trajectories that took place in the contexts where these theories originated from, mainly central Europe and the United States. In the case of orthodox Marxists, for instance, Latin America’s

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25 Another influential source for liberation theology was the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Dussel 1995b, 95, Freire 2000). This was the case both in theoretical terms (its understanding of consciousness-raising and its notion of hope) as well as in practical terms (the organizing of local communities in literacy campaigns) (Kirylo 2011).
underdevelopment was understood to be the result of the feudal relations of production inherited from a “backward” Spanish colonial culture. Many Orthodox Marxists still believed to various degrees that the forces of production must first be developed by modern capitalist industries in order to eventually be able to route them towards a socialist mode of production (like the Mensheviks did earlier in Russia). Against these approaches that still lingered in social-scientific debates throughout the 20th century, dependency theorists explained Latin America’s underdevelopment not as a deficiency of modernity, but as a result of the very structure of modern capitalist production (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992).

Because modernization theories presupposed the “primitive accumulation” of capital, as Marxists called it, or the colonial project which enriched Europe at the cost of enslaving Latin America and Africa, the underdevelopment caused by such colonial project could not directly be resolved through more capitalism. Dependency theorists, such as Samir Amin, instead called for the “delinking”26 from such global system and the implementation of non-capitalist modes of production that do not presuppose the teleological stageism of both capitalists and orthodox Marxists (Amin 1987).27

The language of dependency theory consequently permitted the participants of the second meeting of the Episcopal Council of Latin America (CELAM), which took place in 1968 in Medellín, Colombia, to understand Latin America’s poverty within a neocolonial

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26 Within decolonial thought, the notion of an epistemic “delinking” from Eurocentrism has been advanced by Walter Mignolo (2007). In effect, Mignolo applies to epistemology the framework that dependency theorists such as Amin developed earlier in the field of economic development.

27 A proper understanding of dependency theory disproves the commonly held misunderstanding that assumes that liberation theology is nothing more than a syncretism of Marxism and Christianity, a declaration facilitated by the Vatican’s 1984 condemnation of liberation theology and its “terrible contradictions” caused by a Marxist influence (CDF 1984). To be sure, as we shall see with Dussel’s postsecular reading of Marx, this entire frame of the situation should be rethought after accounting for the ways in which Marx’s own work contains a theological subtext.
context of dependency imposed by the economic forces of the Global North (CELAM 1968). This meeting is assumed to have consolidated the many trajectories and perspectives that soon would give rise to liberation theology as a theological movement connected to the social and political praxis of the struggling poor. The following year, Rubem A. Alves’s *A Theology of Human Hope* (1969) would appear in print, initiating a cascade of publications that gave clarity and theoretical depth to the movement, the most important being Hugo Assmann’s *Teología desde la praxis de la liberación* (1973) and Gustavo Gutierrez’s *Teología de la liberación* (1975).28 According to Dussel’s own historical account of liberation theology, Gutierrez’s contribution, which soon became the paradigmatic text of the movement, made explicit the collective nature of liberation theology as a movement not dependent on a single founder but on a continental ecclesial experience (Dussel 1995b, 114). This was a continental experience of walking with the poor in their social and political struggles that became solidified in the famous “preferential option for the poor.” Of course, this is also what made liberation theology so dangerous in the eyes of right-wing Latin American governments and the intelligence apparatus of the U.S. government, both of which cooperated in the subsequent persecution of theologians and practitioners throughout the continent (Dussel 1995b, 153). In its socio-political commitment to liberation, however, and particularly in its deployment of social-scientific findings as a diagnostic tool to get there, liberation theology enacted not just change in the content of theological inquiry but a true transformation in the form of theological reflection (Dussel 1974b, 182).

28 Alves’s text was based on his doctoral dissertation “Toward a Theology of Liberation,” written at the Princeton Theological Seminary the previous year. Similarly, Gutierrez’s text grows from a lecture he gave in 1968 before the CEPAL conference, titled “Towards a Theology of Liberation” (Scannone 2009, 60).
1.1.2 Liberation Philosophy

On the other side of the disciplinary divide, liberation philosophy develops tangentially to the emergence of liberation theology by also consolidating itself in the late 1960’s in Latin America, amidst debates in dependency theory and the political struggles for socialism in the region. Like liberation theology, liberation philosophy is an intellectual movement grounded in praxis that ultimately aims to theorize reality and not ideas (Dussel 2011b, 511). However, unlike its theological counterpart whose participants came from all corners of the Americas, liberation philosophy as such first appears exclusively within a single national context (Argentina), with the added caveat that many of these philosophers were also involved in the development of liberation theology, before also spreading to other parts of the continent.\(^29\) The escalating political circumstances of repression in Argentina soon urged these philosophers to offer a continental reflection on the conditions of economic, political, and cultural domination in the region. Liberation philosophy’s own “pre-history,” as Eduardo Mendieta puts it, is also a rich one that starts with the critique of colonization in las Casas and continues in the justification for anti-imperial emancipation in Simón Bolívar and others (Mendieta 1996, xviii). The discursive location from which it emerges as a professional academic philosophy, however, is the mid-20\(^{th}\) century debate on the nature and character of an authentic Latin American philosophy, which at the time was taking place between Leopoldo Zea and Augusto Salazar Bondy. Salazar Bondy famously proposed that given Latin America’s condition of economic and cultural dependency, an authentic philosophy had yet to appear in the continent (Salazar Bondy

\(^{29}\) Fornet-Betancourt construes these affinities (the personal and the continental) as the two principal elements that result in a “convergence in questions of method and contents” between liberation theology and liberation philosophy (Fornet-Betancourt 2000, 692).
A group of young Argentine philosophers, among them Dussel, Rodolfo Kusch, Juan Carlos Scannone, and Horacio Cerutti, responded to Salazar Bondy’s call by searching for a philosophy that would negate Latin America’s dominated condition. This is how liberation philosophy was born in the early 1970’s (Scannone 2009, 61).

With the 1973 publication of the collective *Hacia una filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana* (Ardiles et al. 1973), liberation philosophy characterized itself as the elaboration of a unique method and a categorical framework that would demonstrate the existence of an authentic Latin American philosophy, yet not without renouncing any claim to universality. The framework was developed through an engagement with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, particularly his notions of totality, exteriority, and alterity, out of which an analogous “preferential option for the poor” was conceived. In this elaboration, Latin America was the exterior Other to a totalizing European consciousness, which put Latin America in a critical position to unmask the domineering aspects of a European philosophy which pretended to speak for the universal when it only spoke to itself about itself (Dussel and Guillot 1975). On the other hand, the method of this critical philosophy was advanced through an engagement with the dialectical tradition from Aristotle to Hegel and the latter’s critics – Friedrich Schelling, Ludwig Feuerbach, Marx, and Søren Kierkegaard. Accordingly, Hegelian dialectics were deemed to work within a totalizing logic that prevented a true radical exteriority to intervene in the dialectical process *i.e.* Latin American thought. An *analectical* method or moment was instead put forth that accounted

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30 The importance of this political engagement with Levinas from a Latin American perspective continues to be forgotten in the history of ideas. For instance, contemporary North American and European scholarship on Levinas presents itself as having inaugurated a political engagement with Levinas, a gesture which perpetuates the Eurocentrism that the Latin American philosophers sought to criticize in the early 1970’s (Maldonado-Torres 2012b).
for a way through which such exteriority can irrupt the dialectical process from the outside, thereby establishing the foundations for a new system beyond the given totality (Dussel 1974a). With these two elements in hand, liberation philosophy embarked on the task of rewriting not just the history of philosophy, but all philosophical domains of inquiry. More and more thinkers began to contribute to such task from their respective hermeneutic locations, creating a rich systematic philosophical movement, yet one not without its creative internal differences.31

The work of Enrique Dussel is here representative of liberation philosophy. Not only did he critically engaged the work of Levinas to develop the broad categorical framework of liberation philosophy and also substantially advanced the analectical moment, but he also explicitly intervened in the Zea-Bondy debate by seeking to recover the history of Latin American thought and insert it within a universal history of philosophy.32 In the 1970’s Dussel would be primarily preoccupied with the development of a five volume Latin American ethics, which was roughly summarized in his 1977 Filosofía de la liberación (Dussel 2011a), a book equivalent to Gutierrez’s in its synthesizing of the intellectual movement to which it belongs. A bomb attack at his home led Dussel to seek exile in Mexico, where he embarked on an ambitious decade-long study of Marx’s oeuvre that would produce arguably one of the most original readings of Marx’s

31 One of the main points of contention has been on the extent to which Marxist concepts should or should not be incorporated into the framework of liberation philosophy, as seen in debates over the usage of “people” [pueblo] or “class” as the subject of philosophy. Horacio Cerutti argues that through this debate, liberation philosophy became split between a “populist” current, and those critical of populism, with each side subsequently breaking down cross finer methodological issues (Cerutti Guldberg 2006).

32 Dussel attended Levinas’s courses while he was simultaneously a licentiate student in religious studies and a doctoral student in Latin American history in Paris – this is after having already earned both licentiate and doctoral degrees in philosophy in Argentina and Spain respectively. Dussel’s intellectual biography thus greatly prepared him for the ensuing intellectual horizon that would take over Latin America.
in the last century, as I shall demonstrate below (Dussel 1993b). In the 1990’s, Dussel begins to rewrite the categorical framework of liberation philosophy once inherited in the dialogue with Levinas, this time by entering in conversation with the linguistic and pragmatic turns of the Frankfurt School (Dussel 1996). This new era in liberation philosophy results in a new ethics (Dussel 1998) and a new politics of liberation (Dussel 2009) that are said to supersede those developed in the 1970’s. Around the same time, but most steadily since the early 2000’s, Dussel would take the last turn of his intellectual itinerary by assuming the broad agenda of the decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres 2011a). This new stage in the maturation of liberation philosophy has solidified its status as a philosophy with global validity, setting the ground to call for a “South-South” dialogue across other experiences of historical alterity, such as African and Asian philosophies (Dussel 2013).

What makes Dussel’s work crucial for the arguments of this chapter is that besides its paradigmatic contributions to liberation philosophy, it also contains important contributions to liberation theology. In this sense, Dussel’s work is perhaps the best entryway for a study on the relation between liberation theology and liberation philosophy. This is a relation that has been a source of much contention in the reception of Dussel’s work. Mendieta points out, for instance, that in the U.S. academy, Dussel’s work “has been unequivocally ghettoized and relegated to the ‘safe’ area of theological studies,” resulting in a rebuttal of liberation philosophy as an autonomous field of inquiry distinct from liberation theology (Mendieta 1996, xiii).33 For this reason, Dussel himself has

33 Indeed, this has been the main criticism of liberation philosophy in U.S. philosophical circles. Ofelia Schutte, for instance, argues that Dussel’s theological work is “legitimate” while his work in ethics and political philosophy is problematic for its “critique of secular-scientific education” that is “conservative in its stand against modernity” (Schutte 1993, 179, 180, 185).
continuously insisted on what could be characterized as a Kantian separation of his theological work and his philosophical work, so as to avoid any potential reductionist understandings of liberation philosophy’s authenticity. In this account, the philosopher is not barred from examining religious sources, but she is to do so philosophically with the tool of reason alone and not theologically (or as Kant would put it, biblically) via the tool of revelation. This is, of course, a question of methodological secularization, which is why liberation philosophy is often understood as putting liberation theology on secular grounds, doing something similar to what liberation theology does but without a “religious orientation” (Schutte 1993, 174).^{34}

1.1.3 The Conflict of the Faculties

A brief look at Immanuel Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* (1996) will allow us to better understand Dussel’s self-conscious separation of his theological and philosophical works, which will open an inquiry into the relationalities between the two movements. In this text, Kant delineates the tasks of the main faculties of the late 19th century university. The “higher” faculties of theology, law, and medicine are to be ruled by external factors to reason, while the “lower” faculty of philosophy is to be ruled by the tenets of reason alone (Kant 1996, 250). Accordingly, the (Christian) theologian draws his teachings from the Bible while the jurist does so from the code of promulgated laws (Kant 1996, 251, 253). The philosopher, on the other hand, is tasked with the examination and criticism of the

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^{34} Fornet-Betancourt articulates the thematic fields shared by both liberation theology and liberation philosophy in the following way: (i) a comprehension of philosophical activity as a practical activity that arises from a certain historical reality; (ii) the poor as a hermeneutic point of departure of philosophizing; (iii) the function of philosophy as the critical unmasking of oppression towards liberation; (iv) the inversion of the priority of philosophical rationalities i.e. the ranking of practical reason over theoretical reason; (v) the transformation of philosophy into an ethical universe, meaning that all of philosophy becomes geared towards the liberation of the poor; (vi) the incorporation of the social sciences and popular wisdom as a methodological renovation; and (vi) the comprehension of the history of philosophy beyond the history of ideas (Fornet-Betancourt 2000, 693-695).
higher faculties for their own benefit and the benefit of society at large (Kant 1996, 256). What Kant calls the “legal conflict of the faculties” takes place when either of the higher faculties comes into conflict with the teachings of philosophy, as when the biblical theologian jumps over “the wall of ecclesiastical faith” and “meddles with his reason” (Kant 1996, 252). In this example, the biblical theologian is to remain focused on “ecclesiastical faith” while the philosopher (in Kant’s language, the “rational theologian”) can focus on “religious faith” (Kant 1996, 262). Such distinction permits Kant to release the essence of religion away from Church dogma, making the task of the philosopher the critical accounting of the gap between ecclesiastical and religious faiths.

For Kant, the philosopher must then be able to distinguish the essence of religion from what “is a matter of historical belief” (Kant 1996, 263). In the conflict just mentioned, the theologian will likely object to the “philosophizing away all the teachings that must be considered real revelation and so taken literally” (Kant 1996, 264). However, the philosopher must challenge the theologian on confusing historical content with pure religious belief to the point “of so concentrating on the means, dogma, that it completely loses sight of the final end, inner religion, which must be moral and based on reason” (Kant 1996, 263-264). What Kant understands religion to be here does not differ in content from his account of a morality based on duties (Kant 1996, 262). From this perspective, there is only one true religion and not different religions – even if there are “different varieties of

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35 This “legal conflict” is to be differentiated from an “illegal conflict,” which takes place when the higher faculties are influenced by irrational demands from the public (Kant 1996, 257-258).

36 This task inaugurates a certain strand of modern philosophy of religion, which is not to be confused with a philosophical theology. Daniel Weidner is clear on this distinction: For Kant, “Philosophy of religion is neither religion’s justification by philosophical means (as Schleiermacher’s philosophical theology would claim to be), nor is it the observation of religion from an already constituted standpoint outside of it (as it is for Fichte’s Critique of all Revelation). Rather, the philosophy of religion is an act in which philosophy at once distinguishes itself from religion and reformulates its content from within” (Weidner 2016, 1334).
belief in divine revelation and its statutory teachings,” that is, “different forms in which the
divine will is represented sensibly so as to give it influence on our minds” (Kant 1996,
262). The error of the theologian in this conflict, according to the philosopher, is to
misidentify “the husk of religion for religion itself,” as exemplified in the numerous
religious sects that abound even within a single tradition such as Christianity (Kant 1996,
270). The philosopher understands this sectarianism as a mistake that regards ecclesiastical
dogmas “for essential parts of religion, and so substituting empiricism in matters of faith
for rationalism and passing off what is merely contingent as necessary in itself” (Kant 1996,
273).

Dussel implicitly follows this Kantian demarcation to differentiate his own
contributions to liberation theology and liberation philosophy. His philosophical work is
kept apart from the questions of theology, even as the former engages what could be called
pure religious faith of the Latin American people. This is an engagement that challenges
philosophy’s own secularist avoidance of certain topics that have been traditionally taken
up by theology, but in no way is it meant to enter the theological arena. For Dussel,
philosophy is geared towards a universal secular community of reason while theology is
gearred towards a particular religious community of faith (Dussel 2012a, 11-14, my
translation). In some occasions, Dussel decenters Kant’s evident Eurocentrism by instead
understanding the conflict of the faculties in terms of the 12th century Andalusian

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37 Kant continues, “The very concept of religion shows that it can never be based on decrees (no matter how
high their source); for religion is not the sum of certain teachings regarded as divine revelations (that is called
theology), but the sum of all our duties regarded as divine commands” (Kant 1996, 262). Of these many
sensible forms in which religion takes form, “Christianity, as far as we know, is the most adequate” (Kant
1996, 262).

38 In so passing off contingent practices as if they were necessary laws, the religious sect is reduced to a sort
of “paganism” (Kant 1996, 273).
philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Dussel credits Ibn Rushd with challenging the lack of separability between philosophy and theology advocated by “obscurantist” Neo-Platonist philosophers such as Al-Farabi (Alpharabius) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (Dussel 2012b). 39 According to Dussel, Averroes “intended to separate [philosophy and theology] while showing their mutual autonomy and complementarity” in a way that would demonstrate that “(revealed) truth cannot contradict (rational) truth, and vice versa” (Dussel 2012b, 46). On these grounds, to assume that a rational interpretation (i.e. a secular one) of a text is theological due to the religious association of the text would simply be to confuse the distinct methodologies of philosophy and theology. 40

The Kantian defense of a methodological separation between theology and philosophy would seem to confirm the common understanding that liberation philosophy situates liberation theology *on secular grounds*. A closer look into the shared methodological premises of both movements, however, will complicate this common understanding. In the subsequent two sections of this chapter, I shall expand in greater detail how Dussel’s work across the theologico-philosophical divide resignifies the meaning of secularization beyond the Enlightened binary that posits it against the category of the religious. The conclusions will not collapse the specificities of theology and philosophy as modes of inquiry, but they will rearrange what is taken to be the relation between both. Moreover, once the process of epistemic decolonization enters this picture, the decolonization of the secular/religious divide will open a space of indistinction where

39 Here Dussel is channeling Mohammed Abed Al-Yabri’s *La critique de la raison arabe*, whom Dussel read in its Spanish translation (Al-Yabri 2001).

40 Dussel does not inquiry into the grounds for a comparison between Ibn Rush’d’s and Kant’s respective projects, much less go into detail concerning their serious differences (Al Talmamy 2014).
it is no longer helpful to affirm the separability of theology and philosophy, at least at a very specific metatheoretical level of abstraction. Again, this is not to undo their own specificities at more empirical levels. It is only to “reconfigure disciplinary limits on the new basis of interaction,” as Fornet-Betancourt has put it (2000, 696, my translation).

1.2 Dialectics of Secularization and the First Response to Fetishization

Dussel first systematically engages the dialectics of secularization in a 1969 essay that was published as liberation theology was consolidating itself and liberation philosophy became a possibility on the horizon (Dussel 1969a). In this text, Dussel tacitly follows the Kantian agenda for the philosopher of religion by offering a critique of Christianity for having “united and confused” its “transcultural” faith with the values of a specific culture, that of Latin Christendom (Dussel 2003, 190). This situation became evident when the Church responded to the conclusions of the emerging Renaissance science, which conflicted with the established epistemic order of the time. At this particular conjuncture, the Church had the opportunity to articulate the transculturality of its faith by adopting a secularizing position similar to that of Averroes where the nascent scientific conclusions would not be “in opposition to the values necessary to faith” (Dussel 2003, 191). Of course, this did not take place, as the Church instead collapsed the particular values of a single Latin culture with the transcultural values of the Christian faith, effectively invalidating the emerging forms of scientific knowledge and creating “an antinomy that should never have been: science versus Christianity” (Dussel 2003, 190). This antinomy in turn instigated in

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41 This important article, titled “From Secularization to Secularism: Science from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,” only became available in English 34 years after its initial publication, when it was translated and anthologized by Eduardo Mendieta as chapter eleven of Dussel’s collection of essays Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology (2003).
the scientific community the growth of an “anti-Christian secularism” that culminated in the French Enlightenment and whose inheritance remain alive today (Dussel 2003, 201). Dussel here thus ascribes the emergence of modern *secularism* to the failure to articulate *secularization* as a complementary methodological separation between reason and revelation, or between faith and knowledge, where far from being in opposition, each would have its own legitimate domain of inquiry.

Besides this first notion of secularization as a methodological separation, however, in this 1969 article Dussel also advances a second usage of the term “secularization” which adds a historical irony to Christianity’s failure to embrace the first (methodological separation), for it is under this second usage that early Christianity can be understood to have been secular. This second usage refers to a certain atheism of established divinities. For instance, when early Christians advocated for the doctrine of creationism in which “the Absolute is creator” and therefore “the cosmos is created, that is, not-God,” they came in direct conflict with the Roman divinization of the cosmos (Dussel 2001a, 413) that led to the accusation of being atheists of the Greco-Roman gods (Dussel 2003, 188). The historical irony for Dussel is that this “atheistic secularization of the cosmos” where “the Divine is transcendental exteriority” would become the “metaphysical (and ethical) foundation of the secularity of ‘the created’” that leads to the expansion of the empirical study of such creation (Dussel 2001a, 413). In the Renaissance, Christianity thus finds

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42 I am here intermittently deploying a retrospective analysis of the 1969 essay that Dussel offers thirty years later. I will analyze this second engagement below. It is only deployed here without further clarification because it does a better job exposing the issue of the early Christian atheism of the Greco-Roman world than the original 1969 essay.

43 The Christian root of secularization is a topic well understood within the postsecular debate (Asad 2003, Taylor 2007). Gil Anidjar puts this matter most succinctly when he claims that “Christianity (that is, to clarify this one last time, Western Christendom) judged and named itself, it reincarnated itself as secular” (Anidjar 2006).
itself in opposition to a consequence of its own doing: secularization as methodological separation between reason and revelation is ultimately made possible by the early Christian atheization of the Greco-Roman divine cosmos which made the non-divine world (“the created”) into an object of human investigation through reason. The analogy between the threat of Renaissance scientists to the Medieval Christian order, on the one hand, and the threat of messianic Christians to the Greco-Roman order, on the other, allows Dussel to comprehend the failure of secularization as a result of a limitation to grasp the *dialectics* of such secularizing process. The lack of dialectical movement in the process of critical thinking leads once again to a process of divinization or sacralization, epitomized in the Renaissance by the theological rejection of new scientific forms of inquiry. What was once atheistic of another divinity became a closed divinity in its own right.⁴⁴

This process of re-divinization or sacralization is what Dussel would later capture with the notion of *fetishization*, a concept primarily developed in the fifth volume of his Latin American ethics, aptly subtitled “An Antifetishist Philosophy of Religion.” Fetishization is here a process that encompasses both sacralization and totalizing divinization out of which domination emerges (Dussel 1980, 34-35):

> Man-made absolutization of the foundation of the system with the will to power, and as a reason in which men are dominated, is the process of fetishization [… It] it is also the foundation of action and worship: the fetish is operant as well as fascinating, bright, sacred. The fetish is the sacralization of the object that is the necessary mediation for the practical fulfillment of the system of domination: the erotic fetish is the ‘phallus’, the pedagogical fetish is ‘aristocratic culture’, the political economic fetish of capitalism is ‘money’. (Dussel 1980, 46-47, my translation).

⁴⁴ As we shall see in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Sylvia Wynter develops a similar understanding of the way cultural heterodoxies eventually become new orthodoxies.
An internal process of fetishization is what prevents Christianity from deepening the process of secularization out of which it first emerges, leading to a confusion between the essence of religious faith and what is a matter of historical belief, as Kant would put it. To jumpstart a successful dialectics of secularization would entail breaking the inertia of ossification. It would require the development of an anti-fetishist method. This is, of course, what liberation philosophy has been set out to do since its inception, starting with the analectical moment of affirmation that aims to disrupt the self-referentiality of a dialectical process that has become stagnated, thus ceasing to be properly dialectical (Dussel 1974a). Before looking at how liberation philosophy utilizes analectics as a critique of a failed dialectics of secularization, however, let us first examine the other instance in Dussel’s work where he systematically engages the question of secularization.

Thirty years after the publication of the 1969 essay, at conference organized in the United States in May of 2000 fittingly titled “After Secularism,” Dussel returns to the question of secularization.45 The intellectual horizon for this new intervention is no longer the emergence of the liberationist paradigm, but is instead the upsurge of the decolonial turn and the engagement with postcolonial studies. Unlike the 1969 assessment, which was limited to Europe, this new exploration engages the development of secularism in China and the Muslim world (Dussel 2001a, 409). This is a perspective attentive of the colonial difference that allows Dussel to understand the fetishization of both Christianity and science as moments in the unfolding of a global project of colonization, a lens entirely absent in the 1969 essay. Accordingly, the objection to secularism is not that it is anti-

45 The article prepared for this conference is titled “World Religions and Secularization from a Post-Colonial and Anti-Eurocentric Perspective” and is only available in its original Spanish as chapter nineteenth of Dussel’s Hacia una Filosofía Política Crítica (2001a).
Christian (as the 1969 essay argues), but that it is “an Eurocentric and metropolitan ideology typical of the colonialist expansion and fruit of the theoretical conception of the Enlightenment and liberalism” (Dussel 2001a, 409, my translation). After reasserting the difference between secularization and secularism articulated in the earlier treatment, Dussel now makes a crucial distinction between the “mythical-ethical nucleus” of “universal religions” and their “fundamentalist” configuration:

a distinction must be made between a) an ontological mythical-ethical nucleus generator of universal religions [...] And b) the structuring of ‘fundamentalist’ figures of religions, which, having been at the beginning the critical origin of cultures, they transform in the moments of religious decadence (although frequently in the cultural splendor) in culturalized ideological forms that ‘justify’ the dominating expansion of the cultures to which they gave origin. (Dussel 2001a, 409-410, my translation)

This distinction clarifies the character of the dialogical partner that can once again jumpstart a dialectics of secularization as a critique of fetishization in the (post)colonial world. We are talking about the mythical-ethical nuclei of cultural formations.

Dussel concludes his 2000 intervention with the following question: “Is any articulation between peripheral post-colonial cultures with traditional religion and secularity possible, which overcomes the necessary confrontation between secularism and religions under fundamentalist forms (for example, as in the Muslim world)? Is a dialectic full of creative criticality possible?” (Dussel 2001a, 420, my translation). The example Dussel gives here is none other than liberation theology, which precisely sought to recover the criticality of religion in a way that “affirmed and developed” secularization as the autonomous separation of complementary spheres (Dussel 2001a, 421). For Dussel, the methodological deployment of the secular social sciences was a vital component of the liberation theologian’s toolkit in his accompaniment of the social and political struggles of
the Latin American poor. Contrary to how Medieval Christendom responded to new scientific methods, a critical adoption of secular social sciences allowed liberation theologians to overcome the opposition between religious fundamentalism and secularism. In its place, liberation theology posited “a mature and healthy articulation between critical-liberating religion and the necessary secularity of political, and economic institutions, proper to the contemporary development of history in the age of globality” (Dussel 2001a, 422, my translation). Liberation theology here recovers the “mythical-ethical” nucleus of religion alive in the popular religiosities of the Latin American subject, which are interpreted via the prophetic tradition of the early Christian messianic communities – those once accused of being atheists by the Roman empire. This critico-popular religiosity is then deployed internally within Christianity as a criticism of its own fetishization that has justified social, political, and economic forms of domination (Dussel 2001a, 420). This is the moment of “desacralization and atheization of the current order, a defetishization of the dominators (even if they are called Christians in Latin America or in the United States): the struggle of the prophets against idols” (Dussel 1995b, 180).

As a Latin American response to the dialectics of secularization, liberation theology cannot simply be understood as the religious equivalent of a presumed secular liberation philosophy (and vice versa). For liberation theology already finds itself in an intricate relationship to secularity which complicates a mutually exclusive understanding of the

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46 This is an object of criticism by theologians and philosophers alike, such as those of the radical orthodox vein that argue that liberation theology preempts a radical transformation of theology because it perpetuates the liberalism of the secular social sciences (Milbank 2006). Maldonado-Torres, has responded to this criticism, noting that the radical orthodox position of John Milbank overstates the significance of Marxist concepts for liberation theology and moreover misapprehends the internal critique that dependency theory made to the social sciences. Maldonado-Torres concludes that Milbank’s argument collapses into a form of Eurocentrism that is far more problematic than the general deployment of the secular social sciences for those interested in continuing the legacy of liberation theology (Maldonado-Torres 2005, 41).
secular/religious divide. While it is true that the ultimate mark of identification for liberation theology is its assertion of faith as a point of departure, this faith is one atheist of the concept of religion that positions itself against a supposedly secular other. As such, liberation theology could be said to be on the same secular grounds that liberation philosophy would be assumed to be on. It is in this sense a certain kind of postreligious theology.

1.3 Putting Liberation Philosophy on Postsecular Grounds

This is where Dussel’s leaves the matter in his 2000 intervention, stopping short of scrutinizing how the dialectics of secularization are engaged by liberation philosophy on the other side of the disciplinary divide. In the remaining of this chapter, I shall investigate how liberation philosophy does this. For not only is the anti-fetishist method “the first thesis of Liberation Philosophy” (“Atheism as negation of the negation”) (Dussel 1996, 11), but most importantly, the process of epistemic decolonization that liberation philosophy is currently undergoing demands the reconfiguration of the boundaries of philosophical inquiry. In this process, liberation philosophy reinterprets what has been dismissed as not proper to the space of philosophical inquiry, allowing, for instance, for a different way of engaging religious discourses without necessarily entering the theological arena. This investigation will allow me to claim that liberation philosophy does not put liberation theology on secular grounds (for the latter is already there). But more radically, liberation theology and epistemic decolonization concurrently put liberation philosophy on postsecular grounds. I will argue that liberation philosophy has all along required the elaboration of a different articulation between philosophy and religion that is its own contribution to jumpstarting the dialectics of secularization. As a case in point, I will
elucidate Dussel’s engagement with the work of Karl Marx, which I contend can be recognized as a postsecular reading of Marx.

1.3.1 Liberation Philosophy on Religion

The subject of religion is most systematically elaborated within liberation philosophy in the aforementioned fifth volume of Dussel’s Latin American ethics. This text offers a brief archaeology of religion in the Americas as well as a theory of religion grounded on the categorical framework of liberation philosophy i.e. an antifetishist analectics, which justifies the text’s subtitle of providing “An Antifetishist Philosophy of Religion (Dussel 1980). From this lens, European modernity, along with its philosophical discourse, is not simply a hegemonic cultural totality, but it now also appears as a divinity that demands compulsory worship from its dominated peoples (Dussel 1980, 35). This divinization of modernity is clearest in Hegel’s accounts of world history and the history of philosophy, both of which culminate in “Spirit worshiping itself in and through [European] man” (Dussel 1980, 44, my translation and brackets). Dussel tells us that such self-referential totalizing divinity “is the ‘god’ of modern philosophers, of which we [liberation philosophers] must know how to be atheists as a theoretical condition of possibility to be able to think a philosophy of liberation” (Dussel 1980, 45, my translation and brackets). This atheistic attitude is, of course, the secularizing anti-fetishist method that was analyzed in the previous section and which also forms a crucial tool in the liberation theologian’s arsenal. Its deployment within liberation philosophy does not turn the latter into a theology, but instead opens the space for a specifically liberationist philosophy of religion.

47 This angle would be further developed in Dussel’s phenomenological account of the conquest of the Americas (Dussel 1995a).
It must be clear, however, that what is encapsulated by “religion” here is no longer dependent on a matter of purely subjectivist or objectivist terms, but it entails a new dynamic relation. Building on Levinas’s redefinition of religion as “the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality” (Levinas 1969, 40), and against Hegel who described religion as “the elevation of the finite to the Infinite, being essentially worship in faith as a representative act,” Dussel here deconstructs religion as “re-ligion,” as “the re sponsible ex position for the Other before the absolutely absolute Other” (Dussel 1980, 52, my translation). The “destruction” of these words with the hyphens is meant to pedagogically signal “that the meaning of each of these terms is new, meta-physically, and not ontologically, understandable” (Dussel 1980, 52, my translation).

In this metaphysical “destruction” of the category of religion, the modern secular/religious divide is unsettled in a way that reconfigures each side of the binary, by extension outlining a new relationality between philosophy and religion. Most recently, Dussel has begun to adopt the language of postsecularity to understand this move, one that entails “discovering the divinities of quotidian religion suggested by Marx, hidden by secularism and invisible to their worshipers (which should be discovered in places like Wall Street)” (Dussel forthcoming, 99, n.281, my translation). I believe this is liberation philosophy’s own contribution towards jumpstarting a new “dialectic full of creative criticality” between secularity and religion: it is an atheism of modern divinities and an advocacy for the other that will shatter such totalizing divinity. In this understanding of analectics as an essentially religious experience beyond the modern secular/religious binary, one can see liberation philosophy’s postsecular grounds.48

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48 This postsecular philosophy is reminiscent of the early Frankfurt School’s engagement with religion. As Mendieta puts it in his introduction to The Frankfurt School on Religion, the Frankfurt School’s approach to
The groundbreaking aspect of conceiving of this process (atheism of the same and religious affirmation of the other) as an original step to reignite the dialectics of secularization, has thus far been obscured in the reception of liberation philosophy. On the one hand, as Dussel put it above, philosophy’s secularist “taboo” on topics related to religion has made it difficult to develop a properly philosophical analysis of religion (Dussel 2012a, 5, my translation). Along these lines, it is not a surprise that the fifth volume of Dussel’s Latin American ethics remains one of his least cited works. Similarly, neither this book nor his Metáforas teológicas de Marx (which I shall engage below) have been translated into English. To contrast, many of Dussel’s theological writings have been translated into English and German, sustaining Mendieta’s admonition that Dussel’s work “has been unequivocally ghettoized and relegated to the ‘safe’ area of theological studies” (Mendieta 1996, xiii). And when the topic has been touched in available translated texts, if only momentarily, it has unfortunately suffered from a case of mistranslation. This is what takes place, for instance, with Mendieta’s translation of The Underside of Modernity, a text explicitly crafted to pursue a dialogue between liberation philosophy and the major philosophers of the First World.

In the first chapter of The Underside of Modernity, Dussel offers a useful contextualization and exposition of the main theoretical contributions of liberation philosophy. After recounting its dealings with politics, erotics, and pedagogy, the reader

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religion is “neither a sociology of religion, nor is it exactly a philosophy of religion, nor is it a mere theological approach” (Mendieta 2005, 11). I believe that a similar novelty is also present in liberation philosophy’s engagement with religion.

49 Dussel’s 1970’s Latin American ethics was only translated in its entirety into Portuguese, as his thought has held a very strong reception in Brazil due to its geographic and socio-political proximity to Argentina. Brazil, of course, also saw one of the strongest inceptions of liberation theology, in no small part as a result of the epistemic and socio-political groundwork laid down by Freire’s radical pedagogy – as I briefly mentioned above (footnote 25).
arrives to the “fourth practical horizon” of liberation philosophy, “the traditional question of the Absolute (Hegel) or of theodicy (Leibniz)” (Dussel 1996, 11). Here, the entirety of the antifetishist philosophy of religion is summarized in less than a page, culminating with the following condensed formulation, which I have included as this chapter’s first epigraph: “Secularization [was] the false name of fetishism; and the atheism of the left was a first dialectical moment, whose second moment is the affirmation of the absolute as liberation” (Dussel 1996, 12, my emphasis and amended translation). In this formulation, one can see how the analectical critique of dialectics is applied to the question of re-ligion, effectively putting forth a new dialectics of secularization as a properly dialectical movement between a certain atheism (as the negation of the negation) and the affirmation of the Absolute, which is to say, the affirmation of the Other. For if there is an Absolute, Dussel claims, “it ought to be Other than every historical system” (Dussel 1996, 11). Only with this affirmation of “infinite exteriority” can a radically liberatory discourse take root, for it is from such transcendental positionality that criteria emerge “to accuse any system of being guilty […] Only the one who affirms the exteriority of the Sacred can definitely be an atheist of every system” (Dussel 1980, 59, my translation).

Dussel is here charging the Left-Hegelian (dialectical) tradition with not understanding the second moment of the dialectics of secularization (the analectical

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50 This need to affirm the Absolute is the primary reason why Dussel’s philosophical work has been seen as suspect or not philosophical enough by critics either inside (Horacio Cerutti Guldberg) or outside (Ofelia Schutte) the tradition of liberation philosophy (Cerutti Guldberg 2006, Schutte 1993). A similar criticism is found in the work of Maldonado-Torres, who argues that Dussel “fuses the trans-ontological and the sub-ontological difference,” thereby collapsing what is beyond Being and the concrete empirical other e.g. the poor, in a way that results in problematic epistemic and political consequences (Maldonado-Torres 2008a, 182). While this it not the place to expand on this, I believe these consequences are the result of fetishization, which once again stresses the importance of dialectical movement to rearticulate exteriority so as to avoid totalization (as Levinas insisted with his redefinition of religion).
moment), thus only advocating for a certain “atheism” that in its lack of affirmation of Otherness became stagnated in an undialectical fashion. This resulted in the fetishization of such atheism, becoming a new divinity or fetish i.e. an anti-religious secularism. This is what it means for secularization to have become the “false name of fetishism.” As Mendieta translated this passage into English, however, the innovative feature of the analectic intervention as a new dialectics of secularization is entirely overlooked. For Mendieta translates the first clause of this passage, originally in the Spanish past tense as I have rendered it above (Dussel 1993a), into the English present tense, as in “Secularization is the false name of fetishism” (Dussel 1996, 12, my emphasis). This is a factual mistranslation that directly eliminates the interpretative gap that Dussel is carving to reinterpret the meaning of secularization anew. In other words, because secularization was once the false name of fetishism, the anti-fetishist analectical intervention seeks to disrupt such false divinity and reignite the dialectics of secularization by positively affirming what it negated all along i.e. the Absolute. Secularization is here no longer synonymous with a process of fetishization. On the contrary, secularization has been restored to its properly dialectical phase of being atheistic of the fetish precisely because of its affirmation of the Absolute Other (Dussel 1980, 118).

In this practical application of an anti-fetishist analectics to the question of religion, liberation philosophy at once redraws the boundaries of the modern secular/religious divide

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51 There is an echo here with Hans Blumenberg’s own redefinition of secularity which also recovers some of secularity’s pre-modern connotations, such as worldliness and finitude (Blumenberg 1983). This echo allows me to respond to Khaled Furani’s misconstrued critique of deployments of the notion of the postsecular, which he claims elide the long history of secularity’s pre-modern connotations. Furani follows Blumenberg to conceive of secularization as “the ways traditions adjust to a new era in order to respond to conditions with which they must engage” (Furani 2015, 13). This process of adjustment is what I have sought to capture by conceiving of secularization as a dialectical process. Far from eliding prior semantic meanings, the dialectics of secularization subsumes them.
and therefore advances a novel approach to theorizing religion that is neither strictly theological nor secularist. In this, the very practice of philosophizing is also transformed. This is why liberation philosophy cannot avoid engaging the religious popular imaginary of the oppressed (Dussel 2012a, 39, n. 75), for the Absolute is expressed here, among many things, as “the God of the mythical narrative of the Latin American popular imaginary” (Dussel 2011a, 167, my translation).52

1.3.2 Towards a Postsecular Marx

As an illustration of the theoretical vistas opened by the placing of liberation philosophy on postsecular grounds, I close this section with an overview of Dussel’s re-reading of Marx on the question of religion.

In the account of the critique of religion as “the premise of all criticism,” as articulated in Marx’s Introduction to his Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law (Marx and Engels 1975, 175), Dussel finds a sophisticated understanding of the role of fetishized religion in the legitimation of an oppressive system (in this case, the emerging industrial capitalist economy). In this well-known text, Marx follows Ludwig Feuerbach’s critique of religion to conceive of religion as a reflection of Man’s self-alienation, as an “inverted world-consciousness” that is a result of “an inverted world” (Marx and Engels 1975, 175). As the “sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions” (Marx and Engels 1975, 175), religion has a crucial role in the justification of the systems that are the cause of human alienation.

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52 This quote from Filosofía de la liberación was problematically omitted in the text’s English translation (Dussel 1985, 104). Against the criticisms from Cerutti Guldberg, Schutte, and others, Dussel has insisted on the rationality of “pre-philosophic religious myths” (Dussel 1998, my translation, 490, n. 342), following the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. Echoing the task of the Kantian philosopher of religion, Dussel here argues that the hermeneutical task is to discern “in these religions their regressive elements and to empower the creative moments of human affirmation” (Dussel 1996, 11). In Chapter Four of this dissertation, I will tease out this moment as one referring to an aesthetics of liberation.
For Marx, the task of philosophy is to unmask these forms of human alienation, whether in religious cloak (in heaven) or its secular counterpart (on earth). For the revolutionary Marx, of course, this is a task that can ultimately only be completed with the elimination of the material sources of such alienation *i.e.* with the “abolition of the proletariat” (Marx and Engels 1975, 187). And because Marx assumed that Feuerbach’s critique of religion had completed the critique of alienation in its sacred forms, Marx’s self-imposed task becomes the critique of alienation in its profane forms. This is when “the criticism of heaven” must turn “into the criticism of the earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics” (Marx and Engels 1975, 176).

Primarily developed in his *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx*, Dussel’s innovative reading of Marx is made possible by interpreting the critique of religion via the anti-fetishist lens. From this perspective, what is criticized by Marx turns out to be not “religion” *tout court*, but the inversion or fetishization of religion (Christianity, in this case) into an “inverted world-consciousness,” the critique of which presupposes an understanding of its prior un-invertedness. Accordingly, Dussel makes the case that Marx’s famous dictum of religion being “the opium of the people” should be clarified to read: the fetishized inversion of religion has become the opium of the people (Marx and Engels 1975, 175, Dussel 1993b, 43-44). It is then the criticism of this fetishism that is the premise of all criticism (Dussel 1980, 50). This anti-fetishist interpretation turns inside out the infamous secularist dismissal of religion as a source of criticism that has dominated Marxist thought since the late 19th century, in its place making space for a Marxist anti-fetishist atheism “as a condition of revolutionary praxis” (Dussel 2001a, 413, my translation).53 The

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53 I would venture to say that a reader attuned to Marx’s inheritance from Hegel should find this proposition already plausible. For Hegel, religion and philosophy share the same content or essence, and only differ in
criticism of religion as a fetish is thus the premise of re-ligion as the affirmation of the other. This is an “unknown Marx” and a postsecular Marx that can be useful to the process of epistemic decolonization if carefully deployed to engage the mythical-ethical nuclei of the cultural forms of the oppressed.\textsuperscript{54}

Dussel substantiates his reading by paying attention to the subtextual deployment of Biblical references throughout Marx’s oeuvre – not just in the young humanist Marx, but also in the mature scientific Marx. In these references, Dussel finds Marx to be executing the critique of theology as a critique of politics, which takes the form Marx’s own “proto-theology” or “\textit{implicit} theology” (Dussel 1993b, 18, my translation). At first sight, one might object that Dussel contradicts the established scholarship concerning the scientific character of the mature Marx. However, Dussel’s analysis is convincing if one takes into account that Marx’s \textit{Capital} was completed through a close comparative reading of Hegel’s \textit{Science of Logic} (1969), which Hegel understood to be the science of \textit{spirit}, science being “the [true] theodicy” (Dussel 1993b, 11, n.19, Hegel 1984, 123). Thus, following Hegel’s theodicy of spirit, Marx’s final revision of \textit{Capital} is such that the explicit critique of politics is corroborated by an implicit critique of theology. Applying Hegel to the realm of a material political economy consequently results in the development

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} With the notion of an “unknown Marx,” I am alluding to the title of Dussel’s pioneering work on Marx’s \textit{Economic Manuscripts} of 1861-63 (Dussel 2001b). The Marx that Dussel uncovers on the question of religion thus adds to the unknowability of the Marx that Dussel had already uncovered in his commentaries of the \textit{Economic Manuscripts}. Therefore, in more than one way, Dussel’s re-interpretation of Marx anticipates contemporary attempts to engage Marxism with “religion and theology” (McLennan 2019, 85), doing so moreover from the perspective of epistemic decolonization that these contemporary attempts ignore.}
of an implicit proto-theodicy, or better yet, an inverted theodicy or anti-theodicy. Instead of tracing the divination of consciousness that culminates in the Absolute (Hegel’s project), Marx does the material inverse, tracing the development and accumulation of capital as a profane divinity, as the producer of alienation and the cause of an inverted world, as the “anti-god, the Antichrist, Moloch, or the fetish” (Dussel 1993b, 12, my translation).

In the third volume of *Capital*, for instance, Marx makes the following remark concerning the character of capital: “In its capacity of interest-bearing capital, capital claims the ownership of all wealth which can ever be produced, and everything it has received so far is but an instalment for its all-engrossing appetite. By its innate laws, all surplus labour which the human race can ever perform belongs to it. *Moloch*” (Marx and Engels 1998, 394, my emphasis). This is one of many references throughout Marx’s oeuvre where he compares the workings of capital to the worshiping of a fetish or false god, in this case Moloch, the ancient Canaanite god of child sacrifices. Dussel’s training in theology and his philosophico-anthropological investigations on ancient Semitic cultures (Dussel 1969b) makes him a very perceptive reader with the ability to capture the subtle ways in which Marx deploys Biblical metaphors such as this one to explain the workings of capital accumulation in the modern world. In this rhetorical gesture, Marx puts forward a theologico-political critique of capital for having divinized/fetishized itself in a profane form. For Dussel, this makes *Capital* into a “demonology” (Dussel 1993b, 131) of an inverted divinity, of capital as a profane divinity or a “worldly God,” as Marx had put it years earlier in his “On the Jewish Question” (Marx and Engels 1975, 170).

The “worldly God” reference in “On the Jewish Question” highlights how the demonological account of capital is constructed by Marx under a long temporal arc.
Although the text has often been charged with anti-Semitism for supposedly endorsing stereotypical depictions of Judaism and Jews (Lewis 1986, 112, Macoby 2006, 66), Dussel reads “On the Jewish Question” instead as putting forth a critique of Judaism as having become a fetishized religion. I cite here one of the most controversial passages in this text:

Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man—and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal self-established value of all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world—both the world of men and nature—of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it. The god of the Jews has become secularised and has become the god of the world. The bill of exchange is the real god of the Jew. His god is only an illusory bill of exchange. (Marx and Engels 1975, 172)

While this is not the place to engage in a substantial examination of the intricacies of this text, Dussel argues that Marx is not making an anti-Semitic rejection of Judaism, but rather is advancing an anti-fetishist critique of Judaism. It is a fetishized Judaism that worships money that must be negated for the emancipation of the Jew, the Christian, and the human in its totality (Dussel 1993b, 44). The criticism of the fetishization of Judaism (alongside Christianity) is here a precondition for a criticism of capitalist accumulation.55

This exact argument continues in Marx’s Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, where Marx articulates an understanding of “the real nature of money” as a “visible divinity” (Marx and Engels 1975, 324).56 Dussel clarifies the circumstance of this depiction

55 I agree with Iain Hampsher-Monk that “only the most superficial reading of [“On the Jewish Question”] could sustain such an [anti-Semitic] interpretation” (Hampsher-Monk 1992, 496). Any rigorous reading of “On the Jewish Question” should place it as a materialist critique of Bruno Bauer’s The Jewish Question, which actually argues (from an idealist position) for the abolition of Judaism as a precondition for the political emancipation of Jews.

56 This is an argument made as an approving commentary of Shakespeare’s depictions of money, so the terms are actually Shakespeare’s. Peter Demetz argues that Marx’s encounter with Shakespeare helped him lose his tongue concerning the social character of money (Demetz 1967, 157). Dussel cites the original German edition of Demetz’s Marx, Engels, and the Poets as one of the few analyses of Marx that became aware of Marx’s demonology (Dussel 1993b, 18, n.29).
by clarifying that for the prophetic tradition of Israel, the visibility of divinity is tantamount to a “satanic” or “idolatrous” divinity that “cannot be God,” mainly because god is transcendent and therefore is not visible (Dussel 1993b, 50, n. 79, my translation). The “divine power of money,” according to Marx, “lies in its character as men’s estranged alienating and self-disposing *species-nature*. Money is the alienated *ability of mankind*” (Marx and Engels 1975, 325). Here, the critique of theology as the critique of political economy attains a higher level of sophistication: the fetishization of money into a worldly God is effectively the inversion of the *essence* of Christianity *i.e.* the inversion of the divine Christ who alienated itself to become human. In other words, money usurps the place of Christ, but through the inverse route that Christ took: money alienates man to become divine itself (Dussel 1993b, 19). Now we can understand better why an inverted Christianity is both a reflection of Man’s own self-alienation (the critique of theology) and the “inverted world-consciousness” of “an inverted world” (the critique of political economy) (Marx and Engels 1975, 175).

Before moving on to the last textual example of Dussel’s postsecular reading of Marx, it should be said that the complementarity of the argument in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* with the analysis of money in “On the Jewish Question” substantiates the claim that the latter text is not of an anti-Semitic disposition. For Dussel is careful in showing how Marx is implicitly placing himself in an internal position critical of Judaic practice for having inverted its prophetic messianic roots to become a religion of domination. By tracing the numerous metaphors that only make sense within a Jewish hermeneutic horizon, Dussel then dispels the contentions that suppose that Marx is somehow ashamed of his own Jewish inheritance (Macoby 2006, 63). According to Dussel,
well before Marx, the defetishizing atheization of social structures as a condition of revolutionary praxis was deeply understood by a tradition of Jewish prophets, among them Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jesus. All of these figures would agree that the origin of all criticism is the criticism of a fetishized religion (Dussel 2001a, 413), and their prophecies critical of Israel would have thus also been labeled anti-Semite (Dussel 1993b, 136, n. 4).^57

In the section “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” undoubtedly the most widely analyzed section of Marx’s three-volume Capital, Dussel finds a theological infrastructure that has for the most part remained either unacknowledged or downplayed, even as Marx explicitly initiates the section by elucidating the theological backdrop of commodities: “A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx and Engels 1996, 81). To illustrate these “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties,” Marx explicitly refers to an anthropological understanding of the “fetishism” found in certain animistic religions, where “the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race” (Marx and Engels 1996, 81). For Marx, this is analogous to what takes place when a commodity takes a live of its own in the market of exchange, hiding the social relations of production of out which it was produced. This is moreover alluded to as a

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^57 This prophetic line of critique was followed by Paul the Apostle, whose critique of law should be understood as a moment in the critique of religion (Dussel 2012a, 74).
vampiric process: “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (Marx and Engels 1996, 241).58

Dussel finds in this deployment of the notion of fetishism perhaps the strongest critique of the idolatrous/demonic nature of capital to be found in Marx’s oeuvre. To be sure, however, part of this interpretation depends on a dubious translation of Das Kapital Vol. 1 into Spanish, which Dussel does not question. Corresponding to the description of commodities as “queer” things, Dussel cites the Spanish version of Das Kapital that refers to the commodity’s queerness as being “demonic.” A commodity is here “un objeto endemoniado, rico en sutilezas metafísicas y reticencias teológicas” or “a demonic object, rich in metaphysical subtleties and theological reticence” (Marx 2005, 87, my translation and emphasis, Dussel 1993b, 154). The German original, as it turns out, does not use the adjective “dämonisiertes” but instead uses “vertracktes,” which can be translated as “baffling” and which has been translated in the standard English translation as “queer” (Marx and Engels 1987, 102, 1996, 81). This mistranslation does not discredit any of the previous examples of a Marxist subtextual theological critique of capital parallel to the politico-economic critique. It is unclear, however, why Dussel lets it slide, especially as he usually cites the German originals to strengthen his argumentation. It would be at this juncture that my own scholarship hopes to develop a more critical account of the demonic nature of commodities and capital. Such account starts with an interrogation of the anthropological legitimacy of the notion of “fetishism” as found in Marx to begin with

58 Gil Anidjar has recently called for an “economic theology as hematology” that would account for the “history of religion as political economy” (Anidjar 2014, 140-142). This is, of course, a part of Dussel’s project in Las metáforas teológicas (not engaged in Anidjar’s work), which traces the metaphoric usage of blood throughout much of Marx’s oeuvre.
Overall, Dussel’s pioneering reading establishes that Marx’s critique of religion is a far more complicated affair than a vulgar dismissal of religion as the opium of the people. Dussel exposes the ways in which Marx makes use of certain theological maneuvers to point to a fundamental contradiction between religion (particularly Christianity, though also Judaism) and capitalism. This is a contradiction that inverts such religion in a process of fetishization where the given religion loses a prior criticality to confront oppression, as it was the case for Christianity when it became the religion of the Roman empire. In this process, Christianity is inverted to become the foundation of the state. According to Dussel, Marx’s critique of religion thus corners the modern pseudo-Christian individual to respond to the theological justification of oppression. If capital is demonic, the pseudo-Christian is left with two options: either to abandon Christianity in the name of capitalism, or to renounce capitalism in the name of Christianity (Dussel 1993b, 131). Marx’s paradigm of the critique of theology as the critique of politics aims specifically to refute any potential attempt to reconcile these two extremes. On the one hand, the critique of theology warns against the fetishization Christianity as the religion of Moloch, on the other hand, the critique of politics warns against an understanding of a capitalism that corresponds to such inverted Christianity (Dussel 1993b, 131). Like Thomas Münzer did four hundred years before, Marx deploys the Bible against the pseudo-Christian in a way that recognizes the criticality of what was once put on its head. It is, as Dussel has put it most recently, a “messianic return to the origins” where a critical Christianity “inverts the inversion of
Christianity” and is therefore “contradictory to capitalism” (Dussel forthcoming).\(^59\) As we shall see soon, this is also an opportunity to decolonize the theological justification of domination (Dussel forthcoming).

Not a theology in the sense that it departs from a position of faith seeking understanding, Dussel’s postsecular philosophical reading of Marx nevertheless allows for a better understanding of the relation between Marxism and liberation theology. For if liberation theology has been dismissed all-too-quickly by certain circles for its association with a seemingly anti-Christian Marxism, it would appear that a more sophisticated understanding of the theological subtextuality in Marx’s own work would have to qualify the negative association of Marxism and liberation theology. It is along these lines that Dussel speculates that Marx’s theological metaphors opened a hermeneutic horizon that liberation theology was able to explore one hundred years later in Latin America.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have surveyed the emergence of liberatory thinking in Latin America, focusing on liberation theology and its philosophical counterpart, liberation philosophy. Against the common understanding of the relation between these two

\(^{59}\) Dussel sees a historical parallel, both to what Marx is doing as well as to what liberation theology would end up doing a century later, in the theological battles between Martin Luther and Thomas Müntzer during the Reformation, which Dussel engages via Engels’s analysis in his *The Peasant War in Germany*. In Müntzer’s revolutionary Christian theopolitics against the feudal Roman priests, Dussel perceives a precursor to the antifetishist theologico-political critique of both Marx and liberation theology. Dussel, however, severely misunderstands a passage where Engels depicts Luther’s biblical critique of feudalism. Dussel cites this passage as referring to Müntzer, when it in fact refers to Luther (Dussel 1993b, 57, n.96, Marx and Engels 1978, 419). This is the case even after Dussel alludes to the passage in its original German (Marx and Engels 1960, 350-351). This error is unfortunately repeated verbatim in Dussel’s most recent analysis of the question (Dussel forthcoming). To be sure, this is an error that does not misrepresent Müntzer’s position per se, but it does exaggerate the differences between Müntzer and Luther. For Engels, *both* made use of the Bible against the feudal order by returning to the origins of Christianity; the difference is that Luther “turned it against the peasants” while Müntzer developed a religious philosophy that “approached atheism” and a political program that “approached communism” which sought to “establish this Heaven, the kingdom of God, here on earth” (Marx and Engels 1978, 419, 422).
movements as one based on a process of secularization, where liberation philosophy puts liberation theology on secular grounds, I have argued that a more complex relationship is at work that puts on the table the radical originality of both intellectual movements. For not only is liberation theology already secular in its affirmation of the secular social sciences (itself a revolutionary move within theology), but liberation philosophy is also critical of secularity in its undialectical modality. The premises and conclusions of liberation philosophy called for a redrawing of the secular/religious divide that transforms philosophical inquiry in its own approach and in its relation to what is understood by the secular and the religious. This was seen in liberation philosophy’s engagement with religion, where a new definition of religion is advanced that goes hand in hand with jumpstarting the dialectics of secularization in an atheist modality critical of totalizing sacralization. This critique of the fetishization of secularity at once restores dialectics to the atheistic critique of sacralization (ossified in the name of secularism) at the same time as it permits the re-igious affirmation of the Absolute in the Otherness of the given system (Dussel 1980, 118). Both moves are a byproduct of what proves to be the quintessential theoretical and methodological contribution of liberation philosophy: the analectical critique of dialectics. I illustrated this engagement via an illustration of Dussel’s re-reading of Marx on the question of religion, an exercise that promises to be useful for the purposes of epistemic decolonization.

The method of analectics, when applied to the study of the dialectics of secularization (and thus, of the ever-shifting dynamics of “religion”), results in a resignification of secularization to mean not just methodological separation, but also the method of anti-fetishism. This is a direct intervention into dialectical thinking, which in
fact is charged with not being dialectical enough in its monologic evasion of the Other. Liberation philosophy provides the tools to understand the emergence of the secular/religious divide as an undialectical process of sacralization where each side of the binary closes on itself. The symbol of the fetish is here deployed to convey the alienated nature of such process. An anti-fetishist analectics calls out the falsity of such divinity (whether in secular or religious cloak). If secularization was once the “false name of fetishism,” liberation philosophy shocks the undialectical totality from the outside, breaking down the ossification by renewing the dialectical process. This process was given the name of re-ligion, which stands for the analectical “affirmation of the absolute as liberation.” The task of liberation philosophy is nothing less than the articulation of the Absolute.

In this reading, one can see a new approach to religion where the previous disciplinary and epistemic boundaries between theology and philosophy are rearranged. This is not to dispense with the boundaries in their entirety, but it is to open a space of indistinction where both approaches mutually reinforce each other in a way that propels a process of epistemic decolonization forward. Consequently, one can no longer maintain the common understanding that liberation philosophy puts liberation theology on secular grounds. Instead, departing from the perspective of epistemic decolonization, was can be said is that liberation theology urges philosophy to stand on postsecular grounds. Similarly, a corollary point could be made concerning how the process of epistemic decolonization pushes liberation theology towards postreligious (or post-theological) grounds concerning its own critique of religious orthodoxy. The resignification of the dialectics of secularization traced in this chapter thus leads towards the reconfiguration of the
categorical frameworks of both theology and philosophy. This is how this chapter responds to Fornet-Betancourt’s call for a revision of the respective functions and forms of knowing of both liberation theology and liberation philosophy (Fornet-Betancourt 2000, 696).

Postsecular in its critique of the fetishization of secularity as secularism, liberation philosophy nevertheless remains distinct from liberation theology in so far as the latter departs from the premises of a community of faith, and the former does not. It is only in this very limited sense that relies on the modern/colonial secular/religious binary that one could say that liberation philosophy is secular while liberation theology is religious. The analytic value of such binary would be limited to that superficial account, which in no way allows for a view of the intricate methodological innovations of each intellectual movement. This whole framing is further complicated, however, with the process of epistemic decolonization. This is what Fornet-Betancourt foresaw when he called out the mutual reliance on a culturally determined organization of knowledge belonging to the Western university (Fornet-Betancourt 2000, 696). The decolonial intervention here is not a question of renouncing “their respective autonomies, nor to deny fields of specific competence,” but to explore how epistemic decolonization reconfigures these disciplinary limits (Fornet-Betancourt 2000, 696, my translation). I have argued that to decolonize the relation between theology and philosophy would entail the development of two interrelated concepts: the postsecular and the postreligious. It is in the convergence of these two trajectories that a zone of indistinction is opened to think beyond established disciplinary orders.\footnote{The concept of a “zone of indistinction” comes from Giorgio Agamben, though I borrow it from the critique of Agamben’s biopolitics put forth by Alexander Weheliye (2014).}
The decolonization of philosophy is a growing project that is being advocated not just from the position of liberation philosophy but also through a vast array of interventions from the Global South, especially from Africa and Asia (Mills 2015, Maldonado-Torres et al. 2018, Monahan 2019, Mungwini et al. 2019). On the other hand, the decolonization of theology has emerged through internal critiques of liberation theology for failing to incorporate, for instance, the analytics of racism and sexism into the frame of liberationist theological reflection and praxis (Petrella 2005, Fernández Albán 2013, Mella 2016). This emergent decolonization of theology would only seem to deepen the postreligious turn initiated by liberation theology, expanding beyond a single mythical-ethical nucleus to transform theological inquiry into an “inter-religious” attempt to grasp “diverse forms of spirituality” (Mella 2016, 456-7, my translation). Given Dussel’s position at the crossroads of liberation philosophy and liberation theology, it is noteworthy that the ongoing decolonization of philosophy has led Dussel to respond with a complementary call for the epistemic decolonization of theology “as the last stage,” even as it was “from the beginning a traveling companion of the decolonization of philosophy and history” (Dussel forthcoming, my emphasis and translation). This formulation of the decolonization of theology as “the last stage” that returns to the beginning is very significant, for it is indicative of the dialectical coherence of Dussel’s long scholarly itinerary, one where there is a complex and symbiotic relation between liberation philosophy and liberation theology. It is out of this relation that liberation philosophy can be said to stand on postsecular grounds.

61 Martin Buber’s rejection of religion in the name of religiositas is here relevant for the construction of a postsecular, decolonial postreligiosity, principally because Dussel also aligns himself with Buber’s tradition of hermeneutics (Dussel 1996, 78). The critique and rejection of fetishized religion (atheism of the fetish) and the affirmation of the ethico-mythical nucleus of universal religions (the affirmation of the Absolute)
CHAPTER TWO

Sylvia Wynter’s Revolutionary Heresy: A Demonic Un/Writing of Secularity

“If we are to understand a newer and still evolving world; if we are to educate people to live in that world; if we are to legislate for that world; if we are to abandon categories and institutions that belong to a vanished world, as it is well-nigh desperate that we should; then knowledge must be rewritten.”

Stafford Beer

“the re-writing of knowledge for which Safford Beer calls, and towards which our own growing irrelevance compels us, must necessarily entail the un/writing of our present normative defining of the secular mode of the Subject.”

Sylvia Wynter

“This at the same time as we repress from ourselves that that is what we are doing: that we are, as humans, self-inscripting and inscribed flesh.”

Sylvia Wynter

2.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at another decolonial response to the epistemic legacies of secular disciplinarity, offering an exposition of the work of the Caribbean intellectual Sylvia Wynter. Since at least the 1980’s, Wynter has meticulously produced a series of analyses deeply critical of our era’s ensemble of modern/colonial discourses and practices as instantiated in the university and cultural media. Indeed, Wynter’s name is now virtually synonymous in the academy with a critique of the colonial epistemic legacies of modernity across the Third World, having become a major figure in the revival of the anti-colonial critique of Enlightenment humanism initiated by other Caribbean intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. In this chapter, I will analyze the ways in which Wynter’s critiques of modern regimes of knowledge production highlight a certain kind of liberal secularity as a dominant structure in the unfolding of modernity/coloniality that must be

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that we saw in this chapter could be clarified with Buber’s work as a background theoretical resource (Lahav 2019, 171).
overcome in processes of decolonization and liberation. Wynter’s work gives us both a sharp diagnosis of the coloniality of secular modernity, as well as the outline of an alternative theoretical prescription: the need to “un/write”\textsuperscript{62} our present “secular mode of the Subject” in the creation of new ways of knowing and alternative forms of life beyond our modern/colonial liberal-secular horizon (Wynter 1984, 22).

The goal of this chapter is to clarify Wynter’s decolonial contributions to the postsecular critique of disciplinarity that has framed the point of departure of this dissertation, while also illustrating Wynter’s postsecular contributions to the project of epistemic decolonization. This project challenges readings of Wynter that interpret her critique of theocentric epistemologies and her praise for the medieval secularizing revolution of the Christian laity as an implicit endorsement of secularism.\textsuperscript{63} While it is true that Wynter’s project presupposes a secular conception of literature (Wynter 1984, 50), I will show that such presupposition is not in a direct conflict with a postsecular interpretation of Wynter’s work. In particular, I will focus on Wynter’s transdisciplinary proposal for a New Science of the Word, a scheme that aspires to bridge the modern split between the natural sciences and the humanities. The substantive innovation of this proposal is its call to re-ground knowledge beyond the lenses and methodologies of the liberal-secular sciences of Man by centering the perspectives of those subjects on whose backs the entire modern world-system has been built – all in the interests of a broader praxis.

\textsuperscript{62} It will be seen that “un/writing” is neither simply erasing, nor a clean re-writing, but more a deconstructive process of “over-write” that resembles a palimpsest.

\textsuperscript{63} Katherine McKittrick, for instance, interprets Wynter’s “counterhumanism” as being “no less secular” than its object of critique (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 11).
to complete what decolonial theorists call “the unfinished project of decolonization” (Maldonado-Torres 2011a, 3, Alexander 2005, 271).

As an example of the new theoretical vistas opened by Wynter’s New Science of the Word, I explore Wynter’s adoption of the concept of *autopoiesis*, which she appropriates from the biological sciences and deploys as a fundamental analytical category within her critique of the liberal-secular epistemic order. It will be clear that Wynter’s deployment of the concept of *autopoiesis* is no longer part of a traditionally liberal-secular/natural-scientific epistemic framework, instead necessitating a new methodological and disciplinary framework outside the scope of the liberal-secular disciplinarity that currently substantiates the “normally unbreachable” natural-social sciences/humanities divide (Wynter 2015, 210). I argue that Wynter accomplishes this idiosyncratic deployment by narrowing the gap between the *poietic* and the *poetic* as interpretative lenses, thus radically redefining the burning questions of the modern university from the perspective of the New Science of the Word: What is the phenomenon of life? And what does it mean to be human? The fact that “we are, as humans, self-inscripting and inscripted flesh” (Scott 2000, 206), for Wynter renders the *autopoietic always-already autopoietic*.64

Because the concept of “flesh” is central to the theoretical production of women of color feminisms, something that will be explored in the next chapter, its appearance in Wynter’s autopoetic turn will allow me to set some conditions for a dialogue to take place between Wynter and women of color feminists. I believe such a dialogue is necessary in lieu of Wynter’s often misunderstood relationship to feminist theory and politics. Against

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64 The exact question of when *poiesis* becomes *poetics* will be further taken up at greater detail in Chapter Four, under an exploration of decolonial aesthetics.
the voices that have interpreted Wynter’s work as a dismissal of Black, Caribbean, or women of color feminisms (Barnes 2006), I agree with Xercis Méndez and Yomaira Figueroa that a much more complementary approach to women of color feminisms and Wynter’s work can be made that would do justice to the former’s role in the “making of decolonial futures” (Méndez and Figueroa 2019). In setting out some of the preconditions for such a relational dialogue, I also follow the work of Alexander G. Weheliye, who has sought to strengthen Wynter’s analysis of the role of gender in the constitution of racial and other regimes of modern hierarchical difference by engaging Wynter alongside the Black feminist critic Hortense Spillers (Weheliye 2014).

Perhaps the most underemphasized aspect of Wynter’s work is the fact that her prescriptive project functions not only at the level of theory, but also at the level of praxis. This aspect of her work has received attention only recently, in large part due to the publication of the anthology *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick (McKittrick 2015). Following McKittrick’s emphasis, I seek to understand how Wynter’s New Science of the Word is not only a meta-theoretical framework for the production of new ways of knowing, but it also seeks to instantiate new ways of being in the world. I identify this practical level of Wynter’s work as the search

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65 See also the last section of the collective paper “Decolonising Philosophy,” which outlines the decolonial contributions of Wynter’s work to the philosophical study of race and gender (Maldonado-Torres et al. 2018).

66 Another key figure within women of color feminism that should be considered in this dialogue is the philosopher María Lugones, whose decolonial intervention into critiques of modernity/coloniality concerning the constitutive role of gender in the construction of race and labor as colonial categories mirrors Spiller’s own work as interpreted by Weheliye (Lugones 2003, Spillers 2003, Weheliye 2014). With the introduction of a gender analytic to the critique of modernity/coloniality, it could be said that Lugones opens the door for an analysis of coloniality from the perspective of lived embodiment and sensibility *i.e.* from the perspective of lived experience *in the flesh*. The interconnection between embodiment and sensibility is further analyzed in Chapter Four of this dissertation. See also Alejandro Vallega’s “The Aesthetic-Cosmological Dimension of María Lugones’ Decolonial Feminism” (2020).
for new (postsecular and decolonial) ceremonies of reincarnation – in which reincarnation entails a postreligious way of comprehending the autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh. Seeking to elucidate this point and bringing together Wynter’s theoretical essays with her literary works, I propose a brief reading of Wynter’s 1962 novel *The Hills of Hebron*. I focus on one of the novel’s concluding scenes in which one of the central characters consciously carves a wooden doll through which he “stumbled upon God” (Wynter 2010, 283). This scene, I argue, is an example of the ceremonies that Wynter’s theoretical work calls for in the overcoming of the secular mode of the subject (Man) and his governing conventions. Wynter’s novel is thus partly a symbolic examination of the practical/ceremonial aspects of what I call below the postsecular autopoiesis of the flesh.

The outline of this chapter is as follows: I will first offer a general introduction to the context of Wynter’s overall epistemic project, expounding the significance that the history of Western humanism has for Wynter. It is only by understanding this broader intellectual terrain that one can make sense of Wynter’s more specific disciplinary and methodological intervention at the crossroads of the natural and the social sciences. I will then explain how Wynter’s proposal for a New Science of the Word calls for nothing less than the full reconstitution of the foundations of knowledge production as they are currently lodged in the institution of the liberal-secular university. Here I take Wynter’s deployment of the concept of *autopoiesis* as a demonstration of what becomes possible if one takes seriously the proposal of a New Science of the Word, distinguishing her project from disciplinary sociological appropriations of the concept as done *e.g.* in the field of social systems theory. Lastly, I present a reading of Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron* through the lens of the postsecular autopoiesis of the flesh.
2.1 Towards a New Science of the Word: Beyond Liberal-Secular Disciplinarity

2.1.1 Contextualizing Wynter’s Work

The emergence of Sylvia Wynter’s work intersects with two currents of social change that give it a special kind of analytic and political acuity. On the one hand, Wynter belongs to the very first generation of Jamaican intellectuals that came of age in the context of the formal success of anti-colonial nationalist discourses and practices. On the other hand, having developed the later part of her career in the United States, Wynter is also an inheritor of the post-Civil Rights intellectual openings made possible by the dissemination of these social struggles into the halls of U.S. universities, which resulted in the creation of new interdisciplinary fields of study such as Black studies. These two currents of social change (national independence and cultural transformation) are to be understood as the epistemological bases from which Wynter’s work makes its most central interventions.

The shortcomings of each of these two currents provides Wynter’s work with its own locus of enunciation and its object of critique. On the international front, it would be the incapacities of the postcolonial nationalist projects to effectively deal with the economic, cultural, and epistemic legacies of colonization in the newly formed nations of the Caribbean, as well as with the rest of the postcolonial world. For Wynter, writing within the context of Jamaica, these incapacities are a cause to continue the in-depth analysis of how colonial legacies continue to delimit the scope of thought and action in a present formally rid of colonial powers. What was once a successful anticolonial uprising at the...
level of state sovereignty, in the end became a substantive failure at the level of subjectivity and collectivity. Wynter finds a similar problem on the U.S. national front with the systematic undermining of the social, political, and epistemic gains of the Civil Rights movement. The reactionary waves that started with the “silent majority” movement of Richard Nixon and that culminated in the neoliberal swings of Ronald Reagan are for Wynter reasons to articulate a sophisticated defense of the promise behind these gains, especially as it pertains to the cultural and pedagogical relevance of Black studies within the university. As the decade of the 1980’s would come to a close, these two reactionary historical trends (the insufficiencies of national liberation movements across the world and the systematic dismantling of the social fabric that was promised to African-Americans in the U.S.) would come together for Wynter under the auspices of the preparations for the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the “discovery” of the Americas to take place around the world in 1992. Wynter’s mature intellectual voice engages this tripartite confluence to produce a profoundly original and deeply critical scholarly meditation on the limitations of our reigning discourses and practices of knowledge production, which either failed to

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68 “When I had been a part of the PNP [People’s National Party],” Wynter tells David Scott, “during the anticolonial struggles, they had been liminal, deviant. Once they got into power, however, they were to become very orthodox, nowhere more so than when they are being most revolutionary and radical” (Scott 2000, 149).

69 In an interview with Greg Thomas, Wynter explains that the biggest shift in her thinking took place after visiting Jamaica in the early 1980’s to take part in the cultural projects that were being prepared in anticipation of the anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s shipwreck. These experiences led her to write a series of groundbreaking essays, most notably “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism” (Wynter 1984) and “1492: A New World View” (Wynter 1995). The latter essay was specifically prepared for a symposium at the Smithsonian Institution in order to explore the relevance of the 500th Anniversary of the Discovery of the Americas (Thomas 2006).
foresee these historical trends, or, in the worst of cases, directly or indirectly collated with them to facilitate their implementation.\(^{70}\)

The above two contexts are important to situate Wynter’s work beyond the postcolonial paradigm forth by Edward Said (1978) and subsequently developed by the subaltern studies project (Guha 1997). To the general extent that Wynter is interested in studying the legacies of colonization in the postcolonial world, with the Caribbean as a primary locus of enunciation, Wynter’s work does overlap with the postcolonial approach. However, more than studying decolonization as a historical event, Wynter’s work departs from a traditional postcolonial approach in its commitment to making decolonization a historical reality. This is an impetus that Wynter’s work picks up from aligning with a certain strand of the Black radical tradition, as elaborated mainly by the Caribbean thinkers Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon.\(^{71}\) It is from such grounds that in her latest phase of intellectual production, Wynter enters in dialogue with scholars from the Latin American and Caribbean “decolonial turn” (Maldonado-Torres 2011b, Wynter 2003). This is an intellectual movement that not coincidentally becomes consolidated around the 500th anniversary of the so-called “discovery” of the Americas. It is through such dialogue that Wynter is now identified as a leading decolonial thinker par excellence.

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\(^{70}\) This critique is most evident in Wynter’s “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” where she indicts the higher education system for aiding in the reproduction of a racist cultural worldview where the policing of Black subjects is a normative regulatory practice (Wynter 1992b). More recently, Wynter has also criticized the assimilationist discourse of “diversity” within the university for collaborating with the assault on the radicality of Black studies (Thomas 2006).

\(^{71}\) Radical postcolonial scholars, especially those with a socialist line, did not have the above disciplinary limitation of their liberal contemporaries. There is here a story to be told concerning how postcolonial studies colluded with conservative criticisms of the left in the academy to detract from the epistemic contributions of Black studies, and ethnic studies in general.
Wynter then follows Césaire’s and Fanon’s critiques of Europe’s false universalism in developing an analysis of the conceptual dynamics of the colonial project that originated from Columbus’s 1492 voyage and whose impacts across all levels of experience continue to be felt today. Césaire’s position has been most succinctly developed in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (published in 1950 as *Discours sur le colonialism*, though only gaining a wide readership in its 1955 edition). In this succinct text, Césaire decisively indicts Europe for its decadence, sickness, and inability to solve the problems that it has single-handedly created: “the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem” (Césaire 2000, 31). Far from being the beacon of enlightenment and progress that it purports itself to be, where the practice of colonization is equated with a positive expansion of civilization and where its own extremes (such as Nazism) are understood as pathological perversions of its otherwise benign logic of technological rationality, Césaire uncovers the ethical and political truths of Europe as fallacies. Instead of delivering civilization, Europe is a “dying civilization” (Césaire 2000, 31). It began to die the moment it justified itself vis-a-vis the spurious image of a savage Other in need of civilization *i.e.* in need of Europe’s civilization. In the very attempt to civilize such falsely-constructed savage Other, Europe itself proceeds “towards savagery” (Césaire 2000, 36). In the colonial project, the attempt to civilize then becomes its opposite and leaves no party unharmed: the “thingification” of the colonized brutalizes the colonizer himself (Césaire 2000, 41, 42, 35).

Wynter builds upon this cataclysmic critique of European civilization and its supporting discourses and ideologies by updating the inquiry to examine how these

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72 Frantz Fanon picks up this assessment of Césaire concerning the relation between civilization and colonization in his depictions of the Algerian War, where what was being observed was precisely the death of colonialism. See Fanon’s aptly titled *A Dying Colonialism* (Fanon 1965) – though originally published in French as *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne*. 
discourses and ideologies continue to be alive in our present. Central in these discourses and ideologies is the discourse of humanism, which was a vital player in the secularizing transformation that gave birth to modern Western Europe from the bosom of Western Christendom. This is the very same humanism that has structured the modern university as a secular site of knowledge production divided into the natural and social sciences, on the one hand, and the liberal humanities, on the other. The unmasking of the contradictions of such humanism that Wynter performs shares in more than one modality Césaire’s critique of the hypocrisy of “Man” as put forth in his analysis of the colonial infrastructure of Nazism. For Césaire, Europeans:

> tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them...because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples...at bottom, what [European Man] cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man...it is the crime against the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa. (Césaire 2000, 36)

Césaire here takes Nazism to be not an exceptional deviation of enlightened European civilization, but quite on the contrary, a linear consequence of such civilization’s investment in coloniality. This analysis charges the supposed liberal humanism at the root of European civilization with tacitly supporting the colonial project until its own fictional delimitations of what constitutes the limits of humanity were tore down by the Nazi project i.e. until Nazism expands the category of the savage and thus delimits that of (white) Man. That humanism is rooted in a colonial infrastructure is why, for Césaire, such pretended humanism never had the capacity to be a “true” humanism “made to the measure of the world” (Césaire 2000, 73).
2.1.2 Synthesizing (Trans)Disciplinary Insurgencies

One could interpret the broader contours of Wynter’s work as continuing the groundwork to make Césaire’s “true humanism” a historical reality. This new humanism, as an ethical and political project, will take, Wynter tells us, a revolution in thought, a complete “re-writing of knowledge” which “must necessarily entail the un/writing of our present normative defining of the secular mode of the Subject” (Wynter 1984, 22). Black studies in its “original Fifties/Sixties intentionality – before its ethnicization in middle-class assimilationist terms as African-American Studies” (Wynter 2015, 186), defends such revolutionary perspective as the site of a critique of the pathologies of modernity where thingification and whiteness are normative categories. This is a revolution, however, that is nevertheless paradoxically evocative of the 16th century secularizing heresy that gave rise to such secular mode of the Subject in the first place: the Studia Humanitatis. It is because all heresies eventually solidify into new orthodoxies (Wynter 1984, 21), that while the Studia Humanitatis helped transform a Medieval Christian theocratic order into the order of Western secular modernity, it did so in a way that was not “made to the measure of the world.” Wynter thus tasks Black studies with re-staging a heresy of the same scale as the one through which “Man” once decentered “God.” This time, however, the heresy is not to be heretical of “God” but of “Man” himself.

For Wynter, one of the strongest openings towards such re-writing of knowledge within Black studies can be found in Fanon’s discovery of the sociogenic explanation. As

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73 To say that this humanist heresy was secularizing is not to say that it was anti-Christian. Instead of rejecting the Christian order tout court, the secular heresy sought to submit the authority of theology to the lay activity of “textual and philological scrutiny in the name of the accuracy of historical meaning” (Wynter 1984, 28). As I argued in the Introduction, the liberal variant of secularity does not negate what would come to be known as its opposite (the religious), instead merely seeking to manage it and contain it.
it is well-known, Fanon followed the steps of Césaire’s critique of humanist discourse in calling for the creation of a new “man” through a process of decolonization (Fanon 2004). In particular, Fanon analyzed the hypocrisies of a peace-aspiring European humanist discourse in light of the colonial violence that the French empire perpetuated in its colonies, most particularly during the Algerian Revolution (Fanon 1965). This is captured by Fanon’s statement that the European humanist is “Concerned about Man but strangely not about the Arab” (Fanon 1967, 48). Fanon’s critique of humanism, to be sure, is premised on his earlier analyses of the phenomenology of blackness as put forth in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 2008). It is in this groundbreaking text that, according to Wynter, Fanon advances an epistemic insurgency against liberal-secular disciplinarity in his analyses of the aspirations of Black Caribbean subjects in his native Martinique to want to be White.

For Fanon (the psychiatrist), these aspirations can be singularly explained with neither the evolutionary explanation found in constitutional psychology, nor with the solipsistic explanation found in psychoanalysis, which was the leading psychological discourse of his time. Instead, Fanon calls for an alternative explanation that also accounts for the influence of structural socio-historical considerations, ignored by both scientific frameworks: “Reacting against the constitutionalizing trend at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud demanded that the individual factor be taken into account in psychoanalysis. He replaced the phylogenetic theory by an ontogenetic approach. We shall see that the alienation of the black man is not an individual question. *Alongside phylogeny and*

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74 Fanon’s struggle was then taken up across the world, from Malcolm X and the Black Panthers in the United States to Steve Biko in South Africa. Biko is a figure that remains severely understudied, and yet whose development of the Black Consciousness Movement as an antithesis to the white supremacist apartheid system is without a doubt one of those alternatives to Man’s governing codes for thought and practice that Wynter defends in her work. For Biko, Black Consciousness gets at the root of the problem, without which there cannot be a “true humanity” in South Africa (Biko 1978).
ontogeny, there is also sociogeny” (Fanon 2008, xv, my emphasis). For Wynter, it is in this deceptively simple proposition that the “purely biological definition of what it is to be, and therefore of what it is like to be, human” is proven to be untenable and insufficient (Wynter 1984, 31). There is something more that determines our experience, the “psychophysical laws” at the level of “human experience” which far from being universal constants, Fanon shows are redefinable (Wynter 2001, 32). The sociogenic understanding of the Black subject’s alienation leads Fanon later in his life to call for the creation of a new Man through a process of decolonization. The re-writing of knowledge is accordingly the precondition for any possibility of a truer humanism. Fanon’s earlier psychological work and his later political work are here exceptionally coherent.

In her engagement with Fanon’s work, Wynter elevates Fanon’s intervention to the level of a scientific principle (which she calls “the sociogenic principle”), in order to mitigate the “genomic principle defining of the species-identity of purely organic life” (Wynter 2001, 31). Wynter specifically positions Fanon’s sociogenic explanation as an intervention into contemporary debates in neuroscience and the philosophy of mind to illuminate the functioning of what she calls “psychophysical laws” at the level of “human experience” (Wynter 2001, 32). For Wynter, these laws are not only redefinable at this level as sociogenic or nature-culture laws, but also as ones whose processes of functioning, while inseparable from the physical (that is, neurobiological) processes which implement them, would, at the same time, be non-reducible, as the indispensable condition of what

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75 It remains unexplored the extent to which Fanon’s accounts of sociogeny and sociogenesis were influenced by the work of the German sociologist Norbert Elias, who in the 1930’s develops an account of Western civilization as a process of sociogenesis (Elias 2000). If Fanon was not aware of this intervention during his writing of Black Skin, White Masks, which is likely, as Elias’ The Civilizing Process only gained momentum after its English translation in the 1960’s, it would mean that Fanon largely coins the concept in isolation. This would explain Elias’ citational absence in Fanon’s text. Otherwise, if Fanon was aware of this intervention, he simply omitted to cite it, and Fanon’s deployment of sociogeny and sociogenesis should then be taken to function within the broad parameters of Elias’ work.
it is like to be human, to these processes alone and, therefore, to the laws of nature by which those processes are governed. (Wynter 2001, 32)

Human experience is here understood as a complex mediation between natural and social processes and not a unidirectional course emanating from “purely organic life.” This is elucidated by Fanon’s account of his own arrival to the French mainland from the French Caribbean. It is only upon this arrival to the metropole that Fanon fully realizes how he is objectively racialized as a “Black” man by “White” others. This causes in him changes in consciousness and embodiment that alter his own sense of self and his own relation to his body in a way that had not been previously possible growing up in Martinique. It takes Fanon a process of socio-cultural displacement to realize that White subjectivity is naturalized in consciousness and embodiment as the normative bearer of humanity, thereby making Black subjectivity into a pathological instance of sub-humanity also at the levels of consciousness and embodiment. This for Wynter demonstrates the dialectical nature of the ontogenic, the phylogenic, and the sociogenic levels of reality (Wynter 2001, 42). This is a realization that Fanon could only have explained by explicitly transgressing the disciplinary limits of the psychology of his time, which did not consider such mediation between the biological and the socio-cultural levels of reality.76

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76 There is a question within feminist theory concerning the utility of Fanon’s work given what has often been interpreted as Fanon’s misogyny (Bergner 1995). Drucilla Cornell and Stephen Seely have argued that Fanon’s negative comments about Black Caribbean women arise not from a virulent misogynistic attitude, but from the “annihilation of sexual difference in a field of violence and colonization” (Cornell and Seely 2016, 99). Lewis Gordon also has sought to dispel this tendency (Gordon 2015, 61). Much earlier, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting sought to make Fanon’s work relevant for an “anti-racist feminist praxis” (Sharpley-Whiting 1996, 161). It should also be clear that Fanon’s analyses of interracial romantic relations depart from an awareness of the pathologies of society. That Fanon believes “in the possibility of love” is thus the reason why he dares to trace its “imperfections and perversions” (Fanon 2008, 24). In Chapter Four of this dissertation, I explore Fanon’s “possibility of love” as “decolonial love” – notion developed by contemporary decolonial theorists.
Psychology is thus re-written to account for the ways in which our psychophysical experience is mediated by the social and cultural levels of reality. This disciplinary transgression makes a “crack” in the Westernized order of knowledge by deflating its false sense of universal applicability, to use Catherine Walsh’s formulation (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 82). The psychophysical laws of human experience are shown to be dependent on cultural contexts across space and time and not universal constants. Nevertheless, it is through these laws that we can experience ourselves as humans beyond our shared biological connections. For Wynter, this conundrum is what is behind the meaning of Fanon’s title *Black Skin, White Masks*, as the skin represents nature (the phylogenetic/ontogenic) while the mask stands in for culture (the sociogenic) (Wynter 2001, 53, Fanon 2008). For Wynter, if our entrance into the realm of culture liberates us from the natural realm, the implicit universalization of our own culture simultaneously subordinates us to our culture’s categories through which “we can alone realize ourselves as, in Fanonian term, always already socialized beings” (Wynter 2001, 33). This is a fact that is conveniently hidden by pseudo-universal liberal-secular sciences of Man and their inability to be self-referential to account for their own limitations. This lack of self-referentiality is a pattern that Wynter identifies, following Paolo Valesio, as a consequence of the problem of the “*topos* of iconicity” where “a member of a class” yokes itself “with the class of classes” – in this case, a culture-specific framework for a universal one (Wynter 1984, 33).

Echoing W. E. B. Du Bois’s prophetic 1903 accusation that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (Du Bois 1999), Wynter argues “the struggle of our times, one that has hitherto had no name” is the struggle against this *topos* of iconicity, applied at the sociogenic level of the “descriptive statement” of the human
The notion of “descriptive statement,” developed by the cyberneticist Gregory Bateson, here simply denotes the status quo or what is maintained in the self-reproduction of any system. At the sociogenic level of the descriptive statement of the human, the *topos* of iconicity signals the construction and reproduction of “humanity” as a system out of a conflation between “a member of a class with the class of classes.” In other words, it indicates “the overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human,” an operation that accounts for Man’s failure to create a humanism made to the measure of the world (Wynter 2003, 267). For Wynter, both “Gregory Bateson and Frantz Fanon, thinking and writing during the upheaval of the anticolonial/social-protest movements of the sixties […] put forward new conceptions of the human outside the terms of our present ethnoclass conception that define it on the model of a natural organism” (Wynter 2003, 267). Their contributions are part of the re-writing of knowledge that will make explicit the “mechanisms of occultation” by means of which the liberal-secular sciences of Man overrepresent Man’s culture-specific categories as if they were universal (Wynter 2003, 328). For only a “redescription of the human outside the terms of our present descriptive statement of the human, Man” (Wynter 2003, 268), will get us closer to a true humanism made to the measure of the world.

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77 Wynter’s also places Fanon’s phenomenology of the lived experience of the Black man in the tradition of Du Bois’s analysis of “double consciousness” (Wynter 1984, 31). For another elaboration on this point, see also Marc Black’s “Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness” (Black 2007).

78 For instance, at the level of physiology and neurology, the descriptive statement of the human body would be its “body temperature, blood chemistry, the length and size and shape of organs during growth and embryology, and all the rest of the body's characteristics” (Bateson 1968, 38). Wynter adopts a great deal of the contributions of cybernetics and systems theory into her own epistemic and disciplinary proposal, a fact that remains understudied in the reception of Wynter’s work. The next section of this chapter further addresses this matter in relation to the theory of autopoiesis. I am preparing a full-length exposition of this question in a manuscript titled “The Cyberneticist of the Word.”
For Wynter, Fanon’s contribution to the heresy of Man ultimately culminates in the development of a new way of thinking, what Wynter initially calls “a science of human systems” (Wynter 1984, 43). This science accordingly seeks to carve a transcultural locus of enunciation from where specific cultures can liberate themselves from the categorical impositions of Man. Two brief examples here help concretize this proposal. First, there is the transcultural anthropological approach of the Ethiopian anthropologist Asmarom Legesse, who develops a method from the perspective of subjects that are “liminal” to a specific socio-cultural order (Legesse 1973). It is from this liminal perspective that the reigning orthodoxy of such order might be understood as contradictory (Wynter 2001, 58). Second, there is the “demonic model” proposal of the British biologist Alex Comfort, who suggests an observation model in biology that does not dependent on a “space-time oriented observer,” mirroring the contribution of quantum theory to the field physics (Comfort 1980, 207). For Comfort, such demonic model is needed to explain, for instance, the meaning of evolutionary change if time is “metaphorical” (Comfort 1980, 208). Both multi-disciplinary examples suggest the extent to which Wynter’s new science must re-write the presuppositions of the sciences of Man beyond the limits of both its social and natural disciplinary frameworks. This is not to reject all knowledge created by these sciences, just as Fanon does not negate the contributions of the phylogenic and the ontogenic approaches, and the Studia Humanitatis does not simply dismiss Christianity either. What is proposed is instead “a new synthesis that can make our uniquely hybrid nature/culture mode of being human […] subject to ‘scientific description in a new way’” (Wynter 2001, 60; citing Heinz R. Pagel's The Dreams of Reason, 330-339).
This synthesis will take full shape as a New Science of the Word with yet another incorporation of Césaire’s work. In a lecture titled “Poetry and Knowledge” delivered in Haiti just after the end of the Second World War, Césaire criticizes the scientism of Western modernity that led to the disavowal of sensibility as a source of knowledge. In rejecting sensibility, the sciences of Man created a deep void that culminated in the instrumental-scientific rationality of the atom bomb. Césaire believes that out of such silence, a poetic form knowledge can be born that can counter any instrumentalization of knowledge (Césaire 1990, xlii). Pondering on what “an original handling of the word can make possible,” Césaire forecasts that “the time will come again when the study of the word will condition the study of nature” (Césaire 1990, xlix). Wynter recovers this prophetic intervention made by Césaire’s and relates it to Fanon’s sociogenic discovery to show how poetic knowledge can be a fundamental part of the analysis of sociogenic codes. In other words, “an original handling of the word” leads Wynter to analyze human systems like “words,” as “narrative schemas” to be read, interpreted, and deconstructed (Wynter 2015, 212). From this angle, it becomes clear how it is the stories told about the Black man that had already made Fanon the Other to the White Man upon his first arrival to the French mainland (Wynter 2001, 42). As a science of narrative human systems (the Word), the re-writing of knowledge that Wynter cautiously lays out is to be primarily launched within the literary humanities, not under the domain of Man’s logics but as inflected through the radical transdisciplinarity of Black Studies (Wynter 1984, 44-45). It is in this vein that

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79 Nelson Maldonado-Torres interprets Césaire as defending the founding of new decolonial sciences: “Césaire proposes the decolonial sciences as an alternative and antidote of sorts to the European sciences,” which have been implicated not only in the construction of European Man, but also in the justification of its modern-colonial project (Maldonado-Torres 2006a, 134). For Maldonado-Torres, “Ethnic Studies both demands and provides tools for a renewed and reconceptualized form of humanities” (Maldonado-Torres 2012a, 93). This is exactly how Black studies reworks the literary humanities in Wynter’s formulation.
Wynter herself has advanced a “demonic” approach to the study of literature, particular as it concerns the place of liminal subjects in the narrative schemas of foundational modern literatures that capture and thus re-constitute their milieu (Wynter 1990).

The Science of the Word then intervenes in the scientific establishment by redefining scientific inquiry “beyond the limits of the natural sciences’ restrictedness to their specific domains of inquiry of the physical and purely biological levels of reality” (Wynter 2015, 209). A study of the Word “as the study of the sociogenic code’s descriptive statement must necessarily not only correlate with but also determine the approach to the ‘study of nature’” (Wynter 2015, 210). This entails a hybrid investigation of the ways in which bios (the genetic, or in Fanon’s case, the phylogenetic and the ontogenic, “nature”) does not simply determine but also implement mythos (the non-genetic, the sociogenic, “the Word”). Put in terms of the psychophysical laws of human experience, the central question here is: how does what happen in the brain (consciousness) becomes flesh

Maldonado-Torres assesses Wynter’s work in his “Notes on the Current Status of Liminal Categories” (Maldonado-Torres 2006b).

Wynter argues that the “absence of Caliban’s woman” is an “ontological absence” constitutive of secular modernity (Wynter 1990, 361). Wynter provocatively argues that “rather than only voicing the ‘native’ woman’s hitherto silenced voice we shall ask: What is the systemic function of her own silencing, both as women and, more totally, as ‘native’ women?” (Wynter 1990, 365). This questioning leads not simply to the task of speaking back, but to the task of developing “demonic models of cognition” outside of the hegemonic mode of speech of which Caliban’s woman is silenced (Wynter 1990, 365). A further elaboration of Wynter’s “demonic” model can be seen in Katherine McKittrick’s Demonic Grounds (McKittrick 2006).

Wynter’s proposal should be a foundational intervention in environmental humanities. Wynter is particularly invested in making a contribution to the debate on climate change, which thus far has not disentangled the specific activities of homo oeconomicus from those of the ecumenically human (Wynter 2015, 230-240). For a further elaboration on this conjuncture, see Max Hantel’s “What Is It Like to Be a Human?” (Hantel 2018). I echo Maldonado-Torres’s reminder, however, that if the decolonization of knowledge “involves various forms of transdisciplinarity,” this does not imply that “all forms of transdisciplinarity are decolonial” (Maldonado-Torres 2015).
(embodiment)? (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 27).\footnote{Wynter adopts this formulation (Wynter 1997, 512) from the philosopher Antonio T. de Nicolás’s exploration of the biology of religion, where he argues that “humans become through their powers of embodiment a multiplicity of theories that became human because man has the capacity to turn theory into flesh” (de Nicolás 1980, 225). This is the secular equivalent of John’s “And the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14 King James Version).} The synthesis that Wynter has in mind here is more than “an articulation of science and poetics together” as Katherine McKittrick and others have argued recently (McKittrick, O'Shaughnessy, and Witaszek 2018, 869). For what it demands instead is a re-constitution of the very foundations of both science and poetics. Herein lies one of the Science of the Word’s most heretical potentials as it redefines the boundaries of Man’s order of knowledge, effectively deflating the latter’s claims to universal factuality as being nothing more than expressions of a certain narrative-schema (Wynter 2015, 213).

### 2.2 Postsecular Autopoiesis/Autopoetics of the Flesh

As I articulated in the above exposition, Wynter believes that the reigning liberal-secular order of knowledge is the latest iteration of the once heretical medieval revolution of the Christian laity. It is true that the secularizing revolution of the \textit{Studia Humanitatis} decentered Christendom’s theocentric order of knowledge, giving birth to new possibilities of cognitive emancipation in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Yet it nevertheless did so in complicity with the colonizing enterprise led by Christian mercenaries and missionaries across what is now the Americas. In this complicity Wynter finds the fundamental aporia of secularity: the fact that our “secular mode of the Subject” (Wynter 1984, 22), or current descriptive statement of the human, was brought into being “by a humanly emancipatory and homogenizing Western world system that is, \textit{at the same time}, a no less humanly subjugating imperial system” (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 63). This
is so because the emancipatory vision of the secular human (Man) did not question the colonially constructed boundaries of humanity inherited from Christendom (Wynter 2003, 283-311). Wynter deals with this aporia by affirming the “demonic grounds” covered over by Man’s emancipatory liberal secularity. As I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, this conceptual move can be conceived as a decolonial contribution to the understanding of postsecularity. Instead of hastily proceeding to analyze the “return” of religion as that which lies beyond the secular, as standard studies of postsecularity do, Wynter highlights the coloniality of secularity as something to be negated in the unfinished project of decolonization. This is the “new ceremony” (Wynter 1984) that Wynter has been searching for throughout her work, the ceremony that can wed together the cognitive emancipation initiated by the secularizing Studia Humanitatis and the “demonic grounds” of those subjects upon which such liberal-secular order is built in the first place.

For Wynter, part of the new ceremony that will negate the aporia of secularity entails then a reconstructive re-writing of secularity, appropriating its heretical character that once permitted a partial emancipation from the Christian theocentric worldview. 83 This is the limited extent to which, as McKittrick has put it, Wynter’s project is “no less secular” than her object of critique (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 11). Secularity here includes the “metalanguage” that puts together all external observer liminal positions in a way that avoids the overrepresentation of a single position (Wynter 1984, 48-49). In the form of a New Science of the Word, this entails for Wynter the re-interpretation and re-writing of the literary/aesthetic orders, through which “we come to imagine/experience ourselves, our

83 This is the positive element in the notion of “un/writing,” which entails writing over what was previously written. It is the reconstructive component of deconstruction.
modes of being” (Wynter 1984, 50), so as to conceive of new images, experiences, and modes of being beyond secular/colonial Man. Because of the role that “narratives defined as ‘literature’” have had in the “ordering narratives of secular man, whose mode of being would be imperatively global” (Wynter 1984, 50), the New Science redeployes the techniques of textual and philological scrutiny used in the Studia Humanitatis to subvert the authority of theology. In my view, the New Science inherits such secular conception of literature as a residual secularity. But in its rejection of an investment in a “humanly subjugating imperial system,” such secular inheritance is transformed into what I conceive is a demonic secularity. This demonic secularity is Wynter’s postsecular secularity that is heretical of the reigning “secular mode of the Subject.”

2.2.1 An Original Handling of the Word: Wynter’s Redeployment of the Theory of Autopoiesis

If the New Science aims to elucidate the mechanisms of (over)representation and occultation which Fanon shows to be alterable, the “making-conscious of the functioning of these codes,” Wynter argues, “will enable humans to determine these self-regulating codes rather than to be determined by them” (Wynter 1984, 65, n. 56). From elucidation to self-determination, from theory to praxis, the New Science assists in the making of a “true” humanism “made to the measure of the world.” Becoming conscious of these mechanisms or codes will allow us to break the reciprocal feedback loop sustaining of Man’s descriptive statement of the human, a loop between our modes of representation, imagination, and

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84 This was a transition from narrative orders being dependent on a system of “gods” to the reliance on a system of “metaphors” (Wynter 1984, 50). In this process, a “religio-aesthetic” form of self-representation becomes a “purely aesthetic” form (Wynter 1984, 51). One could here criticize Wynter for maintaining a rigid understanding of the unfolding process of secularization as being mutually exclusive from its apparent opposite, the religious. Such binary approach is in tension with other moments in Wynter’s work where she understands the overlaps and mutual imbrications of both elements of the binary.
being, on the one hand, and our “collective systems of behavior” – what Jacques Derrida refers to as “writing” (Wynter 1984, 22) – on the other hand, both of which are verified by each other (Wynter 1984, 22). This is the passing from Man’s secularizing poetics of the *propter nos homines* to a species-oriented (postsecular) poetics of the “We-the-ecumenically-Human” (Wynter 2015, 194). The interruption of this reciprocity loop moreover “effects what Maturana and Varela call the autopoiesis through which all that lives realizes its mode of being” (Wynter 1984, 22). With the encounter of this concept of “autopoiesis through which all that lives realizes its mode of being,” we have reached the end of Wynter’s *oeuvre*, which is to say, its beginning; for a new autopoiesis is simultaneously both cause and effect of the re-writing of knowledge which Wynter’s work brings forth. In other words, this is the nucleus of Wynter’s attempt to bridge at once both the natural-social sciences/humanities divide at the level of scholarly disciplines, as well as the secularizing/demonic divide that substantiates the order of knowledge of the university at the level of the episteme.

The importance of Wynter’s appropriation and redeployment of the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana’s and Francisco Varela’s concept of autopoiesis has surprisingly gone largely overlooked in the general reception of Wynter work. Because autopoiesis is a concept that revolutionized systems theory and many sub-fields across the natural and social sciences since the middle of the twentieth century (Mingers 1995), Wynter’s adoption of the concept as a “demonic model” should be understood as a fundamental aspect of her re-writing of knowledge. The failure to comprehend the importance of this concept in Wynter’s work could be attributed to the still too disciplinary

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85 The recent exception to this long-standing trend would be Max Hantel’s “What Is It Like to Be a Human?: Sylvia Wynter on Autopoiesis” (2018).
reception of Wynter’s work, which remains largely unfamiliar with the sources of the concepts that Wynter puts together. It is my conviction, however, that in this redeployment one can see a concrete example of the transdisciplinary theoretical vistas opened by the New Science of the Word. In particular, a careful study of the contribution of Maturana and Varela to Wynter’s proposal will also add a better understanding of the overall influence of cybernetics in Wynter’s thought. Besides Gregory Bateson, who gives Wynter the notion of a “descriptive statement,” for instance, the cyberneticist Safford Beer gives Wynter the grounds to call for the rewriting of knowledge, as the first epigraph of this chapter shows. Beer’s argument is put forth in none other than the preface to Maturana and Varela’s *Autopoiesis and Cognition* (Beer 1980), which is the text from where Wynter initially picks up the concept of autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela 1980). Wynter agrees with Beer that such rewriting of knowledge cannot be done through the endless breakdown of concept that disciplinary analysis provides, but that it must be done through the creative mechanism of synthesis. Unlike analysis, synthesis does not merely “interrelate disciplines; it transcends them” (Beer 1980, 65). As I demonstrated in the previous section, Wynter’s New Science does this by the way in which it understands the relation between *bios* and *mythos*. In this section, I argue that such approach should be seen within a broader amalgamation of *poiesis* (creation, production, matter) and *poetics* (the Word). In Wynter’s New Science, the theory of *autopoiesis* is determined by the Word: it becomes a theory of *autopoetics*.87

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86 This formulation will return in Chapter Four, under an exploration of Edouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* (1997). As I illustrated in the Introduction to this dissertation, for Beer, “relation is the stuff of system. Relation is the essence of synthesis” (Beer 1980, 63).

87 Here, Wynter’s understanding of mythos is not unlike what in the previous chapter Dussel referred to as the “mythical-ethical nucleus” of religion (Dussel 2001a, 409, my translation).
In a time of revolutionary upheaval in the University of Chile during the 1960’s and early 1970’s, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela developed the concept of autopoiesis as an application of cybernetics and systems theory into the biology of cognition. Their work sought to conceive of a more sophisticated description of the existence of life and living systems, particularly self-generating molecular biological systems. Maturana and Varela sought to understand “the organization of living systems in relation to their unitary character” in a way that can also illuminate on the system’s own production and autonomous reproduction of itself (Maturana and Varela 1980, 75). The concept of autopoiesis is meant to capture the necessary and sufficient conditions to characterize “the organization of living systems” (Maturana and Varela 1980, 82). This signifies that living systems reproduce themselves: their internal elements are both causes and effects of the reproduction of the system. To call living systems autopoietic is to see them as closed systems, at least at the level of their operations where the internal elements self-generate and reproduce themselves in order to maintain the unity and self-organization of the system. If there is any interaction with the outside, the “environment” in the language of systems theory, then such interaction is already predetermined by the internal structure of the living system itself. The phenomenological domain generated by autopoiesis is what Maturana and Varela call “cognition” (Maturana and Varela 1980, 123). This, in fact, is one of the more controversial conclusions of the theory. As Maturana put it in an earlier

88 Maturana credits the politics of this time period with giving him a language to say new things (Maturana and Varela 1980, xvi). Wynter recognizes this as a part of the epistemic transformations enacted by social uprisings (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 28). The radical politics of cybernetics are by now largely forgotten. An example of such politics was Project Cybersyn, a governmental initiative that applied cybernetics to the management of the national economy during Salvador Allende’s presidency in Chile. The principal architect of this project was none other than Stafford Beer. For a history of Project Cybersyn, see Eden Medina’s Cybernetic Revolutionaries (Medina 2011a).
essay: “Living systems are cognitive systems, and living as a process is a process of cognition” (Maturana and Varela 1980, 13).

A brief inquiry into the etymology of “autopoiesis” helps in the explanation of the concept’s contribution. Maturana claims that “the word” came to him during a conversation he had with José Bulnes, a literary scholar that at the time was working on an essay about Don Quijote’s dilemma of taking either the path of arms (praxis) or the path of letters (poiesis) (Maturana and Varela 1980, xvii). Poiesis and praxis, of course, are Greek terms that respectively denote creation and action. As the well-known story goes, Don Quijote decides to become a knight instead of pursuing a life as a writer, estimating praxis over literary poiesis. At the time, Maturana was struggling to find the right word to convey the autonomous organization of living systems, finding in the Greek poiesis the creative element or (re)production that he sought in life (Maturana and Varela 1980, xvii). Thus, auto-poiesis is mobilized as a neologism to convey the autonomy of the organizational (re)production of living systems.

In Wynter’s New Science, Maturana and Varela’s concept of autopoiesis takes a central explanatory role in the illumination of the mechanisms of representation through which humans inscribe ourselves as human. These mechanisms include those of occultation through which we make this entire process opaque to ourselves (Wynter 2003, 328). The history of our species consists of this entire ensemble of operations described by Wynter. The theory of autopoiesis thus gives a name and a reference to the struggle that until recently “had no name” (Wynter 2003, 262). It is the struggle to become self-

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89 An example would be the hidden theological roots in the process of secularization itself. Here, Gil Anidjar (while not referencing Wynter) is very succinct: “Like that unmarked race, which, in the related discourse of racism, became invisible or white, Christianity invented the distinction between religious and secular and thus made religion. It made religion the problem—rather than itself” (Anidjar 2006, 62).
conscious at the level of the human species. As Maturana puts it, “We become self-conscious through self-observation; by making descriptions of ourselves (representations), and by interacting with our descriptions we can describe ourselves describing ourselves, in an endless recursive process” (Maturana and Varela 1980, 14). The endless recursivity is what, according to Wynter, will enable humans to determine the codes and narrative schemas that order social life, rather than to be unconsciously determined by them (Wynter 1984, 65, n. 56). The transcultural space that can liberate us from the constrains of a single culture, the new metalinguistic, or as Beer puts it, “metasystemic” (Beer 1980, 65) ceremony that promises a more “fully realized cognitive autonomy as a species” (Wynter 2015, 242), will come about autopoietically as a result of our becoming aware of our own autopoietic praxis. This is the only way we can come to know our social reality “outside the terms of the eusocializing mode of auto-institution in whose web-spinning field alone we are recursively enabled performatively to enact ourselves in the genre-specific terms of our fictive modes of kind” (Wynter 2015, 202). The promise of the new science of human systems is the “making possible of such a meta-systemic, indeed, meta-cosmogonic outsider perspective” (Wynter 2015, 241).

Never in her work does Wynter feel the need to recognize that her appropriation of the concept of autopoiesis overlaps in intention with the adoption of the concept within more traditionally sociological approaches to social theory – perhaps because of their widespread diffusion. Here it is worthwhile just to mention the work of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. During the 1980’s and 1990’s, Luhmann incorporated systems theory, Maturana and Varela’s concept of autopoiesis, and the linguistic turn into social theory in order to conceive of social systems as self-constitutive autopoietic systems.
In a way like what Wynter was doing at the time, Luhmann’s work abstracted away from Maturana and Varela’s biological concept of autopoiesis, originally applied at the level of biological life, to explain the reproduction of life at the social level. Luhmann inflected his use of the concept of autopoiesis though the linguistic turn in a way that resulted in a theory of society based on the element of “communication” and not on individuals or actions (Luhmann 1995). Luhmann’s approach was a disciplinary insurgency within the social sciences, one that has since sparked an array of similar adoptions of the theory of autopoiesis, most commonly in the fields of economics (the market as a system) and legal studies (law as a system).

Luhmann’s sociological adoption of the theory of autopoiesis clearly overlaps with Wynter’s sociogenic embracing of the theory on the centrality of language and communication. In that regard, it is important to note the controversy that Luhmann’s work has sparked, particularly the rejection by both Maturana and Varela of Luhmann’s use of the concept. For the Chilean biologists, sociological applications of the concept of autopoiesis miss the point of the distinction between production and operation, which results in a tendency to metaphorize the concept, thereby losing its explanatory power (Cadenas and Arnold 2015). While they do not clarify this question in Autopoiesis and Cognition,90 in their subsequent The Tree of Knowledge, Maturana and Varela do defend the position that social systems do not reproduce life in the strict materially creative sense indicated in the etymological root of poiesis. Instead, what social systems do is merely

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90 In this earlier text, the question is only posed as follows: “If human societies are biological systems the dynamics of a human society would be determined through the autopoiesis of its components. If human societies are not biological systems, the social dynamics would depend on laws and relations which are independent of the autopoiesis of the individuals which integrate them” (Maturana and Varela 1980, 118). We know, of course, that Wynter will follow Fanon in understanding the hybrid aspect of human systems, bios and mythos, poiesis and praxis, in an endless dialectical recursivity.
operationalize life (Maturana and Varela 1987). From this presupposition, social systems cannot be closed autopoietic systems, but are only instrumental aggregates of autopoietic biological systems that do reproduce life.

From a social-scientific perspective, Jürgen Habermas has also criticized Luhmann’s autopoietic turn because its deployment entails the strict separation of social and psychic phenomena into closed off systems (Cadenas and Arnold 2015, 174). Still operating within the linguistic turn, Habermas’s own work seeks to link both the social and the psychic through an understanding of language and communication that takes the best of both action-theoretic approaches (which Luhmann’s work criticizes) and systems-theoretic frameworks. This social theory is concretized in Habermas’s two-volume *The Theory of Communicative Action*, which attempts to bridge the gap between the social and the psychic with the development of a dual “systems-lifeworld” framework (Habermas 1984/1987). If Habermas does not use the concept of autopoiesis, his convincing critique of Luhmann is nevertheless significant for us because it allows us to place Wynter’s own sociogenic adoption of the theory within these broader social-scientific debates.

The deployment of the concept of autopoiesis in Wynter’s New Science of the Word is analogous to Luhmann’s in that they both understand social systems as centered on their communicative elements. In Wynter’s case, this is what is provided with the notion of a “narrative-schema.” She is closer to Habermas, however, in not reifying a mutual exclusivity between the social and biological levels of existence, particularly in her analysis of psychophysical laws of experience. Instead, Wynter deploys the concept of autopoiesis in a way that accounts for the interplay between the biological and the social levels. This is how Wynter sees the mutual interaction between *bios* (phylogenetic and ontogenic) and
mythos (sociogenic). To be sure, I do not think that this is an abstraction or a metaphorization of the concept of autopoiesis in the way Maturana and Varela argue is the case with Luhmann’s application of the concept. Wynter’s approach seeks to understand the hybridity of autopoiesis, as conditioned by our phenomenological limitation i.e. as conditioned by the Word. Her project is thus about understanding the materialization and self-reproduction of symbolic narrative mechanisms through which humans reproduce themselves/ourselves as hybrid bios-mythoi beings. It is not just communication that is at stake here, but the biological implementation of social codes. This includes, for example, the opiate cognitive releases that take place upon the successful assimilation and reproduction of such code codes. In this sense, poiesis and poetics (the Word) come together dialectically because what happens in the brain (consciousness) becomes flesh (embodiment). Wynter’s work thus puts forward a more sophisticated adoption of the theory of autopoiesis than Luhmann’s work does.

Wynter’s proposal for a new science of human systems invested in decolonization exceeds the disciplinary and epistemic foundations of the science of Man. Her proposal transdisciplinarily re-constitutes the foundations of both science and poetics beyond their articulation as found in secular modernity. This is then a postsecular project that brings together the biological and the social levels of experience as conditioned by the word. I understand this to be a complex imbrication of poiesis, praxis, and poetics that preempts Don Quijote’s dilemma that inspired Maturana and Varela to deploy the concept of autopoiesis. In other words, for Wynter, the path of arms (praxis) and the path of letters
(poiesis) each do not make sense without the other, a formulation that illuminates Wynter’s relation to politics, particularly anti-colonial and revolutionary politics.\textsuperscript{91}

In this framework, the question of what it means to be human for Wynter is reframed as a question of “self-inscripting and inscripted flesh” (Scott 2000, 206) – “flesh” no longer understood in imperial Christendom’s terms as “fallen” vis-à-vis redeemed “spirit” (Wynter 2003, 274). This new account synthetizes material matter (\textit{bios, poiesis}) and the internalization of symbolic codes (\textit{mythos, poetics, the Word}) through which we imagine and experience ourselves as members of a system (\textit{praxis}). To be human thus means the constant autopoietic/autopoetic process of \textit{becoming-flesh}, materializing and symbolizing consciousness (the phenomenological domain that Maturana and Varela call “cognition”) into embodiment.\textsuperscript{92} This results in Wynter’s positive contribution to a new humanism, a humanism based not in “purely biologically absolute terms” but in a “meta-Darwinian and meta-\textit{homo sapiens} proposal that we are co-human because subject to the same laws of \textit{Auto-institution} as a hybridly third level of existence – that is, of the human defined as \textit{Homo Narrans}” (Wynter 2015, 194, n. 18). Understanding the praxis of being human as an autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh, as Maturana and Varela’s endless recursive process of describing ourselves describing ourselves, will carve out for us the

\textsuperscript{91} As we shall see in Chapter Four, as part of an analysis of the aesthetics of liberation, the conjunction of praxis and poiesis in Wynter’s work will find a resonance in Dussel notions of practical poiesis and poietic praxis (Dussel 2011a, 110). Cervantes’s \textit{Don Quijote} actually plays an important part in Wynter’s understanding of the novel form as a secularizing literary genre - see her “On Disenchanting Discourse” (Wynter 1987).

\textsuperscript{92} The notion of “becoming-flesh” that I am developing here works at a more abstract level than Alexander G. Weheliye’s notion of “pornotroping,” the “becoming-flesh of the (black) body” that “forms a primary component in the processes by which human beings are converted into bare life” (Weheliye 2014, 91). Weheliye’s notion is developed not at the level of phenomenology but at the level of biopolitics through a supplemental reading of Wynter with the work of Hortense Spillers. Nevertheless, Weheliye’s intervention has been central in my understanding of Wynter’s work and is a powerful critique of Eurocentric and racist accounts of biopolitics in the traditions of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben.
transcultural space that will liberate us from the constrains of a single culture, Man’s.\(^93\)

This is part of the generation of the postsecular ceremony that will wed the cognitive emancipation initiated by the secularizing *Studia Humanitatis* to the “demonic grounds” of secular modernity’s liminal subjects.

### 2.3 Postreligious Ceremonies of Reincarnation

Wynter’s postsecular, decolonial re-writing of knowledge rejects the false objectivity in the sciences of Man that presumes that *logos* supersedes *mythos*. The New Science of the Word instead recovers *mythos* from the demonic grounds of Man’s liminal subjects as a co-primary foundation of human autopoietic praxis (without rejecting *logos*), and from here calls for the re-writing of the narrative-schemas through which we experience ourselves as human. This is a task that is formally analogous to the secularizing project of the *Studia Humanitatis*, which sought to break away from the determinations of a theocentric order of knowledge by privileging *logos*. Wynter subsumes the secular conception of literature that comes out of that project, but doing so from outside of “the secular mode of the Subject” that it created. I have argued that this move is a postsecular decolonization of secularity through which the anti-dogmatic (heretic) character of the Christian laity’s revolution is now re-enacted against the liberal secularity of Man itself, which in its own perpetuation of the coloniality of imperial Christendom has been ossified

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\(^93\) Only in her most recent writings does Wynter adopt the term “autopoetic” (Wynter 2015) as opposed to “autopoietic.” Wynter here follows Ira Livingston’s *Between Science and Literature: An Introduction to Autopoetics* (2006), which finds inspiration in Maturana and Varela’s work to explore the intersections of science and literary/cultural studies. Not once does Livingston mention Wynter’s work, however, despite her pioneering adoption of the theory of autopoiesis since the early 1980’s within the literary humanities. Livingston’s neologism is meant to “vernacularize” the concept of autopoiesis and also “mark the realms of culture and meaning” (Livingston 2006, 2). It is unclear, however, how Livingston understands the relation between *poiesis* and *poetics*. I argue that such relation cannot simply be collapsed into a single concept, despite one’s attempts to show their imbrications at the level of sociogenic experience.
into orthodoxy. In the remainder of this chapter, I will offer a concrete example of the making-conscious of the functioning of the codes that Wynter’s own work uncovers.

I first, however, propose that Wynter’s long-searched for new ceremony that can supersede the coloniality of secularity is to be understood as a symbolic process of rebirth (Wynter 1997), a return to the flesh as conditioned by the Word, which is to say, it is a process of reincarnation. This understanding of reincarnation is substantially different from a traditionally religious sense beyond our “immanent frame” (Taylor 2007). It is instead a *demonically secular* account of reincarnation as the process of “self-inscripting” of the flesh. Through the self-conscious internalization of our new symbolic codes, we will imagine and experience ourselves as members of a new system.94 This is where Wynter’s secularity proves to be “demonic.” As a *postsecular* heretical challenge to Man, demonic secularity must also be understood in a *postreligious* sense insofar as Man invents not only the secular but also the religious as the co-constitutive other side of the coloniality of secularity. Moving beyond the secular/religious is therefore an important resource to the making of such new ceremony beyond Man and his modernity/coloniality.

Drucilla Cornell and Stephen Seely recently have searched for the new ceremony in the ritual practices of the “demonic grounds,” specifically the spiritualities of the African diaspora (Cornell and Seely 2016, 131).95 Cornell and Seely’s engagement with Wynter

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94 Wynter’s work thus usefully supplements Dussel’s account of how a new system emerges through a process of liberation (Dussel 2006). Dussel’s account is articulated at the level of the normativity of politics, yet it lacks the psychophysical dimension of human experience that Wynter provides.

95 In her interview with Greg Thomas, Wynter argues for the spirituality of Black music: “I can’t help feeling that the role of Black music has been to bring the spiritual into the secular. The whole idea of ‘Soul.’ In Fanon’s concept, the belief in ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ is a scientific concept; there is this other thing (consciousness, spirit, soul, even mind) that the body makes possible but which is not a property of the body itself” (Thomas 2006, 29). For an interpretation of Fanon as a “post-secular and transmodern liberation thinker” that explores the materialization of imperial divinity in the construction of a colonial order, see Maldonado Torres’s *Against War* (2008a, 13).
can be said to be a postsecular decolonizing intervention into critical theory; the latter has abandoned a serious commitment to revolutionary praxis while defending the secular mode of the subject in the rhetoric of modernity. For Cornell and Seely, Wynter’s anti-colonial critique of Man opens the door to conceive of new resources for revolutionary praxis besides those allocated by a Eurocentric “critical” theory. The new ceremony that Wynter calls for in this sense, they argue, must be “a ceremony beyond the secular (the ‘secular’ being, of course, an alibi produced from within the monotheistic episteme of Man) that can connect the project of renaturalization with one of reenchantment” (Cornell and Seely 2016, 157). Following the cue from women of color feminists such as Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and M. Jacqui Alexander, for whom spirituality is an invaluable resource for struggle (Cornell and Seely 2016, 48), Cornell and Seely gesture to the ways in which spiritualities, particularly Vodou and Candomblé, can have the power to disrupt the reciprocal feedback loop between our modes of representation, imagination, and being, and our “collective systems of behavior.”\footnote{Chapter Three of this dissertation follows Anzaldúa’s and Alexander’s work to explore how the epistemologies and corporeal practices in spiritual systems can enact the kind of “delinking” (Mignolo 2007) that Wynter envisions as being necessary to re-write the secular mode of the subject (Alexander 2005).} Though Cornell and Seely do not discuss it, I believe their analysis is similar to what Wynter herself explores in her sole published novel *The Hills of Hebron*, before the development of any of Wynter’s theoretical interventions.

**2.3.1 Discovering Oneself (Discovering God) in Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron***

Despite the increasing attention that Wynter’s work has gathered in the last few years, it continues to be the case that little attention has been paid to Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron* (2010). Published in 1962, *The Hills of Hebron* is Wynter’s sole published novel and effectively made her “the first Black woman novelist from the English-speaking
Caribbean” (Liddell 1990, 322). Its marginalized status within the reception of Wynter’s work speaks to the tight disciplinary boundaries that separate the literary from the philosophical. In this subsection, I show how this overlooked text in fact actualizes Wynter’s objective found in her later theoretical texts. I focus on the novel’s concluding scenes, where a central character, Obadiah, carves a wooden doll through which he “stumbled upon God” (Wynter 2010, 283). I argue that scenes involving the doll reveal what Wynter will refer to as the new ceremony that will ground the overcoming of the current genre of Man and his governing conventions. That the carving of wood is in essence an encounter with God understands that our autopoietic/autopoetic praxis is all we are, all we have, and all we want ourselves and the world we inhabit to be. This is what I have explored as the autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh.

*The Hills of Hebron* takes place during the years of social and political buildup that eventually led to Jamaica’s formal independence from Britain. The novel focuses on the community of Hebron, a religious group led by a self-proclaimed Moses, which appropriately commanded his followers out of the urban ghettos of Jamaica towards the isolated rural mountains where the community now lives by its own beliefs and customs. The novel opens at the height of Hebron’s most challenging crisis: a drought that has diminished their chances of survival; an accusation of a broken vow of continence against the recently appointed successor of Moses, Obadiah, who soon is outcasted due to his “mad” search for the adulterer that raped his wife Rose; and consequently the establishment of a new leader of Hebron, Moses’s wife Miss Gatha, who rules severely while awaiting for the return of her son Isaac, who is away at school, but who is expected to assume the eldership that belongs to him by birthright. The novel goes on to give an account of Moses’s
rise as the leader of the Church of the New Believers of Hebron, as well as his eventual downfall and the series of events that resulted in the community’s crisis. As the plot progresses, we find out that Isaac is both the man that rapes Rose, and the thief that steals Miss Gatha’s savings, which during the drought were the community’s main source of income. Isaac’s betrayal of Hebron is exacerbated by his escape from the island with Hebron’s savings, leading to a crisis of legitimacy in Miss Gatha’s leadership. The closing scenes of the novel depict the outcast Obadiah selling his hand-made wooden dolls in the urban marketplace, where he experiences an exchange which awakens in him a sense of creativity that makes him return to Hebron to retake the position of the community’s leader, this time with “a new ritual, a new morality, a new right and wrong, a new God” (Wynter 2010, 306).

Analyses of *The Hills of Hebron* tend to coalesce around the novel’s inquiries into the meaning of the nation, especially given that the publication of the novel in 1962 coincides with Jamaica’s formal independence from British rule. Following Wynter’s subsequent understanding of the role of “minority literary criticism” (Wynter 1987), Shirley Toland-Dix argues that *The Hills of Hebron* “not only disenchants colonialist discourse,” but also “probes the limitations of nationalist discourse by depicting and warning against cultural attitudes and practices that are potentially internal threats to the new nation,” therefore remaining “within the parameters of the narrative of the nation” (Toland-Dix 2008, 61, 72-3). Other critics like Anthony Bogues argue that Wynter’s probing of nationalist discourses places *The Hills of Hebron* not on a nationalist literary tradition, but in the tradition of the anti-colonial novel, one concerned less with the parameters of the nation and more with the “rehumanisation” of Jamaican life beyond the
limitations of the nation (Bogues 2010, xvii). For Bogues, the symbolic life-worlds of the
dannés depicted in *The Hills of Hebron* are “outside of the epistemological categories of
modernity” and therefore have the power to reconfigure “the normative categories of
Western political and religious thought” such as nationhood, redemption and “modernity
itself” (Bogues 2010, xix, xxi). This is also the case for Demetrius L. Eudell, who reads
*The Hills of Hebron* through Wynter’s later work. For Eudell, *The Hills of Hebron* seeks
to re-write the symbolic orders inherited by colonialism in order to effect a “transformation
of consciousness” at the level of humanity (Eudell 2010, 331).

Echoing the critical interpretations of Bogues and Eudell, I believe that *The Hills of Hebron*
is at its most critical and productive at the level of the symbolic life-worlds of
the dannés. On this point, in more than one way, as Kelly Baker Josephs has put it, “*The
Hills of Hebron* presents in fiction, in a more concrete form, the theory that Wynter later
works out in her critical articles” (Josephs 2013, 61). I believe this is the case with the
novel’s examination of the practical/ceremonial aspects of what I have called a postsecular
autopoiesis of the flesh. This is seen very clearly in the actions and events that unravel in
the novel’s concluding scenes. After months of “searching for the adulterer,” the outcast
Obadiah only “had found himself and returned to Rose” (Wynter 2010, 282). A carpenter
by trade, Obadiah soon begins to gather wood and builds his new room which he will share
with Rose and the child which he has now taken in as his. It is here where a crucial moment
of the narrative takes place. Waiting for the day to start in order to look for work in the
urban marketplace, Obadiah:

took up a fragment of wood and carved idly, thinking of making a toy for
the child. Then as he shaped the rough outlines of a doll, he began to
concentrate. For the first time in his life he created consciously, trying to
embody in his carving his new awareness of himself and of Hebron. When
he had finished he put the doll in his pocket and left Hebron as twilight settled into the hollow spaces between the hills. He took the short cut down the hill-side that by-passed the church. From time to time he touched the doll as if it were a fetish. For in carving the doll, Obadiah had stumbled upon God. (Wynter 2010, 283)

In this powerful scene, Wynter represents Obadiah’s symbolic reincarnation as a New Man. The scene touches on what becomes one of the central questions in Wynter’s theoretical corpus: how poiesis, when done with a certain praxis, becomes poetics. The unity of poiesis and praxis depicted in Obadiah carving the doll (poiesis) for his son (praxis) awakens in Obadiah something that he had not experienced before in his entire life. The creative praxis taking place in this scene effectively breaks a feedback loop between Obadiah’s self-representation and his behavior, to the point that such material creation leads Obadiah to see himself differently (“his new awareness of himself”) and thus to want to behave differently. In terms of Maturana and Varela, the carving makes Obadiah self-conscious because he engages in a process of self-observation in order to properly convey himself and Hebron into the carving. The carving thus opens a process of descriptive recursivity that unmask}s the codes and narrative schemas that order Hebron’s (and Jamaica’s) social life. This is what takes place with the question of God. Rather than to be unconsciously determined by the false idol, Obadiah makes a new one: it is his own creative agency itself, embodied in the “fetish” in his pocket. The dialectics of poiesis and praxis thus lead to a symbolic process of reincarnation where a new consciousness becomes

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97 This is also a dynamic of gift giving that brings forth the question of an ethics of exchange within a community. Maldonado-Torres has analyzed this question in phenomenological terms following Emmanuel Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel, concluding that “The gift of the self represents, beyond the solipsistic achievement of truth and knowledge, the point of entry of the existent into the human” (Maldonado-Torres 2008a, 240). In the case of Obadiah, it is his entrance into a new humanity beyond Man. In Chapter Four, I will examine the logic of the “gift of self” in the context of a theorization on decolonial love.
flesh. This entire process is a new ceremony that has wedded together a secularizing cognitive emancipation with the “demonic grounds” of those outside of Man.98

The *postsecularity* of the process of reincarnation depicted in the above scene comes across in the fact that it is “God” whom Obadiah’s creative praxis summons in his search to embody himself. This theological encounter is emblematic of Wynter’s demonic secularity, having a double effect that slowly becomes evident to Obadiah in the subsequent events that unfold that day. The first and clearest effect is a *disenchantment* or detranscendentalization of God evident in Obadiah’s ensuing understanding of the doll as “all that was God” (Wynter 2010, 307). Such disenchantment is part of the self-awareness that enables one to determine sociogenic codes rather than to be determined by them. In this sense, the realization “All that was God lay in the palm of my hand” (Wynter 2010, 307) is a commentary on the function of religion and theological inquiry. In Wynter’s theoretical writings, the function of religion is disenchanted as that of “guarding against the entropic disintegration or falling apart of our artificially instituted, cosmogonically chartered fictive modes of kind and their societies as autopoetic living systems” (Wynter

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98 At another level, the process depicted in this scene is also a reworking of Hegel’s master-slave metaphor in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1997), which is a central metaphor for the labor process in Marxist theory. In Wynter’s version of the standoff, there is something in the creative labor of the slave, the working on the thing (the doll), that exceeds poiesis itself and enters the realms of praxis (the gift to his son) and poetics (God). The crafting of the doll is the material externalization of the consciousness of the slave as Hegel puts it, and it is from this act that the slave finds the recognition that he previously did not have. Like Fanon’s commentary on the master-slave dialectic (Fanon 2008), Wynter elaborates the horizontality of the slave’s world in a way that does away with the verticality of the master, the object of desire of those that are stuck within the dialectic *e.g.* Moses’s black God. For an elaboration of Fanon’s engagement with Hegel, see Maldonado-Torres’s *Against War* (2008a). Following Maldonado-Torres’s account of the centrality of love in Fanon’s engagement, I argue that it is a praxis of love that exceeds both dialectics and the very framework of recognition. What we have instead is an “analectical” process, in Dussel’s understanding (Dussel 1974a), where the thing produced, the fetish/doll is “beyond any price” (Wynter 2010, 298). Humberto Maturana argues that love is one of those “experiences that cannot be fully specified in a human society without destroying the basic individual structural plasticity needed for the establishment of consensual domains and the generation of language” (Maturana and Varela 1980, xxix). It is from one’s sense of love that an “ethical evaluation of the society that the loved one integrates” can take place (Maturana and Varela 1980, xxix). I am developing the line of inquiry opened in this footnote in a manuscript titled “Decolonizing the Struggle for Recognition.”
In other words, religion functions in human systems as the dumping grounds of the responsibility for our collective agency and capacity for auto-poietic/poetic reproduction. Obadiah’s “new awareness of himself and of Hebron,” one made through his conscious poietic praxis, gives Obadiah an outsider perspective to the sociogenic codes of Hebron, a community founded as the search for a kingdom on earth with the help of a black God (Wynter 2010, 147). That such God now laid in the palm of his hand means that Obadiah no longer needs “the illusions of our hitherto story-telling, extra-human projection of that Agency” into such form of God, Moses’s black God (Wynter 2015, 245).

As a side note, it could be argued that the Marxist voices in the novel also get this perspective, such as the man in the town’s center that leads Moses to think “In this new raceless world that he talked about, what was the place there for God, for the black God?” (Wynter 2010, 223). In his pioneering interpretation of The Hills of Hebron, Kenneth Ramchand argues something along these lines, that Wynter implicitly endorses this Marxist critique of Moses, given the “weight of the presentation” that Wynter gives it (Ramchand 1970, 128-129). Ramchand goes as far as claiming that “Wynter comically deflates the cults depicted in her novel” (Ramchand 1970, 128). In his analysis of Obadiah’s carving scene, however, Ramchand conveniently leaves out the last sentence about stumbling upon God, which he therefore leaves unexplained. Moreover, if Ramchand’s intuition is correct, it remains a mystery why Obadiah returns to Hebron given the Marxist critique of the churches’ deceptiveness portrayed in the novel (“We want nothing to do with churches” (Wynter 2010, 223)). Vis-à-vis Marxist theory, I suggest that Wynter’s intervention is to quietly put forward the question of religion within revolutionary thought, much in the way Dussel would later go on to answer in his Las metáforas teológicas de Marx (Dussel 1993b).
– as we saw in Chapter One. Before the onset of liberation theology, Wynter here seems to complicate the understanding of the function of religion (and therefore of churches) within a process of liberation. This is ultimately why Obadiah decides to return to Hebron with a “new awareness of himself and of Hebron” in order to change it and join the changes that are happening at the national level.

The second effect of Obadiah’s encounter with God, dialectically connected to the above process of disenchantment, is the re-enchantment of the world. The fact that all that is God lays in Obadiah’s palm should not be read as a negation of meaning. On the contrary, it is the grounding of all possible meaning in poietic/poetic praxis. To be sure, this is a realization that Obadiah only attains after an exchange with a foreigner who asked him to buy his wooden doll. The man, in exile from what one assumes is the rise of Nazism in Germany, presents himself as an expert in sculptures and carvings. Seeing that Obadiah’s doll is identical to those he has seen in Africa, he asks Obadiah “what legend did you carve this doll from?” (Wynter 2010, 300). After an initial confusion, Obadiah comprehends that the man “understood at once that there was more to the doll than the wood and the shape he had fashioned” (Wynter 2010, 300). Obadiah thus responds with “the story of Hebron, of their search for God, for it was out of this, the dream and the reality, that he had carved the doll” (Wynter 2010, 300). The description of Hebron that Obadiah is forced to conjure for an individual outside of the community leads Obadiah to a new realization of Hebron’s search for God, now from a disenchanted or “degodded” perspective (Wynter 2003, 263). That all that is God lays in Obadiah’s palm then consciously affirms the function of religion, or more specifically spirituality, in the creation of places like Hebron. This new realization is the necessary re-enchantment that allows for the “apprehension of the newer,
brighter worlds that could spring from the fusion of men’s creative dreams” (Wynter 2010, 300). Having disenchanted the illusions of either an imperial Christianity, or Moses’s negation of it in the form of a black God, Obadiah is ready to return and lead Hebron out of its crisis. From his newfound outside perspective (“his new awareness of himself”), one that incorporates both moments of disenchantment and re-enchantment, Obadiah diagnoses the failures of Moses’s leadership (“the dream and the reality”). Man’s “attempts to create Hebrons would continue for ever” (Wynter 2010, 300-301). Hebron here symbolizes the spirit of Man, or better yet, of the Human.

As a last point, a basic re-enchanting aspect of the novel that has been lost in its reception is its connection to the narrative of the Bible. Josephs mentions in a footnote that while “Moses’s role in leading his followers into a form of exile does correspond with his name” in the Bible, she “cannot discern any connections between Obadiah and Isaac and their biblical counterparts,” therefore concluding that the names in Wynter’s novel have “no consistency in their application” vis-à-vis the narrative of the Bible (Josephs 2013, 170, n. 4). I argue that Wynter is indeed trying to accomplish something with the name choice of both Isaac and Obadiah as the two characters that have to battle for the legacy of Hebron. In the Bible, Isaac is the grandfather of the Edomites from the Kingdom of Edom, who according to none other than the prophet Obadiah, are guilty of betraying their neighbors of the Kingdom of Judah in collusion with the invading Babylonians. Obadiah’s book, the shortest in the Bible, prophesizes the destruction of Edom and visualizes the eventual redemption of Judah and all Israelites. Just from this schematic outline, Wynter’s novel could also be read as a re-writing of the Book of Obadiah from the anti-colonial perspective of the damné. The city of Hebron is here significant for being considered the
most ancestral of all Jewish communities at the center of the Kingdom of Judah. Obadiah’s prophecy against the Edomites in Wynter thus becomes a warning against the neighbors of the damnés that colluded with the modern/colonial system to oppress them (Isaac raping Rose and taking the money-box and leaving Hebron), being also a redemptive story about the hopes and aspirations of the process of decolonization that will rebuild Hebron (Obadiah’s return with schooling and engineering initiatives to connect Hebron with the rest of Jamaica).

In Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron*, the new ceremony that at once supersedes the coloniality of secularity proves to be a poietic praxis aimed towards liberation. This ceremony synthesizes the cognitive emancipation initiated by the secularizing *Studia Humanitatis* (the question of disenchantment) to the “demonic grounds” of those subjects liminal to the secular mode of the Subject (the question of re-enchantment). Searching for the adulterer, Obadiah ends up finding himself. And seeking to embody himself in his work, he ends up stumbling upon God. By a conscious act of storytelling in the form of the carving of a doll (Césaire’s “original handling of the word”), Obadiah unknowingly breaks off from the status quo of Hebron *i.e.* he offers a redeescription of the human outside the terms of his present descriptive statement of the human, Man (Wynter 2003, 268). He finds his own demonic grounds, out of which he can then return to Hebron with “a new ritual, a new morality, a new right and wrong, a new God” (Wynter 2010, 306). And yet, this new vision is not one that benefits from the overrepresentation and occultation of how modes of autopoietic praxis function – as Moses’s vision did. Instead, it understands itself within a broader and general framework of “all the labour and all the visions of all Hebrons to come, and after them and after them until the end of them. And the end of them was the
beginning of them” (Wynter 2010, 307). It furthermore understands the function of God in postsecular/postreligious terms, as encapsulated in an epigraph from Dostoevsky to the concluding chapters of *The Hills of Hebron*: “the end of the whole national movement is only the search for God […] God is the synthetic personality of a whole people considered from its origins until its end” (Wynter 2010, 279). This line gestures to the function of an autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh, the fact that all we are is “self-inscripting and inscripted flesh” *in praxis*, a praxis of liberation. Here, the secular/religious divide vanishes to make way for “new continents of the spirit” and “new planets of the imagination” (Wynter 2010, 301).

### 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the broader contours of Wynter’s critique of the epistemic order of Man. Wynter’s proposal to re-write knowledge within the unfinished project of decolonization exposes the aporia of secularity in the modern/colonial world. This is an aporia that Wynter solves through an affirmation of the “demonic grounds” upon which such world is built upon. This is a proposal that aspires to supersede the epistemic impasses between the sciences of Man and the humanist tradition which, while historically the point of departure of the sciences, has since the rise of the former become an appendage to the search for truth in the university. This re-writing from the vantage point of the “demonic grounds” of those that fall outside of the category of Man presupposes what I have called a *demonic secularity* heretical to the reigning “secular mode of the Subject” *i.e.* Man.99

99 By definition, a heresy can only be properly heretic from the perspective of orthodoxy. Therefore, in the affirmation of heresy, one already finds a concession to orthodoxy as a perspective from which to make a judgment. This is one of the effects of the aporia of the secular. Anthony Bogues’s understanding of heretic and prophetic modes of engagement in Africana thought is here helpful to understand Wynter’s position. For Bogues, the heretic intellectuals are the ones that challenge the orthodoxy of “white/European normativity” after having learnt its discourses (Bogues 2003, 13). This is to be contrasted to the prophetic intellectuals that from a position of exteriority (“madness” or “unreason” to the eyes of the Enlightenment) “narrate a different
have interpreted this move as a postsecular decolonization of secularity, the unmasking of the false pretense of objectivity of the secular sciences of Man. Wynter’s postsecular and decolonial re-writing of knowledge recognizes the word, *mythos*, as the co-primary foundation of human autopoietic praxis. The false objectivity of Man was rooted, among many things, in his pretension that *logos* supersedes *mythos*. The approach that Wynter calls the New Science of the Word recovers *mythos* from the demonic grounds of Man, calling for the re-writing of the narrative-schemas through which we experience ourselves as human.

Wynter may share with the participants of the postsecular debate a critique of the normative grounds of secularity, yet what distinguishes her perspective is that it does not arise from a Eurocentric perception concerning the failure of secularity. Instead, Wynter’s perspective arises from a perspective liminal to the rhetoric of modernity, that of a Caribbean intellectual who traces the development and expansion of secularity as part of a colonial/imperial system of domination. In elucidating Wynter’s complex engagement with secularity, this chapter hopes to supplement what I think is a lack of conceptual depth in the understanding of how secularity fits within Wynter’s work. A postsecular interpretation of Wynter’s work entails understanding her emphasis on preserving and deepening the cognitive advancement (or learning process in Habermas’s sense) brought forth by the

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100 Wynter’s work should in this sense be taken to be central to the postsecularization of literary studies. For instance, Lori Branch’s recent program for a postsecular literary studies argues that “Humanistic and social science work on personhood provides important grounds for postsecular studies in that it situates believing, poetry- and narrative-making human reality in the world, not as something aberrant in an insentient, strictly material cosmos” (Branch 2016, 99). Wynter’s work contributes to this project in a way that I would argue is more critical than Branch’s own proposal, which is insufficiently critical of religiosity and its apparent return and is not interested in the project of epistemic decolonization.
secular revolution of Man, yet doing so in a way that no longer predicates such emancipation on the colonial subjugation of some people.101 This is where the labor of decolonization takes precedence as the unwriting of such secular mode of the Subject. The conceptual reworking of secularity that I see in Wynter is thus similar to what we saw was the case with Enrique Dussel in the previous chapter. If Dussel conceives of secularization as a certain atheism of the fetish, one whose other side of the dialectic is the affirmation of the absolute, Wynter’s own demonic secularity is heretical of Man (the fetish) while at the same time calling for a new ceremony through which the subject can be symbolically reborn into an order beyond Man. I have elucidated this point with a brief reading of Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron*, which elaborates many of the themes that Wynter’s theoretical work would later take up but doing so through the form of poetic knowledge.

The main goal of Wynter’s New Science of the Word is the elucidation of the mechanisms of (over)representation and occultation, process which will enable us determine these “codes” rather than to be determined by them. Only in doing so will we be able to attain anything remotely close to Césaire’s idea of a “true” humanism “made to the measure of the world.” This leap will take place with the rupture of the reciprocal feedback loop sustaining the reigning descriptive statement of the human, a loop between our modes of representation, imagination, and being, and our “collective systems of behavior” – what Derrida calls “writing” (Wynter 1984, 22). This is a New Science that thus conceives of social systems as narrative-schemas to be scrutinized philologically or semiotically. I have shown how in making this move, Wynter’s proposal brings together *poietic* and *poetic* spheres in a new transdisciplinary way beyond the “normally unbreachable” natural-social

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101 There may be worries that Wynter is here developing an overly rationalist philosophy of religion. I think those worries can be mitigated, however, with an emphasis of embodiment and the flesh in Wynter’s account.
sciences/humanities divide (Wynter 2015, 210). The recursivity that opens up with the breaking of this reciprocal feedback loop, Wynter tells us, will carve a transcultural phenomenological space for the engendering of self-consciousness beyond our immediate descriptions of ourselves. This is also the promise of the new ceremony that still must be found.

The above analysis of Wynter’s work has allowed me to set some conditions for a dialogue to take place between Wynter and women of color feminists. I will explore this dialogue in the next chapter through a focus of the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and M. Jacqui Alexander. These two writers share with Wynter an ambition to re-write the “secular mode of the Subject” from a politics of decolonization, while also uncovering ourselves as the sacred agents of social change that we are. Wynter’s autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh will resonate in the next chapter with the Chicana theory in the flesh paradigm (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2016). In the last chapter of this dissertation (Chapter Four), such engagement will continue in Mayra Rivera’s Poetics of the Flesh (2015), continuing the search for a new ceremony beyond the secular in the aesthetics, poetics, literary explorations of Man’s liminal subjects.
CHAPTER THREE

Spirituality as a Critique of the Coloniality of Secularism: The Case of Women of Color Feminisms

“The ‘safe’ elements in Borderlands are procreated and used, and the ‘unsafe’ elements are not talked about.”
Gloria Anzaldúa

“What Marxian philosophy and the metaphysics of spiritual thought systems have in common: dialectics of struggle. Paradoxes of the Divine.”
M. Jacqui Alexander

3.0 Introduction

This chapter continues the critique of liberal secularity as opened up by the contributions of Enrique Dussel and Sylvia Wynter in Chapters One and Two of this dissertation. As we saw in Chapter One, Latin American liberation theology inaugurated a form of critique that challenged not just the conservatism of orthodox theology, but also the secularity of the social sciences. Liberation theology has been criticized, however, for not sufficiently questioning the subject position which it inherited from the theological discourses from which it sought to differentiate itself. The argument is that the movement, mostly composed of men of European ancestry, reproduced the patterns of domination that have silenced women and racialized populations in the Americas, especially those that do not comfort to the heterosexism imparted by Latin American Christendom (Althaus-Reid 2005, Maldonado-Torres 2005). This limitation sparked the emergence of Black, womanist, queer, and Indigenous liberation theologies, movements which have greatly contributed to the opening and deepening of a theological discourse critical of domination across different socio-cultural contexts. These movements have deconstructed theology in a way that has decentered the ecclesiastical centrality of Christianity in liberation theology, resulting in the development of theology as an intercultural spiritual project. Instead of offering an examination of these contributions to liberation theology, however, in this
chapter I follow Wynter’s demonic opening beyond Man to propose to look at a parallel intellectual movement that has similarly put forth a critique of both ecclesiastical theologies and the secularity of the sciences, but from outside of theology: women of color feminisms.

A heuristic designation that agglomerates a series of interventions into feminist theory coming from racialized women in the United States, women of color feminism develops a feminist methodology and critique that finds the experiential commonalities among women of color without collapsing any cultural, national, political, or sexual differences. In the writing of figures such as Gloria Anzaldúa (2007), M. Jacqui Alexander (2005), Audre Lorde (2007), bell hooks (1993), among many others, one moreover finds an unrepentant critique of both religious and secular epistemologies for having facilitated the colonization of existing ways of knowing and being in the Americas. This is a critique that departs from an extra-institutional, formally non-religious setting, where “spirituality” is retrieved and deployed against both religious and secular epistemic frameworks and institutions (Facio and Lara 2014, Comas-Díaz 2008). For many of these thinkers, spirituality comes to function as an alternative source of knowledge or an alternative way of knowing in its own right that decenters the strict epistemic methodologies of both religious theologies and the secular sciences. And yet it is often the case that the centrality of such spirituality is either underemphasized or outright dismissed in the reception of their works, whether this is done by mainstream feminists or other “progressive” discourses that find anything remotely alluding to spirituality to be a

\[102\] For a useful analysis of this problematic, see M. Jacqui Alexander’s and Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (1997).
deviation from the emancipatory legacy of the Enlightenment. Their reception is therefore often a secularized one that has the effect of disjointing the complex dynamic unity of their work. It is this reactionary dismissal by the liberal-secular disciplinary order that makes women of color feminist critique a fruitful mode of inquiry for the purposes of dismantling the coloniality of knowledge (Lander 2000), at the heart of liberal-secular disciplinarity. This chapter therefore engages with the intellectual production women of color feminisms in order to recognize some of their contributions to the critique of liberal secularity as a modern/colonial epistemic order.

This chapter therefore focuses primarily on two figures within women of color feminism that despite their overlaps in approaches are rarely analyzed in conjunction: the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa and the Afro-Trinidadian scholar M. Jacqui Alexander. In specific, I develop a reading of Anzaldúa’s concept of *la facultad* that makes explicit what I argue is its postsecular character. In this reading, *la facultad* becomes a methodology that incorporated the material legacies of coloniality into the constitution of other ways of knowing beyond what is sanctioned by liberal-secular epistemologies. I similarly engage Alexander’s concept of “Sacred praxis embodied” as a comparable response to the coloniality of secular disciplinarity, one, however, that comes from another locus of enunciation: the Afro-diasporic Caribbean experience. In advancing a relational reading between Anzaldúa and Alexander, I gesture towards the potentialities opened by the confluences between both places from which these thinkers launch their projects: The U.S-

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103 Two prominent examples of this secularizing are the receptions of Anzaldúa in the works of Donna J. Haraway (1991) and Walter Mignolo. I will analyze the latter’s in section 3.2 of this chapter.

104 That their work is mostly studied in depth at the margins of disciplinary knowledges, such as in ethnic studies, further aligns women of color feminist critique with the kind of decolonizing epistemic proposal called for by Sylvia Wynter and analyzed in the previous chapter of this dissertation (Wynter 2015).
Mexico borderlands and the Caribbean waters. I demonstrate such potentialities by searching for the Caribbean in Anzaldúa’s work, a search that proves fertile at the semiotic level, where the Caribbean hides behind a sensorial slippage made by Anzaldúa that turns the Caribbean into a symbol of her New Mestiza spirituality. Such sensorial slippage, I argue, results not in an error, but in the development of consciousness-raising. Both Anzaldúa and Alexander demonstrate how the material realities of coloniality incarnated in the body can become tools for an alternative production of knowledge beyond the demands of secular disciplinarity.¹⁰⁵

As women of color feminists, the elements of gender, sexuality, and race take a primordial position in Anzaldúa’s and Alexander’s analyzes of embodiment, knowledge production, and spirituality. This is evident from Anzaldúa’s account of the border “running down the length of [her] body” (Anzaldúa 2007, 24), to Alexander’s deployment of the figure of the welder as the subject who must master the intimate and paradoxical nature of fire to survive the Crossing. And yet, it is well-known that many male scholars that venture into women of color feminism avoid the significance of these elements. In this exercise, I humbly seek to challenge this pattern. In my interpretations of Anzaldúa, Alexander, supported by the queer poetics of Cherríe Moraga and Cheryl Clarke, as well as by the work of Audre Lorde, this chapter adds depth to the postsecular autopoiesis/autopoeics of the flesh analyzed in the previous chapter. Broadly working within Moraga’s “theory-in-the-flesh” paradigm (which openly connects the work of Anzaldúa and Alexander), this chapter lays the grounds for an examination of the aesthetic

¹⁰⁵ As I will demonstrate below, I follow the steps of scholars such as AnaLouise Keating (2006) and Theresa Delgadillo (2011), who have previously advanced this argument. In Chapter Four of this dissertation, I engage the more recent contribution of Mayra Rivera (2015), via the aesthetic discourse of theopoetics.
as a sensibility that can be an alternative way of thinking and knowing from the perspective of epistemic decolonization – an examination to be undertaken in the next and last chapter of this dissertation.

The outline of this chapter is as follows: I will first offer a contextualization of Anzaldúa’s work, particularly her reception in the U.S. academy. Subsequently, I will engage her notion of la facultad and illustrate its limited reception in the work of the Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo. Mignolo’s adoption of Anzaldúa will help us illuminate some of the ways in which secularity as a disciplinary attitude and methodological presupposition must be rethought from the perspective of epistemic decolonization. The chapter’s third section is a transition point, a crossroads between Anzaldúa’s and Alexander’s work. Here, I begin to sketch their relationalities via the figure of the Ocean. Lastly, I delve into Alexander’s spiritually-rooted feminist praxis, paying attention to what her embracing of Afro-diasporic spiritualities does for the development of other ways of knowing beyond those sanctioned by the reigning “secularized episteme” (Alexander 2005, 7).

3.1 Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual-Activist Project

Since the early 1990’s, due to the wide popularity of her first and sole single-authored monograph *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2007), the work of the queer Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa has been increasingly incorporated into the canons of a wide ranging of fields across the humanities and social sciences. While part of the Chicana renaissance that overtook the largely male-dominated nationalist phase of Chicano studies, Anzaldúa’s broader reception was facilitated by two distinct though overlapping institutional trends within the American university: the rise in postcolonial and
poststructuralist/postmodern studies in the 1980’s and 1990’s, on the one hand, and the need to make the canon more inclusive to accommodate for the shifting demographics of the university’s student population, on the other hand. It is for this reason that, as these two trends converge, a large proportion of Anzaldúa’s readers have adopted her work as a matter of pedagogical tokenism, often using the key terms of postmodern and postcolonial approaches. The Latina philosopher Linda Alcoff links this popularity to the commodifying cooptation of radical Third World figures that saw the faces of the revolutionary communists Frida Kahlo and Ernesto “Ché” Guevara being plastered in Hollywood movies and mass-produced t-shirts (Alcoff 2006). Alcoff’s analysis allows us to understand much of the superficial character of Anzaldúa’s reception as fulfilling the role of the Latina token in university programs that are being asked to “diversify” their curricula. In this sense, if for Alcoff the media exposure of Frida and Ché is inversely proportional to the intellectual engagement with their projects as revolutionary intellectuals, the same could be said of Anzaldúa’s wide reception across the disciplines: “Often cited,” Alcoff argues, Anzaldúa “remains undertheorized” (Alcoff 2006, 256).

In my own work, I seek to theorize with and about Anzaldúa’s work in a way that does not replicate the facile ways in which her work is often flattened to be a voice for the “Chicana experience” void of its own analytic and explanatory categorical frameworks.107

106 Alexander and Mohanty address this type of reception as a trend that affects all scholarship produced by women of color (Alexander and Mohanty 1997). Within the very limited reception of Anzaldúa that actually pays attention to the role of spirituality in her thinking, Lara Medina (2011b) and Alma Rosa Alvarez (2007) each read Anzaldúa in either a postcolonial or a postmodern framework.

107 To echo Alexander and Mohanty once again, this is a conundrum common to intellectuals of color, whose production is eagerly accepted by the whitestream if it is solely anecdotal or experiential, meaning that it is not taken to contain its own theoretical analytic and explanatory framework. In this scenario, such experience can only be properly explained with the help of canonical (read white) theoretical frameworks. This is an argument that Lewis Gordon makes, for instance, concerning the reception of Frantz Fanon (Gordon 2015,
Anzaldúa was very much aware of the specific ways in which her work was circulating across several fields by the late 1990’s, noting that the quick acceptance of some of her ideas were in a direct relationship to the degree to which these were taken to be “safe.” In an interview with her friend and collaborator AnaLouise Keating, Anzaldúa says:

The “safe” elements in _Borderlands_ are procreated and used, and the “unsafe” elements are not talked about. One of the things that doesn’t get talked about is the connection between body, mind, and spirit—anything that has to do with the sacred, anything that has to do with the spirit. As long as it’s theoretical, if it’s about history or about borders, that’s fine. . . . But if you start talking about nepantla—this border between the spirit, the psyche, and the mind—they resist. (Anzaldúa 2000b, 159)

This telling formulation gives further substance to Alcoff’s analysis of the superficial reception of Anzaldúa. If there is an inverse relationship between in passing citations and in-depth theorizations of Anzaldúa’s work, this is an inverse relationship that is plotted along an axis of secularization: the more Anzaldúa’s work is secularized, striped of its “unsafe” spiritual elements, the more it is cited. And yet at the same time, the more Anzaldúa’s work is circulated in a secularized form, the less it is understood in its own terms. An in-depth theorization of Anzaldúa’s work must therefore seek to understand these “unsafe” elements, by avoiding the secularizing demands of the liberal disciplinary order and its connotations of what constitutes a “safe” object of study.

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5). Barbara Christian famously challenged this formulation, arguing that “people of color have always theorized - but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic” (Christian 1987).

108 Notice the similarities of this thesis with Stafford Beer’s indictment of the liberal disciplinary order of knowledge production: “knowledge grows by infinitesimals, but understanding of the world actually recedes, because the world really is an interacting system” (Beer 1980). As we saw in the previous chapter, Sylvia Wynter partially builds her own epistemic project on Beer’s call to rewrite the foundations of knowledge production. Such re-writing, which I interpreted as being _postsecular_, promises to be what will allow an understanding of Anzaldúa’s work in its own terms without having to cast aside her “unsafe” elements. It is not a coincidence that a leading thinker of systems theory shares with us an analysis of the limits of liberal secularity. AnaLouise Keating, in fact, argues that certain developments in systems theory exemplify the kind of worldview put forth by Anzaldúa (Keating 2005, 243).
Few are those readers of Anzaldúa that not only pay attention to the centrality of spirituality in her work, but moreover seek to further systematize it and expand its consequences across all spheres of life. AnaLouise Keating has been one of the most prominent voices in this regard. Keating recognizes that scholars avoid Anzaldúa’s “politics of spirit” mainly because of a fear of being discredited or dismissed as not being theoretically rigorous enough (Keating 2008, 54-55). Aspiring to counteract this stifling fear, much of Keating’s work has been dedicated “to validate the spiritual components of Anzaldúa’s writings and to demonstrate that a politics of spirit can lead to new tools for social change” (Keating 2005, 253). Like it is the case for other radical women of color feminist thinkers active at the twilight of the millennium, the spiritual politics of Anzaldúa’s work deeply “challenges us to move beyond mono-thinking, binary-oppositional politics, and other forms of self-destructive thought and action contributions” so as to develop “new theoretical perspectives, pedagogies, and social justice actions” (Keating 2008, 66). Keating’s own work has then the unambiguous intentions of encouraging others to “explore Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism and perhaps develop their own forms of spiritual activism as well” (Keating 2005, 253).

Only alluded to once in Borderlands/La Frontera as “spiritual mestizaje” (Anzaldúa 2007, 103) what Anzaldúa would later call “spiritual activism” is perhaps the concept that would best capture the broader contours Anzaldúa’s entire work. An “amalgam of spirituality and political activism” (Anzaldúa 2015, 39, 19), a “politics of embodied spiritualities” where “embodied practical material spiritual political acts” take center stage (Anzaldúa 2015, 90), spiritual activism captures the dynamic and complicated processes of epistemic, psychic, social, political, and spiritual transformation that
Anzaldúa’s work seeks to enact. Designed “to challenge individual and systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social injustice,” Keating interprets spiritual activism as a certain “spirituality for social change” (Keating 2005, 242). Teresa Delgadillo has further elaborated this overarching concept, which proves to be a “transformative renewal of one’s relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-reflexive critique of oppression in all its manifestations and a creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred” (Delgadillo 2011, 1). For Delgadillo, spiritual mestizaje is a critical collective process, which unlike New Age spiritualities, does not center individual transformation at the expense of the overthrow of systematic structures of oppression (Delgadillo 2011, 7).

Comparing and contrasting spiritual mestizaje to institutional theologies of liberation and other projects within women of color feminism, Delgadillo points to the work of M. Jacqui Alexander as also being a spiritual mestizaje of sorts. For Delgadillo, Alexander’s spiritual mestizaje confronts the colonial histories of dominant religions as well as the postmodern secularism that dismisses non-Christian spiritual systems as illegitimate traditions of thought:

Alexander consciously and intentionally follows the path opened by Anzaldúa, allowing herself to recognize Mojuba and Voudou, the African-based spiritualities that had been always present in her life, and even more importantly, allowing her spirituality to exist within her academic work, ‘becom[ing] open to the movement of Spirit in order to wrestle with the movement of history,’ as she describes it (Delgadillo 2011, 18-19).

While mindful of the fact that Anzaldúa’s and Alexander’s projects emerge from distinct historical and cultural contexts, Delgadillo’s analysis focuses on their shared goals and

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109 This is a point that is often lost in secularizing accounts of spirituality in Anzaldúa. Jean Franco, for instance, argues that the re-appropriation of the symbol of Coatlicue in Anzaldúa is part of “New Age Chicana feminism” (Franco 2004, 216).
functions. In the remaining of this chapter, my goal is to further cultivate this relational analysis without flattening contextual differences.\footnote{One of the most crucial of these differences concerns how their works engage the racial dynamics inherited by the colonial order, such as those having to do with processes like Indigeneity, Blackness, mestizaje, and what has been called mulataje. For a summary of the meaning and function of these terms, see the anthology \textit{Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought} (Martínez-San Miguel, Sifuentes-Jáuregui, and Belausteguigoitia 2016). I will thematize some of these in the analyses below.}

3.2 \textit{La Facultad} as a Postsecular Methodology

In the interests of furthering a “comprehensive analysis of Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism,” which for Keating necessarily entails digging deep into Anzaldúa’s theories of “El Mundo Zurdo, the Coatlicue state, la facultad, mestiza consciousness, making soul, imagination, nepantla, nagualismo, nos/otras, and conocimientos/desconocimientos” (Keating 2005, 253), in this section I offer an analysis of Anzaldúa’s concept of \textit{la facultad}. Only briefly developed in passing at the end of the third chapter of \textit{Borderlands}, \textit{la facultad} is succinctly defined as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (Anzaldúa 2007, 60). Not to return in the body of the text, a distant reader may puzzle as to why such concept is introduced at such exact moment in the narrative and theoretical unfolding of \textit{Borderlands}. A closer reading, however, shows that the very chapter structure of the text is a careful constructive demonstration of \textit{la facultad} as a hermeneutic of meaning-making that hones sensibility, abstraction, and interpretation as ways of knowing. As each chapter walks us through a “path of knowledge – one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our \textit{raza}” (Anzaldúa 2007, 41), \textit{la facultad} appears as a method through which Anzaldúa is able to recover subjugated knowledges found within the folds of reality.\footnote{Anzaldúa’s usage of the term “raza” here alludes to the political construction of the Mexican-American as an internally colonized population within the United States, as advocated by the Chicano movement. As we shall see below, far from being an endorsement of Chicano nationalism, Anzaldúa’s deployment is a...}
I argue that la facultad is a postsecular epistemic methodology or philosophy of knowledge, meaning that it does not presuppose the assumptions of the modern secular/religious divide—discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation. One of the ways Anzaldúa does this, as Amala Levine has argued, is by making a “shift toward a post-rationalist epistemology that acknowledges the spiritual, the imaginal, and the emotional as legitimate sources of knowledge, offering a broader, more inclusive vision of reality” (Levine 2005, 172-173). For Levine, this shift entails abandoning a positivist objectification and quantification of matter as the totality of reality (Levine 2005, 179). As we shall see, this entails neither a rejection of the rational intellect or a total return to the pre-rational, but the complementation of rationality through what it previously had rejected, remaining “materially grounded in the body” (Levine 2005, 179). I build on Levine’s account in order to problematize facile applications of Anzaldúa’s thought that are not rooted in such materiality, of the body and of the borderlands. The embodied material critique that emerges here reflexively contributes to the opening of postsecular ways of reading and interpreting “beyond instrumental reason” that can expand “notions of selfhood” in humanistic and social-scientific study (Branch 2016, 97).112

critique of the heterosexism and patriarchalism of la raza. In this sense, the path of knowledge specifically refers to the lived experience of a Chicana lesbian that was “raised Catholic” and “indoctrinated as straight” (Anzaldúa 2007, 41). If sexuality is Anzaldúa’s “ultimate rebellion” against her Mexican and Chicano contexts, then there is something substantive about the connection between queerness and spirituality (Anzaldúa 2007, 41). I will expand this point in section 3.4 of this chapter, especially through a reading of the poetics of Cherríe Moraga and Cheryl Clarke via the work of Audre Lorde.

112 As I already indicated in the previous chapter, I find Lori Branch’s program for a postsecular literary studies generative. However, I do not share with her work its “postcritical” impetus to leave behind a hermeneutic of suspicion and skepticism. From the perspective of epistemic decolonization, criticality is to be subsumed as part of the dialectic, as we saw is the case with Dussel’s work in Chapter One of this dissertation.
Let us then immerse ourselves in the path of knowledge that Anzaldúa lays out for us in *Borderlands* that leads us to la facultad. Chapter One of *Borderlands*, “The Homeland, Aztlán/El otro México,” famously opens with an affirmation of the U.S.-Mexico border as an “open wound” that allegorizes the conditions of both peoples on each side of the geopolitical division (Anzaldúa 2007, 24). In this chapter, Anzaldúa offers radical re-writings of the histories of both the Chicana in the U.S. Southwest and the recent Mexican migrant who nonetheless claims to have an ancestral relation to the land that was once the home of her ancestors (*i.e.* Aztlán). This chapter thus lays the foundations to understand Chapter Two, “Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan,” a critique of machismo and androcentric patriarchalism in Chicano and Mexican cultures. Chapter Two is accordingly an analysis of the “intimate terrorism” that is the life in the borderlands (Anzaldúa 2007, 42), particularly the life of a queer Chicana lesbian. It is through this path that Anzaldúa is soon able to “enter” the serpent.

Titled “Entering into the Serpent,” Chapter Three is a historical and semiotic genealogy of Mexico’s ancestral mythopoetic roots. To further contextualize the origins of contemporary Chicano/Mexicano machismo, Anzaldúa thus traces the symbolic transformations of the symbol that is, without a doubt, the most representative of mexicanidad within the Mexican and Chicanx imaginaries: the Virgen de Guadalupe. Recognized by the Vatican as the first apparition of the Virgin Mary in Latin America, the mixed-race Guadalupe represents for some the triumph of Christianity over the pagan indigenous peoples of the Americas that validates the colonial enterprise that led to the formation of Mexico and Latin America. Anzaldúa’s analysis of Guadalupe, however, extends the analysis of this icon beyond the limits of Christian historiography, entering the
sphere of Mexica mythology. Part of the cultural redefinition of femininity put forth by Chicana cultural production since the 1970’s (Pérez 2007), Anzaldúa offers a syncretic interpretation of Guadalupe where one can also perceive in her the mother deity of creation in Mexica mythology: Coatlicue. Anzaldúa’s exercise retells the narrative of the apparition of the Virgin, but neither from the vantage point of Christianity nor that of (secular) anthropology. Instead, Anzaldúa’s locus of enunciation here is the converted Indigenous who finds herself living between two worlds, in the “intimate terrorism” of the borderlands, a state of nepantla [in-between-ness].

According to Anzaldúa, when Juan Diego, the Indigenous man who encounters the virgin, recounts his vision to Fray Juan Zumárraga, he reports having seen Tonantzin Coatlalopeuh, understood to be one of the many manifestations of Coatlicue. The Spanish Catholic priests, however, in a crucial moment of mistranslation, or perhaps a sensorial slippage (mishearing) aided by their ignorance of the complexities of Nahuatl language and Mexica philosophy, are surprised to hear that their pious Indigenous convert has been visited by the Virgin of Guadalupe from Extremadura, Spain, an icon who just so happens to be a black Madonna from the home of Hernan Cortes, recent conqueror of the Mexica-led Triple Alliance.

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113 Scholarship on the topic can be found in Jacques Lafaye (1976) and Stafford Poole (2017).

114 Syncretism is a term in religious studies that denotes the development of new religious beliefs or practices as the fusion of at least two pre-existing elements e.g. Santeria as a syncretism of elements in Christian and Yoruba religions. It could be argued that syncretism is a form of transculturation applied to the sphere of the religious, where transculturation refers to the complexities of cultural interaction among distinct cultures – as developed by Fernando Ortiz’s anthropological studies of Caribbean culture (Ortiz 1995). Accordingly, Anzaldúa’s spiritual mestizaje could be understood as a type of transcultural syncretism. For a summary of the meaning and function of these terms, see the anthology Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought (Martínez-San Miguel, Sifuentes-Jáuregui, and Belausteguigoitia 2016).

115 In the next section, I explore the development of the concept of nepantla in Anzaldúa’s later work.

116 For an analysis of this transformation, see Jeannette Favrot Peterson’s Visualizing Guadalupe (2014).
Anzaldúa here conveys the scenario of an equivocation in the technical sense developed by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, where it refers to the communicative process where distinct worlds are being seen (Viveiros de Castro 2004). In Anzaldúa’s exploration, both Juan Diego and Fray Juan Zumárraga are accordingly pointing to different ontological beings as they linguistically seem to agree on what they both think they are seeing and talking about. From this exchange, the first mestizo symbol of the Americas is born as a palimpsest of not just ways of “seeing the world” but also of the “real worlds that are being seen” – worlds that are violently clashing and engendering something new: the “intimate terrorism” of the borderlands, nepantla.

Anzaldúa’s deconstruction of Guadalupe re-signifies her veneration across times and spaces in a way that gives it symbolic meaning beyond a standard Christian understanding of piousness or its secular inverse as “an opiate of the ostensibly braindead masses that numbed people into acceptance of their unfortunate and unenlightened lot in life,” in the words of Laura Pérez (2007, 3). For Anzaldúa, such veneration does not necessarily imply the reproduction of a colonizing form of religiosity, as in the internalization of discourses concerning women’s sexuality that Christian missionaries sought to inculcate via their teachings. Instead, in such venerations one could unearth a

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117 For Viveiros de Castro, an “equivocation is not just a ‘failure to understand’ [Oxford English Dictionary], but a failure to understand that understandings are necessarily not the same, and that they are not related to imaginary ways of ‘seeing the world’ but to the real worlds that are being seen” (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 11). This concept of equivocation “is not just one among other possible pathologies that threaten communication between the anthropologist and the ‘native’—such as linguistic incompetence, ignorance of context,” but instead is “a properly transcendental category of anthropology, a constitutive dimension of the discipline’s project of cultural translation” (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 10).

118 Pérez is, of course, critical of both accounts. Her work archives the artistic productions of Chicana artists and analyzes how they have resignified traditional symbols of Chicanidad and Mexicanidad, especially Guadalupe.
creative political retrieval of the spiritual, cultural, and historical palimpsest that such symbol encompasses *i.e.* a reclamation of Indigenous ancestry. For Anzaldúa, this political spirituality is most evidently seen in the examples of Indigenous, mestizo, and Chicanx resistance to their everyday oppressions, from the initial years of colonization, to the days of independence in the nineteenth century, the Mexican Revolution of the 1910’s, and the U.S. Farm Workers Movement of the second half of 20th century. All these movements were identified foremost by a flag of the Virgen de Guadalupe, alluding to the complexity of her signification beyond strict religiosity.¹¹⁹

Readers of Anzaldúa often miss the importance of such semiotic deconstruction, which far from only being a partial explanation for contemporary Chicano/Mexicano machismo, is likewise a demonstration *la facultad* in its own right. Ricardo Vivancos Pérez notes in his analysis of Anzaldúa’s writing process, that the section on *la facultad* was originally drafted by Anzaldúa as a full chapter of *Borderlands*, only to be eventually reduced to its final page and a half (Vivancos Pérez 2013, 42). While Vivancos Pérez does not explain the rationale behind this decision, I argue that it is related to the demonstrative approach that Anzaldúa decides to take throughout *Borderlands*. By placing the didactic introduction of *la facultad* at the end of the semiotic deconstruction of Guadalupe, Anzaldúa suggests that without *la facultad*, one would not be able to see *Coatlicue* behind the Guadalupe in the first place, that is, the deeper structure behind the surface. This is

¹¹⁹ For a throughout account of these resignifications of Guadalupe, see David Branding’s *Mexican Phoenix* (2001). For accounts of the Farm Worker Movement and more recent socio-political deployments of Guadalupe by Mexican-Americans or Mexican immigrants, see the works of Claire Wolfeich (2005), Jeanette Rodríguez (1994), and Alyshia Gálvez (2010). For examples of this political spirituality in the lives of Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women, see the anthology *Fleshing the Spirit* (Facio and Lara 2014).
what is connotated in the title of the chapter where la facultad is introduced: “Entering into the Serpent,” which is to say, encountering Coatlicue, the “Skirt of Snakes.”

As a method for the recovery of subjugated knowledges not based on a sole process of abstraction, la facultad is not something that can be taught as content. It is instead an embodied “survival tactic” available to all but most developed in the inhabitants of the borderlands: “The prohibited and forbidden […] Los atravesados […] the squint-eye, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’” (Anzaldúa 2007, 61, 25). The latter have it most developed because of what it means to materially survive the borderlands. What is being stressed here, as Delgadillo puts it “are the material conditions of the border and its inhabitants, the historical creation of the border, and the histories of marginalization embodied in that border” without which “there would be nothing requiring transformation and the kinds of consciousness that could bring it to fruition” (Delgadillo 2011, 179). In this sense, the consciousness that Anzaldúa gives form to, la facultad, “emerges from, rather than mimetically represents, the material conditions of the border” (Delgadillo 2011, 179). Such material conditions are the infrastructural elements that are easily overlooked by superficial readings of Anzaldúa that make the borderlands an overly abstract analogy no longer rooted in the intimate terrorism

120 In Nahuatl, “Coatl” means “serpent.” One can thus easily see the rich possibilities for an equivocation to take place between Juan Diego and Fray Juan Zumárraga, when Tonantzin Coatlahueuh roughly translates as “Our Lady Who Has Dominion over Serpents.”

121 Levine understands la facultad as “a synaesthetic faculty, involving intuition, imagination, senses, and emotions as well as the inner eye” (Levine 2005, 179). A great example of a theoretical development influenced by la facultad, is Chela Sandoval’s Methodologies of the Oppressed (2000). Sandoval systematizes what she takes to be the survival strategies of Third World subjects living inside the First World Empire of the United States. For Sandoval, the methodologies of the oppressed are an “apparatus for countering neocolonizing postmodern global formations” and are most evidently represented as a “theory and method of oppositional consciousness (Sandoval 2000, 1-2).
of the serpent. And because these materialities are the condition of possibility of Anzaldúa’s broader spiritual activism or spiritual mestizaje, the latter frame never even gets off the ground in such superficial readings of Anzaldúa.122

Because of the modernist assumption that materiality and spirituality are in a mutually exclusive relation, it is difficult for many readers to perceive how Anzaldúa’s work imbricates the materiality of the spiritual with the spirituality of the material. In the reception of Anzaldúa’s work, it is Anzaldúa’s most well-known collaborator, Cherríe Moraga, who has questioned Anzaldúa’s use of the spiritual at the expense of a deeper material analysis of oppression. A foundational figure in women of color feminist thinking whose work extends into the realms of fiction and theatre, Moraga was of the position that Anzaldúa’s venture into the underworld was too abstract and idealistic to support a material analysis of the real everyday oppressions of women both within and beyond the borderlands (Vivancos Pérez 2013). Moraga’s own “theory in the flesh” paradigm, developed in the groundbreaking anthology This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, edited by both Moraga and Anzaldúa, has been vastly influential in its own terms as an alternative to Anzaldúa’s “spiritual-activist” approach, though the differences between these two approaches have often been downplayed in the presentation of a holistic Chicana theoretical corpus. For Moraga, the act of theorizing departs not from an initial process of abstraction or idealization, but from “the physical realities of our lives” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2016, 23). This is an act, moreover, which must lead to a “politic

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122 Irene Lara usefully deploys the notion of la facultad as part of the “spiritual epistemologies” that support the retrieval of what she calls a “bruja positionality within Chicana/Latina studies that includes developing our own bruja-like epistemologies” (Lara 2005, 24, 10). This is a subjective positionality which, in following Anzaldúa’s “spiritual activism,” seeks to heal “the internalized beliefs that demonize la Bruja and the transgressive spirituality and sexuality that she represents” (Lara 2005, 10).
born out of necessity” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2016, 23). This materialist politics is perhaps the essence of the theory-in-the-flesh approach, entailing a focus on materiality as a source of thought in a way that challenges immaterialist idealist abstractions. The latter is assumed to correspond to the realm of spirituality as an immaterial abstraction without practical grounding in the physical realities of life. This is why, for Moraga, spirituality cannot be a primary source for a material critique of oppression.

While it would be an exaggeration to assume that Anzaldúa’s and Moraga’s approaches are opposed to each other, it is important to comprehend their different understandings of the relation between materiality and spirituality for the purposes of teasing out their contributions to the critique of secularity. More than Moraga, Anzaldúa seeks to grasp the spiritual elements of the borderlands and their crossings in a way that does not sideline the material conditions of analysis, starting with the material corporeality of embodiment as the locus of thinking. This entails affirming the borderlands, both material and spiritual, as sites of knowledge production. This is perhaps the principal invitation that Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* has to offer to its reader: an invitation to not only theoretically engage the borderlands and *los atravezados* as subjects capable of producing knowledge, but also to enter the borderlands as one enters the serpent, in a moment not of mere analogy, but of real praxis *i.e. in flesh and blood*.124 This is an invitation to locate

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123 David Carrasco and Roberto Lint Sagarena begin to develop these spiritual–epistemic connections by positing Anzaldúa’s notion of the borderlands as a “*shamanic space* where a different quality of knowledge is achieved through ecstatic trance states which inspire the birth of the ‘New Mestiza’” (Carrasco and Sagarena 2008). To be sure, this is not to say that such account of spirituality is *ipso facto* postsecular. In the conclusion to this dissertation, I will return to this question.

124 Analogy in this sense is not to be confused with metaphor. Vivancos Pérez shows how Anzaldúa follows the psychologist James Hillman’s theories concerning the metaphoric nature of psychic phenomena, where consciousness is shaped by our internal relationship with metaphors. If this is the case, then Anzaldúa’s work could be seen as establishing a certain dialogue with our internalized metaphors (Vivancos Pérez 2013, 24). This is a materialist understanding of metaphor where our subjective relations to social reality are processes
one’s locus of thought and embodied experience in the borderlands, taking in both its material and its spiritual components. This substantive transformation is missed by Moraga’s critique of Anzaldúa, which ultimately overplays the abstract character of spirituality in a way that detaches it from its material root in the space of the borderlands.

Before moving on to a relational reading of Anzaldúa vis-à-vis M. Jacqui Alexander, it is important to briefly look more closely at a response to Anzaldúa’s invitation to affirm the borderlands as a locus of enunciation that misses the broader spiritual framework connected to the materiality of the borderlands. In the work of the Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo, one sees an answer to Anzaldúa’s call, embracing the “safe” elements of her work while jettisoning its broader “unsafe” implications. Fruitful in the ways in which it expands Anzaldúa’s thought at the level of the “geopolitics of knowledge,” Mignolo’s engagement with Anzaldúa signals the ways in which liberal secularity can be assumed as an unchallenged modality of scholarly dialogue even in the task of epistemic decolonization. While not exhaustive or indicative of the wider reception of Anzaldúa’s within the decolonial turn at large, Mignolo’s secularization of Anzaldúa is noteworthy given Mignolo’s solid stature as one of the leading exponents of decolonial thought in the global academy.

Anzaldúa’s work provides for Mignolo a concrete example of a creative response to coloniality. In his first monograph *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003), published in 1995, Mignolo engages Anzaldúa twice in the context of a critique of colonial literacy...
and its relation to territoriality. For this early Mignolo, Anzaldúa’s “great theoretical contribution is to create a space in-between from where to think rather than a hybrid space to talk about” (Mignolo 2003, xiii). Here, Mignolo picks up a linguistic and cultural understanding of the borderlands as a space inhabited by many different languages. i.e. Castilian, English, Nahuatl, etc. This is a “transdisciplinary space for thinking about colonization from the personal inscription […] in colonial legacies rather than writing about colonization from the rules of a disciplinary game” (Mignolo 2003, xiii). In this earlier treatment of Anzaldúa, Mignolo thus limits himself to an analysis of Anzaldúa’s contributions by way of her use of language and linguistic symbols, contributions that have been well articulated and propagated, and have subsequently influenced literary and cultural studies since.

In his second monograph Local Histories/Global Designs, published in 2000, Anzaldúa assumes a more central position in the framework of Mignolo’s argument. Here, the earlier focus on linguistic borderlands gives way to a more abstract epistemic meditation on the significance of thinking within and beyond the borders of the colonial world, what Mignolo terms “border thinking.” In this second book, Mignolo explicitly acknowledges Anzaldúa for giving him the tools to elaborate his notion of “border thinking” – thought it must be said, this acknowledgement only takes place in the preface to the text’s second edition, published in 2012, exactly 12 years after the first edition (Mignolo 2012, xx).125 Developed as a theoretical model to understand how critical thought originates in between the geographic and epistemic borders of Western modernity, border

125 This acknowledgment was itself the response to criticism that Mignolo had previously received for not sufficiently recognizing his intellectual debt to Anzaldúa’s project in the first edition of Local Histories.
thinking entails a challenge to the unidirectionality of colonial knowledges that emanate from inside Western modernity and which along their traveling outwards absorb everything in an imposing and assimilating fashion, becoming “global designs,” such as liberalism (Mignolo 2000, 3). Border thinking is the cracking of the “imaginary of the modern world system,” which allows another kind of knowledge to emerge beyond the global designs of western modernity (Mignolo 2000, 23).\footnote{Mignolo also understands border thinking as the “thinking in between human sciences and literature,” as “a frame in which literary practice will not be conceived as an object of study (aesthetic, linguistic, or sociological) but as production of theoretical knowledge” (Mignolo 2012, 223). In this way, Mignolo’s work intersects Wynter’s proposal for a New Science of the Word.}

Despite being an elaboration on Anzaldúa’s work, Mignolo’s engagement with Anzaldúa makes no mention of how a tangible way in which Anzaldúa’s thinking is “other” is precisely through its calling into question of secular disciplinarity. Even when Mignolo is interested in making such transdisciplinary step by retrieving the concept of gnos\footnote{Reacting to the ways in which Mignolo and others similarly jettison gender in the theorization of epistemic decolonization, the Latina philosopher María Lugones’s calls for a “feminist border thinking” that centers the “liminality of the border [a]s a ground, a space, a borderlands, to use Gloria Anzaldúa’s term, not just a split,” dwelling on the common fractured loci, histories of resistance, in coalition, so as to learn about each}sis, Mignolo never actually recognizes Anzaldúa’s own attempts at having already attempted to do this kind of dismantling. Mignolo attributes to the concept of gnos\footnote{Reactive}is the potential to challenge the hegemony of “epistemology” as a frame through which to understand different kinds of knowledges, an intervention that would rethink of the faith-knowledge binary that separates religious or spiritual epistemologies from secular ones (Mignolo 2000, 11, 8). Having said this, one would expect to find in Local Histories/Global Designs an analysis of gnos\footnote{In this way, Mignolo’s work intersects Wynter’s proposal for a New Science of the Word.}is and Anzaldúa’s epistemic meditations, especially her notion of la facultad. Instead, however, la facultad is not mentioned once in this 400-page treatise on coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking.\footnote{Reactive} To bring this up is not to dismiss...
the productive ways in which border thinking has been a framework to connect intellectual projects critical of Western modernity across the Global South. On the contrary, it is to insist on the even greater capaciousness of the framework, and one that is already present in Anzaldúa’s intellectual project.

In his most recent book-length publication *On Decoloniality* (co-authored with Catherine Walsh), published 19 years after the first edition of *Local Histories/Global Designs*, la facultad does make an appearance, but not as a materially-rooted spiritual sensibility, but abstractly as an “undisciplined” power “to do” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 11). By this point, it is clear that Mignolo’s reading of Anzaldúa is a very abstract one where both the materiality and the spirituality of the borderlands are missing, even as the mutual imbrication of these two is one of the elements of Anzaldúa’s work that makes it most dangerous to the coloniality of knowledge. Indeed, Mignolo’s reading gestures to the question of the assumed relationship between secularity and epistemic decolonization that is at the heart of this dissertation. While for Anzaldúa secularity may very well be one of those European “local histories” that have become “global designs,” for Mignolo, it is part of the frame through which epistemic decolonization takes place, in part due to the religious and spiritual legacies of the colonization of the Americas. Mignolo’s account of Anzaldúa other (Lugones 2010, 753). For a further elaboration of Lugones’s work, much in debt to Anzaldúa, see her *Pilgrimages = Peregrinajes* (Lugones 2003). Frances Negrón-Muntaner compares Mignolo’s “radical abstraction of border thinking” to the “reception of *This Bridge Called My Back* among white feminists,” though Negrón-Muntaner’s focus is not the erasure of spirituality in Anzaldúa’s work, but the erasure of gender as an analytic in Mignolo’s appropriation of Anzaldúa (Negrón-Muntaner 2006, 277). Of course, as I elaborated in the Introduction to this dissertation, spirituality and gender are connected in the modern/colonial project as part of a project of epistemicide.

To be sure, Walsh’s reception of Anzaldúa does not have the same concerns that Mignolo’s does, being more attentive to the kind of epistemic transformation required in the incorporation of Anzaldúa’s broader spiritual project.
takes shape within this setting, even if this is the framing that Anzaldúa’s thought substantially challenges through the deployment of tools such as la facultad.

As I elucidated above, for Anzaldúa, spirituality is part and parcel of the very process of decolonization, as a practice that strives to reconnect with one’s past as subjects fragmented by colonization. This is not an immaterial understanding of spirituality, but it is one entrenched in a materialist understanding of embodied lived experience (the life in the borderlands). For Anzaldúa, as Keating argues, spirituality and materiality are inseparable (which is not to say, however, that they are identical) (Keating 2008, 54). The connection between materiality and spirituality is seen in the understanding that to enter the serpent entails the full reconstitution of the content and form of one’s knowledge, recovering the ways in which knowledge is created at a subconscious or pre-cognitive level through the epidermis of the flesh – a feature that escapes the instrumentalist epistemologies of modernity. Far from being a rosy image of make-belief, this is a painful process apt of the “intimate terrorism” of the borderlands. In *Borderlands*, this is a process that is analyzed in the pages subsequent to the development of la facultad, in Chapter Four “La herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State.” In the Coatlicue State, one shakes off one’s old skin in a traumatic process of immobility where the border crossing halts at a crossroads. Referencing what takes place after one enters the serpent *Coatlicue*, this is an infra-subjective condition where the open wounds on the surface are dealt with – one’s daily visit to “*mictlán*, the Mexica underworld” (Anzaldúa 2007, 70). But this condition,

129 On this point, it must be said that Anzaldúa has been criticized for endorsing what may appear as a romantic return to a pre-colonial past. I cite Keating at length who succinctly accounts for what is taking place here: “Although revisionist mythmaking does play a role in her spiritual activism, Anzaldúa does not try to resurrect ‘old gods,’ reclaim an ‘authentic’ precolonial spirituality or religion, or in other ways nostalgically revivify pseudo-ancient traditions or beliefs. Instead, she investigates a variety of indigenous and post-indigenous histories and traditions in order to learn from them, and she applies what she learns to our contemporary situation” (Keating 2008, 55-56).
one soon finds out, is not a deviation but simply part of the process of crossing the borderlands, a crossing whose dangerous journey leads one to affirm spirituality as integral to one’s subjectivity and being. This is why Delgadillo takes this state to be “the site of death and rebirth in spiritual mestizaje, a metamorphosis that opens the way to acts of interpretation” (Delgadillo 2011, 8), which for Lugones is also a “state of creation” (Lugones 1992). As one absorbs these changes in one’s self, realizing that such halting is not a lack of movement, but part of the process of crossing itself, one is soon able to continue the border crossing. This is what it means to affirm oneself as a full subject of knowledge, in relation to one self, one’s past, and the material land upon which one is standing. One becomes one with Coatlicue, returning home to her “cavernous womb” (Anzaldúa 2007, 68) to which, as we shall see below, we will all return (Anzaldúa 2007, 32).

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130 For a brief reading of the pedagogies of crossing within Anzaldúa’s own work, done within the locus of enunciation of a Mexican subjectivity i.e. not from the vantage of the diasporic atravezado, see Marisa Belausteguiotitia Rius’s “Límites y fronteras” (2009).

131 Because these border crossings are not entirely analogical, I interpret this part of Anzaldúa’s work as both the metatheoretical building of a philosophy of knowledge and the elucidation of an ethnography of migration across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Both arguments are taking place at different registers and levels of abstraction.

132 If the Coatlicue state entails an internally imposed positive halting of the process of crossing which is expressed as stasis or depression, what in her later work Anzaldúa will call the Coyolxauhqui state entails an externally imposed negative fragmentation e.g. colonial oppression. Out of both states, a holistic subject emerges, if only temporarily, through different protocols and with different effects. The refusal of the Coyolxauhqui State takes the form of an imperative “to heal and to achieve integration” (Anzaldúa 2015, 17-20). For Vivancos, the move from Coatlicue to Coyolxauhqui “offered greater possibilities as a visual and textual representation of the body/text metaphor” (Vivancos Pérez 2013, 46).

133 Home for Anzaldúa is also “the most unsafe of all spaces” (Anzaldúa 2015, 156). This comes as part of a critique of homophobia in the Chicanx context. Lara Medina offers an account of the return to the Indigenous Mother, to nepantla spirituality, in the practice of entering the temazcal: Entering the temazcal or the inipi is re(entering) into the womb of the creator mother” (Medina 2011b, 291). This whole process could be taken to be a part of Sylvia Wynter’s framework of postreligious ceremonies of reincarnation, which I explained in Chapter Two.
3.3 At the Crossroads: Beyond (Secular) Continentality

Much before we learn about Coatlicue, in the middle of an outline of a general history of the Chicana in Chapter One of Borderlands, Anzaldúa’s multi-genre cites part of the lyrics to the song “Amalia” by the Venezuelan singer José Luis Rodríguez “El Puma.” Quotations such as these are common throughout the entire first half of Borderlands (the prose sections), though scholars have seldomly offered analyses of these within the overall outline of Anzaldúa’s work. In this case, the lines say: “A la cueva volverán,” which I translate as “to the cave they will return” (Anzaldúa 2007, 32). While not self-evident upon a first encounter, by the time the reader arrives to Chapter Three of Borderlands, it is clear that the symbol of the cave represents the dwelling place of Coatlicue, the Serpent which we are call to enter in the epistemic and migratory process of crossing that Anzaldúa’s text depicts. In bringing this song into the fold of Anzaldúa’s narrative arc, Anzaldúa recruits a popular figure of Latin American music as textual evidence of the vast scope of interpretation of her theories. The claim that we the offspring will return to the mother Serpent’s cave encapsulates the social and psychic/epistemic experiences of the Latin American migrant to the U.S. Southwest in the process of border crossing. It is the New Mestiza’s account of the diasporic return home, a reverse diasporic return to the ancient home of Aztlán out of which her ancestors first departed in a journey south of the continent.

134 An exception is Sonia Saldívar-Hull’s account of Anzaldúa’s work as a “new corrido of the mestiza” (Saldívar-Hull 2000, 212).

135 Laura Pérez has sought to expand on the political meanings of Anzaldúa’s text by interpreting the “Coatlicue State” as being something more than an internal psychic process, as being also the outline of a specific type of Chicana political institution (Pérez 2007). Such interpretation plays with the ambivalent notion of “state,” therefore getting out of the “Coatlicue State” the “politic born out of necessity” that Moraga’s theory-in-the-flesh paradigm calls for. In this case, the Coatlicue State refers to what is needed to actualize the return to and re-appropriation of Aztlán by the New Mestiza and other Chicanx folks: an
While it is well known that Anzaldúa incorporated into her written works a very wide range of images, sounds, and symbols that corresponded to her daily life and lived experience, what is most interesting for the purposes of my argument in this chapter is that Anzaldúa’s textual citation of El Puma’s song is actually inaccurate. The quote in question appears in all variations of the song not as “A la cueva volverán” but as “Y a la Guaira volverán,” referring by Guaira to the capital city of the Venezuelan state of Vargas, the country’s main port.\(^{136}\)

Now, at our disposal lie at least two approaches through which to interpret this intertextual inaccuracy. We can either make a critique of rigor on the basis of liberal-secularist presuppositions i.e. that the reference is erroneous and therefore Anzaldúa’s citational practices are sloppy at best. Or, we can let go of such modality of reading and instead follow the internal dynamics of Anzaldúa’s creative praxis. In this second approach, such intertextual inaccuracy points to the harmonizing of ideas that take place at the level of the sensorial, where apparent slips of the senses (mishearing in this case) become sources of creative interpretations that lead to the development of critical thinking, theorizing, and consciousness-raising.\(^{137}\) Such construction of knowledge out of moments of sensorial slippage can be understood through an epistemology where the full corporeal materiality of the flesh (including its mysteries and slippages) is taken to be a

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\(^{136}\) The song opens with the image of two women leaving Maracaibo (another city in Venezuela) wondering when they will return to La Guaira: “De Maracaibo salieron / Dos palomitas volando / Y a la Guaira volverán / Y a la Guaira volverán / Pero a Maracaibo cuándo” (Carrasco 1985). Curiously, this mistake is reproduced verbatim in the Spanish translation of *Borderlands* (Anzaldúa 2016, 52). As far as I know, this is a mistake that has gone unnoticed in the reception of Anzaldúa’s text.

\(^{137}\) The complexity of transmission from sound to the written word has, of course, been the center stage of studies on orality and literacy (Carlson, Fagan, and Khanenko-Friesen 2011).
mediator of knowledge production. This is the case, for instance, with Moraga’s theory-in-the-flesh paradigm. At these crossroads of a critique of liberal secularity and the workings of the flesh, what at first appears to be a deviation (a mishearing or an error in citation), in fact proves to be the destination: *A la cueva volverán.*

That Anzaldúa (mis)hears the name of a continental Caribbean city and instead interprets it as the symbol of *Coatlicue’s* cavernous womb is also a convenient occasion to address the question of Anzaldúa’s relation to the Caribbean as a locus of thought and experience. Already in our exegesis of Anzaldúa’s development of *la facultad*, the Caribbean was spectrally absent when Anzaldúa conjures the Virgen de Guadalupe as the first mestizo symbol of the Americas. In such move, writing from the embodied positionality of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Anzaldúa is historically sidelining the encounter between Christians and Indigenous Taino and Carib peoples that took place in the Caribbean before the conquest of the Aztecs a quarter of a century later (Edmonds and Gonzalez 2010). While not her project per se, accounting for these experiences would most likely qualify the symbolic weight that Anzaldúa ascribes to Guadalupe in her spiritual mestizaje. It is on these grounds that a Caribbean scholar such as Frances Negrón-Muntaner has criticized Anzaldúa (and much of the work inspired by her theories) for not thinking the Caribbean “as an autonomous location outside of its United States racial...

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138 As we shall see in the next section, Alexander’s project of “rewiring of the senses” will add further depth to this formulation (Alexander 2005, 308, 310, 328).

139 A similar critique is made by Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo in relation to Anzaldúa’s erasure of “the contemporary Native American inhabitants of the Southwest and their very different mytho-genealogies,” who are sidelined by Anzaldúa’s reification of a “defunct Mexican Indian culture and history to the exclusion of dozens of living indigenous cultures” (Saldaña-Portillo 2003). Above, I cited AnaLouise Keating’s response to this criticism. For a philosophical analysis of the conquest of the Aztecs that decenters Eurocentrism and does not flatten the complex years from 1492 to the 1520’s, see Dussel’s *The Invention of the Americas* (1995a).
coordinates” (Negrón-Muntaner 2006, 273). While respecting the concrete goals and necessary demarcations of Anzaldúa’s project grounded in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, I take the Guaira/Cueva slippage as an entry point to uncover the place of the Caribbean in Anzaldúa’s work. This exercise will also facilitate our transition to the analysis of the work of M. Jacqui Alexander.

Anzaldúa is constantly mindful of the conceptual limits of the frameworks that she has developed out of the geographical context of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The figure of the ocean or the sea here appears as a challenge to such limits, as the borderlands of the borderlands. In at least two crucial moments of the text, the ocean appears as that entity that does not respect borders (Anzaldúa 2007, 84, 25). If sporadic and not substantially developed, these instances of conceptual delimitation conceive of the ocean as having the capacity to displace land-based understandings of the border and its borderlands, palpable in the very linguistic designation of the borderlands. Far from being uninterested in what lies beyond the “continentality” of the borderlands, beyond their “deep affiliation to national or continental ontologies” as Nelson Maldonado-Torres defines the concept of continentality (Maldonado-Torres 2006, 2), Anzaldúa’s work is in fact quite aware of such beyond.

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Negrón-Muntaner does mention the few ways in which work inspired by Anzaldúa has made an impact on the Caribbean and Caribbean Studies. One of these has been through the thinking of Hispanic Caribbean diasporic subjects as border people, where the Hispanic Caribbean experience is linked to the experience of U.S. Latinos, the former functioning as bridges that can strengthen relations with other diasporic communities in the United States – the work of Juan Flores is exemplary here (Flores 1993). Another way through which Anzaldúa has inspired contributions in Caribbean Studies has been the deployment of the concept of the borderlands as a critique of the centrality of the nation-state as a unit of analysis to conceptualize Caribbean experience. In this regard, there is perhaps no other figure that can best represent this than Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel’s work (Martínez-San Miguel 2003). Third is the valorization of the in-between location of the diaspora “as a resource rather than a hindrance to imagining a more inclusive national community” (Negrón-Muntaner 2006, 274). The linguistic borderlands are also developed within a Puerto Rican diasporic context by Ana Celia Zentella in her Growing Up Bilingual (1997). More recently, Lorgia García-Peña has very fruitfully engaged Anzaldúa within the context of Haitian-Dominican studies in her Borders of Dominicanidad (2016).
What lies beyond the continentality of the borderlands is of such reverence for Anzaldúa that she even assumes it as one of the many sources of her spiritual mestizaje.\footnote{Maldonado-Torres develops the notion of continentality in a “post-continental” critique of continental philosophy, rooted in the specificities of Caribbean philosophy (Maldonado-Torres 2006c). As we shall see below, this kind of “post-continental” thinking that Maldonado-Torres has in mind can also be seen in the work of M. Jacqui Alexander, developed specifically from the positionality of an Afro-Caribbean diasporic experience.} One of the first instances where this takes place is just on the third page of *Borderlands* as part of the very well-cited poem which opens the text. This poem depicts the narrator (one of Anzaldúa’s personas) strolling along the U.S.-Mexico border fence, contemplating the landscape and a group of Mexican children playing soccer. The narrator describes these children as often needing to cross over to the U.S. side of the border fence in order to retrieve their ball. In this landscape, the Pacific Ocean is visible, audible and olfactible, awakening the senses to a certain contrast \textit{vis-à-vis} the “gritty wire / rusted by 139 years / of the salty breath of the sea” (Anzaldúa 2007, 24). This contrast leads the narrator to a famous indictment of the realities of the borderlands:

\begin{verbatim}
1,950 mile-long open wound
 dividing a pueblo, a culture,
 running down the length of my body,
 staking fence rods in my flesh,
 splits me splits me
 me raja me raja

This is my home
 this thin edge of
 barbwire. (Anzaldúa 2007, 24-25)
\end{verbatim}

While countless scholars have cited the above section of the poem, circulating it as perhaps the most original and critical passage from the entire text, there has not been as much attention paid to the poem’s lines that come right after the above, which include references
to the sea and to the Afro-Caribbean spiritual figure of Yemayá, the Yoruba deity of the waters and mother of creation:

The sea cannot be fenced,

*el mar* does not stop at borders,

To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance

*Yemayá* blew the wire fence down. (Anzaldúa 2007, 25)\(^{142}\)

Here, the open figure of the ocean calls out the continentality of the border, which is to say, the naturalized assumptions that allow for the ontological division of land that would justify the building of a fence or wall to separate peoples. The ocean and its currents could thus be said to be “postcontinental” in the sense that they contain the capacity to undo the material and ideological bricks that have led to an ontologically nationalist walled world. This is the sense in which, for Maldonado-Torres, “a new set of metaphors and lived realities begin to acquire existential and epistemological significance, such as the border, the archipelago and the sea, among others” over a “continental ontology of belonging” (Maldonado-Torres 2006, 5). While only in momentary fragments, the ocean in Anzaldúa’s work dislocates the borderlands and its logics, gesturing to another (postcontinental) way of being where the distribution of space does not divide peoples, cultures, bodies, and flesh.

In connecting the figure of the ocean to the Afro-Caribbean spiritual deity of Yemayá, Anzaldúa is making a connection between spirituality, on the one hand, and, postcontinentality or the critique of continentality, on the other hand, that for us substantiates some of the ways in which her work can help us redefine the notion of the

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\(^{142}\) An exemptional, if brief, case that proves the rule highlighted by Negrón-Muntaner is an essay written by Mariana Ortega, who foregrounds Anzaldúa’s line about the uncontainability of the ocean to offer a phenomenological exploration of a series of photographs that she took during the 1999 Puerto Rican Festival in Cleveland, Ohio (Ortega 2004). While Ortega does not have space to deepen the relationalities between the borderlands and the Caribbean, it is significant that the manifestations of Puerto Rican pride lead her to a meditation on *nepantla* and what it means to become a “New Mestiza” (Ortega 2004).
postsecular. In this opening poem, the continentality of the border fence reflects the arrogant secularity of the “white man” who partitions the world according to his own divisive logics and categorical frameworks. The postcontinentality of the ocean, on the other hand, echoes the open spirituality represented by Yemayá, whose force blows away the walls constructed by the white man, which include his secularities and his ontological nationalisms – projects which are, of course, mutually reinforcing. This postcontinental spirituality of the ocean is then for Anzaldúa a powerful critique of modernity/coloniality in all its manifestations that allows her to affirm herself within her own specific locus of enunciation: her body, her flesh, and her home, the borderlands, Coatlicue, “this thin edge of / barbwire.” This is Anzaldúa’s own contribution to Moraga’s theory-in-the-flesh paradigm, a contribution where spirituality is not preemptively erased as source of materialist critique of oppression.\footnote{There is more to be said concerning the conceptual connections between continentality and the secular/religious divide, on the one hand, and postcontinentality and postsecularity, on the other. Border logics are here continentalist, secularist, and therefore disciplinary in their double signification concerning the enforcement of rules and methods. The borderlands, therefore, gesture towards the postcontinental, the postsecular, and the transdisciplinary.}

Before moving on to looking at what lies within the ocean, I would argue that the late development of the concept of nepantla in Anzaldúa’s work responds in part to the ways in which Anzaldúa began to reckon with the consequences of decentering continentalist accounts of identity formation and political action. Even though the concept originates in a specific culture of Mesoamerica (Nahua), Anzaldúa sees in it the conceptual opening to expand and unify some of her earlier theoretical constructs, such as El Mundo Zurdo, the New Mestiza, and spiritual mestizaje. In fact, the concept of nepantla takes shape as Anzaldúa herself responds to how Borderlands had been received by the academic
establishment in very restricted terms. This is articulated most clearly in an interview with
Keating, where Anzaldúa claims: “I find people using metaphors such as ‘Borderlands’ in
a more limited sense than I had meant it, so to expand on the psychic and emotional
borderlands I'm now using ‘nepantla.’ With nepantla the connection to the spirit world is
more pronounced as is the connection to the world after death, to psychic spaces. It has a
more spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous resonance” (Anzaldúa 2000a, 176).

While found in a nascent form in her early writings, the concept of nepantla is most
explicitly developed in Anzaldúa’s posthumous Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro (2015).
By this time, nepantla aspires to capture in a more ample form what in Borderlands was
the path of knowledge from the atravezado to the New Mestiza. No longer rooted in
“external forms of identification” (Anzaldúa 2009, 302), the nepantleras are the ones that
“help us make the crossings, and guide us through the transformation process of
conocimiento,” the ones that are “not quite at home here but also not quite at home over
there” (Anzaldúa 2015, 17, 81). They are the ones that “speak from the cracks” (Anzaldúa
2015, 93), from the zones “of impetuous transition, the point[s] of contact between the
worlds of nature and spirit, between humans and the divine […] where spiritual
transformation or rebirth occurs during visionary states of consciousness” (Anzaldúa 2015,
93, 28-29).

One of these such nepantleras for Anzaldúa could be the Afro-Trinidadian
feminist M. Jacqui Alexander, whose work offers us the possibility of reconnecting with
another ancestral history erased by colonization: the transatlantic African diaspora.

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144 For further elucidation on Anzaldúa’s construction of nepantla, see Keating’s “From Borderlands and
New Mestizas to Nepantlas and Nepantleras” (2006) and the first chapter of Mariana Ortega’s In-Between
(2016).

145 It is noteworthy to remember that Anzaldúa credits Caribbean women with her becoming conscious of the
gender politics of language, particularly concerning their usage of the first person plural “nosotras,” which
in her own Chicano context was unthinkable (Anzaldúa 2007, 76).
Within the limited spectrum of this chapter’s argumentative arc, Alexander’s work picks up where Anzaldúa’s work leaves us, articulating the epistemic consequences of the postcontinental/postsecular spirituality of the ocean by assuming the latter as her own locus of enunciation.

3.4 Afro-Diasporic Spiritualities and the Unfinished Project of Decolonization

In the remaining of this chapter, I look at M. Jacqui Alexander’s work as an example of a postsecular scholarly practice that advances epistemic decolonization. Like Anzaldúa, Alexander also roots her theorizing on the fleshy materialities of the body as the channels through which the legacies of coloniality are experienced. In this task, as it is the case for Anzaldúa, spirituality plays an essential role in both the methodological and the prescriptive aspect of the production of knowledge. If for Anzaldúa, however, spirituality is something to be found outside of, or parallel to, institutional religion, for Alexander, spirituality is what is found after the decolonization of religion. With this framing, Alexander makes an intervention into feminist theory by demonstrating how spirituality can be an epistemic and political agent that reshuffles the categorical agenda under which feminist theory is developed. This is how Alexander’s work advances the “un/writing of our present normative defining of the secular mode of the Subject” called for by Sylvia Wynter, as we saw in Chapter Two (Wynter 1984, 22).

Contrasting to Anzaldúa, Alexander’s locus of enunciation is not the U.S-Mexico borderlands, but the historical currents of the Caribbean and the Atlantic Ocean. This is not

146 In other words, religion is the effect of the colonization of the spiritual (Alexander 2005, 281). This is a similar formulation to what we saw in Chapter One was Dussel’s account of the fetishization of the “mythical-ethical nucleus” of “universal religions” into their “fundamentalist” configurations (Dussel 2001a, 409-410, my translation).

147 A similar intervention, but in a Muslim context, is seen in the work of Saba Mahmood (2005).
to say that Alexander’s work has little to say to the atravezado or the New Mestiza, for doing so would be committing the same fallacy that assumes that Anzaldúa has little to say on the Caribbean. Quite on the contrary, in her sole self-authored monograph published to date, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2005), Alexander includes a full chapter dedicated to *This Bridge Called My Back*.\(^\text{148}\) In this evocative piece, Alexander gives an account of the trajectory that led her to become the kind of scholar that she is, thus paying homage to those that came before her in a tradition of radical and spiritually-rooted feminists of color. Here, Alexander describes with utmost care the influence that Anzaldúa’s work has had on her own intellectual development. When Anzaldúa makes the practice of border crossing an opportunity to redeem the epistemic contributions of los atravezados, Alexander thus sees in this move a relational opening to excavate the lived experiences of her own crossings and those of her ancestors. This is where the currents of the Atlantic, the Caribbean in particular – the ground zero of the New World, as Junot Diaz puts it (2007) – take precedence as a geographic space from where to launch a meditation on the violence of modernity, in both its religious and secular formulations.\(^\text{149}\) In making this move, Alexander inserts herself within a tradition of Black studies that grounds the Crossing of the Transatlantic Middle Passage as the material and symbolic condition of possibility that gives the Black subject a place and a voice to be. Like Anzaldúa’s invitation to enter and inhabit the borderlands, Alexander’s invitation is thus to enter the Crossing.

\(^\text{148}\) This chapter is itself an extension of an earlier essay that appeared in *This Bridge We Call Home*, a follow up anthology to *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Anzaldúa and Keating (2002). In this earlier version, Alexander explicitly states that “This essay is in honor of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, who bore the original vision” (Alexander 2002, 102).

\(^\text{149}\) In Chapter Four of this dissertation, I will engage Junot Diaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as an example of a Latinx literary response to the violent legacies of modernity/coloniality.
Alexander’s project then seeks to recover the long lost “secrets” and memories held in the waters of the Crossing (Alexander 2005, 258). These are secrets that signal a condition of loss, “fragmentation and dismemberment” in the subject of the Crossing, a condition of forgetting caused by colonization that is “so deep that I had even forgotten what I had forgotten” (Alexander 2005, 281, 260). What for Anzaldúa is a path of conocimiento, of “knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our raza” (Anzaldúa 2007, 41), for Alexander becomes a “deep yearning for wholeness” that “can subvert and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment” (Alexander 2005, 281). This work of memory and remembrance against the “alienation, separation, and the amnesia that domination produces” (Alexander 2005, 14), requires the development of alternative methods for knowing beyond those sanctioned by the reigning “secularized episteme” (Alexander 2005, 7). It is here where Alexander embraces the spiritualities of the African diaspora, such as Vodou or Lucumí, from her specific subject positionality as a Black queer woman from the Caribbean. Such locus of enunciation is the mediation through which these spiritualities will concretely develop new ways of knowing and being, a “rewiring of the senses” that can weave together (re-member) the dismembered subject back into wholeness (Alexander 2005, 308, 310, 328).

From Pedagogies of Crossing’s initial dedication to Yemayá, to its concluding bilingual “Prayer Poem in Praise of Yemayá Achaba,” Afro-diasporic spiritualities are the frame of Alexander’s work. This is very much why Delgadillo considers Alexander’s work

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150 Such embrace takes part as an implicit critique of patriarchal and heterosexist interpretations internal to these traditions. For a further development of Alexander’s project that traces the “turbulent fluidities of blackness and queerness” in the Middle Passage, doing so in a way that is also critical of facile metaphorizations, see the work of Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley (2008, 193). For a similar queer engagement with these traditions, but as a philosophical critique of Western philosophy, see the work of Roberto Strongman (2019).
to be a type of spiritual mestizaje. Indeed, the just alluded to “Prayer Poem in Praise of Yemayá Achaba, Mediator of the Crossing” that closes Pedagogies of Crossing could be seen as the inverse mirror to Anzaldúa’s opening poem in Borderlands, where Yemayá represents the spiritual postcontinentality of the ocean that blows away the borders constructed by the white man. In this prayer poem, Alexander recognizes Yemayá as her own “coauthor” (2005, 330-332), already gesturing how the channeling of spirituality reworks standard assumptions in the production of knowledge. That this prayer poem is finalized during a stay in the Mexican Caribbean, as explicitly stated in the last footnote of Pedagogies of Crossing (2005, 371, n.36) adds a powerful symbolism to the relationalities between experiences of border crossing that are the focus of each thinker.

For Alexander, placing oneself in the spectrum of Afro-diasporic spiritualities eventually necessitates the suspension of habits of knowing that allow for the emergence of other ways of knowing beyond the secular coloniality of knowledge. Just as for Anzaldúa chamanería “awakens some deep, hidden memory or lost knowledge of times past” (Anzaldúa 2015, 32), for Alexander, the embodied ceremonial practices required in either Vodou or Lucumí leave certain “markings on the flesh” that signal the existence of something more than what is given or perceived with the senses (Alexander 2005, 297). For example, in the bodily habituations that Lucumí ceremonial rituals accomplish, in other words, in the practitioner’s embodied communion with the sacred, subjects undergo a series of transformations that alter one’s subjectivity, particularly one’s embodiment and temporality.151 In ceremony, the subject connects her present to her past and future in a

151 To distinguish these types of epistemic transformation from more cognitive-based ones, I have coined the term “trance-formations.” This neologism alludes to the moments of “trance,” the “visionary states of consciousness” as Anzaldúa calls them (such as spirit possessions in Afro-diasporic spiritualities) that lead to radical epistemic change. I am currently developing this concept in a manuscript in progress.
way that transcends the boundaries of what is sensorially given. The subject realizes that she is not crossing the borderlands alone, but that she is walking along in the accompaniment of what Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús has termed the “co-presences” (Beliso-De Jesús 2015, 218). She has articulated “a method of encountering a past that is not past,” as Christina Sharpe puts it, and thus has become “undisciplined” in the way of producing knowledge (Sharpe 2016, 13). Ceremony, Alexander tells us, “as Sacred praxis embodied” thus “marks an important reversal of the thinking as knowledge paradigm” (Alexander 2005, 307).

The markings on the flesh that form as an effect of these habituations communicate something that has always been there, but that one has forgotten in a forced processed of amnesia i.e. colonization. These are the secrets untraceable in the “secularized episteme” of the “thinking as knowledge” paradigm. In developing this framework, Alexander effectively demonstrates the rich potentiality inherent in the theory-in-the-flesh paradigm to relate to different experiences of oppression and resistance within women of color. Doing so demands the move away from a conception of “living alterity premised in

152 This is not to say that embracing Afro-diasporic spiritualities is about “living in the past;” it is instead about having a certain “relationship to Time” (Alexander 2005, 278). Keating similarly points out that, in the case of Anzaldúa, remembrance has to do not just with respecting the ancestors, but also with not repeating the mistakes of the past (Keating 2008, 56).

153 This can be seen in recent anthropological studies on the ways in which uninitiated practitioners become subjectified or interpellated into Afro-diasporic spiritualities. For instance, in her Religion in the Kitchen, Elizabeth Pérez explains how the undertheorized “micropractices” of food preparation within Lucumí houses are just as important as the “macropractices” which have been the predominant focus of scholars in the anthropology of religion (Pérez 2016). In describing the pedagogical relations between the initiated and the uninitiated, Pérez argues that “forgetting is an index of memory more fundamental to ritual practice than conscious recollection” (Pérez 2016, 68). Here, standard understandings of “learning” and “remembering” are defunct and what takes place is an epistemology of Sacred praxis embodied. In Pérez’s example, the sources of spiritual knowledge are the material practices that one must assimilate not by cognizing or thinking, but by doing, in the learning process. These are the pedagogies of crossing, pedagogies of recalling what one did not know one has always already known, what one has forgotten but now is brought back in the ritualistic habituations of the body.
difference,” which is reificatory, to one of “living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity” (Alexander 2005, 8). Getting this point across leads Alexander to make use of the figure of the welder as the subject who must master the dangerous fire in order to survive the Crossing. A prominent symbol in the queer poetics of women of color feminism, most exemplified in the poems “The Welder” by Cherríe Moraga (published in This Bridge Called My Back) and “Of Althea and Flaxie” by Cheryl Clarke, both of which are recognized in a footnote of Pedagogies of Crossing (2005, 367, n.22), the figure of the welder epitomizes for Alexander everything that must come together for knowledge “to be embodied and made manifest through flesh, [as] an embodiment of Spirit” (2005, 15). For the welder is not afraid of the fire, but knows that “she has to become intimate with this danger zone in order to re-create, to create anew; to enter the fire not figuratively, or analogically, but actually, that is, in flesh and blood” (2005, 266). A brief analysis of these poems will give flesh to this chapter’s theorizations of embodiment, touching on the gendered, sexualized, and racialized levels of experience that are front and center of women of color feminism.

In “The Welder,” Moraga offers the image of a welder as a representation of the intense work women need to undertake to affirm themselves as material and symbolic creators of meaning. The poem is a succinct poetic demonstration of Moraga’s theory-in-the-flesh paradigm, where the corporeal materiality of the body as the locus of thinking and acting is central, against idealisms that ignore the importance of material embodiment in the development of thinking and theorizing. “I am a welder,” the poem affirms, “Not an alchemist” (Moraga 2016, 219).

No magic here.
Only the heat of my desire to fuse
what I already know
eexists. Is possible. (Moraga 2016, 219)

The above stanza explicitly distances the welder away from facile notions of spirituality ("No magic here," a position consistent with Moraga’s critique of Anzaldúa that I outlined above), while simultaneously centering “the heat of my desire” as a source of creation. This is a creation that challenges the lukewarm false universalism of white feminists that smooth over differences within women. The welder instead understands that “we bend,” but “at different temperatures” (2016, 219). Therefore, coalitions (“fusions”) are possible, but “only if things get hot enough” (2016, 219).

It is the intimacy of steel melting
into steel, the fire of our individual
passion to take hold of ourselves
that makes sculpture of our lives,
builds buildings.

And I am not talking about skyscrapers. (Moraga 2016, 219)

Steel melting, the welder’s craft, is here the metaphor for the needed work to bring forth the “politic born out of necessity” called for by Moraga’s theory-in-the-flesh. When things get hot enough, steel will melt to build buildings that are not skyscrapers. These are buildings like the bridge on one’s back, a bridge of flesh, that bring women together “in relationality and solidarity,” in Alexander’s terms. “The Welder” ends with a materialist affirmation of this coming to consciousness of the need to be actional: “I am the welder. / I am taking the power / into my own hands” (2016, 220).

The juxtaposition between the intimacy of steel melting, the heat of desire, and the sculpting of one’s lives gives Moraga’s “The Welder” a powerfully erotic connotation in the context of same-sex desire. This is a connotation that is most explicitly explored in Cheryl Clarke’s “Of Althea and Flaxie,” the second poem that Alexander alludes to when
she deploys the symbolism of the welder in her meditation on the flesh’s markings. In
Clarke’s poem, Moraga’s erotic sculpting in the heated intimacy of steel melting becomes
the quotidian story of the lives of two women who loved each to death without a care for
the heteronormative order around them:

In 1943 Althea was a welder
very dark
very butch
and very proud
lived to cook, sew, and drive a car
and did not care who knew she kept company with a woman
[…]
Althea was gay and strong in 1945
and could sing a good song
from underneath her welder’s mask
and did not care who heard her sing her song to a woman. (Clarke 1982, 15)

Althea and Flaxie do not fear the fire of their desire, and this is what allows them to become
intimate, to make sculpture of their lives, as Moraga would put it. Two queer women living
in intimacy, in the background of a heterosexist world, entails that they have learned to
“make peace with contradiction and paradox” (Alexander 2005, 15). For Alexander, this is
the ultimate lesson of the fearless welder: “The difference between the welder and those of
us who fear fire is the consciousness and attentiveness she brings to the process of entering
fire, and it is this consciousness that cultivates the intelligence to discern, embrace, and
live that important, yet malleable, relationship between destruction and sustenance. Fire
can kill, but without it we will die” (Alexander 2005, 266).

The erotic subtext brought in by the queer poetics of Moraga and Clarke recalls
Audre Lorde’s influential understanding of the erotic as developed in her essay “Uses of
the Erotic” (Lorde 2007). Indeed, of three epigraphs that are included in the revised version
of Alexander’s “Rembering This Bridge,” one is Moraga’s, one is Anzaldúa’s, and the last
one is from Lorde’s “The Uses of the Erotic” (Alexander 2005, 280). In this essay, Lorde famously defines the erotic as a “resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane […] the life-force of women” (2007, 53, 55). The value of the erotic has been suppressed through the oppression of women in history, a fact that, for Lorde, has led to its reduction and equation to the pornographic (2007, 54). Lorde urges women to reclaim the erotic as a source of creativity, particularly though the recognition of the erotic’s spiritual roots. For Lorde, such separation of the spiritual from the erotic is symptomatic of a process of secularization i.e. of the separation of the spiritual from the political (2007, 56). Reclaiming the spirituality of the erotic thus concurrently leads to the recovering of spirituality for politics. Indeed, the “passions of love,” the “physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us,” are the bridge that unites the spiritual with the political (2007, 56). This understanding of the erotic therefore helpfully connects Moraga’s and Clarke’s queer poetics to Alexander’s critique of secular epistemologies.

In uniting the queer poetics of the welder to Lorde’s spiritually-rotted notion of the erotic, Alexander seeks to fulfill the “contemporaneous task of a theory of the flesh,” which is “to transmute this body and the pain of its dismemberment to a remembering of the body to its existential purpose” (Alexander 2005, 329). The “politic born out of necessity” that such theory calls for here concretely becomes an intervention into the secularity of feminist politics. For if feminism took strides to articulate the claim that “the personal is political,” it nevertheless did so assuming the Enlightened secularist separation of the spheres of the spiritual and the political. Like Lorde, Alexander contests such assumption, unsettling the

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154 While Lorde is principally writing for women about their embodied experiences, I do not take it to entail that her analysis is strictly foreclosed to other subjectivities, whether masculine or beyond a gender binary.
spiritual/political binary by upholding both the politicality of the personal and the sociality of the spiritual (a sociality always-already political). Refusing the secularizing privatization of the personal which becomes an isolated depository of the spiritual, Alexander defends the political socialization of the spiritual when she follows Luisa Teish’s words: “we are political because we are spiritual” (Teish 2002, 507, Alexander 2005, 323). Alexander’s politics are thus not only feminist, anti-colonial, and transnational; they are also spiritual.\footnote{See the anthologies \textit{Fleshing the Spirit} (Facio and Lara 2014) and \textit{Postsecular Feminisms} (Deo 2018b).} This is a spiritually-rotted feminism which has the ambitions of undertaking a “remapping of the major categories with which a transnational feminism has been engaged” (Alexander 2005, 297). This is the sense in which I interpret Alexander’s work as being part of a wider postsecular horizon.

It is from such postsecular feminism that Alexander engages Marxist theory in a way that neither replicates the theory’s Eurocentrism nor its vulgar militant secularism. Echoing the postsecular Marxism of Enrique Dussel that I analyzed in Chapter One, this engagement is encapsulated by Alexander’s formulation: “What Marxian philosophy \textit{and} the metaphysics of spiritual thought systems have in common: dialectics of struggle. Paradoxes of the Divine” (Alexander 2005, 266). Only from a postsecular positionality could these two seemingly opposing intellectual traditions join hands in a struggle for liberation. For Alexander, it is in this capacity to live with contradiction, like the welder, that both Marxism and Afro-diasporic spiritualities come together. Said otherwise, the dialectics of struggle, the paradoxes of the Divine, \textit{are} the pedagogies of crossing. From these reflections, Alexander’s work is plainly central to contemporary debates concerning the decolonization of critical theory (Vizcaino 2016).
3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have engaged the work of two radical queer women of color feminists for whom spirituality is a central component of their intellectual production. In their work, spirituality is an instrument through which secularized epistemes are decentered in a process of epistemic decolonization. It is this decolonial deployment of spirituality, and not one that maintains the coordinates of the modern/colonial secular/religious divide, that renders their work open to the postsecular horizon. Such deployment takes the material corporeality of embodiment as its arbitrator, challenging the “thinking as knowledge paradigm,” or cognitivist accounts of knowledge production that disregard what takes place beyond the abstractions of the mind. What results is a phenomenological methodology that prioritizes the flesh in a way that neither presupposes a Christian nor a positivist interpretation. Whether in the form of la facultad, or of Sacred praxis embodied, the corporeal materiality of the body (in the flesh) here contains alternative ways of producing knowledge beyond the demands of liberal-secular disciplinarity.

Such centering of the corporeal materiality of the body as a locus of thought in its racialized, gendered, and sexualized significations, of course, is part and parcel of a tradition of women of color feminism that Anzaldúa and Alexander belong to. My analyses of their works hope to bring their fruitful contributions to bear on the ongoing turn to embodiment in the philosophies and sociologies of religion developed within the postsecular debate. If these interventions have diagnosed, for instance, the intellectualist

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156 In doing so, the work of these thinkers partially overlaps with the *sentipensar* paradigm as it has been developed in several genealogies of Latin American thought, from Orlando Fals-Borda and Eduardo Galeano, to Saturnino de la Torre and Arturo Escobar (Fals-Borda 2014, Moraes and de la Torre 2002, Escobar 2016). This is a paradigm of thinking that remains largely understudied in languages other than Spanish. For a recent contribution to its dissemination, see Lia Pinheiro Barbosa’s “The Sentipensante and Revolutionary Pedagogies of Latin American Social Movements” (2019). I am currently working on an essay that explores the overlaps between U.S. women of color feminisms and this Latin American *sentipensante* paradigm.
biases of cognitivist accounts of religion based on beliefs (Smith 2012), their unfamiliarity with how coloniality shapes lived experience makes such postsecular intervention run the risk of reproducing a very limited (over)representation of embodiment, mainly “Man’s” (Wynter 2003). Women of color feminists can fill in this gap, but their absence from discussions of postsecularity signals the field’s theoretical phallogocentric and Eurocentrism.

In going beyond Man’s logic through a process of decolonization, their work thematizes the coloniality of the secular in a way that further resignifies the meaning of postsecularity. In other words, their work begs the questions of both the postsecularity of decolonization and the decoloniality of the postsecular. In making this triangular schema, more radical understandings of both decolonization and postsecularity emerge, insisting on the claim that decolonization cannot ignore the spiritual element of lived experience, while postsecularity cannot ignore the question of coloniality. In their works, spirituality, as that which is beyond or outside the coloniality of the secular/religious divide, and the process of decolonization, go hand in hand in a way that, as Maldonado-Torres has been able to diagnose, substantiates the concepts of the postsecular (and the postreligious) to refer to parallel parts of the process of decolonization (Maldonado-Torres 2008b, 381-383). Maldonado-Torres is clear in arguing that without voices like Anzaldúa’s and Alexander’s, the discourse of the postsecular simply “won’t go very far” (Maldonado-Torres 2008b, 382).

Indeed, Anzaldúa and Alexander already travel many of the routes outlined in Lori Branch’s programmatic account of postsecular studies, such as the revision of the

157 As a reminder, I further develop the notion of the postreligious in the Conclusion of this dissertation.
secularization thesis, the recognition of secularism as ideology, a certain “faithful” approach to language, and a renovation of the big questions of humanistic inquiry (Branch 2016, 95-99). What they problematize in Lori’s account, however, is the equation Lori makes between critical hermeneutics and instrumental reason. For Lori, at the level of method, secularity represents a critical hermeneutic of suspicion ruled by instrumental reason, meaning that postsecularity would consequently represent an abandonment of such criticality i.e. a “post-critical” method beyond instrumental reason (Branch 2016, 97). Anzaldúa and Alexander go beyond the secularity of instrumental reason but without discarding the criticality of suspicion. For them this criticality is needed, but not within an anti-foundationalist attitude (as it is the case within the rhetoric of modernity), but from their positionalities as women of color who must theorize against the grain of coloniality.
CHAPTER FOUR

Towards the Decolonial Redistribution of the Sensible: Against the Secularity of Aesthetic Experience

“I accept Brecht’s thesis that in settled periods of history, culture – and literature which is its part, with criticism as its partner – can reflect reality. But that in traumatic times like ours, when reality itself is so distorted as to have become impossible and abnormal, it is the function of all culture, partaking of this abnormality, to be aware of its own sickness. To be aware of the unreality of the unauthenticity of the so-called real, is to reinterpret this reality. To reinterpret this reality is to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it.”

Sylvia Wynter

“Thought of the Other is sterile without the other of Thought […] the other of Thought is the aesthetics implemented by me and by you to join the dynamics to which we are to contribute.”

Édouard Glissant

“The Absolute as motivation for the liberation of the oppressed, of the poor, of the people, for their liberation, is an anti-deist God. It is the God of the mythical narrative of the Latin American popular imaginary.”

Enrique Dussel

4.0 Introduction

The previous three chapters have traced distinct engagements with the modern secular/religious binary, from Latin American philosophical and theological debates, to Caribbean anti-colonial thought and women of color feminist thinking. In each of these chapters, the question of aesthetics or aesthetic experience has made itself present without being developed further. We saw this in Enrique Dussel’s philosophizing of the Absolute as expressed in “the God of the mythical narrative of the Latin American popular imaginary” (Dussel 2011a, 167, my translation). We then saw it with further clarity in Sylvia Wynter’s proposal for a New Science of the Word, where a re-writing of aesthetic symbolic orders is called for to redefine what is means to be human beyond the secular mode of the subject (Wynter 2015). Lastly, in the previous chapter, an examination of the respective projects of Gloria Anzaldúa and M. Jacqui Alexander and their association with
certain forms of spirituality, led to the deployment of a queer poetics that seeks to articulate alternative ways of knowing beyond the secular coloniality of knowledge. While aesthetics is often taken to be a subject of inferior or extraneous importance to supposedly more pressing matters of ethics and politics, the central positioning of art in the development of religion and philosophy in a figure like Hegel, makes aesthetics a topic of relevance in the development of a decolonial philosophy of religion and the decolonization of philosophy in general (Hegel 1997). The purpose of this chapter is thus to gather the previous divergent threats as a contribution to the emergent discourse of “decolonial aesthetics,” or better yet, the development of a “decolonial aesthesis” (Institute 2011, Mignolo and Vazquez 2013), clarifying the ways in which aesthetics can take a central role in the decolonization of the secular/religious divide.

Aesthetics here gathers importance because, as Wynter has put it, it remains the primary place through which we acquire categories to experience the world and ourselves, therefore also being the first site for a reconceptualization that will take us beyond our current predicament at the underside of modernity. Without such rewriting of our aesthetic orders, Wynter argues, there simply cannot be large scale changes or transformations in the ways in which we do things, in the ways in which we are who we are. If Marx reprimanded philosophers for fixating on interpretation at the expense of praxis, Wynter argues that no “revolutionary assault against” reality can take place without a prior aesthetic reinterpretation of reality in the first place (Wynter 1976, 129). More to the point

 Wynter is here criticizing Roland Barthes’s theory of aesthetics for being too detached from conscious processes of creation. Instead, Wynter follows Bertolt Brecht to argue for an aesthetic praxis that does not merely represent reality, but one that reinterprets it with an authentic revolutionary aspiration to change it (Wynter 1976). In a later essay, Wynter would follow the Caribbean philosopher C.L.R. James to defend a robust fusion of “theoretics and esthetics” (Wynter 1992a, 70).
concerning our engagement with the secular/religious divide, however, in Dussel’s formulation (again echoing Hegel), aesthetics express the moment of creativity in the dialectical process after the negation of the system and the affirmation of the Other (Dussel forthcoming). This is the moment that leads to what in Chapter One was called the “mythical-ethical nucleus” of religion as a first expression of the Absolute in a process of liberation (Dussel 2001a, 409). An aesthetics of liberation would therefore here become the latest stage in a liberation philosophy initiated as an anti-fetishist philosophy of religion, where the function of aesthetics is understood in relation to religion, ethics, and politics as the search for the Absolute as liberation.

Decolonial aesthetics then becomes a battle to articulate how modernity/coloniality structures the field of lived experiential possibilities (Mignolo 2010, Gaztambide-Fernández 2014). If a radical postmodern philosopher such as Jacques Rancière has usefully theorized aesthetics as the field where the sensible is distributed and redistributed (Rancière 2006), then the analyses advanced in this chapter point towards a decolonial “redistribution of the sensible” wherein alternative forms of experience emerge as real possibilities to ground the revolutionary transformation of the world. Continuing the engagement with the figures analyzed in the previous three chapters, this chapter at once questions the secularization of sensibility in Western aesthetics (Lockward 2017) while at the same time illuminating the spiritual elements in the redistribution of the sensible. In this way, it defends the project of decolonial aesthetics as yet another contributor to the ongoing theorizations of postsecularity that are reframing the shifting dynamics of the secular/religious divide in our contemporary era (Beaumont 2019, Gorski et al. 2012). Specifically, this chapter turns to Caribbean and Latinx literary aesthetics in the form of
theory and narrative to reveal how spiritual experiences are channeled as forms of knowledge for subjects touched by colonial systems of oppression. This is an exercise that demonstrates how the literary-aesthetic field can be a primary site for the elaboration of alternative ways of being beyond the normativity of the modern/colonial secular/religious matrix.

The outline of this chapter is as follows: First, I articulate the project of decolonial aesthetics and show what is at stake in understanding the specific role of aesthetics in processes of decolonization or liberation. Second, I trace some postsecular (and therefore, postreligious) elements in the project of decolonial aesthetics. Here, a kind of decolonial theopoetics begins to emerge, which I mainly explore in the writings of Caribbean intellectuals such as Edouard Glissant and Aimé Césaire, as well as in contemporary scholarship on these figures. Lastly, I offer close readings of two contemporary novels in the Caribbean and Latinx literary arena: Cristina Garcia’s *Monkey Hunting* and Junot Diaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The exegesis of these texts will uncover several of the theoretical developments of this dissertation, offered here as a reinterpretation of reality for the purposes of un/writing our modern/colonial secular/religious modes of subjectivity.

### 4.1 Recovering Aesthesis and the Redistribution of the Sensible

Aesthetics is a subfield of philosophy that only self-consciously emerged during the European Enlightenment, often regarded as the site for the theorization of art, beauty, or sensibility (Mandoki 2007, 4). Perhaps the most influential figure on this front is Immanuel Kant, whose *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* and *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kant 2011, 2000), where foundational in the formalist
articulation of aesthetic values and criteria through which to judge the artworld and its affects. Since Kant, modern aesthetics has deepened this impetus to formulate a philosophy of art where distinct forms are judged for their various approximations to the harnessing of the beautiful. Hegel, for instance, continued this project in a way that would account for the relation between art forms and the history of humanity as a teleological process of greater self-consciousness (Hegel 1988). Like it was the case with his philosophy of religion (briefly analyzed in Chapter One), where Christianity appears as the culmination of the history of religion, Hegel’s aesthetics elevate the history of Western artistic practices and sensibilities, ostensibly imposing them as the measuring stick for the experience of absolute beauty.

This normative Eurocentrism permeating aesthetic theory has made aesthetics one of the liveliest receptions of the decolonial turn in theory and criticism (Gómez and Mignolo 2012a, Gómez and Mignolo 2012b). Decolonial thinkers seek to reclaim aesthetic theorizations by demonstrating how such normative Eurocentrism colonizes sensibility or aesthesis into very narrow and limited conceptions of art and beauty, at the expense of others sensibilities that would generate different associations concerning the meaning of artistic practice and the understanding of beauty (Mignolo 2010, 14). The task to decolonize aesthetics is not simply to recognize the aesthetic values and attitudes of non-European cultures, but to “delink” from and to destabilize the imposition of Eurocentric regimes of sensation as natural ways of constructing sense and meaning in the world. “Decolonial aesthetics” therefore calls for a rediscovery of aesthesis in order to expand the field of sensuous experience in a way would permit the making of new worlds of meaning and sense – what in Chapter Two Wynter called the finding of a “new ceremony” (Wynter
In this sense, to decolonize aesthetics entails the liberation of aesthesis, of sensibility, from the constraints set forth by my modern theorists of aesthetics.

Alejandro Vallega has succinctly conveyed the consequences that would ensue for any liberatory thinking if the decolonization of aesthetics is not taken to be a serious topic of discussion (Vallega 2014). For Vallega, without an assessment of the coloniality of hegemonic aesthetic categories, any liberatory project would be destined to reproduce the limited frame of sensible experience that is sanctioned by modern theories of aesthetics. Departing from the premises of Latin American liberation philosophy, Vallega argues that aesthetics is far from being of superfluous relevance for liberatory thinking. Quite on the contrary, “aesthetic experience appears as a basic and necessary element for the politics and ethics of liberation” (Vallega 2014, 72). This primacy of aesthetic experience within ethico-political theory and practice boils down to the phenomenological fact that all experience begins with one’s sensing of the world. In the terms of liberation philosophy, this is expressed with the categories of “proximity” and “alterity” that are the categorical foundations of liberation philosophy. This means that liberation philosophy also advances an aesthetics of liberation, even though it has not been thematized in the same way that its ethics and politics of liberation have been. The necessity of such aesthetics of liberation makes it a presupposed ground for the development of any ethics and politics of liberation, which is why its explicit thematization is needed to avoid the risk of introducing problematic Eurocentric categories at the level of sensibility. Without such analysis of how

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159 Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez clarify that the expression “decolonial aesthetics” was first introduced in 2003 into the conversations of the Modernity/Coloniality Research Collective by the “Colombian citizen-intellectual, artist, and activist, Adolfo Albán Achinte” (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013).

160 As I explained in Chapter One, this categorical framework was developed in dialogue with the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas (Dussel and Guillot 1975).
sense experience is understood in the process of liberation (or decolonization), the overall process could become compromised from the very beginning at the metaphysical level.

Vallega focuses on temporality as one specific aspect of experience that situates “thought practically a priori” (Vallega 2014, 107). After all, it is within the frame of a given temporality that all thought and action take place in a non-reflective way i.e. naturally. And yet, temporality is itself a conceptual construct through which our thought and actions acquire sense and meaning. A decolonial inquiry into modern temporality thus uncovers a particular sensibility with universalist pretensions that claims to make sense of all historical phenomena. This sensibility of time is what Walter Benjamin called the “empty time” of modern teleological progress and development (Benjamin 2007), which grows out of the European Enlightenment to establish itself as the universal measurement of time.¹⁶¹ For Vallega, modern temporality is thus constituted by coloniality just as modern capitalism and liberalism are made possible by their economic and political colonial undersides. Most crucially, any liberatory thinking that does not question the coloniality of time would be destined to presuppose it and thus reproduce it as a frame of experience. Doing so would smuggle coloniality back into the form of a supposedly “decolonial” thinking. Regardless of the content of such thinking, “its status and validity as thought/knowledge will be situated a priori by a sensibility that puts it under the judgment of the coloniality of power and knowledge (Vallega 2014, 107). The stakes are therefore high for liberatory thinking when it comes to understanding the role of aesthetics. The a priori, often “pre-rational” and “pre-linguistic” (Vallega 2014, 109) character of modern aesthetic experience that is

¹⁶¹ The work of Walter Benjamin has a tremendous affinity with decolonial thinking, a fact that remains to be fully explored in scholarship. I am currently working on a manuscript that reads Benjamin’s philosophy of history from the underside of modernity.
intertwined with coloniality “must be not only exposed but also overturned in order to begin to gain an opening for a philosophy of liberation” (Vallega 2014, 107).

In Vallega’s account, the coloniality of time is in part uncovered by Aníbal Quijano’s analysis of “the overlapping or pyramidal asymmetrical simultaneity of various temporalities” in Latin America, which introduce an “ana-chronic sense of time and history in that the simultaneous asymmetry of temporalities situates them (temporality and history) beyond a single line of development or ordering of lives and sense of existence” (Vallega 2014, 8-9). A decolonial account of temporality here begins to make space for alternative ways of situating time and history, such as those upheld by many Latin American indigenous peoples. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, this issue was demonstrated by way of M. Jacqui Alexander’s analysis of how Lucumí ceremonial rituals accomplish a series of transformations in the practitioner that alter their subjectivity, particularly their sense of embodiment and temporality (Alexander 2005, 278). More recently, Maldonado-Torres has emphasized along these same lines that aesthetic experience is a “a key aspect of the decolonization of being, including the decolonization of time, space, and embodied subjectivity, but also of power and knowledge” (Maldonado-Torres 2016, 26). The centrality of aesthetics as the primary site for phenomenological experience therefore cannot be overemphasized in the construction of a project of liberation or decolonization.

Consequently, if in modern aesthetics the category of representation is the key to the relation between world and art, a decolonial retrieval of aesthesis necessitates an alternative to representational discourse. For Walter Mignolo, one of the leading thinkers of decolonial aesthetics, this implies a turn away from the immateriality of representability and a return to the materiality of creation (Gaztambide-Fernández 2014, 201). Mignolo
here gestures to the Enlightenment reception of Aristotle’s Poetics, where mimesis (representation) takes priority over poiesis (creation). In Aristotle’s terms, poetics emerge when the material creation of poiesis hones a certain aesthesis (sensibility), in part through the process of mimesis (representation) (Gaztambide-Fernández 2014, 203). A decolonial retrieval of aesthesis, then reprioritizes poiesis over mimesis by focusing on the embodied materiality of creation. Through this maneuver, decolonial aesthetics circumvents the supremacy of theorizations of beauty, taste, and representation, instead thematizing the material and embodied corporeality of the act and process of creating, departing first from a phenomenological account of sensation. Decolonial aesthetics is here a kind of “everyday aesthetics,” one that departs from the themes of alterity and proximity.

Having just outlined the bare bones of the decolonial intervention into aesthetics, we can retrospectively reopen some of the issues analyzed in the previous three chapters, and now understand them in line with the development of a decolonial aesthetics. For instance, we can interpret Wynter’s entire intellectual project, particularly her proposal for the development of a New Science of the Word (analyzed in Chapter Two), as a major contributor to the theorization of decolonial aesthetics. Her synthesis of bios and mythos, of poiesis and poetics, as the autopoietic/autopoetic praxis of being human/becoming-flesh, is nothing but the assertion of the material and embodied corporeality of the act and process of creating meaning. Wynter’s own idiosyncrasy is that a phenomenological account of sensation must be in serious dialogue with the sciences of Man, which is how her foray into cognitive science should be comprehended. If for Vallega, aesthetics is the foundation

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162 In recent years, “everyday aesthetics” has itself become a subfield of aesthetics (Mandoki 2007, Saito 2007). An exchange between this subfield and the emerging paradigm of decolonial aesthetics no doubt promises to enrich both constellations.
for an ethics and politics of liberation, for Wynter, it is also the ground for a philosophy of consciousness. Let us remember that in her analysis of Fanon’s sociogenic re-writing of psychology, it is the stories told about the Black man that had already made Fanon the Other to the White Man upon his first arrival to the French mainland (Wynter 2001, 42).

Similarly, Alexander’s account of the epistemic transformations inherent in the practices of Afro-diasporic spiritualities (analyzed in Chapter Three), entails an understanding of the Sacred that is “inconceivable without an aesthetic” (Alexander 2005, 323). This can now be fully understood as a postsecular contribution to decolonial aesthetics, where the secularity of artistic creation and aesthetic experience are challenged (Lockward 2017). The spatio-temporal interpellations of Afro-Caribbean spiritualities, already alluded to above, here provide a concrete and powerful challenge to the secularity of modern “empty” time. This implies a decolonization of secularized temporality that alludes to the connection between the senses and spiritual experience. The process that Alexander refers to as a “rewiring of the senses” (Alexander 2005, 328), here should thus be identified as the grounding of aesthesis. And because time is such a vital component of being, this spiritual “rewiring of the senses” is then also a direct contribution to the decolonization of the onto-theological notion of Being/being (Maldonado-Torres 2016).

A decolonial aesthesis consequently departs from the “markings on the flesh” that are results of the bodily habituations and rituals of creation (Alexander 2005, 297). Within a context of coloniality, this entails a subjective position of incompleteness or separation. As Alexander puts it, because colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, the work of decolonization has to make room for the deep yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which,
when satisfied, can subvert and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment. (Alexander 2005, 281)

This “yearning to belong” is why Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez have understood the development of a decolonial *aesthesis* as a process of “healing” the “colonial wound” left over by colonization. In the first English-language collection of essays on decolonial aesthetics, they write:

> Decolonial aesthesis departs from an embodied consciousness of the colonial wound and moves toward healing. It is a heterogeneous historicco-embodied move, it perceives the wound of coloniality hidden under the rhetoric of modernity, the rhetoric of salvation. Decoloniality is at once the unveiling of the wound and the possibility of healing. It makes the wound visible, tangible; it voices the scream. And at the same time decolonial aesthesis moves towards the healing, the recognition, the dignity of those aesthetic practices that have been written out of the canon of modern aestheTics.163 (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013)

Following Alexander, Mignolo, and Vazquez, I understand the healing elements of decolonial *aesthesis* as both a “poietic praxis” and a “practical poiesis,” borrowing the terms from Enrique Dussel. For Dussel, these mirroring formulations capture the material and intersubjective elements of the process of liberation, where the moment of *poiesis* is the material labor of creation that is only practical if it is aimed intersubjectively towards the affirmation of an Other as *praxis* (Dussel 2011a, 110). By conceiving of decolonial aesthetics as both a poietic praxis and a practical poiesis, I seek to illuminate the foundational relation suggested by Vallega between an aesthetics of liberation and the ethics and politics of liberation developed by Dussel and others (Dussel 1998, 2009). The decolonial intervention into aesthetics is here a moment in an overarching theoretical architectonic of liberation. Before moving on to examine in greater detail the spiritual

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163 Mignolo and Vazquez use the spellings “aestheTics” and “aestheSis” to accentuate the differences between the modern theory of art, and the decolonial rediscovery of the senses (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013). For stylistic reasons only (and not as a conceptual criticism), I do not employ these spellings.
component of this healing *aesthesis*, it will be useful to compare our understanding of decolonial aesthetics with a leading radical theorist of aesthetics: Jacques Rancière. Rancière has developed a theory of aesthetics intimately connected to an understanding of political praxis as the “redistribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2006). This formulation of the “redistribution of the sensible,” I believe, can elucidate for us the revolutionary “word-making” element of decolonial *aesthesis* as a “poietic praxis” and a “practical poiesis.” These formulations will also add another layer of complexity to what in Chapter Two was conceived as Wynter’s “autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh.”

Rancière echoes Kant in conceiving aesthetics as a “system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience” (Rancière 2006, 13). However, in doing so, he is invested in connecting such aesthetic experience to political praxis. Accordingly, for Rancière, the modern regime of aesthetics is “a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Rancière 2006, 13). For instance, the experience of modern politics is the organization of power and the distribution of roles based on a specific field of sensible possibility. This experience of politics Rancière renames “the police,” and it is to be understood as inherently antithetical to the properly political (Rancière 1999, 28). The political, on the other hand, exemplifies the logic of equality that breaks with the unequal organization of power and distribution of roles laid down by the police (Rancière 1999, 29). For Rancière, therefore, political praxis entails the “redistribution of the sensible” against the *policing* of what is visible, sayable, and thus politically possible. It is the expansion of the aesthetic field of sensation to include those who have no part in it.
In its rediscovery of *aesthesis*, the project of decolonizing aesthetics is well understood as a redistribution of the sensible that targets the policing logics of Eurocentric sensibilities. The redistribution of the sensible is here the poietic praxis and a practical poiesis of liberation, the irruption that supplements and therefore consequently modifies the field of aesthetic-political possibility in a way that shows the exclusive gaps of previous arrangements. In my view, this modification is what Wynter refers to as the “constant revolutionary assault” against reality – as the first epigraph to this chapter indicates (Wynter 1976, 129). I shall now examine in greater detail the spiritual component of a decolonial *aesthesis*.

4.2 Spirit and Poetic Knowledge: On Postreligious Theopoetics

In 2011, a group of artists and thinkers collectively self-published a brief text identified as the Decolonial Aesthetics Manifesto (Institute 2011). This text concisely pronounces the intervention of decolonial aesthetics vis-à-vis postmodern and altermodern aesthetics.\(^{164}\) In short, postmodern aesthetics are critical of the main claims of modernity (such as universality) but are said to be modern in so far as they remain unconcerned to what lies beyond Europe. Altermodern aesthetics, on the other hand, announce the exhaustion of postmodernity, and call for a rearticulation of a global modernity, but without repeating the impositions of the previous modernity (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013, Rudrum and Stavris 2015). Accordingly, decolonial aesthetics are not to be conceived as yet another iteration of modern aesthetics (like the two other recent aesthetic movements), but are instead to characterize another direction towards “re-inscribing, embodying and dignifying those ways of living, thinking and sensing that were violently devalued or demonized by

\(^{164}\) I will elaborate on the relation between postmodern, altermodern, and decolonial aesthetics in the conclusion to this dissertation.
colonial, imperial and interventionist agendas as well as by postmodern and altermodern internal critiques” (Institute 2011).

Towards this end, the Decolonial Aesthetics Manifesto conceives of the decolonization of aesthetics as an endeavor that ought to be “intercultural, inter-epistemic, inter-political, inter-aesthetical and inter-spiritual” (Institute 2011). While each of these designations deserves its own careful study, in this section I explore the significance of “inter-spiritual” praxis to the advancement of a decolonial aesthesis, as developed in the work of several contemporary theorists. Postulating the correlation between aesthetic and spiritual experiences will allow me to clarify how aesthetics can take a central role in the decolonization of the secular/religious divide. This will be seen in action in two concrete examples from the Caribbean and Latinx literary arena.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres, one of the signatories of the Decolonial Aesthetics Manifesto, has recently further articulated the connection between aesthetic and spiritual elements in the process of decolonization (Maldonado-Torres 2016). For Maldonado-Torres, “Decolonial aesthetic creation, including decolonial performances of self and subjectivity are, among other things, rituals that seek to keep the body open as a continued source of questions, as a bridge to connect to others, and as prepared to act” (Maldonado-Torres 2016). Like Alexander’s emphasis on ceremony, the ritual of creation here is a major component in the transformation of subjectivity. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that Maldonado-Torres’s account is premised on the work of Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde, both of whom convey the association between artistic creation and spirituality in indispensable terms – as we saw in Chapter Three. Anzaldúa’s notion of “spiritual mestizaje” can here be retrieved as an inter-spiritual element in the recovery of aesthesis.
And because Anzaldúa uses spiritual mestizaje and spiritual activism interchangeably (Anzaldúa 2007, 103, 2015, 39), a line of questioning is opened as well to inquiry into the relation between inter-spiritual and inter-political practices as a redistribution of the sensible. Thus, following the work of women of color feminists, for Maldonado-Torres, “Decolonial artistic creation and decolonial spirituality aim to keep the body and the mind open as well as to keep the senses sharpened in ways that can best respond critically to anything that aims to produce ontological separation” (Maldonado-Torres 2016, 27). And if the secular/religious divide is taken to be a source of “ontological separation,” then the inter-spiritual praxis of decolonial aesthetics should be understood as demanding a postsecular and postreligious horizon of thought and action.

Another theorist that is helpful in thematizing the spiritual element of decolonizing aesthetic experience is the theologian Mark L. Taylor, for whom aesthetics is the language of the theological (Taylor 2011). For Taylor, the theological is not the same as institutional theology (i.e. Theology), but quite on the contrary, is what escapes or exceeds Theology. In this sense, if “doctrine” is the guild language of institutional theology, then the language that escapes it is the symbolic artful image, which conveys “the promise and threat of the spectral, the haunting by peoples and groups who are often rendered disposable, excluded, and oppressed” (Taylor 2011, 12). This understanding of a theologically spectral aesthetics usefully supplements Dussel’s notion of aesthetics as the moment of creativity in the dialectical process after the negation of the system and the affirmation of the Other, as well as Wynter’s view of aesthetics as a revolutionary world-making praxis. Indeed, it is the spectrality of artistic creation, its spirit, that makes such poietic praxis and practical poiesis threatening to the system. The auto-poiesis/poetics of the flesh (analyzed in the last two
chapters) here emerge in their most compelling revolutionary form as nothing less than the “spirit of revolution” (Cornell and Seely 2016) i.e. as the creation of a new words/worlds.

Taylor’s theological rendering of aesthetics brings us to the discourse of theopoetics as a hermeneutic lens through which to interpret the intersection of aesthetic and spiritual experience. Theopoetics finds itself at the juncture between aesthetics and the theological to understand how spirit is expressed in practice i.e. how it is fleshed in the Word. Initially pioneered by mid-twentieth century theologians such as Stanley Hopper and Amos Wilder, a contemporary revival of theopoetics pays “greater attention to form, genre, and the methods of theological reflection, particularly the ways in which certain theological voices are given authority and others are marginalized” (Keefe-Perry 2016). For Scott Holland, theopoetics is about “experimenting with imaginative constructions of God and artful compositions of the self. It is a genre of writing – and living – that focuses on an evolving poiesis: an artful, inventive, intuitive and imaginative act of composition performed by authors” (Holland 2016). A decolonial intervention into this genre has been opened by Patrick Reyes, who argues that “indigenous practices that [seek] to recover lost religious and cultural practices” are a type of theopoetics (Reyes 2016). Theopoetics here signifies “the creative language of a community and its members to express what is above and what is beyond” (Reyes 2016), similar to Taylor’s conception of the artful image. To be sure, however, there remains an ambiguity in theopoetic discourse concerning the extent to which institutional theology and doctrine reassert themselves back into the theorization of aesthetic-spiritual experience. Such ambiguity is not present in the work of all the other
figures we have analyzed in this dissertation, unequivocally equating decolonial aesthetics and spirituality with a form of post-religiosity.\textsuperscript{165}

The postreligious theopoetics that emerge in the writings of the figures analyzed in this chapter, to echo Wynter, is a \textit{heretic} or \textit{demonic} theopoetic that departs from how colonial constructs (such as race and gender) condition one’s subjective and intersubjective field of perception. This is a decolonial redistribution of the sensible that, as its practical element of affirmation, seeks to break the chains of the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon 2004). As Taylor argues, the symbolic power of the theological is rooted in the material corporeality of the flesh that “wears out chains” and eventually makes them snap (Taylor 2011, 222).\textsuperscript{166}

The work of Mayra Rivera is another contributor to this decolonial theopoetic. In her \textit{Poetics of the Flesh}, one finds a historical and analytical contextualization of the notion of “flesh” that brings together European philosophy, Christian theology, Caribbean thought/poetics, and U.S. women of color feminism, to challenge the epistemic foundations of the secular/religious divide (Rivera 2015). Following Cherríe Moraga’s theory-in-the-flesh paradigm (analyzed in Chapter Three), where the flesh generates alternative ways of producing knowledge, Rivera conceptualizes flesh as the “constitutive relation to the world” premised on “the susceptibility to being shaped by the world” (Rivera 2015, 94). Not assuming “a simple opposition between theology and literature or between metaphysics and critical thought,” Rivera follows the “poetic longings and creativity in all

\textsuperscript{165} Taylor elaborates on the notion of a decolonizing spirituality in a forthcoming article titled “Decolonizing Spirituality,” set to appear as part of a special issue on “Decolonizing Spiritualities” that I am currently editing.

\textsuperscript{166} This line is taken from Victor Serge’s poetry. In this intervention, Taylor deploys Serge’s line “In time, flesh will wear out chains,” to criticize the neo-colonial regime of mass incarceration in the United States (Taylor 2014).
these modes of thought” (Rivera 2015, 4, 2). This is an understanding of poetics rooted in the Caribbean poet-philosopher Edouard Glissant, whose *Poetics of Relation* (1997) is the main architectonic of Rivera’s *Poetics of the Flesh*. If Taylor deconstructs the “theo” in theopoetics, Rivera accordingly does the same to the “poetics” side of the equation, expanding the notion to involve “not only styles of writing, but also modes of knowing, being, and acting in the world” (Rivera 2015, 4).

If for Glissant, the world is grasped with a capacious conception of “Relation,” Rivera enfleshes this concept to be one’s “condition for corporeal survival and flourishing as well as the source of its vulnerability,” a condition that is in fact “the basis of all life and all knowledge” (Rivera 2015, 94). And since “opacity” is the “real foundation of Relation” (Glissant 1997, 190), in contrast to the transparency of enlightenment rationality, the flesh is said to reveal the dark and mysterious depths of the world.167 Once again, we have seen this in our analysis of Anzaldúa and Alexander, where the flesh is a palimpsest of entangled relationalities that contains long-lost histories, memories, and material elements. This is why, for Rivera, the “flesh remembers things I never knew and will never know” (Rivera 2015, 110), and the poetics of the flesh must dissect how the flesh is constituted by social and geographic elements often ignored in purely biocentric (in Wynter’s sense) accounts of flesh. Anzaldúa’s well-known indictment of the U.S.-Mexico border as an “open wound,” “staking fence rods in my flesh” (Anzaldúa 2007, 24), also analyzed in Chapter Three and picked up by Mignolo and Vazquez as the metaphor for the experience of

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167 The transparency of enlightenment rationality survives in (post)modern thought. Rivera here has in mind the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, who tries to undo the Cartesian mind/body dualism by folding the former within the latter. In doing so, however, Rivera argues that Nancy flattens and discards the utility of “flesh” (as opposed to “body”) as simply “too religious” (Rivera 2015, 12). Nancy’s bodies are consequently “pure extension–no inside, obscurity, beneath, or beyond” (Rivera 2015, 97-98). In this regard, Nancy’s work ends up showing itself as simply being all-too-modern in its self-appointed construction of the secular and the religious.
coloniality, is for Rivera the paradigmatic example of such materially-embodied theorizing that is at once poetic and political” (Rivera 2015, 151).

An analogous intervention into a decolonial theopoetic, rising not from the ruins of theology but from continental philosophy of religion, can be found in An Yountae’s *The Decolonial Abyss* (2017). An takes as a point of departure Glissant’s poetics, particularly his account of the Middle Passage, to politicize the Christian theological notion of the mystical abyss while simultaneously excavating spiritual resources in Caribbean thought. This turbulent navigation leads to a reading of Glissant as a secular mystic (An 2017, 24) where the spiritual and the political fuse towards a poetics aimed at liberation and solidarity (An 2017, 121). Like it was the case in Rivera’s work, poetics here entail a mode of being that simultaneously is epistemic, aesthetic, political, and spiritual, making possible an open “creolized future” or a future where the subject striving to overcome trauma embodies relational possibilities once thought impossible within the colonial abyss (An 2017, 129).

The implementation of the concept of *creolization* is here pertinent for the purposes of decolonizing the secular/religious divide vis-à-vis aesthetic and spiritual experience. For Glissant, “What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible” (Glissant 1997, 34). “It is not merely an encounter, a shock… a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the

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168 Following Korean naming conventions, I am here referring to An Yountae by his last name.

169 “Secular” because it is unconcerned with dogmas about “God or transcendence” (An 2017, 5), thus being located outside Theology. To be sure, it remains unclear the extent to which such deployment of the “secular” is, for An, in line with a notion of postsecularity. It should be clear that for me, this would be a secularity that works along a decolonizing notion of the postsecular.
mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry” (Glissant 1997, 34). A central practice in the Caribbean that is often described as the undesirable racial or linguistic mixing of pure components, An productively reads creolization as a mode of becoming where the elements interacting are always already creolized or in an inter-relational flux, therefore exceeding the politics of purity of “onto(theo)logy” that freeze the dynamism of becoming into the stillness of being (An 2017, 118). Creolization could thus be an example of the “intercultural, inter-epistemic, inter-political, inter-aesthetical and inter-spiritual” praxis that a decolonial retrieval of aesthesis is trying to get at. Here, the healing aesthesis of Glissant’s theopoetics of the abyss makes possible the reconstruction of the traumatized/colonized self in a way that both orthodox theological and secular-philosophical accounts of the abyss (blind to the colonial difference) are unable to accomplish. In Glissant, the abyss of the Middle Passage is transformed into the “womb abyss” that gives birth to a new collective/national consciousness in Relation (An 2017, 106). This the world-making praxis that Wynter has in mind when she calls for a re-writing of aesthetic symbolic orders to redefine what is means to be human.

The opacity behind Relation, which for Rivera grounds the depths of the flesh/world/word, is in fact the dwelling place that amalgamates the epistemic, aesthetic, political, and spiritual dimensions in a way that no original elements can be split up. Such opacity, “In the end became knowledge” (Glissant 1997, 8). If this is a poetic knowledge,

170 I explore the inter-spiritual aspect of creolization in my analysis of Cristina Garcia’s *Monkey Hunting* in the next section. For an analysis of racial politics of purity, see Michael Monahan’s *The Creolizing Subject* (2011).

171 Unlike Rivera’s *Poetics of the Flesh*, An’s *The Decolonial Abyss* does not engage women of color thinkers. Alexander’s account of the abyss, not to mention Anzaldúa’s notion of the “cavernous womb,” would no doubt add a more critical layer of analysis to An’s cosmo-political theology. I have previously made this criticism in my review of An’s text (Vizcaino 2018).
Glissant is here paying his debts to Aimé Césaire, whose critique of the Western regime of knowledge production claims that modern scientism sacrifices the faculty of sensibility in a way that creates a deep silence out of which poetic knowledge emerges (Césaire 1990) – as I analyzed in Chapter Two. “Only the sacred phenomenon of love,” Césaire claims, can still give us an idea of what that is hidden in that silence (Césaire 1990, xliii). We now have the tools to evaluate Césaire’s poetic knowledge as an inter-spiritual decolonial aesthesis, where the sacredness of love (Lorde’s erotic) directs the process of transformation towards healing the open wound of coloniality.\(^{172}\) The aesthetics of proximity and the mystery of a relational opacity here amalgamate to conceive what has been called *decolonial love* (Díaz 2012, Figueroa 2015). I will go into more detail concerning this concept in the next section of this chapter, as part of my reading of Junot Díaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.\(^{173}\)

4.3 Caribbean and Latinx Literary Responses to the Coloniality of Secularism

It is via this emerging lens of a postreligious decolonial theopoetics that I want to now analyze how Caribbean and Latinx literature put forward a redistribution of the aesthetico-political field of possibility in a way that breaks the chains of our modern/colonial regime of perception. In the two examples below, by no means exhaustive or representative of Caribbean and Latinx literature, we see the fleshing of the Word as a

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\(^{172}\) Lorde reminds us that poetry is the genre through which women have been able to historically bridge the Eurocentric division between ideas and feelings. In her famous formulation, poetry is not a luxury, but a “vital necessity of our existence,” a channel that spans from language, to ideas, to action – “Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought” (Lorde 2007, 37).

\(^{173}\) Césaire also contributes to the critique of the coloniality of time with his notion of the *untimely* as a womb of possibility where “the historical present is not – or no longer appears to be – identical with itself” (Wilder 2015, 37). For Césaire, to grasp the untimeliness of lived experience leads one to become clairvoyant or prophetic. In this sense, Césaire comes close to the prophetic tradition of Caribbean intellectuals, in Anthony Bogues’s typology (2003).
revolutionary assault against reality. In their symbolic enunciations, one sees glimpses at the autopoiesis/autopoetics of the flesh in a struggle against modern/colonial sensibilities and modalities of being. This is part of a decolonial aesthesis that expands the aesthetico-political field of possibility to heal the wounds of the fragmented/traumatized/colonized subject. The theological element of these interpretations, as a haunting spectrality, will be seen in how spirituality is represented as a form of poetic knowledge that imagines other ways of being-in-the-world beyond the coloniality of being.

4.3.1 Exilic Flesh

Cristina Garcia’s *Monkey Hunting* depicts the lived experiences of three generations of Chinese-Cubans in the Americas, from Chen Pan (the first generation that was enslaved to work alongside African slaves in Cuba’s sugar plantations) to Domingo Chen (who fled Cuba’s Revolution to fight in the Vietnam War on U.S. side). Along the way, the novel deals with questions of ethnic and national belonging, the legacies of slavery in the social and cultural life of the Americas, as well as with the politics of sexuality and racialization. We encounter the first Chinese maroon in Cuba’s history, the creation of a new people (Afro-Chinese Cubans), as well as the complications and longings of diasporic life, whether in Cuba, China, the U.S., or Vietnam. *Monkey Hunting* enters the fire in flesh and blood to question the naturalization of the conceptual unit of home.\(^{174}\) Problematising a facile binary between home/diaspora, the novel harnesses what I call “exilic flesh” without falling into an idealist romanticizing of the space of the in-between that often ignores the materialities of the flesh and its spiritual needs.

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\(^{174}\) See my discussion of the queer poetics of women of color feminism (Chapter Three) to understand what is at stake with the metaphor of “entering the fire.”
It is the third and fourth generations of Chen Pan’s descendants that most deeply complicate the binary between home and diaspora. One experiences transnational geographic displacement, the other does not. Both, however, share a similar experience that ties them together without each knowing about the existence and situation of the other. On the one hand, Chen Fang is Chen Pan’s granddaughter (third generation), the third child of the famous Doctor Chino Lorenzo Chen, who spent time studying Chinese medicine in mainland China as an Afro-Chinese Cuban foreigner. By the time Chen Fang is born in China, Lorenzo “had return to Havana a stranger after being a foreigner abroad” (García 2004, 191), leaving his wife back in China with their three children. Despite legally being assigned to the female gender upon birth, Chen Fang grows up in China passing as a boy to secure money from her father (who would only fund the education of a boy as Chinese girls could not attend school). From her sexual and gendering experiences, Chen Fang does not feel like she belongs like everyone else around her. Because of such experience of nonbelonging, she longs to identify with her absent Afro-Chinese Cuban father and wishes to leave for Cuba, where she imagines she can have the freedom to marry anyone she wants – thinking that in Cuba it would be acceptable for a woman to marry another woman (García 2004, 92). When the First World War stops Lorenzo’s money from reaching Chen Fang’s mother, Chen Fang “become[s] a woman,” being forced to marry a man whose family paid Chen Fang’s mother for her service as a wife (García 2004, 92).

Chen Fang’s otherness, both in terms of her sexuality and her identification with her Afro-Chinese Cuban father, challenges the home/diaspora binary by rendering her lived experience at “home” one that instead resembles that of diaspora. In this sense, Chen Fang inhabits the crossroads despite her lack of geographic crossing. She is an atravezada who
does not belong at “home,” but who needs to make the crossing to feel at home: sexually and nationally/ethnically. Chen Fang thus embodies the state of *nepantla* as Anzaldúa conceives it (as we saw in Chapter Three). This is a state of *nepantla* in tension, one close to the pain of the Coatlicue State, and not a facile valorization of the in-between space at the expense of materiality and spirituality.

Such crossing in tension is exemplified by Chen Fang’s last years of her life. Having never made it to Cuba, thus never being able to love freely, Chen Fang spends her last days (depicted in the “Last Rites” section of the novel) under solitary confinement by the Chinese communist government for her homosexuality. Living under confinement, a seeming contradiction to the practice of crossing, does not prevent her from entering the fire in flesh and blood; in fact, confinement seems to encourage the crossing: “Here in my cell, I live in my body more familiarly than before” (García 2004, 231). What give her sustenance all those years, to the surprise of the prison guards, is the spiritual nourishment of poetry, despite not having paper to read or write on.

For Chen Fang, as it will also be the case with Domingo, poetry becomes the unifying structure that ties together the subject in diaspora (exilic flesh). Indeed, for the entirety of Chen Pan’s family, poetry becomes a symbolic stand-in for something like family legacy, as poetry is the only memento that Chen Pan brings from China to Cuba. The fact that Chen Pan’s father lived as a “good poet” is the only thing that Chen Pan’s Cuban descendants know about their family history in China – despite the fact that he was “incapable of composing verses on assigned subjects, as was required by examiners” to become an official imperial poet (García 2004, 11). The spiritual nourishment of poetry that Chen Fang finds in confinement is a material healing mechanism that allows her to
survive in a condition of ontological damnation, learning to “live in [her] body more familiarly than before.”

Domingo Chen is Lorenzo Chen’s grandson, the fourth and latest generation of Chen Pan’s descendants depicted in *Monkey Hunting*. Seeking to revenge the debilitation of his father (Pipo Chen) at the hands of the Cuban communist government, who targeted Pipo for not supporting the Cuban Revolution, Domingo deserts to the U.S. and soon (after the death by suicide of his father in the New York City subway) joins the U.S. Army’s fight against the communist forces in Vietnam. Unlike Chen Fang, Domingo experiences transnational geographic displacement. The psychic consequences of this displacement are not unlike Chen Fang’s, however. As a classic example of diaspora, Domingo does not easily feel “at home” in his new home. To forge such feeling of belonging, Domingo needs to make the crossing in psychic terms. This leads him to enlist in the U.S army and to cross over to Vietnam to prove his new nation that he is worthy of their recognition. What Domingo encounters in Vietnam, however, is what complicates his seemingly simplistic narrative of diasporic flight.

Because Domingo has a “heavy accent and brown skin” (García 2004, 107), he does not find the trust of his colleagues. It is in such second-order crossing that Domingo discovers the markings on his flesh in a way that, as Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel has put it (in the context of the biographical narratives of Piri Thomas and Frantz Fanon), “subvert[s] the value of citizenship as a crucial step for the construction of subjects who belong legally to the metropolitan society but not to its national imaginary” (Martínez-San Miguel 2014, 123). From discovering the workings of his flesh, Domingo’s worldview is shattered. Now the hidden marks of his flesh become an object of thought and a nascent
thinking subject. This is a painful process from which Domingo would not come out unscathed.

The moment when Domingo’s world collapses takes place when he enters a Vietnamese boy’s makeshift cave to gather evidence of guerilla activities. Instead of finding the communist enemy, the alien, or the Other, he “felt oddly at home there” (García 2004, 109). This sense of familiarity collapses Domingo’s justificatory schema for his presence in Vietnam, an implicit affirmation of imperial Americanity at the expense of his colonial difference as an Afro-Chinese-American subject. Closely reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s prophetic sensorial slippage (“A la cueva volverán” – as discussed in Chapter Three), when Domingo thought he was positively deviating from his historic path (joining the U.S. anti-communist efforts), all he was doing was actually returning home, to the “cavernous womb” to which we will all return. In Domingo’s case, the cavernous womb is quite literally the Viet Con’s cave that makes him feel oddly at home back with his Cuban communist mother. For it was Domingo’s own mother who testified against her husband for anti-revolutionary activities, leading to his arrest, psychological torture, and eventual desertion along with Domingo – when Domingo’s mother finds out that he has joined the U.S. Army, she drops all communication with him. Far from affirming his imperial belonging to the U.S., Domingo’s crossing to Vietnam reconnects him to the repressed loci of colonial difference as expressed in his living flesh: not only his blackness, and his anti-imperialist communist mother, but also but his Chinese ancestors, with whom he is connected via a literal poetic relationality. After all, inside the Vietnamese cave, Domingo also found scraps of poems covering the walls, which he wanted to keep and translate (García 2004, 109). The racist suspicion of his colleagues is thus ironically confirmed, but
at a deeper existential level that only now he alone realizes: the depths of his flesh, its poetic markings and not any superficial ascriptions e.g. skin color, connect him more to the Viet Con than to his own U.S. American colleagues. He is the alien, the Other, that he was looking for.

Entering the cavernous womb is tantamount to staring at the Serpent and falling into the Coatlicue State. It is in this painful process of deconstruction and reconstruction of all conceptual categories of thought that Domingo imagines the enemy “speaking to him in Spanish, fast and with a Cuban accent” (García 2004, 116). In the Coatlicue State, the cavernous womb of the mother, at the crossroads of nepantla, the familiar and the strange blur towards a zone of indistinction where the only language at work is that of the poetics of the flesh. Lost in this whirlwind, Domingo visits Tham Thanh Lan, a Vietnamese sex worker. Upon first sight, there seems to be a special connection between them, as her eyes “widened as if she recognized him […] She seemed familiar to Domingo, like he’d known her as a child” (García 2004, 155). Domingo “looked at her face and wondered what love had to do with memory. Did it ransack the past the way a song could? The body, he thought, stored everything in its flesh” (García 2004, 162). The poetics of the flesh here point towards a shared relationality that is hidden just beneath the epidermal surface. Domingo is right there, in the cavernous womb that for Glissant is the “womb abyss” which has the power to give birth to a new subjectivity; staring at the abyss, asking the questions that Alexander poses about the relation between memory and the flesh to “become intimate with [the] danger zone,” to be able to “create anew; to enter the fire not figuratively, or metaphorically, but actually, that is, in flesh and blood” (Alexander 2005, 266). It is at this
moment where the poetic thinking in the flesh is ready to create the politic(s) born out of necessity.

Domingo now finds himself in a similar situation as Chen Pan’s vis-à-vis Lucrecia four generations before, who Chen Pan buys out of the slave economy to build a life together. In the abyss, Domingo imagines building a world with Tham Thanh Lan in a way that would take her out of the cycle of violence in which she finds herself. Putting in place the groundwork for such actions and contemplating its radical consequences (especially as a U.S. soldier), Domingo simply does not have the will to enter the fire. At a Buddhist pagoda, praying either to Buddha or Changó in a paradigmatic example of the inter-spiritual practice of creolization, Domingo chooses to leave Vietnam, and like so many U.S. soldiers did, leaves a pregnant Tham Thanh Lan behind. Instead of making the crossing, Domingo retraces his steps. He is unable to cope with an understanding of the construction of home in/as nepantla, with an understanding of his role in the U.S. imperial military and symbolic devastation of Vietnam as a colonial subject himself, with his own racial and poetic markings on his flesh, and with the psychic realignments needed to enact a spiritual re-linking and process of rebirth into a new Man (Fanon) capable of loving after the ruins of coloniality. Just as it was the case with Chen Fang, there is no facile resolution to this Coatlicue State; just the constant and unending process of healing (Anzaldúa 2015, 20).  

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175 Domingo’s inter-spiritual experiences also speak to Lorde’s understanding of the erotic as a spiritual epistemology in the flesh. In an early scene, Domingo finds himself sexualizing the feet of the Virgin Mary, a spiritual and erotic exploration that immediately leads to remember his own sexual assault traumas (García 2004, 51-2).

176 Indeed, Domingo is an example of what Christina Sharpe calls “wake work” (Sharpe 2016, 19). Seeking “to articulate a method of encountering a past that is not past,” Sharpe wants to “depict aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of
Monkey Hunting problematizes a facile binary between home/diaspora without falling into a postmodern idealizing of the in-between that tends to ignore the materialities of the flesh and its spiritual needs. In this sense, Monkey Hunting puts forth a type of a “poetics of the flesh” where home is the flesh that one carries on one’s back, in the vernacular of women of color feminists (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2016). The home is not simply the place that one leaves in diaspora, nor is it the place where one finds oneself now. Home is instead conceptualized in post-continental terms (Maldonado-Torres 2006c), as found in “the blood of [Chen Pan’s] grandsons as it traveled through their flesh” (García 2004, 192). Home is a process of relating to one another in community beyond any land-based geographic markers (beyond continental thinking), beyond a naturalized biological notion of the family. Given the importance of poetry in Chen Pan’s family history, finding poems in the Viet Con’s cave is for Domingo a return to the cavernous womb of the home, as for Chen Fang reciting poetry in solitary confinement is a way to live in her flesh in resistance. In Monkey Hunting, the flesh connects subjects to themselves and across generations, diachronically and synchronically, in an example of how a poetics of the flesh is always a poetics of relation and a poetics in the flesh. The flesh, moreover, is only discovered in the practice of crossing, in nepantla. It is a receptacle of memory and the bond that builds sociality and community across differences. And yet, there is no guaranteed teleology of healing in such poetics. Chen Fang and Domingo remain in nepantla across different borderlands, with no concrete resolution and with no tangible experience of decolonial love: one lives ontological damnation in solitary confinement, the other is traumatized by war and unable to enter the fire in flesh and blood.

slavery’s denial of Black humanity” (Sharpe 2016, 13-14). Wake work in this sense is a “theory and praxis of the wake” of slavery, “a theory and a praxis of Black being in diaspora” (Sharpe 2016, 19).
4.3.2 Decolonial Love as a Sacred Gift of Self

Junot Díaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* traces the conundrums of the Cabral and De León families from the shadows of the Trujillato in the Dominican Republic to the poverty-stricken streets of New Jersey. The book’s narrator, Yunior de las Casas, now a college writing instructor, seeks to make sense of a complex set of archival materials that sit inside three refrigerators in his basement. This compilation is the “book” that we as readers are reading. The novel’s center of gravity from the first line of the novel is Oscar’s curse, which is part of the larger curse that we all take part in, whether we believe it or not (for *it* believes in us! (Díaz 2007, 5)):

> They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and other began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially fukú, - generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and Doom of the New World. (Díaz 2007, 1)

That the curse’s medium (how it travels across spaces and times) is also the infrastructure of the modern/colonial world-system (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992) is a reason why scholars of decoloniality have picked up *Oscar Wao* as an important element in the analysis of coloniality.178

My interpretation of *Oscar Wao* seeks to contribute to existing scholarship on Díaz’s decolonial contributions by reading this text within the framework of a decolonial theopoetics. In my view, Junot Díaz’s work is a descendant of other figures in the

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177 For a study of this framing in terms of archival theory, see my colleague Enmanuel Martinez’s dissertation “The archipelago and the archive” (2019).

178 See the recent anthology *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Hanna, Harford Vargas, and Saldívar 2016). José David Saldívar has been a pioneer on this front, going as far as making a contribution into world systems-theory out of Díaz’s literary constructions (Saldívar 2011).
Caribbean (theo)poetic tradition, like Césaire and Glissant, and is deeply in debt to the work of women of color feminists.\textsuperscript{179} Oscar Wao’s first line cited above can thus be read comparatively vis-à-vis the first line in Glissant’s \textit{Poetics of Relation}: “For the Africans who lived through the experience of deportation to the Americas, confronting the unknown with neither preparation nor challenge was no doubt petrifying” (Glissant 1997, 5). If for Glissant, what was carried in the screams of the enslaved were nothing less than universal events (Glissant 1997, 74),\textsuperscript{180} I argue Díaz’s work seeks to widen the aesthetic field of “sonorous” sensibility in a way that the universality of those cries can be sensed as they reverberate in the world today. This is part of a decolonial aesthesis that responds to Glissant’s “cry of poetry” (Glissant 1997, 9) to give meaning to the colonial experience in a way that makes the cries “sound nothing less than differently pitched humanities” (Weheliye 2014, 332), thus opening new vistas on what it means to be human upon the ruins of coloniality.

\textit{Oscar Wao}’s main contribution to such widening of the scope of what it means to be human is its exploration of decolonial love. Aligning his literary vision within the project of decoloniality, Díaz has famously claimed that “The kind of love that I was interested in, that my characters long for intuitively, is the kind of love that could liberate them from that horrible legacy of colonial violence. I am speaking about decolonial love” (Díaz 2012). My exegesis aspires to articulate such understanding of decolonial love to reveal that it is a sacred praxis embodied (Alexander, Césaire) that cures/heals, and which

\textsuperscript{179} Díaz himself has acknowledge numerous times that perhaps his main influences as a young writer were all women of color, especially Toni Morrison and Sandra Cisneros (Díaz 2012).

\textsuperscript{180} For Glissant, every cry on a slave ship to the Americas or at a Plantation “was an event” and is also “the only sort of universality there is” (Glissant 1997, 73-74).
can only be perceived after a decolonization of sensibility. Out of the wounds of the colonial abyss, decolonial love names the marks on the flesh to be able to understand and treat them (Lorde 2007), most visibly seen in the constructs of race and gender. Rooted in a generous open receptivity to the other (Fanon 2008) that remembers (Alexander, Glissant), and that in its most radical formulation leads to the point of substitution (Maldonado-Torres 2008a), decolonial love aims to heal the colonial traumas that live under the flesh of subjects and entire communities, allowing one to conceive of alternative ways of living (and dying) beyond the ruins of modernity/coloniality.

The “first sign” that Oscar’s family had been cursed was that Beli (Oscar’s mother) had been “born black.” And “not just any black. But black – kongoblack, shangoblack, kaliblack, zapoteblack, rekhablack – and no amount of fancy Dominican racial legerdemain was going to obscure that fact” (Díaz 2007, 248). What was once carried in the screams of the enslaved now survives in processes of epidermal sedimentation as racialization. In the ethno-nationalism of Trujillo’s Dominican Republic, being-Black (a prieta) is tantamount to not being a Dominican; which is to say, to being a Haitian, a noncitizen. Being sold into servanthood as a toddler upon the death of her family, Beli’s curse unmasks the temporal omnipresence of coloniality. The screams of the enslaved are not to be found only in the past, they can continue to be heard today in those liminal subjects marked by the logic of coloniality.

Literary analyses of Oscar Wao here tend to go on to analyze Beli’s rescue by the benevolence of her aunt La Inca. In doing such move, however, their hermeneutic frameworks take part in the reproduction of the coloniality of knowledge by not giving ethical and epistemic agency to a minor but vital character in the novel’s narrative that has
chronological precedence to La Inca’s appearance. If La Inca does subsequently rescue Beli from captivity, it is only because Zoila, the dark-skinned neighbor of the Cabral’s family, first fed Beli with her own breastmilk before she was taken away and sold into virtual slavery by distant relatives. What is taken for granted in these literary analyses that simply forget Zoila is the labor that racialized and gendered damned flesh performs in nurturing life, in this case Beli’s life. Forgotten and invisibilized by a literary establishment that only perceives what it has categories to understand, Zoila’s flesh is an example of the embodied generosity of the damné that exceeds dominant logics and categories of understanding. Her labor is therefore a labor of love in the ways it was theorized earlier by Césaire (and Lorde in the previous chapter). By allegory, Zoila represents the repressed and therefore unacknowledged contributions of gendered and racialized bodies to the construction of the modern/colonial world-system.\footnote{For Glissant, those that live in the colonial abyss “do not brag of being chosen. They do not believe they are giving birth to any modern force. They live Relation and clear the way for it, to the extent that the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and that, consequently, their memory intensifies” (Glissant 1997, 8).}

An interpretation of Oscar Wao that seeks to expand the aesthetico-political field of possibility must understand Zoila’s positionality within the narrative as the “demonic ground” which contains an “alterability” to shift the “ground beneath our feet” (McKittrick 2006, 146). I follow Katherine McKittrick’s development of the notion of “demonic ground,” which itself builds upon Sylvia Wynter’s groundbreaking critique of mainstream feminist literary criticism (Wynter 1990) – analyzed in Chapter Two – to understand the demonic as the epistemological locus from which what appears to Man as unspeakable or invisible gets to speak or appear in defiance of Man’s rules. The demonic is here theological in that it haunts a dominant lens of interpretation that is invested in silencing subjects like
Zoila. Therefore, centering Zoila’s demonic grounds shifts our own lens of interpretation (our hermeneutic ground) to be open to listen the poetic cries of the damné: it is a redistribution of the sensible that allows us to see in Zoila an image of decolonial love.

Because Zoila only appears as a passing glimpse in the narrative of *Oscar Wao*, however, the novel’s more substantial exploration of the demonic grounds of racialized women is in the relationship between Beli and her daughter Lola. In the relational flesh-to-flesh intimacy between mother and daughter that captures the threat of breast cancer (when Beli asks Lola to feel the bump within her breast), one glimpses at once the coloniality of one’s material conditions of possibility and an epistemology that seeks to make sense of this beyond the knowability of the given (beyond what medical science can tell us about breast cancer). This will be an erotic epistemology based on the opaque silences of the flesh that harnesses the spiritual powers of the flesh-in-Relation (flesh-to-flesh), as articulated by Lorde. As Yunior puts it in lieu of what will be the only first person narrative in the entirety of *Oscar Wao*, “This is how it all starts: with your mother calling you into the bathroom” (Díaz 2007, 51). The minute series of realizations that unfold from such encounter are the core of Diaz’s poetic meditation on the epistemic and spiritual powers of the flesh. These meditations ground a further exploration of the difficulties of practicing a kind of love beyond the ruins of coloniality. At stake in this exploration is a comprehension of the kinds of traumas that live in the flesh of subjects touched by the legacies of colonization. In the case of this familial triad between Beli, Lola, and Oscar, besides racialization, there is a focus on how racialization is connected to violent processes of gendering, sexualization, dehumanization, and how these processes resonate across
generations, whether a physical perpetuation or as an afterlife in the collective unconscious. In this case, it is the seeming inevitability of Beli’s breast cancer.

The threat of breast cancer for Lola becomes not only an existential threat, but an ontological one that is not unlike the one that Beli suffered at the hands of Trujillo’s goons a generation earlier (to be analyzed below), nor unlike the one suffered by their enslaved ancestors in the times of chattel slavery. Lola’s “feeling, the scary witchy one” (Díaz 2007, 57) points to perceiving how one’s material conditions of possibility are sedimented in the flesh and therefore continue to undergird those marked subjects (racialized and gendered) in analogous but shifting ways, from the plantation to dictatorship and subsequently under diasporic working-class conditions of “social death” (Patterson 2018). In the language of Anzaldúa, this is la facultad at work – also analyzed in Chapter Three – conditioned by the yearning for wholeness, to belong (Alexander). That is why such ontological threat is not tacitly approved as inevitable but is challenged in the most radical way possible: imagining another way of knowing, being, and living. It is here where Lola gets both the “feeling” and an impulse to escape. The feeling points to an erotic epistemology that takes over the self under conditions of duress as a survival mechanism. As we shall see below, such awakening also occurs in Beli during her own traumatic event, when she is assaulted to the point of being given up for dead. Beli’s feeling alludes to the kind of poetic knowledge that is revealed by the spiritual powers of the flesh.

If Zoila stands for Oscar Wao’s demonic grounds (and is therefore external to the Dominican Republic’s own metanarrative system of legitimation), La Inca represents the internal critique from such system. As it is often discussed, it is La Inca who finds an exploited and captive Beli, and unlike other members of Beli’s family that rejected her due
to her blackness, affirms her as her own in her difference. Against the insistence of Beli’s captors that she could not be Abelard’s daughter because she is “a prieta” (Díaz 2007, 257). La Inca affirms Beli not from a logic of sameness, but one of distinctness, open to Beli’s othering blackness. It is the affirmation of this otherness as equal, an incomprehensible feat for Abelard’s ethno-nationalist family, that disarms, if only within this intersubjective relation, the oppressive power of racialization. This affirmation takes the form of, as Fanon puts it, a “movement of love” (Fanon 2008, 24), that sees (Lorde’s moment of naming the nameless) and challenges the racial ontology of the Dominican Republic, seeing in Beli’s eyes the haunting gazes of her parents: “when the girl emerged from the coop, unable to unbend her body because of the burn, La Inca had stared into her wild furious eyes and seen Abelard and Socorro staring back at her. Forget the black skin – it was her. The Third and Final Daughter. Though lost, now found” (Díaz 2007, 257).

Beli goes on to live a tumultuous life under the Trujillato, resulting in her exodus to the U.S. and subsequent diasporic life with her children, Oscar and Lola. Indeed, the principal event that structures the intergenerational traumas for the Cabral’s is Beli’s brutal beating by Trujillo’s goons in another type of demonic ground, the spatial geography of slavery: the sugarcane fields. This event directly sparks the family’s diasporic journey and particularly overdetermines all attempts to engage in the movement of love needed to heal traumas. Beaten “like she was a slave. Like she was a dog” (Díaz 2007, 147), it is

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182. It could thus be said that within the logic of decolonial love there is a form of de-racialization. Maldonado-Torres begins to theorize a form of de-racialization, alongside a form of “des-gener-acción,” (following the work of Laura Pérez in his essay “On the Coloniality of Being” (Maldonado-Torres 2007a). De-racialization is not to be confused with color-blindness approaches to racializing processes, which far from seeking to go “beyond race,” merely manage to naturalize its causes and effects.

183. The spatial geography of slavery maintains another temporality: “one second you were deep in the twentieth century, (well the twentieth century of the Third World) and the next you’d find yourself plunged 180 years into rolling fields of cane” (Díaz 2007, 146).
implicit that Beli was also raped. In the middle of the brutal ordeal, however, Díaz introduces a sliver of hope. Beli sees “for a brief instant La Inca praying in her room – the silence that lay between them now, stronger than love – and in the gloaming of her dwindling strength there yawned a loneliness so total that it was beyond death, a loneliness that obliterated all memory, the loneliness of a childhood where she’d not even had her own name” (Díaz 2007, 148). In the liminal space between living and dying, Beli has a vision of La Inca in spiritual fervor. La Inca in silent prayer gestures towards something that is “stronger than love” that has the power to negate death and forgetfulness, and that, like the cries born out of colonial violence, resonates across spatial-temporal coordinates. This spectral haunting is narratively symbolized in the “creature” that soon comes to Beli’s rescue. The creature “placed its intelligent little paws on her chest and stared down at her. You have to rise,” the creature says. “My baby, Beli wept. Mi hijo precioso. Hypatía, your baby is dead. No, no, no, no, no. It pulled at her unbroken arm. You have to rise now or you’ll never have the son or the daughter. What son? she wailed. What daughter? The ones who await” (Díaz 2007, 149).

Scholarly interpretations have not paid sufficient attention to this figure in Oscar Wao’s narrative. Often taken as a magical-realist *deux ex machina* device, “the Mongoose,” as the narrator refers to it for short, is initially described as quite the opposite: it *would* be a mongoose were it *not* for its “golden lion eyes and the absolute black of its pelt” (Díaz 2007, 149). A recurrent character during the most violent scenes in *Oscar Wao*, I argue the creature is the tool through which Diaz channels spirituality as a form of poetic knowledge. This fleshing of the Word is evident in the untimely revelation that Beli will have two more children that await their entrance into the world. This untimely revelation points to the
process of knowledge production under heightened senses and/or in the liminal position between living and dying *i.e.* in what Benjamin would call the time of rupture (*kairos*) (Benjamin 2007). This is tantamount to the survival mechanism that Lola discovers upon her flesh-to-flesh encounter with her mother. These untimely revelations disclose that knowledge can be produced under the most traumatic of times and spaces. These conjunctures are beyond language ("the end of language, the end of hope" (Díaz 2007, 147), only in so far as a new language is required to understand them: this is the language of revelation beyond expression (Dussel 1996).

Perhaps the broadest revelation that the creature embodies, however has to do with the complications of decolonial aspirations in a colonial world. Crucial to this interpretation is the fact that the footnote that contextualizes the creature within the novel’s narrative is not placed during any of the creature’s appearances, but instead is placed at the exact moment when a brutalized Beli is at last recognized and rescued by a group of passersby’s. Beli’s “golden eyes of a chabine,” and skin so dark to be taken to be an “haitiano” (Díaz 2007, 151) mirror the “golden lion eyes” and the “absolute black” of the “mongoose’s” pelt. With “a woman’s lilt” (Díaz 2007, 150), the mongoose in this specific example appears to be less a *deux ex machina* and more of an out-of-body exteriorization of Beli’s will to live, her yearning for wholeness, to belong. The footnote that historically contextualizes the Mongoose is worth citing in its entirety:

The Mongoose, one of the great unstable particles of the Universe and also one of its greatest travelers. Accompanied humanity out of Africa and after a long furlough in India jumped ship to the other India, a.k.a. the Caribbean. Since its earliest appearance in the written record – 675 B.C.E., in a nameless scribe's letter to Ashurbanipal's father, Esarhaddon – the

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184 This, of course, connects back to the historical linkage between processes of dehumanization and racialization, as Beli is also confused upon sight with nonhuman folkloric creatures such as a “baká” or a “ciguapa” (Díaz 2007, 151).
Mongoose has proven itself to be an enemy of kingly chariots, chains, and hierarchies. Believed to be an ally of Man. Many Watchers suspect that the Mongoose arrived to our world from another, but to date no evidence of such a migration has been unearthed. (Díaz 2007, 151)

Placing the mongoose out of natural history and into social history, Yunior inserts its role alongside a circuit of colonial exchange that parallels the deployment of indentured labor from South Asia to the Caribbean after the legal abolition of chattel slavery. It is from this context that the mongoose is a commentary on how coloniality can be challenged from within its own depths, for in the “official” (read colonial) story, the mongoose is used for the territorial cleansing processes to clear the land of any pests and thus facilitate plowing.¹⁸⁵ And yet, Díaz crafts the underside narrative to this colonial story, where the mongoose, is in fact an enemy of kings and chariots.

The mongoose returns a generation later when Oscar attempts to commit suicide by jumping from a bridge: “Gold-limned eyes that reached through you, not so much in judgment or reproach but for something far scarier” (Díaz 2007, 190). Oscar jumps from the bridge only to break his two legs. While not sure, Oscar has an implicit sense that the Mongoose saved his life. Subsequently searching for love in the Dominican Republic, Oscar finds himself in the same cane fields where his mother had been beaten. It would be in this temporal geography where the memories and traumas that live on the flesh make themselves appear to Oscar. Oscar unknowingly thinks that “this world seemed strangely familiar to him; he had the overwhelming feeling that he’d been in this very place, a long time ago. It was worse than déjà vu” (Díaz 2007, 298). What occurs with Oscar in the cane

¹⁸⁵ Traders brought the mongoose to the islands of the Caribbean around the end of the 19th century to control the native population of rats, which were damaging the production of the plantations (Hinton and Dunn 1967, 66-67).
fields is more than any work of transference of memory or trauma across generations. Oscar discovers the ethical impetus of substitution of decolonial love across mother and son that is “stronger than love” in its silent opacity. The impetus of substitution is what leads one to conceive of the substitution of one’s body for the body of the other, even to the point of accepting one’s own death as a result of such act (Maldonado-Torres 2007b, 156). This takes place, for instance, during La Inca’s pious prayer gathering that materialized in the “miracle” that saved Beli. For soon after such gathering, La Inca becomes very weak and is never seen as strong as she was then. Through the impetus of substitution, one’s experiences affect those they are connected to. Oscar’s presence in the cane fields is worse than déjà vu not just because the memory of Beli’s experience has been living in Oscar’s flesh, but because what is now happening to Oscar is also being (re)lived by Beli in another spatial geography. The demonic element of the sugarcane fields has shifted the ground beneath Oscar’s feet.

Curiously, just as it was the case with Beli, Oscar soon realizes that he is not alone, seeing a mental image of La Inca: “Oscar found himself facing his abuela[...] Didn’t I tell you you were going to die?” (Díaz 2007, 299). The image of La Inca negates Oscar’s loneliness as he walks the fine line between living and dying, jumpstarting a work of memory and remembrance that transports him back to his suicide attempt on the bridge. He “felt like he was falling again, falling straight for Route 18, and there was nothing he could do, nothing at all, to stop it” (Díaz 2007, 299). The gift that was once passed down from La Inca to Beli now makes its way towards Oscar. To no one’s surprise, the mongoose makes a third appearance, in a true “eternal return” (Díaz 2007, 296), ripping the cane with “tremendous winds…like the blast an angel might lay down on take off” (Díaz 2007, 300).
The Mongoose rushes towards Oscar across the tall cane field while singing with a beautiful voice, guiding Oscar’s taxi driver until encountering Oscar lying unconscious, “one finger tap away from dead” (Díaz 2007, 300). Recovering at the hospital, Oscar dreams of the Mongoose: “what will it be, muchacho? it demanded. More or less? And for a moment he almost said less. So tired, and so much pain – Less! Less! Less! – but then in the back of his head he remembered his family. Lola and his mother and Nena Inca… More he croaked. ----- ----- -----, said the Mongoose, and then the wind swept him back into darkness” (Díaz 2007, 301, my emphasis).

The gift that is now in Oscar’s hands is thus returned with the same generous and open affirmative movement of loving back. This is the gift that gives meaning to Oscar’s life and maintains alive the entire enterprise started by La Inca as a debt payment to her cousin Abelard. In his dream, and therefore at the level of the unconscious, Oscar at last embraces the power of decolonial love, sidestepping his individualist way out (“Less! Less! Less!”) in the name of an aesthetics of proximity i.e. his collective filiation, Alexander’s yearning for wholeness and yearning to belong. As Glissant would put it, he is living Relation, which intensifies memory (Glissant 1997, 8). He has crossed the “bridge of love” that Anacaona wanted to build among the Tainos in defense of the European invaders (Díaz 2007, 244). This is the kind of love that can fill the dotted lines said by the Mongoose, and the many empty lines and pages throughout Oscar Wao (Díaz 2012). Decolonial love here becomes an act of faith (Césaire’s sacred love) and a labor of remembrance that affirms life, not to preserve what already is, but to bring forth what is not. It is a movement that disrupts the appropriative individualist logics that uphold Man’s modern/colonial status quo to find “the human in the dehumanized subject” (Figueroa 2015, 51).
Like Domingo’s experience in *Monkey Hunting*, however, Oscar’s experience demonstrates that there is no teleology of healing guaranteed in any decolonial praxis. After surviving his brutal beatdown and returning to the U.S., Oscar continues to dream of the cane, “the terrible cane, except now it wasn’t him at the receiving end of the beating, but his sister, his mother, heard them shrieking, begging for them to stop, please God stop, but instead of racing towards the voices. He *ran away!* Woke up *screaming. Not me. Not me*” (Díaz 2007, 306). Oscar ends up returning to the Dominican Republic to attempt to build a life with the woman he has fallen in love with – Ybon, the retired sex-worker neighbor of La Inca. The deadly threats of Ybon’s lover, however, eventually materialize in Oscar’s death.

Was Oscar’s death thus a consequence of decolonial (self)love? Or was it instead a betrayal of the web of relation knit from La Inca to Beli and Lola all the way through Oscar? This will be up to whoever finishes writing the novel. Yunior imagines Lola’s daughter, Isis, poring over Oscar’s notebooks and letters in order to make sense of it all and put a final end to the family’s curse. In my reading, however, there is an extent to which there is no mutual exclusiveness between these two possibilities. Oscar’s death in the cane fields where he bonded with his mother across spatial-temporal coordinates, is haunted by the many other bodies that collapsed on the face of the yoke of colonization and slavery. Oscar’s death is therefore a universal event in Glissant’s sense, remaining inscribed within the *long duré* of modernity/coloniality. The question that remains concerns the nuances of theorizing decolonial love *in* catastrophe. Is it that decolonial love

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186 It is not coincidental that both Domingo and Oscar rely on the emotional labor of sex-workers for the processing and coping of their traumas. It is symptomatic of their position as men in a gendered sexual economy.
deviates into catastrophic love only because we continue to live within the “metaphysical catastrophe” (Maldonado-Torres 2016) of coloniality? Or, and this would be the more radical step, is it that decolonial love is already catastrophic in itself (without deviation) because it comes from catastrophe? While these questions are representative of the complexities of theorizing decolonization at any level of experience, what can be clearly affirmed is that Oscar’s attempt at decolonial love (whether truncated or not, whether a betrayal or not) demonstrates the still effervescent forces of the catastrophe that is coloniality.

*Oscar Wao* expands our understanding of the capacities of the flesh to remember and to know more than what we think we remember and know. A decolonial theopoetic runs through its narrative and symbolic structure in its attempt to capture a notion of love that can heal subjects wounded by the colonial abyss. This kind of love, which is rooted in a generous open receptivity to the other that re-members, is one that is spectral, therefore theological or sacred in its most radical sense: it seeks to heal the wounds of coloniality through a revolutionary process of transformation or realignment. Such process, however, in its complex radicality and without teleology of healing that guarantees progress, can quickly lead to catastrophic consequences.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have recuperated divergent threads to articulate a contribution to the discourse of decolonial aesthetics, elucidating in particular how aesthetics can take a central role in the decolonization of the secular/religious divide. Taking a cue from Jacques Rancière, I have proposed to conceive of decolonial aesthetics as a “redistribution of the sensible” wherein alternative forms of experience emerge as real possibilities to ground the
revolutionary transformation of the world (Wynter). Such postsecular decolonial aesthetic understands the sphere of the aesthetic as a mode of experiential thought based on sensibility that challenges secularizing epistemic processes that partition one’s way of sensing, feeling, thinking, and thus experiencing (being-in) the world. The decolonial “redistribution of the sensible” at work here makes way for alternative forms of knowing and being beyond those deemed proper or valid by the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality, such as those made possible by poetic praxis.

Decolonial aesthetics, when analyzed vis-à-vis the secular/religious divide, at once questions the secularization of sensibility in Western aesthetics while at the same time illuminating the spiritual elements in the redistribution of the sensible. It is in this sense in which I have proposed to configure decolonial aesthetics as yet another contributor to the theorization of postsecularity. In the Latinx Caribbean literary artworks analyzed in the last section of this chapter, the sphere of the spiritual appears as an alternative channel for an undisciplined form of knowledge that calls for the creation of a “politic born out of necessity,” in the words of Moraga’s theory-in-the-flesh paradigm (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2016, 23). This is a kind of poetic knowledge akin to a form of revelation while not transcendental in the theologically orthodox sense. Our close readings of these cultural products have showed how the literary-aesthetic field can be a primary site for the elaboration of alternative ways of being beyond the normativity of the modern/colonial secular/religious matrix. Their poetics are neither strictly religious nor secular. Through such destabilization, a postsecular and postreligious poetics emerges to conceive of new ways of reinterpreting reality to bring forth the possibility of a new world beyond our
modern/colonial one. In these exercises, the Word creates the World anew, articulating a
new “poetics of the flesh” and a new flesh of the Wor(l)d.

If this dissertation started with an analysis of how liberation theology and liberation
philosophy emerge in conjunction, we have concluded it with the last stage in the
development of liberation philosophy: the aesthetics of liberation. In the aesthetics of
liberation, the critique of theology as the critique of politics finds a way to formulate the
decolonization of religion via artistic creation. This is why I have made use of Dussel’s
terms of poietic praxis and a practical poiesis to understand how the aesthetics of liberation
contribute to the development of the ethics and politics of liberation. Curiously, if critique
of religion is the premise of all criticism, its beginning, then it should also be its end (both
“end” as in aim and as in completion). In this way, not unlike Hegel’s project, we have
ended by arriving to the edge and by returning to the beginning. As Dussel has said
recently, paraphrasing Ludwig Wittgenstein, at the end of the aesthetics of liberation, one
finds what one cannot speak of. This would be the unnamable, the abyss, which only a
mysticism of liberation can approximate. A decolonial redistribution of the sensible is a
part of this approximation.
CONCLUSION

Decolonizing the Postsecular

“PROUD FLESH: [Laughter] Okay, finally, for the record, what’s your theoretical relationship to Aretha Franklin?! Once, you said, maybe paraphrasing, slightly, “When I write, I want to sound in theory the way Aretha Franklin sounds in song.”

SYLVIA WYNTER: Yes, I think, I WOULD LIKE TO FEEL THAT EVERYTHING I SAID HAD A LIBERATING AND EMANCIPATORY DIMENSION. That’s what she has. Black singing, at its best, it has this--like Gospel. That I wanted. But also I was always aware that it wasn’t that I was thinking anything linearly. It never came linearly. It tends to come the way a flower blooms. It comes unexpectedly; and it has nothing to do with “genius.” It has to do with this beginning to question your own “consciousness.” It’s the idea of poesis, again; there is also a poesis of thought; a new poesis of being human. These concepts don’t come in a linear fashion. They build up. They build up, you know? So as you’re talking they build up and they build up the way music builds up and up and up until you get that sudden . . .”

-Greg Thomas’s interview with Sylvia Wynter

5.0 Coda

Over the previous four chapters, this dissertation has sought to elucidate the conceptual connections between secularity and coloniality as they have been made manifest in Western modernity. Such exercise has unearthed the aporetic “darker side” of Enlightened secularity: the fact that secularity’s liberation of some was codetermined by the subjugation of others. From this vantage point brough about by a process of epistemic decolonization, this dissertation has then sought to intervene in ongoing theorizations concerning the relation between secularity and modernity, which have gone by the name of the “postsecular debate.” In the context in which issues relating to the coloniality of secularity are prevalently overlooked, the postsecular challenge to modern secularity has largely focused on the positive side of the aporia of secularity i.e. on how secularity emerges as the cognitive emancipation from theocentric worldviews, the return of which
would imply the failure of secularity as such. The rethinking of secularity that is taking place in the works of figures such as Charles Taylor and Jurgen Habermas seeks to reconceptualize secularity, no longer as a failure due to the seeming return of religion to the public sphere. Theorists of secularity, in a postsecular age, would thus have to learn from the mistakes of their anti-religious past. This entails understanding modernity as a dialectics of secularization vis-à-vis what is taken to be the domain of the non-secular i.e. “religion.” No doubt a promising conceptual step in the theorization of the meaning of modernity, the absence of an analysis of coloniality in these dynamics runs the risk of reintroducing the Eurocentrism of an old secularism into the concept of postsecularity. This dissertation therefore has contributed a decolonial analysis to the postsecular debate by looking at how the coloniality of secularity must be accounted for in new attempts to rewrite secularity.

The main figures analyzed in this dissertation, Enrique Dussel, Sylvia Wynter, Gloria Anzaldúa, and M. Jacqui Alexander, all agree that modern secularity contains a darker (colonial) side where cognitive emancipation comes at the expense of epistemic and material subjugation. While each of them represents different critiques of modern secularity from the vantage point of epistemic decolonization, their works collectively point out the need to overcome the entire secular/religious divide in order to find an emancipatory, liberatory and critical exit out of the modern/colonial cage. This dissertation aims to synthesize their respective contributions and direct them towards the postsecular debate to reframe the latter’s key terms. Against an Eurocentric account of modern secularity that disregards its colonial inheritance, this dissertation hypothesizes that the seeming “return” of religion to the contemporary global political arena that has sparked the
entire debate has less to do with a supposed failure of secularization and more to do with the perpetuity of modernity’s disavowed colonial structures, such as the coloniality of power. With this intervention, this dissertation argues that the emerging notion of the postsecular would have more analytical leverage if it is conceived not simply as an internal self-reflexivity of Western secularist modernity but also as a liminal or analectical project that strives for the decolonization of modernity and its entire secular/religious apparatus. Understanding the coloniality of secularity (and not just of religion) allows for the resignification of postsecularity to not only function within the goal to fulfill the project of modernity (Habermas 1990), but also finish the “unfinished project of decolonization” (Maldonado-Torres 2011a, 3, Alexander 2005, 271). From this perspective, postsecularity does not take for granted what “religion” is but instead is invested in ways of thinking and acting that no longer presuppose the secular/religious divide in its entirety.

Epistemic decolonization is thus the principal means through which the figures analyzed in this dissertation engage the secular/religious divide. It entails an examination of the methods and presuppositions to produce knowledge in modern thought in order to examine the extent to which these have been co-determined by the colonial project. This is not to deny the validity of modern knowledge in an a priori reactionary fashion but to begin to articulate how modern/colonial collusion has mitigated alternative ways of producing knowledge and what it would mean to affirm those alternative ways as equally valid sources of knowledge. This is the pedagogical moment of self-reflexivity in which those living under the aegis of modernity learn from what has been marginalized by modernity’s

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187 The question of religious fundamentalisms (whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, etc.) across the world today is thus arguably better understood not in relation to the insufficiencies of secular modernity, but as a consequence of misunderstanding modernity’s colonialist co-constitution.
colonial project. In Dussel’s case, it entails philosophizing out of the “popular religiosities” of the Latin American subject. For Wynter, it means affirming the “demonic grounds” of colonized peoples and marrying such perspectives to the cognitive emancipation facilitated by modernity, such as Aimé Césaire’s proposal to fashion a “true humanism” made to the measure of the world that would simultaneously necessitate a rewriting of knowledge beyond its current scientificist limitations. For Anzaldúa, it entails embracing la facultad as a recovery process for subjugated knowledges, and for Alexander, it involves the “rewiring of the senses” enabled by spiritual practice. In these case studies, the secular/religious frame is understood to be a key component of the workings of modernity/coloniality. The affirmation of what exceeds or is “beyond” this frame (Dussel’s analectical moment) is thus a crucial moment in the process of epistemic decolonization.

The wager of the decolonial intervention on the postsecular debate is that the subjugated knowledges that escape or complicate the secular/religious divide may have the potential to better understand some of the processes currently taking place around the world that have led to the rethinking of modern secularity. This potential analytic acuity does not derive from a spurious claim of superior epistemic privilege of those at the underside of modernity. Instead, it has more to do with the gaps found in the epistemologies of Western modernity, which have been constructed on the premise that the knowledges belonging to non-Western cultures are inherently inferior. Epistemic decolonization is the restoration of a learning process that never took place, between cultures that first met in the context of a colonial power relation. There is some resonance here between epistemic decolonization and Habermas’s notion of translation as a “mode for nondestructive secularization” that mediates between secular and religious spheres (Habermas 2005, 328). For Habermas, such
view of translation is at the heart of his notion of postsecularity as a learning process that will “avoid a clash of civilizations” between the modern West and the modernizing non-West *i.e.* the Third World. Unlike Habermas, however, the decolonial intervention argues that such “clash of civilizations” has already happened, and its name is colonialism. Therefore, the notion of a learning process that is needed to comprehend the problem must be much more extensive than that of a translation between secular and religious spheres, because the latter still does not dislodge how those two categories were constructed through a colonialist clash of civilizations in the first place. The learning process that is needed must then go to the inner most depths of modern epistemology, out of which a rethinking of all foundational modern categories emerges, most relevantly for us, the secular/religious divide. This is why, in my view, the notion of the postsecular goes hand in hand with that of the postreligious – as I will further elaborate below.

5.1 The Analectics of Decolonization

In this section, I close many of the loose ends in the previous four chapters of this dissertation, such as criticisms of the postsecular, the normative content of the postreligious, the relation between spirituality and postsecularity, the concept of desecularization, Dussel’s proposal for a transmodern critique of modernity, among others. This is by no means an attempt to settle these issues once and for all but an attempt to set the bases for their development in future scholarship.

Echoing James Beckford’s criticism that the notion of the postsecular has little value due to the apparently contradictory meanings of the term (Beckford 2012), a number of criticisms of the concept have since surfaced, largely from the field of postcolonial studies. These criticisms would seem to question our decolonial deployment of the term.
Aamir R. Mufti, for instance, emphatically claims that he is “not a postsecularist because the concept is an internally incoherent one, evasive about the transition it supposedly marks and confusing different levels of analysis” (Mufti 2013, 9). As I have demonstrated in the Introduction, and in subsequent moments throughout the previous four chapters, this criticism fails to recognize the distinct levels of abstraction at which seemingly divergent deployments of the postsecular take place. Bruce Robbins, like Mufti, makes the blanket statement that “our society has never been secular. Whether we want to or not, therefore, we don’t have the option of declaring ourselves postsecular” (Robbins 2013, 56). Such rejections of the analytic value of the term, based on a mistaken assumption that the prefix “post” merely means denial, only demonstrate an underlying incomprehension of the postsecular debate as a whole. It is precisely the ostensible stubborn presence of religion in the eyes of what was supposed to be a secular modernity that has led to the postsecular debate and its revision of secularization as an open-ended process. To realize that we have never been secular is what it means to be postsecular in its most general sense. This is also why, for Justin Beaumont, Klaus Eder, and Eduardo Mendieta, “we can also never become postsecular enough” (2018, 10).

If we have never been secular, however, then we have also never been religious. More provocatively, to echo Bruno Latour once again, if “we have never been modern” (1993), then we have also never been “colonial.”\footnote{The concept of “colonial difference” has been articulated by Walter Mignolo to account for how the colonial world fails to be modern precisely because Western modernity refuses to recognize its own co-constitutive investment and dependence in coloniality (Mignolo 2002).} I take these propositions not to deny the historical content of what has happened in the past nor to deny the analytic and normative significance of these terms, but to indicate a process-based phenomenology of
being where incompletness is the order of the day. We have never been what we have claimed to be, but our very claims to be one thing or the other, based on what we do, give sense to who we are. In other words, it matters less the extent to which we are able to claim certain categories than the practices that compose our lives – Michel Foucault already made this very clear (Foucault 1970). This dissertation’s examination of the secular/religious divide from the perspective of epistemic decolonization should then be understood in these terms as an investigation into practices and the limits of concepts. Doing otherwise would simply be missing the map for the territory, as Wynter has so powerfully argued (Wynter 2006).

A key argument that this dissertation has analyzed is that the postsecular is paired with the postreligious. Thus one of the aims of building on the notion of postsecularity has been to overcome religion as a form of coloniality (postreligious) rather than to argue for the supposed “return” of religion (how the notion of the postsecular is initially articulated by Habermas and others). This is why the substantial contribution of this dissertation begins with the development of a decolonial philosophy of religion and ends with an examination of decolonial aesthetics or an aesthetics of liberation as the creative element that, among many tasks, engages in the decolonization of the concept of religion. I have followed Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Mark L. Taylor in conceiving the notion of the postreligious as the mirror element of a decolonial postsecular move (Maldonado-Torres 2008b, 383, Taylor 2011, 3-4).\textsuperscript{189} This conceptual move is facilitated by the recognition of the coloniality of religion, manifest in the spiritual and politico-economic colonization of

\textsuperscript{189} The “post-religious” has also been developed within a postsecular philosophy of religion by the German theologian Hans-Joachim Höhn. I expect to engage his work in future scholarship.
the Americas (Dussel 1995a). As we saw in Chapter One, liberation theology powerfully encapsulates both postsecular and postreligious moves, for at the same time as it abandons established theological demarcations by embracing the secular social sciences, it offers a critique of a colonialist religiosity for siding with the oppressors at the expense of the oppressed, the subject that becomes the point of departure for theological reflection. Chapter Three, moreover, demonstrated the radical deployment of spirituality in women of color feminism that negates the secularism of much of critical theory while also opposing religiosity as an institutional apparatus, including theology (Facio and Lara 2014). From the perspective of epistemic decolonization, at least at a certain level of abstraction, postsecularity therefore entails postreligiosity (Viefhues-Bailey 2015). This is a unique position in the postsecular debate that contrasts with the dominant understanding of postsecularity for which the fact of religion leads to the re-writing of secularity. However, it is this dissertation’s argument that both sides of the binary must be challenged in a dialectical process of decolonization. Any one-sided (undialectical) attempt would re-iterate the old binary e.g. fetishized religiosity posing as postsecularity, or secularism posing as the postreligious.

Thus to re-write both secularity and religiosity dialectically is what this dissertation understands as the decolonization of the secular/religious divide. The question of spirituality arises as a potential answer to this quandary, which brands the postsecular challenge as a sort of “re-enchantment, or re-spiritualization, of the mundane world” (Calhoun, Mendieta, and VanAntwerpen 2013a, 9). The well-known contemporary formulation of “being spiritual but not religious” indicates a postreligious impetus, though its relation to postsecularity is more ambiguous. In this dissertation, as it was just alluded,
the subject of spirituality emerges primarily in the work of women of color feminists. For them, but also for all other figures analyzed in this dissertation (if only to different extents), because the secular/religious divide unfolds as part of the colonization of the Americas, the affirmation of what such colonization negated is part of the process of epistemic decolonization. Reconstructing the spiritual practices of the colonized is therefore a potential way out of the modern/colonial condition – what Wynter calls, not without a dose of irony, one’s “demonic grounds.” The forms of spirituality that have the propensity to be both postsecular and postreligious would therefore have to be decolonizing.190

The praxis of decolonization is then what gives the most originality to our notion of the postsecular. Through this paradigm, postsecularity emerges as something more than a rearticulation of liberalism, as I believe ultimately is the case with Habermas’s notion of the postsecular. It is through the praxis of decolonization that our notion of postsecularity is also something other than a reactionary return of theocentric frameworks, as is the case in conservative criticisms of modern secularity.191 The latter, I suggest, should not be included in the frame of postsecularity, but should be instead understood as taking part in a more limited process of desecularization. Here, I continue the conversation left off in the Introduction to this dissertation, in which Mignolo all-too-quickly dismisses the concept of postsecularity as not useful for the task of decolonization. In lieu of postsecularity, and principally relying on the linguistic labor of the prefix “de,” Mignolo uses the term “de-secularization” to connote to the ways in which secularity is to be decolonized (Mignolo

190 I am currently exploring this question as the editor of a journal special issue titled “Decolonizing Spiritualities.”

191 I have in mind John Milbank’s critique of secularism for being a type of heresy (Milbank 2006, 2013). Unlike Wynter’s postsecular heretical project, however, Milbank’s heresy is anti-secular in its attempt to return to orthodox Christian theology.
2011b, my emphasis). In this move, however, Mignolo misapprehends the reflexivity of the postsecular project. As Beaumont, Eder, and Mendieta have clearly shown, postsecularity itself is a form of reflexivity akin to epistemic decolonization (2018, 10). On the other hand, the concept of de-secularization that Mignolo invokes (with a hyphen) in fact has a specific genealogy rooted in the sociology of religion, primarily developed by Peter Berger, who once was a strong defender of the “secularization thesis” before admitting its mistaken theoretical assumptions and thus its limited descriptive properties (Berger 1999). However, in Mignolo’s brief intervention, Berger’s work is absent. It is thus unclear the extent to which Mignolo’s normative proposal for de-secularization relies on Berger’s definition, for whom desecularization (without a hyphen) expresses the late-20th century reactionary articulation of religion against secularization.192 Because of this reactionary element, desecularization has also been understood as a form of “counter-secularization” (Karpov 2010). This is why I do not associate desecularization with liberatory proposals of the postsecular but with largely conservative criticisms of modernity.

The intervention that I have reconstructed in this dissertation does not treat decolonization as an undialectical reaction. This picture of decolonization is a colonialist mirage that seeks to discredit the creative productivity of decolonization. In this sense, to decolonize the secular is to negate the coloniality of secularity (secularism) while reflexively rearticulating secularity beyond its liberal premise, to be of the measure of the world. This second moment is what Dussel encapsulated in Chapter One with the atheistic posture towards the “fetish,” part of a dialectical process that makes space for the Other to

192 It also remains unclear the added meaning of the hyphen in Mignolo’s rendition of the concept, which is missing in Berger’s spelling.
rupture the totalization of such dialectics (this is the analectical *moment*). Because decolonization is dialectical to the core (Ciccariello-Maher 2017), I have constantly spoken of jumpstarting the “dialectics of secularization” (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006), a process that by necessity engages what is other to itself, what goes by the name of “religion” and could also be comprehended with the aforementioned concept of desecularization. Put simply, postsecularity is the broader normative frame under which desecularization (as a sociological object) makes sense, and the decolonization of postsecularity is part of a dialectical process as the analectical moment of extrinsic rupture.

Dussel’s proposal for a transmodern critique of modernity is here helpful to comprehend how this dissertation conceives of the decolonial intervention into the postsecular debate. For Dussel, *transmodernity* conceptually encapsulates the specific critique of modernity that arises from the latter’s “underside” (Dussel 1996). Unlike postmodern critique, which arises from within the fissures of modern thought, transmodern critique originates from the exteriority of modernity *i.e.* the Third World, as a critical synthesis of both worlds. Such critique is therefore not to be confused with anti-modern reactionary critiques of modernity *tout court*, many of which emerge from within modernity to romanticize a pre-modern past. Dussel here plainly distinguishes between two elements of modernity: (i) rational emancipation, and (ii) irrational praxis of violence (Dussel 1996, 136). Very much like Wynter’s call for a new ceremony, Dussel here defends the negation of modernity’s irrational praxis (colonialism), while affirming and subsuming modernity’s rational emancipation. For Dussel, this is the form that epistemic decolonization is to adopt. What results is a new order of thinking beyond modernity/coloniality where there is mutual dialogue between all the world’s cultures.
However, this is not to be confused with S.N. Eisenstadt’s proposal for “multiple modernities” (2000), which does not presuppose the labor of dialectical synthesis that alters the meaning of modernity to the same extent as Dussel’s proposal. Unlike the paradigm of “multiple modernities” which argues for the co-existence of various historical instantiations of modernity/coloniality, the paradigm of transmodernity focuses on the negation of modernity’s irrational praxis of violence. This is why we have followed Dussel in making the crucial distinction between secularization as a dialectical process of criticality to be affirmed, and secularism as a fetishized irrational totalization to be negated. Decolonizing postsecularity is therefore also a transmodern project (Maldonado-Torres 2008b).

Dussel’s specific posturing vis-à-vis modernity then permeates my understanding of epistemic decolonization. It is through this lens that we can now better understand the contribution that decolonial aesthetics aspires to make, as initially discussed in Chapter Four. Decolonial aesthetics essentially restages the epistemic critique of modernity found in Dussel’s formulation but at the phenomenological level of sense-perception. Decolonial aesthetics may share with its postmodern counterpart the criticism of modern aesthetics but differ in their locus of enunciation. On the one hand, postmodern aesthetics depart from a deeply internalized position at the bosom of modernity i.e. in Europe, which is why they have so little to say to histories and experiences beyond Europe. In this sense, decolonial thinkers argue that postmodern aesthetics (and postmodernity in general) remain all-too-modern. Decolonial aesthetics, on the other hand, engages in a critique of modern theorizations of aesthetic experience from a position of exteriority to the rhetoric of

193 I thank Dussel himself for pushing me to develop this point in our exchange at the 2019 Philosophies of Liberation Encuentro held at Loyola Marymount University.
modernity *i.e.* those histories and experiences beyond Europe that have been largely ignored by modernity. Most importantly, however, postmodern and decolonial aesthetics differ in their ultimate aim: the postmodern dismisses all grand narratives in the name of skepticism, the decolonial seeks to rearticulate a project of flourishing and liberation for all of humanity, without falling into the old traps of modern thought. In this regard, decolonial aesthetics overlap more with the emergent movement of altermodern aesthetics, which itself is critical of the limitations of postmodernity and calls for a rearticulation of a new modernity based on relational processes of global translation and even creolization without also returning to the old narrative of modernity (Rudrum and Stavris 2015, 253). Decolonial aesthetics too calls for the rearticulation of a new modernity beyond the failures of the modern/colonial project, but unlike altermodern aesthetics, this is done from a position liminal to modernity itself and with a normative commitment to liberation from domination. This is what we can now call the transmodern impetus of decolonial aesthetics. From this perspective, both postmodern and altermodern projects share a Eurocentric genealogy and normative project of modernity that ignores the deeper consequences of its darker side. Decolonial aesthetics are antithetical to this, and thus call for a new horizon where modernity can be re-written from the outside, though nevertheless dialectically in dialogue with modern, postmodern, altermodern, perspectives.

### 5.2 Outro

I conclude this dissertation with a brief analysis of the Sylvia Wynter epigraph that inaugurates this Conclusion. In more than a few ways, this epigraph encapsulates what this

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194 This formulation comes from Nicolas Bourriaud’s “Altermodern Manifesto: Postmodernism is Dead,” which accompanied the 2009 Tate Triennial, titled “Altermodern” and was curated by himself.
dissertation has been aiming to pursue: the synthesis of emancipation, aesthetics, spirituality, consciousness, and (auto)poiesis. This epigraph is itself the conclusion to an interview that Wynter did with her former student Greg Thomas (2006). Thomas closes the interview by asking Wynter what her “theoretical relationship to Aretha Franklin” is, for it is said that Wynter herself once conceived of her own theoretical project in the terms of what Franklin had done in the genre of music. Wynter’s response is telling. She argues that her whole project is to be understood within the goal of liberation and emancipation, which is what Black music (like Franklin’s) ultimately provides – the question of decolonial aesthetics. At its best, for Wynter, this music contains a “Gospel,” which Wynter claims to have wanted all along – the question of spirituality. Wynter confesses, however, that this did not come “linearly.” Instead, it comes and goes unexpectedly, “the way a flower blooms.” It comes with the questioning of one’s consciousness, which is immediately linked to the question of poiesis: a “poesis of thought; a new poesis of being human.”

Like Wynter’s questioning of her own consciousness, this dissertation has come about with no pretensions of linearity. We can now throw away the ladder, to see the blooming of a flower and to listen to the sounds of the postsecular gospels in our midst.

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195 One cannot overemphasize the humorous nature of this comparison. Wynter is notorious in the academy for the difficulty of her prose, often only matched by the likes of Hegel and Heidegger (who are mostly read in translation, unlike Wynter who writes in English). On the other hand, Franklin is generally regarded as one of the most beautiful singers of 20th century American pop culture, as her nickname “The Queen of Soul” indicates.
REFERENCES


